



Why the role of the adult facilitator in children and young people's participation is crucial?



Children and Young people with Carine in Uganda during the research © 2018 Denis Onyodi / World Vision

Dr. Carine Le Borgne, Senior Policy Adviser on Ending Violence Against Children at World Vision UK asks why the role of the adult facilitator in children and young people's participation is crucial?

In support of the World Vision UK 'It Takes A World' campaign which focuses on protecting children in emergency situations from violence, World Vision has partnered with children around the world on a **research project, entitled: 'Their Fight, our future'** (<https://lnkd.in/dbD62Qn>). World Vision UK chose this name because around 250 million children and young people live in countries affected by armed conflicts^[1]: conflicts they did not create, conflicts in which they have no say, conflicts which are destroying their childhoods. One of the primary aims of the research is to put children and young people at the centre as we seek to ignite movements with, and for, children and young people. To achieve this, the role of the adult facilitator is crucial to empowering children and young people to discuss and devise solutions and influence policymaking.

This qualitative research set out to create a space for children and young people from our programmes in Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Kenya, West Nile Uganda and the Central African Republic, and UK young people to discuss the plight of children in armed forces and groups. The participants were children and young people both directly or indirectly affected by armed conflict, who wanted to stand with their peers for the rights of the most disadvantaged children such as child soldiers. As a result of the focus group discussions, the children and young people developed messages and three calls for action to the UK Government: a call for the UK Government to use their political experience and diplomacy with governments of conflict-affected countries; to provide more funding for projects to protect and respond to children affected by the violence of conflict; and to provide a platform for British young people to raise awareness and discuss solutions to child recruit being used in armed forces and groups.

The research reinforced that the role of adults is not only to facilitate the process of preparing children to discuss solutions, it is also to create partnerships with adults in power; and facilitate face-to-face contact between those adults in power, children and young people, so that they may agree on a common agenda and implement it together.

In my previous research (Le Borgne, 2016, 2017) [2], I suggested that policy-making should include more collaborative work and meaningful activities with children and young people to support them to express their views directly to policy-makers/decision-makers, and to enable real dialogue about the issues children face in their everyday lives. Children and young people's meaningful participation in decision-making processes can be achieved through three-point relationships that include children and young people, adults in power (decision-makers), and a facilitator (an NGO staff member).



Pictured on the left are Paige, Faheemah, Asini, Raphaëlle with Minister Lord Ahmad (FCO), centre and back left our CEO, Tim Pilkington © 2019 Carine Le Borgne/World Vision

The role of the adult facilitator is pivotal and should be strengthened; it is key to generating more dialogue between decision-makers, children and young people. To exemplify this, I facilitated a face-to-face meeting between a Minister from the Foreign Commonwealth Office and the young people involved in the research to discuss the findings of 'Their fight, our future'. As a result of this meeting, the Minister invited the young people to present the findings to the cross-government Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict in the coming months. Without the adult facilitator, it would have been difficult for the young people to meet the Minister, to be listened to and their views taken into account.

To conclude, the three-point relationships, with the pivotal role of the adult facilitator in children and young people's participation is the new route for children and young people to influence policy

making.

[1] UNICEF 2016

[2] Le Borgne, C. (2016). *Implementing children's participation at the community level: The practices of nongovernmental organisations* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Edinburgh.

Le Borgne, C. (2017). *Implementing children and young people's participation in decision-making at the community level: the practices of non-governmental organisations*. CRFR Research briefing 87