

## World Vision's Guidelines for Child Participation

As an international child-focused organisation, World Vision's (WV) ministry goal is the 'sustained well-being of children within their families and communities, especially the most vulnerable!'. Children play an important role as citizens and their participation in family, faith communities, schools, and society directly contributes to their well-being. A key component to achieving our vision is WV's commitment to empowering boys and girls as active participants in all the processes that contribute to their well-being through meaningful child participation at the local, national and international level. This is evidenced in WV's *Child Well-Being Aspirations and Outcomes*, our *Statement of Core Values* and our *Child Well-Being Policy*, all of which affirm the age-appropriate participation and empowerment of children.

In September 2009, the World Vision International (WVI) Board approved the policy on the Well-being of Children, which includes the following section on children's participation:

*Children can play a significant role as agents of transformation. We seek to build children's ability to participate, taking into account their age, maturity and context. We uphold children's rights to be listened to, to express their opinions on matters that affect them, to freedom of expression, thought, association and access to information, while respecting the roles and responsibilities of parents and others in authority. When children learn to communicate opinions, take responsibility and make decisions, they are prepared for improved academic performance and good citizenship. We support child-led associations that give children a public voice and contribute to development of leadership skills. Children's participation must be relevant and voluntary, and must never be tokenistic or manipulative.*

In addition, the *Programme Effectiveness Policy*, approved by the WVI board in 2009, provides principles, standards and an associated self review tool that emphasise the importance of enabling the meaningful participation of children in all programmes and projects in World Vision.

All of these board-approved partnership policies, mandates, and values affirm the following **operational definition of child participation**:

*Child participation is when children under 18 years of age contribute to decisions and take action on issues that affect their lives. This is best done through empowering children and nurturing positive relationships between children, adults, and communities based on mutual respect and partnership at familial, local, national, and international levels.*

### Purpose of this document

This document gives guidance on the minimum basic expectations to uphold the quality of child participation across World Vision. The Guidelines help ensure meaningful and safe child participation by explaining what is expected from World Vision staff, adult and youth volunteers, and partner organisations prior to, during, and after participatory engagement with children.

### Scope of the Guidelines

World Vision as an organisation has made principle level choices to value and include the voices of children in every aspect of our development, advocacy and disaster management work. Whenever we approach a community, a situation, a partnership with another organisation, or a new context, WV respects the right of children to participate in the decisions that will affect their well-being. These guidelines are meant to help foster this inclusive attitude towards children and to encourage us to always take into account the perspectives of children in our decision-making. More information and resources that describe our approach to including children as key stakeholders in our work can be found in the [Handbook for Development Programmes](#) and [Good Practices for Putting Development Programmes into Action](#) ([www.wvdevelopment.org](http://www.wvdevelopment.org)).

<sup>1</sup> Most vulnerable children refer to children whose quality of life and ability to fulfil their potential is most affected by extreme deprivation and violation of their rights. These children often live in catastrophic situations and relationships characterised by violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, exclusion, and discrimination.

Therefore, these guidelines are applicable:

- In all contexts and at all levels where WV works including all projects, sponsorship, programmes, sectors, themes, lines of ministry and organisational governance and strategy.
- For all WV staff and adult/youth volunteers working directly or indirectly with children under 18 years of age.
- In any and all types of child participation, including but not limited to: sponsorship activities, focus group discussions and research, children's clubs, children's engagement in community activities supported by WV and child representatives participating in national/international decision-making events.<sup>2</sup>

### What is included in this document:

- 1.) **Five Guiding Principles**<sup>3</sup>: The guiding principles state WV's overarching goals and aspirations for the quality of child participation associated with our organisation.
- 2.) **The Guidelines on Child Participation**: The guidelines are a way to operationalise the five principles, giving more specific details on what children and adults can expect of WV's practice in child participation.
- 3.) **Key Criteria and Helpful Resources**: These are intended for WV staff to use when preparing for, conducting, and following up with programming in which children, adolescents and youth participate.

## Five Guiding Principles for Child Participation

### 1. Child Participation is a right and works to fulfil other child rights

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), particularly Article 12, emphasises the importance of a child's right to participation in the matters and decisions that affect their lives. In addition, Article 15 of the CRC affirms a child's right to meet together, self-organise, and to join groups and organisations as long as their actions do not hinder others from enjoying their rights. While child participation is a right in itself, it also operates as one of the core principles of the CRC, making it a foundational component to the successful fulfilment of other child rights.

### 2. Child Participation is ethical and safe

Child participation applies ethical and transparent principles throughout the entire process, ensuring that the best interest, safety and security of every child is the overarching principle for all engagement with children.<sup>4</sup> WV applies due diligence to encourage children to participate in ways which are safe and does not put them or other children at increased risk of harm.

### 3. Child Participation is meaningful and sustainable

Meaningful child participation contributes to the well-being and empowerment of children, especially the most vulnerable, as active and responsible citizens in ways that are appropriate according to a child's age, maturity, gender, religion, differing abilities, and context. WV emphasises the importance of an empowering environment and age-appropriate approaches to child participation throughout the entire life cycle of children and adolescents.<sup>5</sup> WV also encourages continuous opportunities for child participation within a community over one-time or sporadic events.

### 4. Child Participation strengthens familial, community and societal relationships

Child participation promotes positive communication, enhances the effectiveness of community development, and promotes mutual respect between children and adults. Recognising that children's well-being is affected by their environment (especially by the adults in their lives), WV works to ensure that adults

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<sup>2</sup> Events refer to both WV and non-WV related events and includes but is not limited to: WV Regional forums and Triennial Councils, Special Sessions on Children for the Committee on the Rights of the Child, United Nations General Assembly meetings.

<sup>3</sup> These principles are supported by the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework created by WVI's Education and Lifeskills team. See The Child Participation Reference Guide for more information.

<sup>4</sup> WV Guidance Note: Child Protection Ethics in Child Participation Activities. World Vision International 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Please reference the Helpful Resources for Standard 9 for additional guidance on how to engage children at different stages of the life cycle in developmentally appropriate ways.

value the participation of children and consider them as respected partners in development and advocacy. Child participation also contributes to a more democratic and equitable society where both children and adults are jointly responsible for child participation.

### 5. Child Participation is a process and method across different sectors

Engaging children in meaningful decision making is an on-going process which can be considered as a part of WV's work in every sector. Involving children in development, advocacy, emergency response and preparedness and in the governance of WV enhances the quality of our programmes, the effectiveness of our strategies, and empowers children as responsible citizens throughout the process.

## The Guidelines for Child Participation

The Guidelines for Child Participation operationalise the above guiding principles and give internal and external stakeholders a more concrete idea of what to expect of WV's practice in child participation.

1. Adults, relevant partners, children, and youth in the community are **continuously sensitised** to the importance and value of child participation.<sup>6</sup>
2. WV staff members, partners and volunteers<sup>7</sup> who facilitate child participation **have the capacity and training** to work safely and effectively with children.
3. Children and care-givers **give informed consent** for children to participate in WV or partner supported activities while recognising children's rights to freedom of association or peaceful assembly.
4. WVI **Child Protection Standards** are in place and followed.
5. Child participation involves children in issues and decisions that are **relevant** to their daily lives and concerns.
6. Child participation is **accessible, inclusive, and non-discriminatory**.
7. Child participation is **facilitative, not manipulative**, and values children's input.
8. Child participation activities and methods **are child-friendly**.
9. Child participation is conducted in ways that **lead to empowerment of children, youth who are responsible citizens, and community transformation**.
10. WV staff, partners, and volunteers demonstrate accountability to children through a commitment to timely **feedback, monitoring, evaluation, and learning cycles with children that improve the quality of child participation**.

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<sup>6</sup> Adults and relevant partners include but are not limited to: parents, care-givers, community elders, local officials, teachers, and faith leaders.

<sup>7</sup> The term 'volunteers' refer to any and all volunteers above the age of 18 years old.

## Guidelines for Child Participation: Key Criteria and Helpful Resources

In order to uphold the guidelines for Child Participation and build capacity to facilitate child participation, WV staff and volunteers should begin with the Guidance for Development Programmes and the Integrated Competency Development (ICD) Learning Resources.

**The Guidance for Development Programmes** is an integrated set of resource materials available to support the implementation of World Vision long-term local development programmes. The reference documents and range of integrated tools found there can also be used by staff to operationalise these guidelines. This includes tools to engage children in the design process, project models, root cause analysis tools, as well as suggested practices in the monitoring and evaluation guidance documents. ([www.wvdevelopment.org](http://www.wvdevelopment.org)).

It is also essential that programme teams have staff with the competencies needed to effectively engage with children. The **Integrated Competency Development (ICD) Learning Resources** ([www.wvdevelopment.org](http://www.wvdevelopment.org)) provide guidance tools and resources to support national offices in strengthening the competencies of local level teams implementing World Vision’s Development Programme Approach, including child participation.

In addition, the table below includes criteria that further explain each of the Guidelines for Child Participation and recommends helpful resources available within WV and externally. These are intended for WV staff to use when preparing for, conducting, and following up with programming where children, adolescents and youth participate.

Guideline	Criteria/Evidence	Helpful Resources
1. Adults, relevant partners, children, and youth in the community are <b>continuously sensitised</b> to the importance and value of child participation. <sup>8</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community sensitisation to and advocacy for child participation is done continuously throughout the life of a programme and national office and includes efforts to help the most vulnerable children of all ages to participate in decision-making in all aspects of life (like in the family, at school, in local government or in WV).</li> <li>WV staff and volunteers communicate the value of both boys’ and girls’ participation in all aspects of programming, community/caregiver engagement, and interaction with children.</li> <li>Adult and societal attitudes toward both boys’ and girls’ participation are taken into account in the Risk Assessment for Child Participation (see Standard 4).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Beyond Article 12: Essential Readings on Children’s Participation</a>, by Henk van Beers, Antonella Invernizzi, and Brian Milne</li> <li><a href="#">WV Child Participation Reference Guide</a></li> </ul>
2. WV staff, partners, and volunteers <sup>9</sup> who facilitate child participation <b>have the capacity and training</b> to work safely and effectively with children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff, partners, and volunteers working with children receive regular training on child participation methods, child rights, engaging with children effectively, identifying and including vulnerable children, and specific skills such as listening, facilitation, and conflict resolution.</li> <li>Staff, partners and volunteers working with children are trained on how to recognise and respond to children who exhibit distress as a result of child participation or who</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">WV Integrated Competency Resources: CEP03 Competency Resource Pack</a></li> <li>WV Tool: <a href="#">Preventing and Responding to Distress in Child</a></li> </ul>

<sup>8</sup> Adults and relevant partners include but are not limited to: parents, care-givers, community elders, local officials, teachers, faith leaders, etc...

<sup>9</sup> The term “volunteers” refer to any and all volunteers above the age of 18 years old.

	<p>disclose sensitive information as outlined in <i>WV's Preventing and Responding to Distress in Child Participation Activities</i> document.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff, partners, and volunteers who regularly work with children/children's groups have a deep understanding of the context, attitudes towards boys /girls/other vulnerable children, and issues that children in the community face.</li> </ul>	<p><a href="#">Participation Activities</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WV Positive Youth Development Principles</li> </ul>
<p>3. Children and care-givers <b>give informed consent</b> for children to participate in WV or partner supported activities whilst recognising children's rights to freedom of association or peaceful assembly.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff or volunteers meet with children and care-givers to explain the intended purpose, potential risks, and expectations of a WV or partner supported child participation activity.</li> <li>• Consent forms are translated into local languages and are in accessible format for children with certain impairments.</li> <li>• Children and care-givers are given time to consider their involvement before giving consent and are given the option to not participate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WV Child Protection Standards</li> </ul>
<p>4. WVI <b>Child Protection (CP) Standards</b> are in place and followed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All staff, adult/youth volunteers, partners or persons who work directly with children comply with WV's Behaviour Protocols.</li> <li>• A Child Protection Risk Assessment for Child Participation is completed prior to the start of WV supported child participation activities in collaboration with local experts and relevant stakeholders; child participation halts if significant child protection risks are identified.</li> <li>• In high risk/volatile areas or when addressing sensitive issues, Risk Assessments are completed on a regular basis in collaboration with boys, girls, and caregivers.</li> <li>• A complaints mechanism is established for children to make a complaint about any issue regarding their involvement in child participation. The mechanism is accessible for all children including those with certain impairments.</li> <li>• Formal complaints containing sensitive topics, specific names, and specific places are locked in secure facilities.</li> <li>• A system for reporting child protection incidents is in place and understood by all staff working with children.</li> <li>• If/when children travel outside their country with WV, Protocols for Child Travel – In and Out of Country are in place and followed.</li> </ul>	<p>Information about WVI's Child Protection Standards can be found on <a href="#">wvcentral</a>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WV Integrity and Risk Hotline: Phone (+44 20 7939 8708) or Email (worldvision@control-risks.com)</li> <li>• <a href="#">Guidance for Level 1 Child Protection Incident Preparedness Plans</a></li> </ul>
<p>5. Child participation involves children in issues and decisions that are <b>relevant</b> to their daily lives and concerns.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child participation is focused on issues children have first-hand knowledge and experience with in accordance with a child's age and ability, and/or includes necessary capacity building and information sharing in order for children to make informed decisions.</li> <li>• Space and time is given for children to highlight and address issues that they themselves identify as relevant and important, even if those topics do not correspond with meeting agendas or activities.</li> </ul>	<p>Child Participation Tools in <a href="#">WV Guidance for Development Programmes</a></p> <p>(Click Programming→Community Engagement Tools)</p>

<p>6. Child participation is <b>accessible, inclusive, and non-discriminatory.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All children are given an equal chance to participate regardless of sponsorship status, age, ethnic origin, gender, language, religion, disability, health, social, economic, legal, or any other status, vulnerability or relationship to WV.</li> <li>• Adequate time, budget, and effort is given to include the most vulnerable children and to sensitising children and adults to including marginalised children.</li> <li>• Marginalised and vulnerable children are not part of a separate children’s group but are appropriately mainstreamed into child participation programmes unless a clear business case is made for a focused group of children.</li> <li>• Potential risks to marginalised children are identified and taken into account in the Risk Assessment for Child Participation (See Standard 4).</li> <li>• The age/maturity, gender, abilities, customs, religion, and language of children are taken into account in the way child participation is organised (for example, the way information is presented and materials are used).</li> <li>• Meeting space is safe, familiar, and physically accessible to all children who are participating; appropriate language translation is provided for meetings conducted in other languages.</li> <li>• If there is a limit to how many children can participate in a certain event or activity, children themselves create the criteria for selection and elect peers to represent the wider group based on the principles of democracy, inclusion, and equality of opportunity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WV tool: <a href="#">Identifying and Listening to Most Vulnerable Children</a></li> <li>• WV <a href="#">Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Module 5 of Article 15 Tools: Who we include as members</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Starting with choice: Inclusive strategies for consulting young children</a>, Save the Children UK</li> <li>• <a href="#">Compassio Manual on Human Rights Education for Children</a> – see sections on thinking/learning styles and children’s developmental levels</li> </ul>
<p>7. Child participation is <b>facilitative, not manipulative</b>, and values children’s input.<sup>10</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The purpose of child participation activities as well as the responsibilities and expectations of both children and adults are clearly outlined, understood, agreed upon, and do not reinforce harmful societal attitudes in regards to the role of boys and girls.</li> <li>• Children have the opportunity to express how they would like to see their work, their opinions, or their perspectives used to enhance WV’s work.</li> <li>• Children play a significant role in how their children’s groups are run, what issues they focus on, and are encouraged to take leadership roles to work alongside adults within their group.</li> <li>• Children are aware of their right to withdraw or refrain from any of WV’s child participation activities at any time without damaging their relationship with WV.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Hart’s Ladder of Child Participation</a> (pg. 8)</li> <li>• <a href="#">Article 15 tools for children’s self-managed groups</a></li> </ul>
<p>8. Child participation activities and methods <b>are child-friendly.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Methods encompass a range of participatory activities and action learning including but not limited to: visual and physical demonstrations, recreational, playing, drama, games, discussion, music, art and more.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Manual from Save the Children: Children and Participation (pgs. 17-24)</a></li> </ul>

<sup>10</sup> Often times, adults may have a predetermined agenda or structured activities for children. While this is normal and can be beneficial, upholding the spirit of Guideline #7 requires adult facilitators to create an environment where children are comfortable to express their views on how activities are run, give advice on additional agenda items, or express discontentment about a particular activity without fear of damaging their relationship with WV.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Essential documents are translated into age-appropriate language and images/symbols that children can understand.</li> <li>• Child Participation allows for rest and fun.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">100 Ways to Energise Groups</a>, by the International HIV and AIDS Alliance</li> </ul>
9. Child participation is conducted in ways that <b>lead to empowerment of children, youth who are responsible citizens, and community transformation.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child participation, in any form, directly communicates the value of respect for others and the connection between rights and responsibilities.</li> <li>• WV staff and volunteers encourage children to grow through reflection and evaluation of their participatory experiences.</li> <li>• WV staff and volunteers encourage children to focus on their contribution to improving their communities, including building healthy and equitable relationships between boys, girls and adults.</li> <li>• Methods and activities build the life skills, self-esteem and self-confidence of children according to the life cycle stage a child is in.</li> <li>• WV staff and volunteers facilitate in a way that is positive, friendly, and gives children the freedom to express themselves and their opinions in creative ways.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">WV Peace Roads Curricula</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">WV Lebanon Children's Council Manual</a></li> <li>• WV Quick Guide: Life Skills Development</li> </ul>
10. WV staff, partners, and volunteers demonstrate accountability to children through a commitment to timely <b>feedback, monitoring, evaluation, and learning cycles with children that improve the quality of child participation.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow-up, evaluation, and monitoring are addressed during the planning stages as an integral part of child participation.</li> <li>• Children are supported and encouraged to participate in the follow-up, evaluation, and monitoring processes of their activities; when appropriate, children are given the opportunity to challenge and influence the conclusions made by adults.</li> <li>• Children are given timely and clear feedback on the results of any decisions they were involved in, how their views have been interpreted/used, and the impact of their participation.</li> <li>• Children are regularly and anonymously asked about their satisfaction with the quality of their participation experiences and for input on how it could be improved.</li> <li>• Children's feedback is communicated to relevant authorities, staff and parent organisations and actively shapes the quality of on-going child participation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Framework and Toolkit for Measuring and Evaluating Children's Participation, by Gerison Lansdown</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">WV Compendium of Indicators for Child Well-being</a></li> </ul>

While the helpful resources and links provided in the right hand column are recommended, you can access more resources through the Child Well-Being and Rights Community of Practice Document Library on [wvcentral](#) (World Vision's intranet site) or at [www.wvdevelopment.org](http://www.wvdevelopment.org)

**References:**

Committee on the Rights of the Child. United Nations. *General Comment No. 12: The Right of the Child to be Heard*. Geneva, Switzerland, 2009. Print.  
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