World Vision®

What do children think?

Children's views on being cared for, protected and participating

A report published by World Vision International Advocacy & Justice for Children on children's views to inform the World Vision partnership's advocacy strategy for the care, protection and participation of children

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What do children think? Children's views on being cared for, protected and participating

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For further information about this publication or World Vision International publications, or for additional copies of this publication, please contact wvi_publishing@wvi.org.

World Vision International • 800 West Chestnut Avenue • Monrovia CA 91016-3198 • USA

Lead researcher: Patricio Cuevas-Parra

Research assistant: Nathalie Cornish

Project advisers: Denise Allen and Kate Laburn-Peart

Technical advisors: Aline Rahbany and Khalil Asmar

National office field assistants: Adamou Hamidou, Brikena Zogaj, Chandila Colombege, Cherry Marcelo,Daniel Hernández, Dorina Lana, Jorge Hernández, Luz Alcira Granada, Marla González, Mookho Thaane, Thato Lepele, Ridiona Stana, Roberto Flores, Sabina Shaheen, Salamatou Salifou, Sarmad Iqbal and Salifou Mounkaila

Publication coordinator: Heather Elliott. **Production coordinator:** Katie Klopman. **Content editing:** Abba Communications, Australia. **Copyediting:** Joan Laflamme. **Design and layout:** Rebekah Roose, May DeCastro (Studio DeCastro). **Proofreading:** Alan Yoshioka.

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Finally, we would like to express deepest gratitude to children from Albania, Colombia, El Salvador, Lebanon, Lesotho, Niger, Pakistan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka for their contributions and involvement in this study.

Children's introduction to the report

As representatives of the Children's Council of Lebanon, we are very proud to introduce this report that we consider essential. It is about children and highlights real issues that every one of us can face in any country.

Writing this introduction is something very special for us because adults rarely ask children's opinions, and many children do not have any opportunity to express their ideas on issues that are important to them.

We are honoured to represent children and to be able to make children's voices heard. We believe that children play a very important role in our communities because we can influence our environment and educate our friends on the issues that are important. We believe that more effort needs to be made to include children in addressing issues related to our own lives.

We are part of the present and the future, and when we are more involved, our society becomes stronger and more advanced. As children we want to contribute to raising awareness and educating others about our rights. We believe that when these messages are conveyed from child to child they get through more quickly and more powerfully.

We would like to give our example to other children, and we hope that all will have the same opportunity to participate and to exercise their rights. We are very happy that World Vision has given us a place to speak up and hope that this opportunity reaches the maximum number of children so that they can understand and protect their rights too.

Melissa (aged 15), Tracy and Aline (aged 13), board members of the Children's Council of Lebanon. Photo: World Vision Lebanon

In introducing this report, we ask World Vision to continue working closely with children and join efforts to achieve important goals for the well-being of children. We want to help with our thoughts and ideas and offer our support in planning and conducting activities to ensure that they are relevant, fun and interesting for us.

Finally, we would like to thank World Vision because it has been working hard to give a voice to children, and it has provided us with great experiences that have changed our lives and our environment.

Board Members
Children's Council, Lebanon

Message from Charles Badenoch

The Advocacy and Justice for Children team that I lead aspires to amplify, share and respond to the voices of the world's most vulnerable children. This report is an expression of that commitment. It is the beginning of a daring process to create meaningful platforms for children to participate in our advocacy strategy on child protection systems, and to build mechanisms of accountability to children.

When children are given a meaningful platform for advocacy, the transformational role they play is profound. Children can, and already do, influence decisions of authority structures from local through national to global levels. The Children's Council in Lebanon who introduce this report is already achieving government policy change in their country. Children's participation in this strategy will galvanise many of these experiences and expand the space for them to enjoy their right as citizens.

I hope World Vision and others hear what the children have told us in this survey and are challenged to make sure that

- community residents know about harmful practices that lead to children being abused, exploited or neglected, and find culturally appropriate solutions
- families under threat can access social protection so that parents can take care of their children
- schools and clinics have prevention, response and rehabilitation programmes that support child protection
- all child protection systems are accountable to those who use the services.

The concerns of these children should not be ignored.

Charles Badenoch
Partnership Leader
Advocacy and Justice for Children
World Vision International
December 2010

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> The research presents the voices of some 400 children associated with World Vision's programmes...

Executive summary

World Vision is an agency committed to the principles and standards of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This report provides World Vision with the opportunity to listen to children and to understand how children's meaningful participation can lead to improved child protection and care. Assuring that children are cared for, protected and participating is one of World Vision's two Partnership-wide external advocacy priorities for 2010–14.

This report brings together the perspectives of 434 children from nine countries associated with World Vision's programmes. The views in this report may be considered indicative of the views of children around the world.[1] Certainly, they raise questions that challenge World Vision to fulfil its mission to realise life in all its fullness for every child. This report does not provide answers to all these questions.

Children's right to be heard

Participation gives children an opportunity to express their opinions, have those opinions listened to, to influence decisions and to achieve change. Participation is fundamental to children's development and well-being. As a child-focused organisation committed to the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, World Vision sets out to ensure that children's voices are heard. Article 12 of that convention creates an obligation to listen to children and give due weight to their opinions in accordance with their age and maturity. This obligation has a range of implications for governments, stakeholders, NGOs and society at large.

World Vision is well placed to strengthen the meaning and understanding of Article 12, as well as to build positive approaches to its implementation. The Committee on the Rights of the Child[2] recognises that children add unique perspectives and experiences which should be considered in decision-making, policy-making, law reform, programme development and evaluation as a part of a meaningful and ongoing exchange between children and adults.

1 The Committee on the Rights of the Child recognises the legitimacy of children's groups who express their view on matters concerning children as a whole (General Comment 12: The right of the child to be heard).
2 Ibid.

Children participating in focus group discussion in Komabangou ADP, Tillaberi Region, Niger. Photo: World Vision Niger

Significant findings of the research

- Children's experience of protection and care is mainly at the informal, local level. In contrast to standard development priorities, children's concerns focus primarily on the safety and security of their environment, psychosocial issues and relationships.
- Significant numbers of children do not have a sense of security or protection at home, school or in their community. These children lack spaces in which they can feel safe. In addition, children are acutely aware of economic insecurity in their families. Economic issues were ranked by children in this study as the second greatest area of concern in their daily life (after problems within their families).
- Children crave the opportunity to share their opinions and have those opinions listened to. All of the children indicated a desire to participate, yet only 46.3 per cent of them believed that they had the right to make decisions about their own well-being.
- Children want to know that their opinions have been heard. Beyond sharing their thoughts, children also want to know what decision-makers do with this information; that is, children seek accountability.
- There is evidence in this study that participation and protection work together. Although children's experiences of participation differed, in this study they were consistently positive about the importance of participation.
- Both participation and protection, however, hinge on the attitudes and behaviours of parents, teachers and other significant adults. Children suggest that parents and other adults should receive training and thus gain awareness of children's rights in order to improve care and protection in the home, school and community.

How World Vision is addressing the care, protection and participation of children

Jaylord (age 16) was one of three official youth delegates from the Philippines at the 5th anniversary of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children. Photo: Fe Olonan / World Vision

World Vision seeks to understand the potential pitfalls and challenges of children's participation in programming, advocacy and policy work, as well as in children's homes and communities. How can these challenges and risks be addressed to ensure that children's best interests are taken into account? What implications does children's participation have for the work of World Vision and its partners? How can actively considering children's perspectives be incorporated into World Vision's mission?

World Vision's Partnership-wide priority that children are cared for, protected and participating requires the implementation of its advocacy strategy to address these needs. World Vision insists that any new course of action on child protection and participation

- be built from the bottom up in order to learn from community experience
- explore priority areas identified by World Vision offices in the global South
- make child participation an integral part of the advocacy strategy.

This study contributes to establishing effective child protection systems at the community level in countries where World Vision is operational, as well as encouraging broader improvement in child protection at the international level.

This study also ensures that children's voices are heard in the development of the child protection advocacy strategy. That strategy aims to strengthen child protection systems at the community level. The current focus of the advocacy strategy is on the formal elements of protection systems, including:

- national laws, policy and regulatory frameworks
- effective coordination between government and civil society organisations
- equal access to protection services for all children
- adequate financial and human resources.

The findings of this study, however, show that children's concerns are less about policies, frameworks and structures, and more about their homes, relationships and communities. These concerns suggest that equal attention must be paid to the informal elements of protection systems because these are where culture, traditional practices and norms embodied by adults directly affect children. Informal actors in child protection systems include parents and other caregivers, school staff and community members. Effective community-level child protection systems that incorporate both formal and informal elements mitigate many of the fears children have expressed in this report.

World Vision is in a position to facilitate the creation of the relationships of mutual understanding and respect among children, parents, teachers, community leaders and other significant adults necessary for an effective child protection system. World Vision can help adults to understand the developmental advantages of children's participation. Children have dignity and worth; giving them opportunities to participate helps them to develop optimally and to succeed in life.

Findings of the child consultation

This consultation aimed to examine the major 'cared for, protected, participating' issues affecting children in countries where World Vision works. The approach was to provide children with a space to express their views and exercise their right to participate. We sought to listen to children and give them the opportunity to influence World Vision's systems, programming and accountability, thus modelling accountability to children whose well-being World Vision pursues.

A total of 434 girls and boys aged 9 to 17 from nine different countries took part in the consultation: 320 (173 girls and 147 boys) responded to the questionnaire, and 114 participated in the focus-group discussions. Children were selected with the intention of gathering perspectives from different religious and ethnic backgrounds, genders, differing abilities, geographic regions, rural and urban areas, and from situations of particular risk.

Context: Why children's voices often aren't heard

Despite the fact that participation in all matters affecting the child is a fundamental human right, many boys and girls perceive their participation to be a special concession granted by adults rather than a right that is respected. Many societies discourage participation of children because it is assumed that they do not have the maturity to make informed decisions; that they can be easily manipulated; or that they may become disrespectful to their elders. In m any societies children also have different levels of participation determined by cultural approaches to decision-making, gender inequalities, and/or discrimination based on differences in age or ability, ethnicity, economic and/or social background, placing some children in a disadvantaged position and preventing them from expressing their views and sharing in decision-making. This report clearly shows that when children are given the opportunity to share their feelings and perspectives, we are better able to address effectively their needs for protection and care.

Main findings of the research

- A significant number of children in this study lack a sense of security or protection in many vital places – home, school or community. They expressed considerable fear and anxiety related to violence, harassment and humiliation in their daily lives.
- Children want the opportunity to participate in matters that affect their lives. The research shows a noteworthy variation in children's perception of their ability to make decisions about their own well-being across different countries.
- A key aspect of protection and participation is the behaviour and attitude of parents, teachers and other significant adults, who often hold the key to realising children's rights. Children suggest that parents and other adults receive training and improve their awareness of children's rights, so that children can be fully cared for and protected in their homes, schools and communities.
- Children want feedback on the impact of their participation.

The findings have been compiled here under the thematic areas of care, protection and participation based on World Vision's Partnership-wide high-level aspirations.

Children rank their top concerns

Children in the surveys were asked to rank the situations or problems that affect them in their everyday life.

- Children in the nine countries surveyed rated problems in their families as a top concern; most listed family-related problems in first or second place.
- Children are acutely aware of economic insecurity within their family, ranking this as the second greatest area of concern. (Not having enough food to eat was the fourth greatest area of concern.)
- With school being the second most frequented place in most children's lives, their perceptions of how they felt and were treated there were also strong.
- Children in many countries were concerned about violence in their communities, drugs and the vulnerability of child labourers.
- Regionally, children from the survey samples participating in the research in Africa, the Middle East and Asia expressed fear and anxiety about war and natural disasters, while children participating in the two Latin American country surveys expressed in their focus-group discussion their concerns about the predominance of violence and the lack of peace and harmony in their communities as well as not having the love and support of their family.

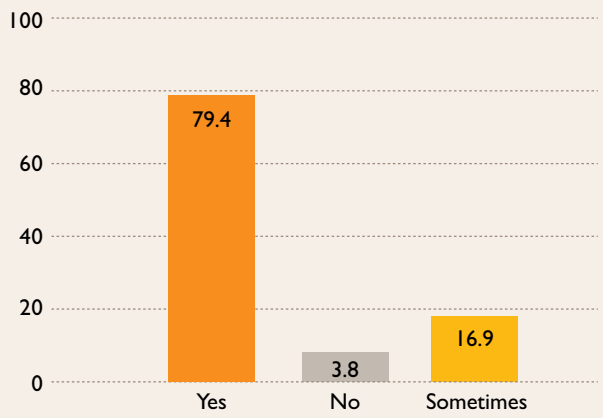
Top five concerns that affect children's everyday life

	1 Priority	2 Priority	3 Priority	4 Priority	5 Priority
Albania	Doing badly at school	When something bad happens in the family	My parents don't have enough money	My parents hurt me by hitting me	Natural disaster
Colombia	When something bad happens in the family	My parents don't have enough money	War or conflict	My parents hurt me by hitting me	Don't have enough food
El Salvador	Doing badly at school	When something bad happens in the family	My parents don't have enough money	Natural disaster	Don't have enough food
Lebanon	When something bad happens in the family	War or conflict	Being hit and insulted by teachers	Doing badly at school	My parents hurt me by hitting me
Lesotho	When something bad happens in the family	Being separated from family	My parents hurt me by hitting me	Doing badly at school	My parents hurt me by hitting me
Niger	War or conflict	Being separated from family	My parents hurt me by hitting me	When something bad happens in the family	Being taken away from family
Pakistan	My parents don't have enough money	Don't have enough food	My parents hurt me by hitting me	War or conflict	Forced to work
Philippines	Don't have enough food	Being separated from family	When something bad happens in the family	Cannot go to school	Natural disaster
Sri Lanka	When something bad happens in the family	My parents don't have enough money	Being separated from family	Natural disaster	My parents hurt me by hitting me

Care

- Children expressed the importance of family for making them feel cared for and safe.
- The majority of children indicate that they feel cared for.[3] Children can identify adults who talk and listen to them and who care about where they are.
- A telling minority of children, however, could not identify either someone they could talk to or a place they could go to for help with pressing concerns. This indicates that children felt that though their family provided care, family was not always the best place to find support and someone to talk to.

1. I can think of one grownup who spends time with me, talks with me and listens to me.



- Adults hold the key to realising children's rights. Overall, children suggested that training be available for parents and other adults to make them aware of children's rights, so as to improve care and protection of children in their homes, schools and communities.

Of the children in this study, 79.4 per cent were able to identify an adult who spends time with them, listens to them and talks to them. Only 3.8 per cent of children indicated they could think of nobody, with 16.9 per cent of children answering 'sometimes'. Thus there is obviously scope for improving the lives of 20 per cent of the respondents. Nonetheless, assuming that the adults who spend time, listen and talk to the other 80 per cent of the children have a positive influence on their lives and do not lead them down an exploitative path, this is a good result.

After the 2004 tsunami hit their villages, these Sri Lankan children found a safe place to play and learn. World Vision Sri Lanka Children's Societies engage children in activities to enhance their talents, build leadership, and help them advocate for social change in their communities. Photo: Harini Dias Bandaranayake / World Vision

When asked whether they could think of a grownup who might be worried if they had been out for too long, 91.9 per cent of children answered in the affirmative, indicating a strong level of care.

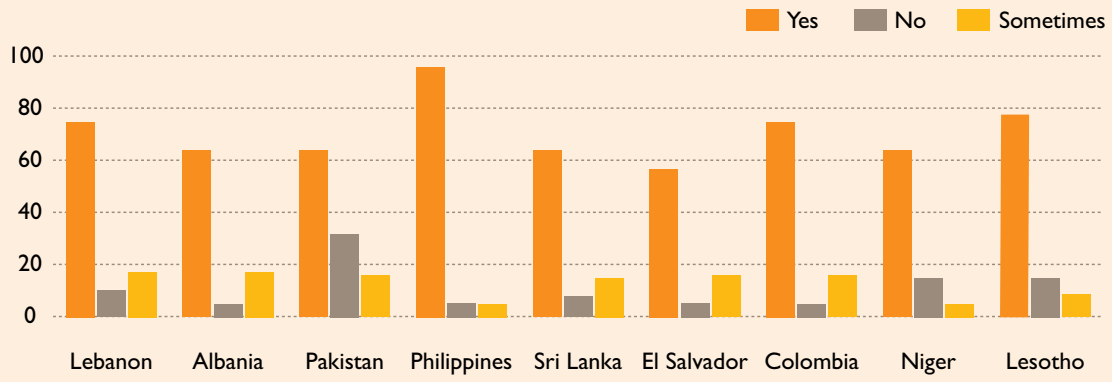
While results were similar across regions and gender, some children in Pakistan and Niger were unable to think of any grownups who would be concerned if they were out for too long.

Interestingly, in Sri Lanka 87.5 per cent of the children said that they could tell parents about problems, yet only 46.2 per cent felt that they knew someone they could talk to or a place they could go for help, indicating that perhaps their parents could not help even though they could talk to them. The likelihood of asking for help at home decreased for children whose parents were absent or who were living in a challenging home environment.

3 Note: In this study, being cared for and feeling protected were assessed separately. See Annex 2 for how this was done in the questionnaire.

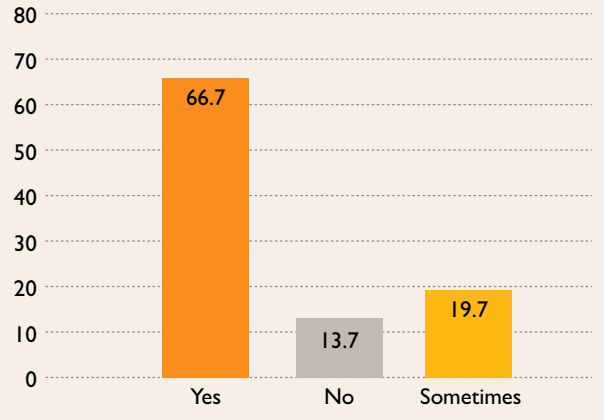
> …only 66.7 % of children felt that they knew a person they could talk to or place they could go for help…

2. I can think of one grownup who might be worried about me if I have been out for too long.



The answers shown in Graph 2 indicate that children have a high level of support, yet only an average of 66.7 per cent of children across the study felt that they knew a person they could talk to or place they could go to for help if needed (see Graph 3). Responses to that question differed greatly among countries, with 95.8 per cent in the Philippines and only 43.6 per cent in Lebanon.

3. When I have these problems/situations, I know a person I can talk to or place I can go to for help.



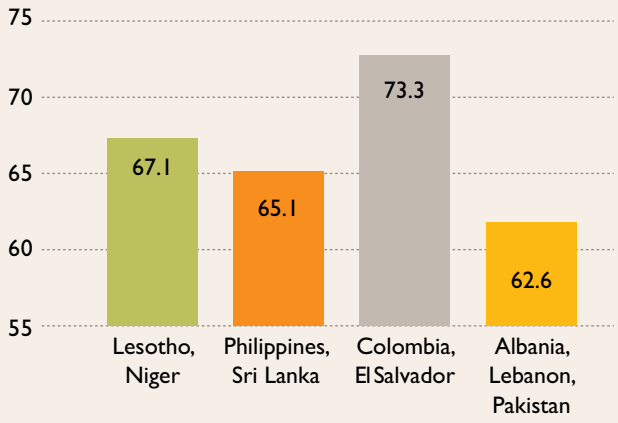
In Lebanon, 51.3 per cent of the children indicated that they talk to their families, yet they also expressed a wish that people would listen to children's opinions and that children's opinions would be considered in the home and in school. This may indicate that children did not feel that their relationships with their families involved mutual respect.

In Pakistan girls and boys resolved issues differently. Boys would speak to:

'Parents sometimes… but most times we just keep quiet.'

'Normally we keep everything to ourselves, but sometimes we share with one or two friends.'

4. When I have these problems/situations, I know a person I can talk to or a place I can go for help.



Girls, on the other hand, tend to share more, responding:

'We share with friends, mothers [and] in the project we have a psychologist.'

'With parents, especially mothers.'

These answers indicate that children felt that their family was not always the best place to go for support or to find someone to talk to.

Responding to the Lebanon survey, numerous children stressed the issue of family conflict and conflict between parents resulting in a lack of care in their family environment. Children's statements included:

'We live in families with lots of interpersonal conflicts and unstable situations.'

'We are scared when our parents hit us; we feel sad and hurt.'

'We feel that we do not have rights and that parents don't trust us.'

Children are aware that adults hold the key to the realisation of children's rights. For example, respondents in Lebanon noted:

'The problem in Lebanon is that we don't have a law that protects children. Parents can hit children to death and the police cannot do anything because parents have the right to hit their children and nobody can intervene.'

'There are some awareness sessions and activities on child rights with children, but they should teach children's rights to the parents or other adults. That will be more helpful.'

Children's responses show a clear need to raise awareness with parents and other significant adults, as well as children, on the benefits of listening to children and including children in decision-making. There is a need to work with parents, teachers and community leaders to strengthen parenting skills, teacher training and awareness of children's rights in order to improve care and protection in the home, school and community.

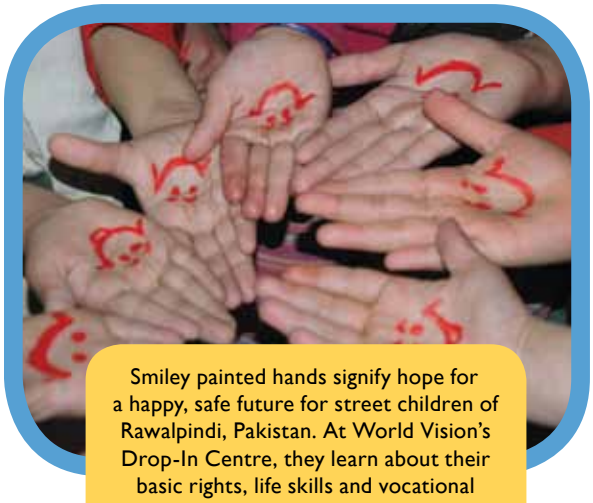
Children also noted the care issues of children living in challenging home environments. When asked about problems that children faced in the community, children answered that children of alcoholic fathers experienced more physical and psychological violence than other children and that they were not considered important in their families. They asked:

'If you are not appreciated in your family, what can you expect from the community?'

Children in Palawan, Philippines, learn early the value of saving, to prepare for personal, family, community, or emergency needs. Their Savings Group keeps their savings in a locked box, and each child has a pass book and an account number (on red card). Photo: G. Jeff Lamigo / World Vision

Protection

A significant number of children do not have a sense of security or protection at home, school or in their communities. For instance, 68.2 per cent of Latin American children surveyed in this research study do not feel safe in their own homes; only 33.3 per cent of such children in Lesotho could identify a safe place to play; and only 25.7 per cent of children surveyed in Pakistan felt safe in their neighbourhood.



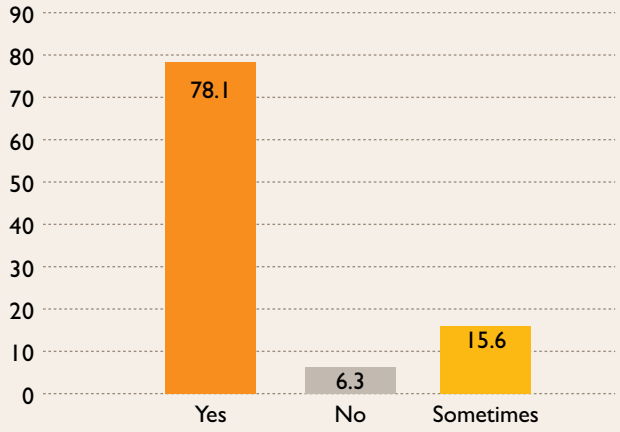
Smiley painted hands signify hope for a happy, safe future for street children of Rawalpindi, Pakistan. At World Vision's Drop-In Centre, they learn about their basic rights, life skills and vocational training, empowering them to make informed choices for their future. Photo: World Vision Pakistan

In all of the countries surveyed children stated that violence affects them at school, at home and in their communities. Violence is expressed in different forms, including physical, sexual and emotional violence as well as neglect.

Bullying, harassment and humiliation at school were identified by most of the children as significant problems that affect their daily life.

Children's responses to the questions that relate the level of safety and protection they feel in their homes, neighbourhoods and communities paint a mixed picture across the globe. Whilst overall responses indicate that an average of 50 per cent of children can identify safe spaces and have a sense of security, these results are skewed by the very high percentages of children who feel safe in particular countries, notably the Philippines. These mask the very low percentages from other countries.

5. I feel safe in my own home / among family members.



In terms of children's sense of safety and protection at home, the country surveys found that on average 78.1 per cent of children felt safe in their own homes. However, only 31.8 per cent of children in the Latin American samples felt safe in their own homes.

Comments made by children in Colombia indicated that they did not feel safe in their communities or, in many cases, in their homes. The majority of children there noted:

'Some children don't receive care and love from their parents, and they don't get any support.'

'Some children don't receive good food… or love and protection.'

The children expressed fear that the violence of the streets could follow them to their homes, resulting in a total lack of spaces in which they could feel safe:

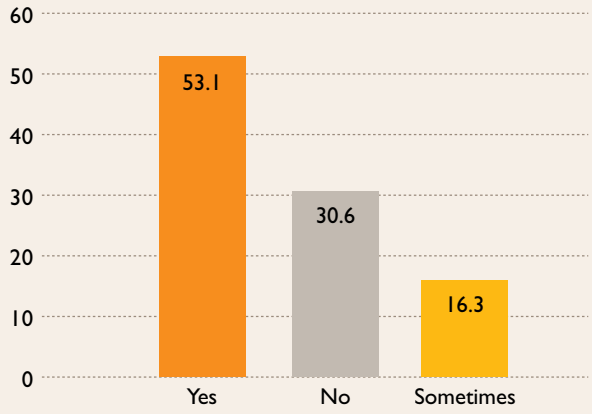
'In my neighbourhood there are lots of fights, and my family is worried that something bad could happen to me.'

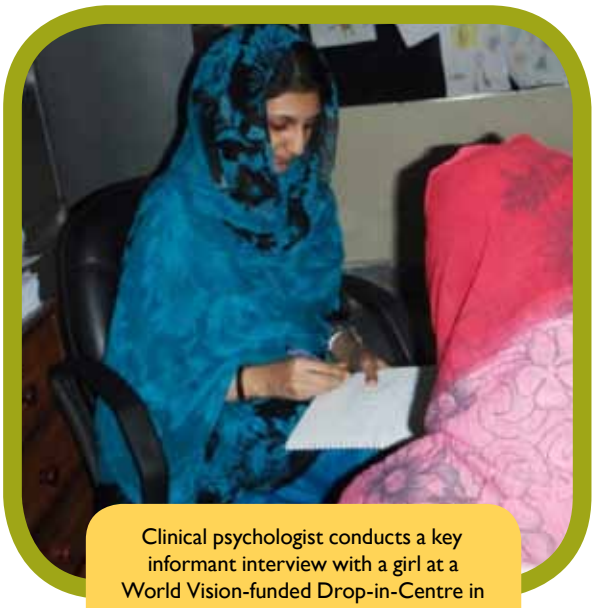
'Around my house there are places that scare me. In my community there is too much violence.'

'I am scared that someone can kill me. I am scared that my house can be robbed or destroyed.'

Children also indicated that it is exceptionally difficult for them to find a safe place to play. Overall, only 53.1 per cent of children in the surveys indicated that they had at least one safe place to play. There were, however, marked differences in the responses from children in the different countries in this study: in Albania, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Colombia and Lesotho, more than 40 per cent of the participants said that they did not have a safe place to play, while most of those in the Philippines (84 per cent) and Niger (71 per cent) did.

6. There is at least one place in my community where it is safe for me and my friends to play.





Clinical psychologist conducts a key informant interview with a girl at a World Vision-funded Drop-in-Centre in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Photo: World Vision

Children in Colombia clearly expressed that they did not feel safe in their communities or, in many cases, in their homes.

Boys in the Pakistan surveys said that there were no playgrounds in their school or community, nor any toys to play with. They also worried about drug addicts near their homes. Girls in Pakistan were afraid of kidnapping, molestation and being harassed by drug addicts. Children in the Sri Lanka focus groups were concerned about indecent proposals, perhaps a deterrent to going out to play.

In the surveys 70 per cent of children from Asia and Africa indicated that they felt safe in their neighbourhoods, whilst only 35 per cent of children in Latin America, the Middle East and Eastern Europe felt the same.

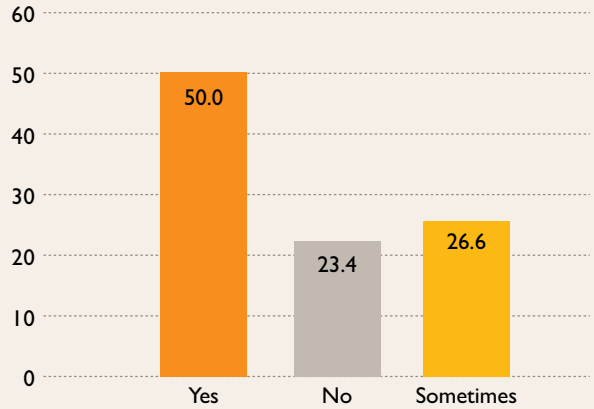
In El Salvador, Children's Clubs give young people a chance to enjoy recreation, gain leadership and organisation skills, be listened to, make decisions, and develop personal or community visions, thus helping them prepare for adulthood. Photo: Katia Maldonado / World Vision

However, these results were again skewed by the high number of positive responses from the Philippines (where 87.5 per cent of children felt safe) and Niger (where 77.1 per cent of children felt safe). The story was very different in Pakistan, where only 25.7 per cent of children felt they had a safe neighbourhood; Colombia, where only 36.6 per cent felt safe; and El Salvador, where only 31.4 per cent of the children felt safe in their neighbourhood.

Children's focus groups in El Salvador also indicated a lack of security, particularly for working children. One respondent said:

> 'There are people who mistreat children. There are children who work in the field; sometimes, when they go out, their rights are violated through mistreatment or rape.'

7. I feel safe from danger in my neighbourhood (while walking to school, playing, etc.).



In the Pakistan survey groups, girls identified a range of issues that affected their sense of safety and security. In particular, they were afraid of harassment and sexual abuse. They indicated that cultural factors inhibit girls' activities. The girls also identified a range of general issues that had an impact on children's sense of security, including the vulnerability of working children, in particular child rag-pickers, both in their workplaces and homes, and the exploitation of children who are used to smuggle drugs.

For many children, school does not provide a haven of care and protection. In some areas we found that children were scared of going to school because of verbal or physical abuse. Children in Lebanon noted that school did not necessarily provide an alternative secure space.

'In schools it is the same situation; teachers and others can hit you and nobody can protect you. Students cannot complain. Some students drop out of school because their teacher hits them too much. Sometimes parents ask teachers to hit children, so children cannot even complain to their parents.'

Colombian children, in particular, expressed a distinct sense of insecurity and a lack of faith in the concept of protection in their homes, communities and even amongst their peers.

'I am scared that people will break into my house to steal.'

'In my community there is a lot of violence.'

'I am scared about the violence among neighbours and among my family members.'

'I am scared of other children that fight between themselves and hit other people.'

Yerlis (age 12), a student of the My Sponsorship Communications Training School, interviews Eduardo Jìmenez, regional coordinator of World Vision Colombia. Photo: Astrid Zacipa / World Vision

'[I am afraid of] the bad influence of adults, maltreatment and people [who] don't feel any responsibility towards children.'

'Some children don't get any attention or love from their parents, nor are they supported.'

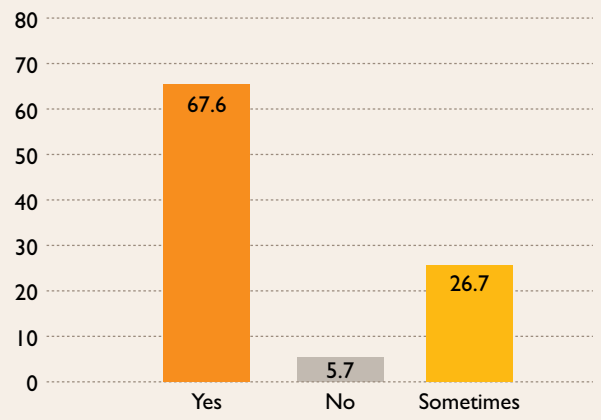
'Children are not given good nutrition, love or protection.'

In addition to the home and neighbourhood, children's sense of security and protection was affected by larger-scale issues. Children expressed their deep concern about early/forced marriage and kidnapping of children for trafficking or exploitation. Children from Niger, Colombia, Lebanon and Pakistan identified war and situations of armed conflict as a problem for them, whilst children from Pakistan, Niger and Sri Lanka stated that natural disasters, such as earthquakes and floods, are a major concern for them.

Participation

- Children's responses indicate a significant variation in their perception of the ability to make decisions for themselves. Children in the Philippines felt empowered to make decisions for themselves; however, Colombian children show a striking contrast, with fewer than 3 per cent feeling that they could make decisions about their own well-being.
- The majority of children felt encouraged to participate in the home. For many children in this study, however, school is not a place where they feel cared for, protected or able to participate.
- Children seek feedback on the impact of their participation.
- Across the surveys, 35.1 per cent of the children felt that they could share their opinions with their religious leaders. This may reflect the attitudes of the religious leaders, the community, the children involved or cultural traditions.
- The majority of children in the surveys felt that they could participate in World Vision activities. However, some children indicated that they could not participate or give their opinions. The World Vision Children's Council in Lebanon wanted an explanation for this, commenting:

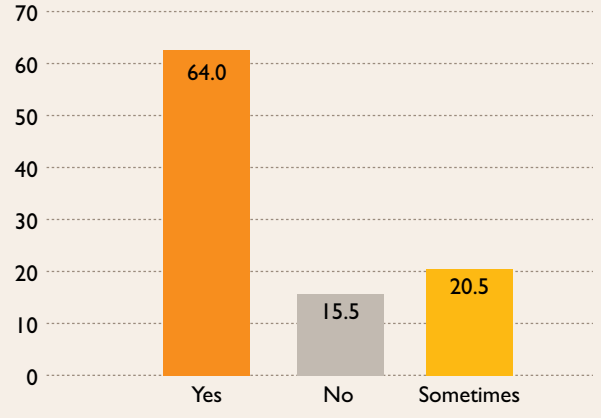
8. I get the chance to tell my parents about what I do and about things that affect me.



> 'World Vision is an organisation that works for children, especially by giving them a space to participate, so it is unacceptable that some children cannot give their opinion.'

Across the nine countries surveyed, children's participation in the home was high. The majority of children could speak to their parents about their activities and concerns. A significant majority of children in the Philippines and 87.5 per cent of Sri Lankan children felt that they could talk to their parents. However, only 48.8 per cent of Colombian children felt that way.

9. My teachers encourage me to share my opinion and views at school.



Colombian children indicated that they were reluctant to ask for help for a number of reasons ranging from fear of discussing 'certain issues' to doubting that anyone would help them because 'nobody listens' to them.

The figures also show that 26.7 per cent of children selected 'sometimes', indicating selective communication, perhaps depending on the issue and the consequences it might have.

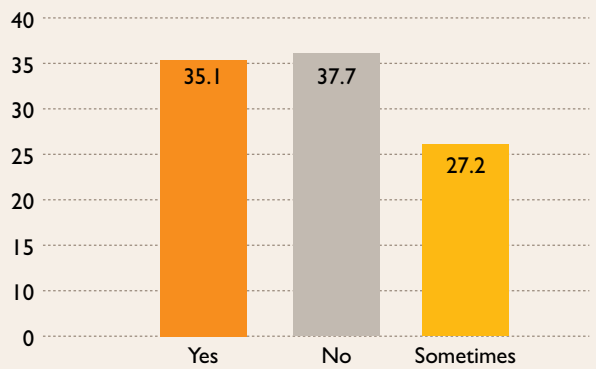
Children's responses showed a range of opinions in terms of significant adults giving children the space to express themselves. In relation to education, 64 per cent of children felt that their teachers encourage them to share their opinions and views at school. Once again, the Philippines recorded a highly positive result of 91.7 per cent, while fewer than 50 per cent of children in Albania and Lebanon felt that their teachers encouraged their participation.

Albanian children felt that they did not have the freedom to express their opinions and ideas at school. Lebanese children outlined a difficult relationship with their teachers. They indicated that they were scared of going to school because the teachers hit them, yelled at them, insulted them, punished them and gave low grades. Only 20.5 per cent of Lebanese children felt that teachers would make decisions about children's well-being.

Relationships with teachers showed strong regional differences; nearly 90 per cent of children in Asia felt that teachers could make decisions concerning their well-being compared with only 27.6 per cent in Latin America. The lowest result was in Colombia, with just 7.3 per cent of children believing that teachers could make decisions about children's well-being.

Only 35.1 per cent of the children surveyed in this study felt they were able to share their opinions with religious leaders. The high responses of 91.7 per cent from children in the Philippines and 48.7 per cent in Lebanon mask the low percentages of just 17.1 per cent in Lesotho and 14.7 per cent in Pakistan.

10. I get the chance to share my opinion with the religious leaders of my community.

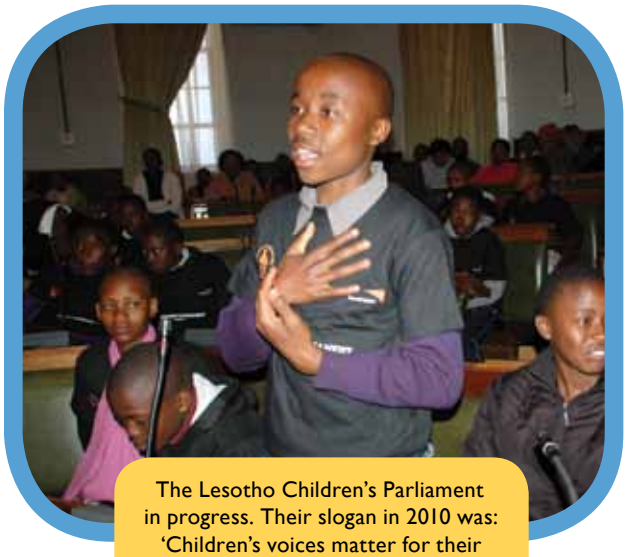


Children's relationship with community leaders also paints a varied regional picture. Over half of surveyed African children believed that their community leaders made decisions concerning children's well-being, while in Latin America only 6.6 per cent of children felt the same. The Philippines had the highest rating, 83.3 per cent, followed by Niger with 65.7 per cent. The lowest ratings were from Pakistan and El Salvador, both with 5.7 per cent, and Colombia with 7.3 per cent. These responses indicate that there is scope to facilitate relationships between community leaders and children. This may be an important step in making children feel more secure, active and empowered within their communities.

World Vision has effective but uneven impact on child participation. The majority of children, 72.2 per cent, felt that World Vision provided them with the opportunity to participate. Of interviewed Filipino and Sri Lankan children, 100 per cent and 84.6 per cent, respectively, felt that they could participate, yet only 42.9 per cent in Niger felt the same.

Children in Niger were mainly aware of opportunities for adult participation. They were able to identify a range of activities addressing problems that children faced in their community, but the activities they identified were awareness sessions for parents on early/forced marriage, health, education and distribution of mosquito nets. The activities are performed by adults and authorities (village chief, mayor), village elders, health or education agents and NGOs. The children stated:

> 'Children have no access to these activities; however, children want to participate, to learn.'



The Lesotho Children's Parliament in progress. Their slogan in 2010 was: 'Children's voices matter for their protection and welfare'. Photo: World Vision Lesotho

Although they felt that they could participate generally, children in Sri Lanka also indicated that they were not involved in most aspects of activities. They felt that children should have a permanent process through which they can participate. They noted:

> 'Generally, the child's views are not followed up or at least children do not hear of it.'

These views were echoed by children in Lebanon, who also wished that there were more opportunity for dialogue. These sentiments raise the question of how long children will participate if feedback and results are not evident.

A significant proportion of the children felt that they could participate only sometimes; the international survey average was 16 per cent.

Children in Lebanon stated:

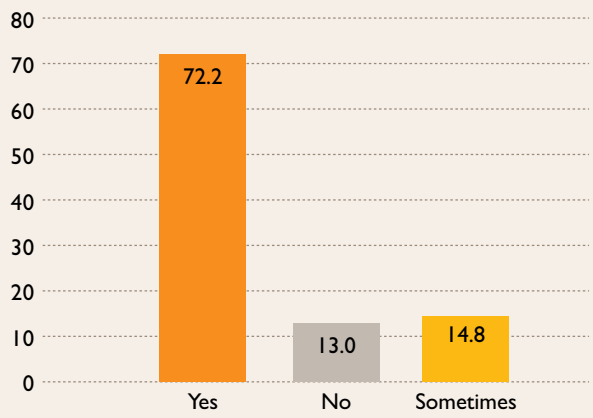
> 'We believe that we can attend World Vision activities only when someone from World Vision invites us. It is not open for everyone. The activities are decided by adults.'

> 'Children that participate in the children's council have more opportunities to do something good; they can give their opinion and they can give ideas for activities. But if you are not in the council you cannot.'

Their responses suggest that children feel that activities for children are dependent upon World Vision or adults organising or facilitating them.

The opportunity to participate is precarious. Many children across the globe indicated that they would like to participate but did not speak up for fear of adults humiliating them. Children in Sri Lanka feared being criticised, and children from El Salvador noted that their desire to participate was inhibited by fear of adults' responses:

11. I usually get the chance to tell my opinion during activities organized by World Vision.



'It is not good that we are not taken into account, but we do not talk because of fear or we sometimes think the adults can embarrass us. We do not make proposals because we might be told that this is wrong. We need to know the people to trust them, to work with them.'

They also observed the importance of environment to participation:

'In the past, the activities used to be held in the field, and it is not adequate, there are no seats, and there is no roof. There is not a space where the young people can participate.'

Children's perception of their ability to make decisions about their own well-being showed significant variations across the countries surveyed. Regionally, 68.8 per cent of children in Asia felt empowered to make decisions while only 25.0 per cent of children in Latin America felt the same way. This can be further broken down to the Philippines, with 87.5 per cent responding positively, followed by Albania, with 65.7 per cent. The lowest response was from Colombia, with only 2.4 per cent of children believing that they could make decisions about their own well-being. Pakistan, Lesotho and Niger also had high 'no' responses of over 58 per cent. Children in El Salvador were almost evenly split on whether children could make decisions about their own well-being.

Children in Lesotho display a banner for their Children's Parliament, with the slogan 'Children's voices matter for their protection and welfare'. Photo: World Vision Lesotho

The responses show that a significant number of children, in particular in Latin America and Africa, do not feel empowered to make decisions about matters that affect them. This indicates that there is a need to work with children to develop their skills and self-confidence so they can become active agents in their own lives, as well as a need to help adults understand the developmental advantages of children's participation.

Consulting children on their willingness to fill the questionnaires for the consultation process. Photo: World Vision Albania

The positive impact of participation can be seen in the levels of resilience and increased self-esteem and confidence of Filipino children. Like all children around the world they face problems, but, as is clear throughout the report, children in the Philippines answered most questions on care and protection in a positive way. Children there celebrated their level of participation:

'We as children should be involved in planning like when we have activities in the ADP and in World Vision. They invite us and we are the ones who plan and they support us. We are even the ones who tell them which materials we need. The staff just guides us. Last Children's Congress, our facilitators were children.'

Indeed, children in the Philippines looked forward to the opportunity to participate being extended to more children. These children show the self-confidence to run activities as well as faith in themselves to take steps to solve their own problems, saying:

'All children can ask help from the *barangay* [village] and Department of Social Welfare and Development. They can also report any time to the police if there are problems.'

'World Vision asks the children what problems we face in the community and what we think we can do to solve the problems.'

Most of the responses in this report indicate that children's concepts of care, protection and participation focused on the local and informal level. However, children in Asia (62.5 per cent) seemed to accept that governments had a role in making decisions about them, while in Latin America only 17.1 per cent agreed. The Philippines recorded 83.3 per cent, followed by Lesotho with 58.3 per cent. Only 8.6 per cent of children in El Salvador felt that government made decisions about children's well-being.

> The children's concerns call for an integrated, holistic child protection strategy…

Conclusions and recommendations

The results of the questionnaires and focus-group discussions show a clear trend. The less participation children had in decision-making at school or in the family, the less they felt in capable of facing problems at home, at school and in their community. There was a strong correlation between children who were involved in their community or in children's clubs and who were consulted for their input, and greater levels of confidence and positive responses in terms of feeling cared for, protected and fully participating in life and decision-making. These children had clear coping strategies in place for times when difficulties arose.

While international conventions articulate rights and obligations, children experience their rights primarily at the local level. It is there that they feel their rights are realised or denied. Children in our diverse surveys across the globe agreed on the importance and value of their families. Family was seen as a place of care, support and security. However, many children indicated significant levels of anxiety and fear of violence in their homes and communities and lack of safety and security. A significant number did not feel safe in their neighbourhoods and could not identify a safe place to play. A significant conclusion from this research is that an effective child protection system at the community level should incorporate both formal and informal elements. Children's perceptions and experiences of being cared for, protected and participating are locally defined and holistic. The issues they raise require an integrated strategy for child protection. This would address:

- the formal elements of a child protection system and systemic issues that create unsafe conditions or inequity
- the informal elements of a child protection system including culture, traditional practices and social norms.

In some ways this challenges the premise of World Vision's child protection advocacy strategy, which aims to ensure that the formal elements of child protection systems are in place so that children's domestic lives are secure. The children's opinions suggested that equal attention must be paid to the informal elements of the protection system because this is where culture, traditional practices and norms embodied by adults directly affect children.

Children's concerns stressed that addressing the economic security of families is a crucial element to children feeling safe and secure. In six of the nine countries surveyed in this report, children ranked issues of economic well-being in the top five areas of concern. Their concerns suggest that the child protection advocacy strategy ought to take a holistic approach which incorporates causal factors when addressing the care and protection of children in the context of family and community.

The purpose of this study was to hear and understand children's views on protection issues and to determine whether they felt cared for, protected and participating in their own lives. Key questions and challenges emerged from the responses the children shared. How will the children's opinions influence the child protection advocacy strategy? How can World Vision ensure that it is accountable to children for the issues they have raised?

The advocacy messages in the child protection advocacy strategy will be aligned with the findings from this research. World Vision can utilise its existing strengths and expertise to act on children's concerns by

- developing a sound partnership with civil society players, such as religious institutions, citizens' associations and clubs
- promoting awareness among community residents of harmful practices that lead to children being abused, exploited or neglected, and working with residents to identify culturally appropriate solutions, engaging them as stakeholders for child protection
- coordinating with other institutions when families are under threat, to ensure that needed social protection is provided so that parents can take care of their children
- coordinating with key institutions, such as schools and clinics, to ensure support for child protection in prevention, response and rehabilitation programmes
- ensuring that child protection systems are accountable to those who receive their services.

Efforts should be made to develop child-focused national strategies that strengthen the participation and protection of children and provide them with opportunities to influence decisions, policies and programmes. Participation requires relationships of mutual respect among children, parents, teachers, caregivers and community leaders. To achieve this goal, strategies and policies need to be redesigned to ensure that programming efforts are directed to sustaining the well-being of children and promoting the establishment of both formal and informal community-based child protection systems. World Vision is committed to this goal.

Country-level programming will determine the best approach to tackling the issues that children face. However, the results of these questionnaires and focus-group discussions highlight the importance of providing meaningful opportunities for children to be involved in planning, implementing and evaluating activities. It also highlights the importance of helping adults to understand why it is important for children to express their views in the home and other arenas, such as school and faith communities. These opportunities contribute to increasing both children's and adults' skills, knowledge and confidence to contribute to positive change for children, their families and their communities.

WV staff member explains to children who don't have yet formal education (reading or writing skills) the consultation process and content of the interview. Photo: World Vision Albania

Participation is a way for children to grow and extend their capacities. In addition to exercising their right to participate, children's opinions help to create more effective and targeted programmes. By facilitating safe spaces in which children can express their views and by involving children in all aspects of the programme cycle, World Vision, as a child-focused agency, is better able to design and implement programmes which effectively address the issues that concern children.

Recommendations

This series of consultations with children was conducted to inform the child protection advocacy strategy; however, the findings suggest that there are important lessons here that could assist other sections of World Vision as they seek to enhance child participation and improve child protection systems.

In developing and implementing the child protection advocacy strategy, World Vision will

- implement mechanisms to ensure accountability to children, especially the most vulnerable, for the issues they have raised
- include children as partners in World Vision's work generally and, in particular, in developing and strengthening child protection systems
- collaborate with church and faith groups as partners in strengthening community-based child protection systems and enabling children and youth within these faith groups to play a significant role in protection-related activities
- ensure that World Vision takes a holistic approach to child protection that recognises economic strengthening as critical for enhancing child protection systems
- seek to empower children and families to create relationships of mutual respect between parents and children and involve children in decision-making as appropriate with regard to their evolving capacities.

In regard to World Vision programming, World Vision will

- identify and explore alternative approaches and arenas for children's participation other than clubs
- develop and provide guidance for children and adults on how to self-organise and manage such spaces effectively, using participatory action research with child-led organisations
- work with partners to link early childhood development and positive parenting with child protection systems to minimise domestic violence, to break cycles of violence and deprivation, and to improve children's contribution to decision-making processes at home and within the community
- develop or recommend guidelines and standards for child participation, and build the capacity of staff and partner organisations to ensure that they have the necessary qualities, understanding and skills to run activities and provide opportunities for meaningful participation from children
- ensure that World Vision and partner-organisation staff members are aware of the purpose, rationale and benefits of a child's right to participate, and make every effort to ensure that the majority of children involved in programmes supported by World Vision and its partners can choose to participate in accordance with their evolving capacities
- promote integrated programming approaches that address the holistic well-being of children, especially with regard to opportunities for economic development for their care-givers.

Children from southern Lebanon participate in a child consultation by filling out a self-administered questionnaire. Photo: World Vision Lebanon

Annex 1

Methodology

Objectives of the research, set out in the Terms of Reference

1. Examine the major social justice topics that are part of CPP (care, protection and participation) and affect children where World Vision works.

2. Provide children with a space to express their own views and exercise their right to participate at community, regional and national levels.

3. Listen to children and give them the opportunity to influence World Vision's systems, programming and accountability.

4. Set the precedent for listening, and being accountable to children at all levels of advocacy.

Research outputs

1. Publish a 'Child Consultation Report' on children's views, ideas and opinions on issues affecting them with regard to CPP and the exercise of their participation rights. (This refers to the present publication.)

2. Publish a 'child-friendly' version of the report to share with children around the world.

3. Review the report on World Vision materials over the past five years that incorporate children's views on CPP-related issues. (This report is published separately.)

The children respondents

The primary research sample comprised 434 children, aged 9 to 17. Altogether, 173 girls and 147 boys participated through the questionnaire, and 114 children participated in the focus-group discussions (FGDs). Children were selected with the intention of gathering perspectives from different religious and ethnic backgrounds, gender, differing abilities, geographic regions, rural and urban areas, and from situations of particular risk. Participants were selected from a cross section of World Vision's global programmes. The selection of countries was made by World Vision regional offices in consultation with national offices and the CPP advocacy research team.

Country	Questionnaires	FGD/Interviews	Number of children
Albania	35	25	60
Colombia	41	12	53
El Salvador	35	15	50
Lebanon	39	11	50
Lesotho	36	0	36
Niger	35	15	50
Pakistan	35	15	50
Philippines	24	6	30
Sri Lanka	40	15	55
Total	**320**	**105**	**434**

The main methodologies for the primary research consisted of FGDs, face-to-face semi-structured interviews, self-administered questionnaires; and participant observation.

The data generated from the questionnaires, FGDs, and interviews were analysed according to theme. The interviews were conducted taking into consideration World Vision's child protection guidelines and the Minimum Standards for Consulting with Children developed by the Inter-Agency Working Group on Children's Participation. All children were interviewed in their own language in order to minimise misinterpretations.

To complement the primary data, a review of World Vision's publications and other materials containing children's views was conducted in order to understand the principles and practices of World Vision's approach to children's participation. This review is published as a separate report.

A reference group and a review committee were formed to provide technical support to the research and editorial processes. These groups were composed of staff members from across the World Vision Partnership who have appropriate experience in research, consultation methodologies and child participation. The research process took place over nine months in 2010 and was divided into the following steps:

- review literature
- develop and pilot interview instruments
- feedback on the tools by the research reference group
- develop guidelines package to ensure ethical, safe and meaningful child participation
- identify and engage national offices to conduct consultation
- translate the tools into local languages
- conduct questionnaires, FGDs and interviews
- translate the results from local languages into English
- data entry and analysis
- feedback on the findings by the research review committee
- report and dissemination of the results.

Annex 2

Child consultation questionnaire

(CPP Advocacy Working Group)

I am from _____

My age _____ I am a ☐ Boy ☐ Girl

1. I can think of one grownup who spends time with me, talks and listens to me.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

2. I can think of one grownup who might be worried about me if I have been out for too long.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

3. There is at least one place in my community where it is safe for me and my friends to play.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

4. I feel safe from danger in my neighbourhood (while walking to school, playing, etc.).

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

5. I feel safe in my own home / among family members.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

6. The situations/problems that I mostly worry about and that affect me in my everyday life are:
(You can choose more than one answer).

- ☐ When something bad (problems/ arguments) happens in the family.
- ☐ When I cannot go to school.
- ☐ When I do badly at school.
- ☐ When my parents don't have enough money.
- ☐ When we do not have enough food to eat.
- ☐ When there is war or conflict that affects my home and community.
- ☐ When there is a natural disaster (earthquake, flood, etc.).
- ☐ When my parents hurt me by hitting me and/or saying very bad things to me.
- ☐ When I am hit and/or insulted by my teachers.
- ☐ When there is no place for me to play.
- ☐ When I am forced to work.
- ☐ When I am forced to beg.
- ☐ Possibly being taken away from my family.
- ☐ Being forced to move from my community.
- ☐ Being separated from my parents and family.
- ☐ Being placed in a children's home.

7. When I have these problems/situations, I know a person I can talk to or place I can go to for help.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

8. I get the chance to tell my parents about what I do and about things that affect me.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

9. My teachers encourage me to share my opinions and views at school.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

10. I get the chance to share my opinion with the religious leaders of my community.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

11. I usually get the chance to tell my opinion during activities organised by WV.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

12. There are children's clubs in my community.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

13. I am a member of a children's club.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No, go to question 16

14. In this club, all children in the community (boys, girls, children with disabilities, children of different religions, minorities) have the same chance to participate.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

15. In this club I have the chance to participate and express my views freely when planning children's activities.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes

16. I think _____ has the right to make decision regarding the well-being of children:
(You can tick more than one option).

- ☐ Parents
- ☐ Teachers
- ☐ Me
- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Neighbours
- ☐ Government
- ☐ Community leaders
- ☐ Religious leaders

Child consultation guide for focus-group discussions and key informant interviews (CPP Advocacy Working Group)

Facilitator's guide

Probes are questions that could help the facilitator investigate more deeply into the issues addressed in the questions if the children fail to understand or need to be asked in a simpler manner

Notes are ideas for facilitators to keep in mind while asking the questions. Probes and notes should be read carefully before conducting the discussions and/or interviews.

Q1. What are the things you like the most in your family and community?

Note: This is an opening question to initiate the communication with the children. There is no need to elaborate on it. It is just get them to start talking.

Q2. What are your dreams and wishes for your community to look like in the future?

Probe: What things have you seen in other communities that you would like to have in this community?

Q3. Close your eyes and try to think about the things that scare you and your friends the most in your community or at home? What are those things?

Probe: What makes you and/or your friends feel unprotected or insecure in your community or at home (events, factors, problems, systems, natural disasters, conflicts, or other risks, such as being forced to work, child trafficking, and others).

What do you and/or your friends do when feeling threatened by these risks?

Q4. What problems do children mostly face in your community?

Probe: Are there children in your community who no one seems to like or who are ignored?

Who are those children? (Examples of those children could be those who feel left out, discriminated against, whose rights are violated, etc.)

Why do you think these children have these bad problems?

Q5. When you or other children in your community face problems, what do you do?

Probe: Do you talk to someone (from the family, a friend, a teacher, etc.)? Do you visit a centre or community organisation seeking help? What kind of help do you usually receive?

Note: If children answer that they don't talk to anyone about their problems, ask the following questions:

Why don't you talk about your problems?

What keeps you from talking about your problems? (perhaps lack of close people to talk to, or lack of centres or community organisations to visit). It might be the children's feelings: mistrust; it is not their right to talk about their problems; it is not safe to talk about their problems; they are afraid to bring up some issues; or other feelings.

Q6. Are there any activities addressing the problems that children face in your community?

Q7. Who conducts these activities?

Q8. Can all children from your community access these activities?

Q9. Should the children get to decide which activities they want to address the problems they face in their community?

Q10. When organisations plan activities for children, do you think the children should be involved in selecting the type of activities and how and where to do them?

Q11. Do children in your community have a space to participate in activities?

How do they participate?

Is their opinion taken into account when activities are planned?

Do children have a role in following up after the activity is finished?

Q12. How satisfied are you with the level of participation that you have in activities in your community?

World Vision staff members conduct one-to-one interviews with a girl, aged 13, to gain insights about CPP issues. Photo: World Vision Lebanon

World Vision International Offices

International Advocacy and Justice for Children
World Vision House
Opal Drive
Fox Milne Milton Keynes MK15 0ZR
United Kingdom
Tel: 44.1908.841.063
Fax: 44.1908.841.064

Executive Office
6-9 The Square
Stockley Park
Uxbridge, Middlesex
UB11 1FW
United Kingdom
Tel: 44 (0) 7758 2900
Fax: 44 (0) 7758 2947

World Visions International
800 West Chestnut Avenue
Monrovia, CA 91016-3198
USA
Tel: 1 626 303 8811
Fax: 1 626 301 7786
Web: wvi.org

International Liaison Office
6 Ch. de la Tourelle
Case Postale 50
CH-1211 Geneva 19
Switzerland
Tel: 41 22 798 4183
Fax: 41 22 798 6547
Email: geneva@wvi.org

European Union Liaison Office
33 Rue Livingstone
1000 Brussels
Belgium
Tel: 32 (0) 2 230 1621
Fax: 32 (0) 2 280 3426
Web: wveurope.org

United Nations Liaison Office
216 East 49th Street, 4th floor
New York, NY 10017
USA
Tel: 1 212 355 1779
Fax: 1 212 355 3018