



Children's Participation in Research: Reflections from the Care and Protection of Separated Children in Emergencies Project

By Gillian Mann and David Tolfree



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Executive Summary

This paper reviews the experience of involving children in the various case studies initiated by the Save the Children Alliance research initiative entitled Care and Protection of Separated Children in Emergencies. It examines the different ways in which children were involved – as informants, in the planning and management of the study, in the analysis of data, in respondent validation and finally as researchers or research assistants. Although the CPSC case studies provide examples of all of these different ways of involving children, none of them should be seen as the “right” way: rather emphasis is placed on defining clear objectives for children’s participation and defining their role according to what is appropriate and achievable in the context and circumstances. Particular emphasis is placed on the importance of using methods and techniques, which enable children to express their own issues and concerns and not just to respond to those raised by the adult researchers. The methodology and methods used are described and discussed.

This paper offers an analysis of some of the factors, which need to be taken into consideration in determining the children’s role in research. These include age, gender, time, the community and children’s experience of participation, children’s level of education and language skill, the presence of key gatekeepers and recognition of the diversity of children’s experiences. A range of ethical considerations are raised: the issue of informed consent of children and of their parents/guardians is discussed, and detailed consideration is given to the issue of distress and the need to deal appropriately with the results of children’s self-disclosure. Some discussion is offered on potential difficulties of children’s participation in communities in which the involvement of children is not considered appropriate, and on the importance of not raising unachievable expectations. Finally, the question of adult-child power dynamics is explored and some measures are suggested to counteract the tendency for children to express “the right answer” rather than their honest opinions and ideas.

A key message of this paper is that securing the participation of children in research can be both empowering and validating for children (and adults) as well as enriching for the research process and its findings. It was found that children’s views and experiences are often significantly different from those of adults, even when the latter believe that they are reflecting children’s viewpoints.

I. CPSC Overview

The Care and Protection of Separated Children in Emergencies Project is a research initiative of the International Save the Children Alliance. It aims to explore issues of fostering, group care and other types of care arrangements for children and adolescents separated from their families in situations of large-scale emergency. While armed conflict and forced migration have been the principal context of the research, the issue of children rendered parentless because of the AIDS epidemic has also been included. The project has commissioned case studies in various countries, using local researchers, with a secondary objective of building research capacity through training and supervision. It is hoped that the outputs of this initiative will inform advocacy efforts and the development of policy and practice for children who live apart from their families.

2. CPSC Involvement of Children

Recent years have seen a growing recognition of the need to involve children directly in research and considerable progress has been made in developing research methods which facilitate young people's active involvement, many of them based on play and activities derived from the PRA methodology. However, while a considerable amount of research has been undertaken in the field of separated children in emergency situations, these studies have not generally adopted participatory research methods.

When the CPSC initiative was being planned it was decided that a systematic attempt would be made to involve children in each of the case studies and to ensure not only that children's opinions were directly accessed, but also that, as far as possible, children were enabled to contribute their ideas both on policy matters and on the components of good practice.

The case studies have relied on the deployment of local researchers who have had different levels of experience in research methods generally, and in children's participation specifically. When necessary, training has been provided to researchers, either by the Research Coordinator, or by the team leader for the particular case study, within the constraints of individual capacities and time. The actual methods and techniques in each study have thus varied considerably, reflecting both the particular context of the research and the abilities and experience of the research team.

3. *Ways that Children were Involved in Different CPSC Case Studies*

Boys and girls can be involved in research in numerous and varied ways. It is important at the outset of any study to be clear on the objectives of involving children and on the roles, which they are to play in the research process. Within the CPSC initiative, children were involved in different ways on different levels. The following is a description of the diverse roles that children have played in the research for this multi-country project.

3.1 Children as Informants

In all of the case studies, which involved the collection of primary data, boys and girls participated as research informants. However, the manner in which they did so differed in each study. Before analysing the ways in which children were involved as informants, it may be helpful to highlight some assumptions that researchers have made in other studies regarding the participation of children.

First, many adult researchers who are trying to facilitate the involvement of children assume that they know what the significant questions are. But if researchers only follow their own line of questions then they may fail to elicit additional ideas, experiences or opinions that children themselves may want to express. While research of this nature may confirm or contradict the assumptions of the researcher, it may provide few new insights or themes. If the aim of research is to better understand the realities of children's lives from their own perspectives, a different approach is needed.

A second assumption that researchers often make is that children have pre-formed perceptions and opinions about the issues of concern to the researchers, and that they will readily express these views when asked. Experience of participatory research with boys and girls reveals that this is not always the case, especially with younger children and young people with relatively poor literacy skills, and especially when children have had little experience in the articulation of the issues being raised.

Seen in this way, participatory research with children is not just a process whereby boys and girls are asked about their ideas and experiences: rather it becomes "a process by which children are empowered to construct a representation of their social world"¹. This approach is greatly facilitated if the researcher is able to provide a range

1. Woodhead, Martin (1998): "Children's Perspectives on their Working Lives", Stockholm, Save the Children Sweden, page 22.

of media which are culturally- and age- appropriate through which children can express themselves, without the process being dominated by the researchers' own constructions, ideas and opinions. It is important for researchers to be aware of the local "currency of communication" and to use an appropriate variety of activities such as drama, mapping, drawings, ranking etc. that suit the context of children's daily lives.

A third assumption that is frequently made by researchers is that children will always give honest and accurate answers to their questions. However, the power imbalance (see discussion in 5.7 below) between adult researchers and child informants may lead the latter to provide "expected" rather than honest responses. This power imbalance may be magnified by gender and ethnic differences, among many other distinctions. The use of practical and participatory activities may enable children to reveal their ideas in subtle and indirect ways, while "respondent validation" (see 3.4 below) helps to check the reliability and accuracy of the way in which researchers have recorded and interpreted children's testimony.

In the CPSC case studies, attempts were made throughout to structure a well thought-through sequence of activities, using a variety of communication media, that could take children into the areas of their lives that the researcher wanted to find out about but which did not introduce an adult-imposed series of pre-determined topics.

An example, drawn from the case study undertaken in the Sinje refugee camp in Liberia may illustrate some of the above points. The researchers wanted to undertake a session with "biological" children in families where there was also a foster child in order to elicit children's perceptions of fostering, "foster siblings" and the issue of discrimination within the household. These children were mainly young boys and girls who probably had never before been asked to discuss these issues. The workshop was partially pre-structured and started out with the researchers requesting the children to prepare and then perform a short drama for the group to show what it is like to live in a family where there is a foster child. What emerged was a graphic portrayal of a pattern of discrimination towards foster children in which the biological children, as well as adult household members, were heavily involved. It is unlikely that a focus group discussion would have elicited this kind of rich and detailed information. It was, however, possible to build on what children were enacting, and then help them to find the language and concepts to talk about the issues raised by the drama.

Various other forms of visual representation can be used in a similar manner: the Appendix offers an example drawn from the Research Strategy in the Case Study on the Development of Fostering in Rwanda.

3.2 Involving Children in the Planning and Management of Research

In the CPSC studies, children were involved in the planning of the research on different levels and in different ways.

In some of the case studies, it was helpful to involve a group of children as a "ref-

erence group” for a piece of research. Tasks for the group included some or all of the following tasks: discussing the objectives of the research, identifying research sites and key informants, discussing ethical considerations and responding to any difficulties encountered by the research team. On a practical level, in some situations it was appropriate to seek the help of children in locating and mobilising informants and in selecting participants for group activities. In Sinje, young leaders of the existing Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs were invited to assist in this way as they knew most of the children in their camp and knew how to find them.

It was also possible in some of the case studies to involve children in the technical development of the research. In some of the case studies, children also played a valuable role in the design of the research, in the production of questionnaires or schedules for interviews and in advising how questions should be asked and how the information should be interpreted. In Tanzania, a group of 5 refugee children between the ages of 13 and 16 assisted in planning and implementing workshops in which other boys and girls participated in a series of activities including song writing, dance and social network drawings. The group also helped the researcher to frame her existing research questions and develop new ones, which could be understood by and explored with children.

3.3 Involving Children in the Analysis of Data

In some situations, it may be helpful and appropriate to involve children in interpreting and analysing the data, which emerge from a study, especially when, it is possible to work with a group of young people who have personal experience of the subject matter. In El Salvador, for example, a group of young adults who, as children, had experienced separation from their families assisted the researchers in going through, interpreting and analysing the data, which emerged from the study. Their involvement was particularly important because they had already spent a great deal of time discussing relevant issues and they were themselves sufficiently detached from their own experiences to enable them to examine the issues in a relatively objective manner. This role enabled them to analyse data from other informants, as well as providing data themselves as respondents.

3.4 Children and Respondent Validation

One aspect of data analysis is known as “respondent validation”: this is a process in which the results of a study are fed back to groups of informants in order to check whether the researchers’ accounts and interpretation are confirmed and validated. One possible function of a children’s reference group for a study may be to read the research report and be invited to comment on it. This practice, however, is not always easy to achieve with children – not least because the language and style of the report may render it difficult to understand. A more appropriate strategy may be to feed back orally some of the key conclusions of the study and invite a group of young people to discuss and comment on them. A word of caution: adult researchers should

not necessarily feel that they must accept all the opinions and ideas expressed by children, just as they would not be obliged to do so with adults. However, researchers are required to consider carefully those issues raised and to explain to participating children how and why their conclusions differ.

3.5 Involving Children as Researchers or Research Assistants

In some situations it may be appropriate to involve a group of young people to assist in data collection. While potential difficulties may arise in doing so, particularly with respect to the time required, the process can be beneficial both in terms of the quality and nature of the information gathered as well as the children's skill development and sense of self-efficacy. Boys and girls can be deployed as researchers on their own, in pairs or small groups, or with adult researchers, as circumstances indicate. On-the-job training is likely to be needed, while careful piloting may serve to test out both research tools and the competence of young researchers.

Deploying young people as researchers has a number of advantages: in some situations, child respondents will disclose more information to their peers than to adults, especially if the child researcher is perceived as having personal knowledge of the issues under consideration and can empathise with the informant. Children may also have a greater awareness of how to raise particular issues and an ability to ask questions in the most appropriate way. Moreover, they may be better able than adults to elicit information from children who are less confident or marginalised, and they may feel able to raise personal issues that an adult would find difficult or impossible.

In El Salvador, a small group of young adults who had already come together to document their own experiences of separation were invited to take part in the CPSC case study. One of the young people was invited to act as a research assistant, while the wider group played an active role in planning the study and in analysing and interpreting the data, which emerged from it. Similarly, a group of refugee children in Dar es Salaam were involved in the design of research tools which they worked together to pilot and implement with separated Congolese children between the ages of 7 and 10.

The above analysis of different roles for children in research activities should not be seen in terms of discrete categories as there is a great deal of overlap between them. A main finding from the CPSC project is that there is no "right" way to involve children; rather, the most suitable strategy is to carefully consider the objectives of the research and to define the most appropriate and achievable way of involving children in it, bearing in mind what is realistic in the context and circumstances. Perhaps most important of all is the need to avoid the tokenistic participation of children. Whatever the level of their involvement in the actual conducting of the research, it is vital that the results of the study are fed back to children: this process can validate both the conclusions of the research and the role of children in it.

4. Factors to Take into Consideration in Determining Children's Roles in Research

Research with children is like research with people of any age: it is important to remember that “children” are not a homogenous group whose needs, interests and abilities are the same. Accordingly, several factors need to be taken into consideration in the determination of children's roles in research.

4.1 Age:

Boys and girls of different ages can participate in research in different ways, and usually different strategies need to be used for children of various ages and developmental levels. For example, research with adolescent informants can often involve sessions with individuals and groups, such as interviews and focus group discussions, in which young people are asked to verbalise their experiences, views and perspectives. Often discussions of this nature are more easily achieved with children in this older age range, as it can be more difficult for younger children to articulate their experiences in this way. Boys and girls between the ages of 7 and 10, for example, may prefer to express themselves by drawing or by playing games. Every individual and group of children is different and research must be designed in such a way as to build on children's abilities to express themselves in the most comfortable and appropriate ways: children, like adults, need to feel in control of the process through which they are sharing their opinions and knowledge. Attention must also be paid to the age-related hierarchies that exist in different societies and how these play themselves out between children themselves.

4.2 Gender:

In many cultures and societies, girls do not have the same power as boys to express themselves in a public arena, especially when in the company of men and older boys. Attention must be paid throughout all phases of the research process to ensure that boys and girls have equal and appropriate opportunities to act as both respondents and researchers. Depending on the local norms, this can take place in mixed and same-sex groups. In the context of war, family separation and other crises such as HIV/AIDS, special consideration must be given to relevant gender and age dynam-

ics, as social norms and practices may be different from those which predominated in previous times. Research activities should be sensitive to existing gender roles and also provide opportunities for children to build on and develop new skills. For example, in research with separated Congolese refugee children between the ages of 7 and 12 in urban Tanzania, a 14-year-old girl was involved as a research assistant in data collection. In this context, it is common for young teenage girls to be involved in childcare and in other household tasks. Their presence in the domestic sphere is therefore not viewed as unusual or threatening on the part of adults, who do not fear that, a young girl will judge them harshly, or expose their private affairs. A girl's involvement in activities such as drawing, singing and playing games with young children is expected within the socially acceptable roles of teenage girls in this context, from the perspective of both adults and children. While involvement in "research" is by no means a traditional role for Congolese girls, the way in which this role manifested itself meant that it was possible to push the boundaries of "typical" behaviour in a way that was entirely comfortable for the children who participated in the study, as well as for those more powerful (namely adults). Furthermore, it would have been very difficult to conduct research of this nature had a young man been involved as a research assistant because parents and guardians would fear the sexual dynamics that might take place between an adolescent boy and their young daughters.

4.3 Time:

Involving children in research takes time; the effective and meaningful involvement of boys and girls in research means supporting them to express themselves in new and creative ways, and doing so can be time and labour-intensive. Realistic and generous time allowances are required for the development of research tools, planning, implementation and analysis. Attention to these issues has definite pay-offs, both in terms of ensuring the quality of the data collected, as well as encouraging a research process, which is ultimately empowering and fun for children.

4.4 The community's own experience of participation:

Separated children represent only one part of those war-affected and other populations who have experienced large-scale change and social disruption. In many societies, adults, like children, have never had an opportunity to express their concerns and opinions. In this context, it is common for adults to wonder why research is focused on children when their own voices have never been heard. This is especially the case in hierarchical cultures where children are spoken to last, if at all. In such instances, it is important for research to engage with all members of the community so that it can be an empowering process for everyone. Ultimately, support for vulnerable children must come from those best placed to assist them, including their parents, guardians, siblings, peers, teachers and other community members. Perceptions that children's views are being "privileged" over those of others can cause social discord and may exacerbate their already vulnerable situation. In order to

avoid this situation in the research with separated Congolese children in Tanzania, focus group discussions and various PRA techniques were used with guardians and other adults: having these adult groups was necessary in order for children to participate with the approval of those who cared for them. This experience highlights the importance of understanding the contextual influences on children's participation and the need to engage with all members of the community in order for research to be both valid and beneficial to those it is ultimately meant to serve.

4.5 Children's own experience of participation:

It is sometimes difficult for children who have had little or no previous experience of expressing themselves in the public sphere to act as researchers because they may feel torn between data collection and the desire to have their own voices heard as research respondents. In such cases, it is not incompatible to develop ways of involving children as both researchers and respondents. This can be done in a number of different ways, including having children interview and record one another's experiences in advance of exploring issues with a broader group of children, or by supporting young researchers to find the appropriate time and place to share their experiences with others. Furthermore, in working with separated and other war-affected children, who themselves may have had inadequate opportunities to explore their own experiences, it is important that those children with a research role have a certain degree of emotional distance so that they can distinguish between their own perspective and needs and those of others involved in the research. This was particularly the case in the El Salvador (see 3.3 above) and the Tanzania case studies (see 3.2).

4.6 Level of formal education and second language skills:

The design and undertaking of research with children (and adults) needs to consider the extent of schooling the children have had, as well as their experience of that schooling. For those children who are currently enrolled in school, involvement in participatory research may require unlearning those approaches to eliciting information which are typical in many school settings, such as through question and answer formats and "testing" an individual's level of knowledge. Such considerations will impact on the way in which methods are devised, as well as the overall design of the research strategy. Issues such as facility with a second language, and children's familiarity in communicating ideas and experiences with different social groups such as younger children or unknown adults should be considered in the determination of realistic and possible roles for children in research. Paradoxically, in a recent study undertaken in Liberia², it was found that those children with higher levels of formal education, who were more familiar with "standard" English, were less effective as researchers than those who were seemingly less articulate and had less schooling.

2. McCauley, Una (2002): "Now Things and Zig-Zag: Perceptions of the Impact of Armed Conflict on Young People in Liberia", Stockholm, Save the Children Sweden.

With the former group, it was found that boys and girls tended to stick to known ways of acquiring information, to use “stock phrases” in expressing themselves and often found it difficult to communicate in an open-ended way that enabled people to discuss and analyse the issues of concern to them. Some of the children with less formal education appeared more open to the process and better able to analyse different nuances in what their interviewees were saying.

4.7 Gatekeepers:

In those places where children’s participation in the public life of the community is unfamiliar or unacceptable, there are often adults who are not supportive of children’s involvement in research, either as respondents or as researchers. In many cases, this situation occurs in those places where the approval of these individuals or groups is necessary in order to enable the full participation of boys and girls in the research. Those who present such barriers may include parents, teachers, older children and other community members. In research with children affected by HIV/AIDS and other vulnerable children in Malawi, for example, a prominent figure in one village expressed an unwillingness to allow children to participate in decisions about their care. He argued that “the democracy thing” did not apply to his community and felt that boys and girls should not be consulted on matters affecting them, because they “do not know what is best for them”. He suggested that the research with children would reveal their incapacity and later, at the community feedback meeting, was genuinely surprised to learn the extent to which children were able to articulate and detail their concerns.

4.8 Recognition of the diversity of children’s experiences:

It is important that research with children attempts to obtain the views and experiences of as diverse a group of boys and girls as possible. Because it is rarely feasible to involve all children equally in a research project, it must be acknowledged that the group of children who participate in a specific piece of research are not necessarily representative and that they may have their own agendas, just as adults do. Moreover, in those instances when research takes place within a short time frame, in an unfamiliar or new community, it is usually adults and others who select children to participate in the research. In these cases, it is essential to consider which children’s voices are actually being heard in the research process: is it the leaders, the articulate, intelligent children, etc.? Who is picking which children to participate, and what agenda do they have (eg: presenting a “good” picture of their community, etc)? In Malawi, for example, it was the adult community members who mobilised groups of children to participate in the CPSC research. Given the strikingly abusive nature of the information obtained from orphaned children in this context, it is important to ask if these were the children who are being “best” cared for, what would we have learned from those in the “worst” situations?

5. Ethical Considerations

5.1 Obtaining informed consent:

Gaining informed consent from boys and girls is a difficult and complex issue. Consent is only “informed” if participants understand the nature of the research and the uses to which it will be put. In practice it is often difficult for researchers to explain this in a way that is meaningful to children whose understanding of research may be extremely limited. In the CPSC case studies, care was taken to explain these issues as fully and simply as possible. Perhaps more important, it is necessary for children to know and understand that their participation is voluntary and that they have a right to remain silent or withdraw from the process if they so choose. In addition, researchers need to carefully consider whether the consent of parents or guardians or others in the community is also required in order for boys and girls to participate. Specific consent on the part of children and their carers is always required if photographs are to be taken for publication.

There is sometimes a difficult balance to be found between, on the one hand, informing children of the ways in which the information they provide may be used (while at the same time maintaining their trust and guaranteeing confidentiality), and on the other hand ensuring their protection in the event of disclosure of abuse or exploitation. This issue is discussed in the next section.

5.2 Balance between distress and empowerment:

Researchers who seek information from children have an inalienable responsibility towards them, especially when the subject matter of the research concerns their private lives and potentially difficult and emotional issues. Because many of the CPSC case studies have attempted to enable children in very difficult circumstances to articulate experiences which are painful (e.g. the experience of discrimination and abuse), it was important from the outset of the project to set in place a range of safeguards for those children who chose to participate. These included:

- Setting out ground rules from the very beginning with local organisations and with individuals so that the subject matter of the research is clear, the role of the researchers is understood and agreed upon (e.g. as not having access to resources), and that areas of difficulty are identified in advance and planned for.

- Ensuring that researchers do not elicit self-disclosure which may unintentionally leave children exposed, vulnerable and without follow-up support. In Rwanda, for example, the (adult) reference group was used as a referral point to ensure that the most appropriate person followed up any child who disclosed abuse or exploitation.
- Ensuring that researchers are able to deal appropriately with any distress which children express: doing so requires not just the personal ability to respond to the child, but a recognition that responsibility towards the child is more important than responsibility for the continuation of the research. One aspect of this safeguard is making sure that the researcher does not raise very difficult issues unless satisfied that he or she can deal with them and if necessary impose limits and boundaries on the discussion.
- Ensuring that researchers are thoroughly familiar with the culture and context in which they are working in order to avoid imposing secondary distress on children. For example, in Sudan, it was vital for researchers to understand that it is culturally unacceptable for a child (especially a boy) to cry, particularly in front of strangers. Placing limits on self-disclosure in such situations may be critical to minimising the personal distress experienced by children.

It is important to remember that people with significant needs may not want to hear what the researcher has to say and may appear not to take in what is said to them: in these cases, the researcher may need to reiterate things many times in order for the boundaries to be clearly delineated between what she or he can realistically do in their research role.

5.3 Level of acceptability within the community for the involvement of children:

This concern relates to the issue raised above (section 4.4) about the community's own level of experience with participation: if the voices of children are the only ones being heard, then adults may feel that their own experiences are not seen as valid. Some may feel threatened by this "privileging" of children's views. Such tensions may lead to community misunderstandings and discord and, potentially, the eventual silencing of children.

5.4 Obligation to discuss with children the implications of their activity on other aspects of their lives:

Researchers should be aware of the ways that context may influence the community and adult perceptions of children's abilities and ensure that they are open and honest with children about the potential ramifications of their involvement in the eyes of others.

5.5 Need to start with small, modest, well thought-through steps:

While it is sometimes tempting to develop elaborate plans for children's participation in all aspects of the research process, it is important to consider children's previous levels of involvement and to build on these. Doing so requires high levels of consultation and considered efforts to ensure that the implications of children's participation have been understood on all levels.

5.6 Raising expectations for change that cannot be guaranteed:

Researchers need to be clear with all members of the community, including children, about what is achievable in the context of the research and what is not. It may be necessary to raise this issue on several occasions, in many different contexts, in order to avoid raising expectations that cannot be met. Researchers who arrive in the community in a vehicle bearing the logo of an NGO may inadvertently convey an unintended and misleading message about their control over resources and priorities.

5.7 Power dynamics and the role of the adult researcher:

In many cultural contexts, children do not take readily to the role of genuine informant and participant, and it is important for the researcher to know from the outset about cultural practices concerning how adults and children communicate. Children may be anxious to give the "right answer" and to please the researcher by saying what they think he or she wants to hear, rather than revealing the truth. There are several ways in which researchers can counteract these tendencies:

- Researchers should explain their role clearly, invite questions, give clear permission to children to say what they want, or to decline to answer if they so choose, and to value their contributions.
- It is sometimes helpful to define the role of the researcher in such a way as to reduce social distance between him/her and the children. One helpful way is to define the role as that of "student" who wants to learn from their experience. It may also be helpful to emphasise one's own ignorance or incompetence by using statements such as "I come from England so I really don't know how things are done here". It can be empowering for children to know that they have information, which the researcher does not.
- It may also be helpful for the researchers to share with children a little about themselves, so that the children are able to see them as "whole persons" rather than as powerful but "unknowable" adults.

6. Conclusions

To date, almost no research has been conducted into the needs and perspectives of separated children. This fact is surprising, given the current emphasis on children's participation in other areas, such as with street and working children. Under the CRC, children have a right to express their opinions on matters that affect them, and it is difficult to see how policies and practices that affect children can be improved without their direct input. The literature on separated children places considerable emphasis on the notion of "good practice", but "good" according to whom? Research from the CPSC case studies repeatedly showed that when adults attempt to speak on behalf of children, whether parents, guardians, members of the community or agency staff, they often get it wrong. Time and time again, children articulate ideas, concerns and opinions that are significantly different than those expressed by adults, even when the adults believe that they are reflecting children's viewpoints.

The key issues and concerns of children can only be identified if children themselves are provided with appropriate opportunities to express themselves, and to do so in a way which enables them to raise and discuss their own concerns, and not just to react to those of the adults around them, including researchers, parents, teachers, NGO staff, etc.

Furthermore, the CPSC experience has shown that children's participation in research can also be influenced by, and influence, their participation in programmes designed to meet their needs. On one level, participatory research for the case study in the Sinje refugee camp in Sierra Leone was greatly facilitated by the extent to which young people had already been mobilised to identify, articulate, discuss and address a wide range of issues of concern to them. The issues raised by the case study are thus extremely relevant to the further development of the programme. On another level, research with children affected by HIV/AIDS in Malawi provided useful pointers for the further development of community-based AIDS prevention and mitigation programmes in which child participation has not been well developed. Good participatory research with children is both empowering and validating. It gives boys and girls skills, which may contribute to their ability to improve their own lives and those of others. Most important of all, children's participation in the research for the CPSC project has shed light on familiar issues and highlighted new areas for attention: in both cases, it is hoped that policies and practices will be changed and improved so that they more accurately reflect the needs, problems, ideas and resources which children themselves have expressed.

7. Pointers to existing literature

There are several publications available on the various methods that can be used for conducting participatory research with children. The three following resources may be especially helpful to those interested in increasing the involvement of children in all stages of the research process.

Boyden, J. & Ennew, J. eds. 1997. *Children in Focus: a manual for participatory research with children*. Stockholm: Save the Children Sweden.

Hart, R. 1997. *Children's Participation*. London: Earthscan Publications.

Kirby, P. 1999. *Involving Young Researchers: How to Enable Young People to Design and Conduct Research*. London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Save the Children UK.

Appendix: Possible Sequence of Activities to be used in Workshop Groups with Foster Children

The following is an example derived from the research strategy for the Case Study on the Development of Fostering in Rwanda. It is included as an appendix in order to highlight one of the many ways in which it is possible to elicit information, experiences and perceptions of children.

The aim of this schedule is to provide a sequence of activities, which will enable children to express themselves, in their own words and concepts, and through the medium of non-verbal activities, as unaffected as possible by adults' concepts and ideas. The intention is to use a range of activities to enable children to raise issues of concern to them, and to express them in their own way. Each activity is intended as a vehicle of communication: the facilitator should exploit the opportunities presented by children's responses to the activities to raise relevant questions and engage in short discussions.

It is essential that the activities should be adapted for use with groups of different ages and genders, and in the light of experience.

- Introductory/warm-up game(s)
- Explanations, emphasis on confidentiality (and its limits), the importance of different opinions and respect for each other's ideas
- Activity 1: "My day". Use pre-prepared cards depicting different activities, which children carry out (e.g. fetching water/firewood, domestic tasks, play, school, washing, going to bed etc.). Invite children (or one child) to arrange these pictures in a sequence to depict their daily routine: if appropriate they can be arranged around a visual representation of a clock or other symbols indicating times of day. Ask others to say how their daily routine is different. Ask what other children in the family are doing at the same time - looking for differences other than determined by age and gender. Ask what is the best time of day and the worst time of day, and why.
- Energizer game/snack
- Activity 2: "My family and Who is Important to Me". Each child to be given a set of cards depicting different people (adults and children of different ages, adults in the role of teacher, priest, older persons etc. – large numbers of cards). Invite the children to choose a card to represent themselves, and then arrange other cards around "me" to show who is closest to me and who is closest to other

people. Researchers may need to “model” this putting themselves at the centre and arrange the cards, with explanations. Get the children to talk about their social maps, looking out for the words they use to describe foster parents and siblings. Ask how they would like to change the position of people in their social maps.

- Game or song
- Activity 3: “How did I get here?” Open a discussion on how children came to be in their present families.

Alternatively, ask them to plan/perform a short role-play on how they came to be in the family.

Second alternative: ask them to draw what they felt like when they first joined the family

- Meal break
- Activity 4: “Just Supposing...”. Using pre-prepared large pictures (humorous if possible), with a “Just supposing...” statement on the back, and invite individual children to respond by making short statements beginning “I would...”.

Examples: Just supposing...

- my foster mother finds me fighting with my brother
- I have an accident and break my leg
- I get my clothes torn
- the social worker finds my original parents
- there isn't enough food for everyone
- I have to work while my brothers and sisters can play
- my parents can't afford to send me to school

Invite children to pose their own “Just supposing...” questions for others to answer. Use the exercise to encourage discussion of relationships within the family and any ways in which the child feels different from other children.

Alternative: create small case studies of situations and ask children to discuss what they would do.

- Energizer game
- Activity 5: “When I grow up”. Invite children in pairs to compose a short story or drama based on their own ambitions and present it to the group. Open a discussion on children’s sense of permanence and belonging, and if possible get them to consider issues around marriage and inheritance if they don't raise these questions themselves.
- Energizer game
- Activity 6: “I am Strong”. Introduce the activity by explaining that the hand is a symbol of strength and that because of the things they have had to cope with they have had to use a lot of personal strength. Invite the children to draw around their hand, and then for each finger and thumb to write a word (or small drawing), which indicates something about them, or something they have done, which has helped them to cope. Share each person’s drawing with the whole group.
- Wrap-up discussion of any issues raised but not discussed. Thanks.
- Final game

