ETHICAL RESEARCH INVOLVING CHILDREN

HARMS AND BENEFITS

Inclusion and representation issues with child researchers in Uganda

Background context:

From September 2006 – October 2008 Save the Children Norway supported children and young people's participation in a thematic evaluation on children's participation in armed conflict, post-conflict and peace building in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Guatemala, Nepal, and Uganda. Collaborations with Child Clubs / Peace Clubs in each country enabled girls and boys to play active roles as advisers, peer researchers, active respondents, documenters and advocates. As part of the participatory research and evaluation process, in- country 'research groups' and 'advisory committees' were formed involving children, young people and national researchers (adult/s). Members of the research group (and sometimes the advisory committee) were provided with opportunities to join capacity building workshops on participatory research to enhance their knowledge, confidence and skills in undertaking ethical and participatory research and evaluation. An initial 'start up' workshop, held in Uganda, brought together children and adult research team members from each country; and subsequent capacity-building and reflection workshops were organized locally.

The ethical challenge:

In Uganda, four children's representatives (two girls and two boys) took part in the initial start up workshop. In the process of establishing the adult-child research groups and advisory group in Uganda an ethical challenge arose as to which children would have an opportunity to be part of these structures and related capacity building workshops. During a Peace Club meeting attended by the national researcher (an adult), children asked whether the same Club members who attended the last workshop would also attend the next workshop. One member remarked "If the same members keep on going for workshops, then there is no need why we should stay as members in this club."

The issue of representation was raised by almost all the clubs and associations involved in the Thematic Evaluation process. As a result of this, the research team arranged for consultations with other stakeholders about issues concerning representation, inclusion and participation. For wider sharing and discussion this ethical issue was also shared during the Virtual Interest Group meeting, which brought together the Save the Children Norway Senior Adviser, Global Researchers, Lead Researchers and Save the Children Focal Points from each participating country via monthly teleconferencing to encourage ongoing efforts to ensure ethical practice.

Choices made:

Through consultations with different Peace Clubs and Children's Associations in Uganda it was subsequently agreed that different children/young people would have a chance to attend each participatory research workshop to ensure increased opportunities for a

wider number of girls and boys to be actively involved in the participatory research and evaluation process. The decision about inclusive participation and representation was communicated and shared among all clubs and associations. Since then, the rotational system of representation has been the mode of selecting children and young people to participate in activities organized under the Thematic Evaluation.

How the rotational system of representation works:

- Democratic elections: Children/ young people through a democratic process elect their own representatives to represent them each time in any activity.

- Inclusive and ethical participation: Children/ young people ensure that the process is inclusive and ethical. That is, equal numbers of boys and girls involved of different: age groups; ethnic/tribal background; abilities (including children living with disabilities); and educational background.

- Peer sharing and learning: Elected children/young people have the responsibility to share the knowledge and skills they have gained with peers in clubs and associations.

This system of rotational representation enabled the active participation of 603 children and young people (225 females and 378 males) in the participatory research and evaluation process in Northern Uganda. The children and young people were mostly aged 10-14 years, but also included some youth up to the age of 20 years. They included: in and out of school boys and girls, children with disabilities, formerly abducted children, child mothers and orphans. Many of the children were living in camps of internally displaced people. Children and young people also reported that "children who went for workshops and trainings rolled out the knowledge gained to other children" (Save the Children Norway and Save the Children in Uganda, 2008).

However, for the advisory committee to ensure continuity, the Peace Club and association members decided it would be better to have elected children's representatives in the advisory committee. However, rather than have only a few children elected, 24 children and young people (12 girls and 12 boys) were elected to be part of the advisory committee, together with six adults (national researcher, representatives of matron and patron – adult facilitators, representatives from local NGOs and Save the Children, and a member of the local authorities). The Advisory Committee held meetings every three months to raise issues, discuss, analyse and give advice to the Peace Clubs and Child Associations concerning the participatory research and evaluation process and outcomes.

Reflexive questions/considerations:

- What efforts can you take to ensure that participatory research processes reaches out to and involves girls and boys from different backgrounds and ages (especially the most marginalised)?

- How can you promote inclusive and rotational representation of children and young people in the research process to ensure wider numbers of girls and boys have opportunities to be actively involved, rather than only involve a few children and young people?

- How can you ensure children's participation in s/electing their representatives?

- How can you encourage and support children and young people to share their learning with their peers?

- How can you ensure transparent information and communication mechanisms among children and young people about selection processes?

References

Save the Children Norway and Save the Children in Uganda (2008). National Report – Uganda – Children's participation in armed conflict, post conflict and peace building.