

CHILD PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE – UNICEF COUNTRY OFFICE CASE STUDIES



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COUNTRY CASE STUDY A: NEPAL

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Background

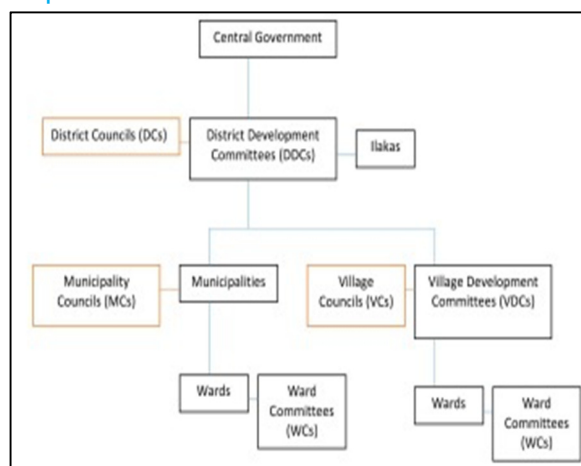
Nepal is a low-income country in South Asia with a population of 29 million. Forty-two per cent of the Nepalese population is under 18 years of age.

Local governance and decentralization framework

The Local Self Governance Act (1999) laid the foundations of a devolved local self-governance system in Nepal. The country's subnational administrative structure comprises two tiers of local government. District development committees (DDCs) form the highest tier of local government, while municipalities (in urban areas) and village development committees (VDCs, in rural areas) constitute the lower tier. In total, there are 75 DDCs, 217 municipalities and 3,157 VDCs. Each local government has a council, which formulates and approves policies, programmes, periodic and annual plans, budget, staffing and audit reports, taxes, fees and service charges.¹ DDCs consist of a number of *ilakas*, each of which is a cluster of four or five VDCs. In turn, each VDC and municipality consists of a number of smaller communities known as wards, the smallest administrative unit in Nepal. VDCs each comprise nine wards. Municipalities have between 9 and 35 wards each (see Figure 1).²

¹ Hesselbarth, Susanne, 'Alignment Strategies in the Field of Decentralisation and Local Governance, Country Study of Practices and Experiences: Nepal', final report, Development Partners Working Group on Local Governance and Decentralization, October 2007.

Figure 1 Central and local government in Nepal



Child rights framework

In 1990, Nepal adopted and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) makes specific reference to child rights and child participation. Nepal is one of the few countries in South Asia where the government has made explicit policy provisions for child participation in local governance.

In July 2011, the Government of Nepal approved the national strategy on Child Friendly Local Governance (CFLG). This framework represents a landmark for children's rights in Nepal. The main objective of CFLG is to mainstream child rights in local governance, focusing on survival, development, protection and participation. The framework places children at the centre of all development policies, structures and processes at the DDC, municipal and VDC level. UNICEF assisted the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (MoFALD) in the development and conceptualization of CFLG, based on experiences gained through the

² Ibid.; Skype interview conducted between Marija de Wijn (UNICEF New York) and Anjali Pradhan (UNICEF Nepal), 1 May 2016.

UNICEF-supported Decentralized Action for Children and Women programme, child rights programmes supported by World Vision, Plan International and Save the Children, and study visits to the Philippines and Brazil, where similar programmes are in place.

UNICEF supported CFLG via three distinct areas of engagement: design of the CFLG strategy, national policy dialogue, and advocacy for child participation in local governance. CFLG has been mainstreamed into both phases of the Local Governance and Community Development Programme (LGCDP), a nationwide, multi-stakeholder local governance programme implemented by the Government of Nepal and supported by 14 development partners. LGCDP allowed CFLG to be scaled up and implemented across the country.

Child participation

Child clubs

One of the main CFLG mechanisms for child participation is the mobilization of child clubs. Through child clubs, about 80,000 children participate in various local governance structures and processes, including ward-level health and school committees, citizens' forums and processes at the DDC, municipal and VDC level.

Adult facilitators initiate child clubs. Facilitators can be, for instance, community-based 'social mobilizers' (recruited and paid for by MoFALD to support local governance processes on the ground), social workers, teachers or representatives of international/local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). During the inaugural child club meeting, child club members discuss and decide upon the club's name and governance structure, including its board committee structure and membership, and

rules of conduct for child club members (including the board).

Child club members are aged 12 to 18 years, and each club has approximately 30 members. Key criteria for the formation of a child club include gender parity and inclusiveness. Facilitators are required to ensure that children from all social and geographical backgrounds participate in the club. At least 50 per cent of a child club's membership and 33 per cent of its board committee should be female, and at least one girl should be selected for a child club executive position. National guidance and facilitator terms of reference ensure uniformity in child club organization and mobilization.

Bal bhela consultations

All local governments are required to conduct two types of planning process: five-year periodic planning and annual development planning. The annual process includes planning and budgeting for projects that directly affect children.

CFLG has ensured child participation in both processes, through child consultations known as *bal bhela* consultations. *Bal bhelas* are conducted prior to the local government development planning cycle and use participatory tools to identify child needs and priorities, which are then brought to the attention of DDCs, municipalities and VDCs. Each *bal bhela* consultation is facilitated by a CFLG resource person, usually a social mobilizer who has been provided with specific training on facilitating these meetings with child participants. Child participants are primarily from local child clubs, but can also include other groups, including out-of-school children, children from marginalized communities and younger children (aged 8 to 11 years). The CFLG framework and policy provision under LGCDP provide clear guidance

to safeguard the participation of vulnerable children. To ensure inclusive participation in *bal bhelas*, child participants are divided into three groups: girls aged 12 to 18 years; boys aged 12 to 18 years; and a mixed group of children aged 8 to 11 years.

During *bal bhelas*, children work in their groups to identify their needs and priorities through the use of drawing exercises, including like/dislike drawings, where children draw one picture of what they like and, alongside it, another picture of what they dislike (see Image 1); risk mapping, through which children identify places where they feel safe or unsafe; and a visioning tool, which children use to depict their vision of the future (see Image 2).

Image 1 Like/dislike drawing



Image 2 Visioning tool



At the conclusion of the *bal bhela*, the groups come back together and, in plenary, the child participants raise their priority concerns, rank these issues according to their importance and

brainstorm potential solutions. The issues and their potential solutions are then included in an action plan and are coupled to a budget estimate, the latter facilitated by the CFLG resource person. Proposed action plans have included proposals for the creation of libraries in schools, for campaigns to end child marriage or abolish open defecations, for play materials to be provided to schools or sanitary pads provided in schools, and for leadership training for child club members. The plan is submitted to the local government council for review. Projects endorsed by local councils are incorporated in local government annual plans and budgets.

Under the national local government operational guidelines, *bal bhela* consultations are mandatory for all local governments. To ensure the funding of priorities raised by child participants, UNICEF successfully advocated for MoFALD to establish a 10 per cent 'child block grant', meaning that local governments have to allocate at least 10 per cent of received capital grants to child-related issues. For local governments seeking to attain 'child-friendly' status, this proportion rises to 15 per cent.

Training on CFLG in general and on *bal bhela* consultations in particular is provided to all local governments through the Local Development Training Academy (an academy responsible for the training of local self-government in Nepal) as well as through partner NGOs at the national, regional and local level. A trainer-of-trainer approach has been used to instruct *bal bhela* facilitators, and a training manual and handbook have been developed to explain how to facilitate *bal bhela* consultations.

Monitoring and evaluation

CFLG monitoring and evaluation is part of the LGCDP monitoring and evaluation framework, which includes several CFLG-related

indicators (see Box 1). CFLG has also been integrated into the MoFALD management reporting system, data from which inform the MoFALD annual review. DDCs and municipalities input local progress data into the web-based reporting system, following which the data are compiled and analysed centrally. It is now much easier to monitor nationwide CFLG-adoption rates and to identify potential bottlenecks in implementation. The system has also helped to create a sense of ownership and instil accountability among DDCs, municipalities and VDCs in regard to CFLG in general and child participation specifically.

Box 1: Child Friendly Local Governance-related indicators

- Number of local bodies (DDCs, municipalities, VDCs) that have incorporated children’s needs in their annual plan through *bal bhela* consultations
- Proportion of ward-level planning workshops with documented participation by women, children and disadvantaged groups
- Number of local bodies (DDCs, municipalities, VDCs) that have adopted CFLG processes, gender-responsive budgeting, gender auditing
- Proportion of capital funds that are allocated to and spent on target groups by local bodies

Impact

In the annual planning cycle for 2015/16, all DDCs, 94 per cent of VDCs and 91 per cent of municipalities reported that they had conducted *bal bhela* consultations, with more than 60,000 children in total participating nationwide. Fifty-four per cent of child priorities identified in *bal bhela* consultations were incorporated in DDC, municipal and VDC

plans. In 2016/17, central government made a total of US\$30 million available – in the form of child block grants given to local governments nationwide – to address child needs and priorities.

Ownership and sustainability

The Government of Nepal has full ownership of the CFLG framework, and child participation has been institutionalized nationwide. UNICEF and other partners provide additional operational budget for the implementation of CFLG through LGCDP, giving a total of US\$300,000 in 2014/15, US\$600,000 in 2015/16, and US\$1,000,000 in 2016/17. Twelve UNICEF staff in Nepal are dedicated to CFLG, including three staff in the UNICEF Nepal Country Office, and nine staff in zonal offices nationwide.

Challenges, opportunities and lessons learned

Challenges

A major challenge has been to facilitate a common understanding of the role of children in local governance among key stakeholders and to increase the capacity of adults to facilitate child participation. This challenge has related specifically to *bal bhela* consultations, as their facilitators were found to have skills gaps. The quality of facilitation skills affects the quality of child participation, and is a key factor in whether child participants feel comfortable and confident in expressing their opinions. To address this challenge, UNICEF has continuously invested in the capacity building of facilitators. More recent experience of training child club graduates as facilitators has also proved successful.

Representation of the most disadvantaged children also remains a challenge. Efforts to address this issue focus on *bal bhela* guidelines and facilitator training, which both emphasize

the importance of inclusion and equal representation of children from all backgrounds.

Lastly, it was found that local governments in general and VDCs in particular are often overburdened with responsibilities. This may manifest as reluctance by local government officials to allocate sufficient time to listening to children.

Opportunities

The multi-donor and government-supported LGCDP provided an enormous opportunity for CFLG and child participation in local governance. The programme enabled nationwide implementation as well as strong government ownership on all levels.

Lessons learned

- Nepal's experience highlights the importance of building on or tapping into existing government systems, structures and mechanisms. This has allowed UNICEF to advocate and create space for children, and enabled the institutionalization of child participation in local governance through the CFLG framework.
- Successful child participation in local governance relies upon strong engagement with local as well as national stakeholders and on making use of ongoing decentralization reform processes and platforms.
- Common child participation tools and processes, including the development of standardized guidelines and reference documents, will harmonize and strengthen child participation.
- Inclusive and equal participation should, at a minimum, be explicitly addressed and mainstreamed in all tools, manuals and guidelines.
- Participation tools and methodologies should be accessible and allow children to

raise priorities with minimum adult guidance or interference.

- Strong and ongoing investment in the training of facilitators is necessary.
- Investment in the capacity of local government stakeholders, particularly in regard to children's rights, is crucial to ensure that local plans and budgets reflect priorities raised by child participants.

COUNTRY CASE STUDY B: BELIZE

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Background

Belize is a small country in Central America. With a population of 347,369 and 22,966 sq km of land, Belize is one of Latin America's smallest countries. Belize has a young population: nearly 35 per cent of the population is aged 0–14 years, and just over 20 per cent is aged 15–24 years.

Local governance and decentralization framework

Despite its size, Belize has undergone decentralization reform and instituted local governance processes over a number of decades. In 1999, these efforts began to take shape in the form of a first set of local government acts and laws, which established a two-tier system of government: central government and one level of local government.

Local government in Belize can be divided into four types of council: city, town, community and village council. In total, there are 2 city councils (Belize City Council and Belmopan City Council), 7 town councils, 12 community councils and 180 village councils. The city and town councils cover the country's urban

population, while the community and village councils cover the rural population. Council responsibilities include: revenue collection; planning and infrastructure; crime and drug prevention and reduction; public health and market management; street and drain maintenance; sanitation and waste disposal; parks and playgrounds; traffic control; environmental protection; coordination of public utilities and cemeteries; and fostering citizen participation through biannual public meetings.

Overall, the trend in Belize has been towards greater decentralization and local government autonomy. Each council generally has discretion over decision-making within its areas of responsibility – albeit within the limits of its financial capacity. A local council’s primary sources of finance are its own revenue, raised by a series of local taxes, which provides the council with discretionary resources, and transfers in from central government.

Child rights framework

Although Belize has worked to implement policies based on the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it lacks national legislation that provides children and adolescents with explicit opportunities to be involved in decision-making. Nor are there any laws or local policies to facilitate child participation in local governance. Consequently, child participation in policy and legal frameworks in Belize is limited. To address the invisibility of children within local government, UNICEF has prioritized – and continues to prioritize – child and adolescent participation across the country.

Child participation initiative

The UNICEF Belize Country Office supports child participation in local governance through the Sustainable and Child Friendly

Municipalities (SCFM) initiative, which was set up as a way to operationalize the Convention on the Rights of the Child at the municipal level. SCFM is an urban programme that targets children and adolescents in cities. Nine municipalities (two city councils and seven town councils) participate in the programme. After a three-year period, SCFM allows each city and town that has come on board to be accredited as a ‘sustainable and child-friendly municipality’. Active child participation is a key criterion for accreditation.

To facilitate child participation, each municipality involved in the initiative has created a Child Advisory Body (CAB). The CAB provides children/adolescents with a consultative space, through which they can review municipal plans and budgets.

CAB aims include:

- bringing a child/adolescent perspective to issues affecting children in municipalities to ensure that their rights and needs are reflected in and promoted by municipal plans
- facilitating knowledge sharing about best practices and lessons learned for agendas relating to child/adolescent rights, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health within municipal plans
- improving child/adolescent understanding of the principles behind municipal plans and their role in improving young people’s lives
- strengthening the skills of children/adolescents (especially vulnerable and disadvantaged young people) in areas such as leadership, decision-making, communication, problem-solving and advocacy, to facilitate their effective participation in municipal development planning.

Each CAB consists of a group of children/adolescents aged 8 to 18 years. These CAB child representatives are selected from existing organizations and structures such as student groups, churches, NGOs and scout groups. CAB meetings are held every six to eight weeks. During the meetings, child participants reflect on the local issues that affect them. For instance, in one municipality, child participants reviewed and commented on the plans to upgrade a local park. After their suggestions were accepted, the children went on to assist in the park's redesign.

CAB meetings support the Ministry of Labour, Local Government and Rural Development (MLLGRD) and are facilitated by local government rapporteurs. Children participate via a range of communication platforms, including WhatsApp, local talk shows (television and radio), drawing exercises, and focus group discussions. CAB child representatives include vulnerable children such as children with disabilities and those from poor families. No specific mechanisms are in place to ensure the inclusion of vulnerable groups, however, and councils were found to be largely unsuccessful in their attempts to include out-of-school children. At the time of writing, the UNICEF Belize Country Office indicated that planning was under way to address specific mechanisms for the inclusion of vulnerable children in the SCFM programme.

Programming steps

In 2013, the Government of Belize agreed to the development of an equity-focused policy to strengthen local government capacity to improve the inclusion of vulnerable children. The plan was to have a well-constructed monitoring and evaluation system that would be used for reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child; for social budgets, national plans and legislation; and for examining delays

and bottlenecks that impede child rights policy implementation. The intended outcome of this monitoring was to have municipalities measuring the performance of actions/interventions toward improvements in gender and social inequalities and quality of life.

As a first step, UNICEF Belize conducted a strategic partner analysis in 2012, in the run-up to the development of the country programme document for Belize 2013–2016. Through the analysis, MLLGRD – which has responsibility for municipalities, reconstruction and development – was identified as a key partner, as was Belize Mayors' Association, a local government association set up to address growing urbanization.

Second, UNICEF conducted a series of meetings and assessments with municipalities to reach a consensus on the SCFM model and key priorities for its implementation. In May 2014, the mayors of nine Belizean municipalities agreed that achieving the Millennium Development Goals at the municipal level is critical to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In June 2014, the same nine municipalities participated in the joint UNICEF–UNDP Rapid Assessment of Belize Local Governments' Capacities, which examined the capacity of local government to design and implement local public policies; deliver basic services; promote transparency and accountability; and engage citizens and promote citizen participation. In July 2014, municipal profiles were produced to document the Millennium Development Goal status of each municipality. In August 2014, representatives of nine municipality councils participated in one-day workshops on SCFM planning and implementation. At this time, mayors also committed to working towards the

accreditation of their municipalities as sustainable and child-friendly municipalities. They signed an agreement to this effect on 26 September 2014, during the national launch of the SCFM initiative.

Between September 2015 and February 2016, each council began to implement the SCFM approach, by:

- establishing a steering committee to ensure the advancement of both the SCFM agenda and child/adolescent participation
- establishing a CAB
- developing draft municipal action plans (including budget) that highlight the priorities that must be addressed to improve children's lives
- appointing a councillor as rapporteur, responsible for ensuring that SCFM issues are discussed at council meetings.

UNICEF Belize further supported two municipalities with training sessions on sustainable and child-friendly municipalities, and collaborated with the National Committee for Families and Children to provide training to CABs and steering committee members on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In addition, following local government elections, MLLGRD conducted a training session on child participation for councillors. While the UNICEF Social Policy Section and Monitoring and Evaluation Section jointly lead on SCFM, it is a cross-sectoral strategy. All initiatives coordinated at the local level are planned through the lens of SCFM, for example, the Communication for Development training on the Zika virus, anti-bullying campaigns and the End Violence Against Children campaign.

Monitoring and evaluation

Administrators and municipal authorities use municipal planning, budgeting and management indicators to track the success of the SCFM programme. Local authorities are

given the opportunity to identify the needs of children within their locality and to determine actions accordingly. The monitoring and evaluation framework looks at the overall improvement in the situation of children and adolescents as well as their awareness of SCFM. It also examines improvement in the capacity and confidence of young people, especially vulnerable children, to participate in municipal development planning. This ensures that municipalities involved in the SCFM programme operate in a more organized manner, enabling them to reach their goals.

Ownership and sustainability

This initiative to improve child/adolescent participation in local governance is jointly owned by MLLGRD, Belize Mayors' Association, UNDP and UNICEF. In the longer term, the aim is for MLLGRD and local governments to institutionalize the SCFM initiative. A strategy for this is yet to be developed.

There is a strong sense of municipal ownership of SCFM, partly because the initiative recognizes the necessity for municipalities to address local priorities and needs. Elected local officials also have a natural political interest in supporting SCFM, as it gives them an opportunity to improve their public image and show how they are helping and serving their community.

At the moment, UNICEF, UNDP and MLLGRD jointly fund the SCFM programme in Belize. In terms of operations, UNICEF Belize has assigned one staff member to support SCFM, and provides additional technical support as needed. SCFM costs Belize US\$370,000, of which UNICEF covers US\$270,000 (including efforts related to responses to the Zika virus and Hurricane Earl) and UNDP and MLLGRD the rest. Municipalities cover the cost of proposed priorities and needs raised by child

participation, as these are integrated in municipal plans.

Challenges, opportunities and lessons learned

Overall, the CAB platform has helped to increase lobbying for children’s interests in Belize. It makes it possible for children and adolescents to have a voice in matters that affect them by giving them the opportunity to be involved in decision-making.

There have also been some challenges, however, particularly in terms of children attending CAB meetings. This is because meetings were initially held during the week, conflicting with school schedules and limiting children’s availability to attend. To avoid this, meetings are now held directly after school. UNICEF Belize is currently in the process of identifying mechanisms that could strengthen the inclusion of vulnerable children such as children/adolescents living with HIV; adolescent mothers and fathers; children living in violent neighbourhoods; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) adolescents and children. Another challenge has been finding local facilitators who can support CAB sessions with the municipal government and help steering committees to develop strategies to improve child/adolescent participation.

In terms of opportunities, the accreditation framework has proven to be an important motivator for municipalities to get involved in the SCFM initiative and to be open towards child participation. At the same time, UNICEF partnerships with Belize Mayors’ Association, MLLGRD and UNDP have been vital to the success of the initiative, particularly in terms of increasing financial and human capacity, and leading consultations with municipalities.

COUNTRY CASE STUDY C: TURKEY

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Background

Turkey is an upper-middle-income country in Southeastern Europe and Southwestern Asia. At the close of 2011, Turkey had a population of 74.7 million, including 31.4 million children and youth aged 0 to 24 years. This represents a young population, particularly in comparison to high-income countries.

Local governance and decentralization framework

Turkey has a three-tier local government system comprising metropolitan municipalities, district municipalities/districts, and neighbourhoods/villages. In Turkey, municipalities are considered the main component of local government. Each metropolitan municipality is governed by a municipal parliament, comprising indirectly elected representatives of the various district municipalities/districts within the metropolitan municipality; an indirectly elected council; and a directly elected mayor. Metropolitan municipalities carry out a variety of functions, including strategic planning; business licensing; maintenance of public infrastructure; environmental protection; solid waste management and wash services; establishment and maintenance of public services such as parks, zoos, libraries, and sports and entertainment centres; public transportation and construction; and maintenance and supply of health, cultural and educational services. Metropolitan municipalities are administratively independent and financially autonomous, and

have their own significant resources (in the form of local tax revenue) besides the central government transfers they receive. Below metropolitan municipalities are district municipalities and districts, which are represented by directly elected mayors and councils. While district municipalities/districts can collect revenue in the form of local taxes and fees, and prepare their own budgets, they largely depend on central government transfers, making them less financially autonomous than metropolitan municipalities.

The decentralization framework in Turkey is highly conducive to citizen participation. In a municipality, the main decision-making body is the municipal council, which by law requires direct participation by citizens through the establishment of citizens' assemblies. Article 76 of the Municipality Law (2005) stipulates that any proposal made by the citizens' assembly must be added to the agenda of the municipal council for discussion. Additionally, municipalities can elect to establish child assemblies, youth assemblies, women's assemblies and disabled people's assemblies, which have the same legal standing as citizens' assemblies. By becoming a member of a child assembly, children can influence a municipality's agenda. It is not compulsory, however, for municipalities to establish these additional assemblies, and many have been unable to do so as yet.

Child rights framework

Turkey ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1995 and has a relatively strong child rights framework, with child rights initiatives implemented at both the national and subnational level. As well as the national Child Advisory Board, Turkey has a national Child Rights Monitoring Board, which is chaired by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies (MoFSP) and includes two child

coordinators – a girl and a boy. A national Child Forum also brings together provincial child rights committee representatives on an annual basis. In addition to the provincial and municipal initiatives described below, secondary school student councils are also in place at the subnational level. These student councils are under the authority of the Ministry of National Education and its local directorates.

Child participation initiatives

UNICEF Turkey supports child/adolescent participation in local governance through two main programmes: the Child Friendly Cities initiative at the municipal level, and child rights committees at the provincial level. These initiatives are implemented jointly by the UNICEF Child Protection Section, which supports the child participation aspect, and the Social Policy Section, which supports the local governance component.

Child Friendly Cities

The Child Friendly Cities programme supported by UNICEF Turkey was first piloted in 10 municipalities in Turkey. The second phase began in 2016 and is being extended nationally with the target of reaching more than 150 municipalities in two years. Child Friendly Cities has been instrumental in establishing child assemblies for children aged 7 to 18 years. Child assemblies serve as a platform for children to express their opinions and concerns about child rights in general and about municipal services in particular. Through the assemblies, children are able to organize, get informed about their rights, identify their priorities and contribute to the full scope of municipal processes, including municipal development planning and budgeting processes.

Child assemblies consist of students, NGOs that serve or work with children, volunteers,

representatives of children's sports clubs, and other experts who work with children. The number of child participants varies by municipality, but on average each child assembly has about 100 child members. A child assembly elects its own managing body and discussion committees. The managing body and committees list the activities they want to organize during the year ahead and set targets to implement these activities. Volunteers from the municipality and representatives of child-focused NGOs facilitate discussions. Child assembly members convene at least once a month to review and discuss the decisions and plans made. By law, the municipal council must consider proposals made by the child assembly.

Inclusive participation in child assemblies is encouraged, and girls' participation was one of the commitments made – and successes achieved – by the municipalities that participated in the pilot programme. Gender equality and the inclusion of very poor children and children with disabilities have largely been achieved in collaboration with local NGOs and local government and by linking to existing social support mechanisms provided for these groups of children. Participation by out-of-school children, those in child-led households, and children living and working on the streets remains a challenge, however.

Key programming steps involved included:

1. UNICEF partnering with the Middle East and North Africa arm of global umbrella organization United Cities and Local Governments to identify and approach potential pilot municipalities for the Child Friendly Cities initiative.
2. Raising awareness among the pilot municipalities and securing their commitment to establish child assemblies.

3. Capacity building of municipality experts and training of child participants, including in the area of strategic planning and budgeting processes.
4. Involving key stakeholders working for and with children at the urban level to support the inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups and to facilitate child assembly discussions.

Child rights committees

MoFSP, with UNICEF support, established child rights committees across the 81 Turkish provinces in response to the National Children's Congress in 2000. Following the Congress, the MoFSP provincial directorate and governorates were first briefed on how to create child rights mechanisms at the local level, and then UNICEF-supported awareness-raising and capacity-building activities took place with adults and children.

Child rights committees bring together children from throughout a province so that they may educate themselves about children's rights and discuss issues affecting their welfare. The committees are involved in conducting peer training to inform other children about their rights and to create awareness about child priorities and the committees. Committee representatives (one girl and one boy from each province) come together annually at the UNICEF-supported national Child Forum. Child Forum participants submit documents to the relevant government ministries outlining the needs and priorities of children in each province.

Each committee comprises children from different groups, including schoolchildren, children in care, children with disabilities, and children living and working on the streets. This diversity allows committees to identify a broad range of issues affecting children, from insufficient play areas and entertainment

centres to violence and problems with the education system. Committee terms of reference specifically state that the inclusion of vulnerable children is a priority. Because of this, special effort has been made since 2015 to focus on the issue of social cohesion among Turkish and Syrian children and to reach out to involve refugee children in the committees. The committees have been mindful of equity and the inclusion of refugee children, and each committee has developed an action plan for peer support in an emergency setting.

Monitoring and evaluation

Child rights committees are monitored and reported on by the provincial governor's office, MoFSP (and its provincial directorate), the Ministry of Interior and the relevant municipalities. Since 2004, these committees have conducted activities across a wide range of child rights work, including teaching other children about their rights, setting up websites, conducting surveys, supporting children with addictions, visiting detention centres for children, and collaborating with local authorities to monitor child rights implementation.

As the Child Friendly Cities programme pilot was still in progress at the time of writing, monitoring and evaluation information for this initiative is not yet available.

Ownership and sustainability

The UNICEF-supported Child Friendly Cities programme in Turkey has created the momentum to institutionalize child participation, but is still in its initial pilot phase. Given that the budget for assemblies is provided and determined by a municipality rather than by a ministry, however, this funding stream may be more reliable and contribute to the sustainability of the programme. In contrast, although child rights committees have been institutionalized under

a circular order made by MoFSP, they are cost intensive and UNICEF continues to fund them.

Challenges, opportunities and lessons learned

The Child Friendly Cities initiative presents some specific challenges as well as opportunities. A key opportunity is the enabling legal environment that it creates, which offers significant room to ensure the sustainability of municipal participation in the future. In the short term, however, municipal elections threaten the continuity of established child participation efforts. Municipal officials are also often more focused on providing a very basic level of child participation, as opposed to robust participation that devolves decision-making responsibility to children. Making child participation meaningful will require ongoing capacity building and training.

Since their introduction in 2000, child rights committees have become the best-known child participation mechanism in Turkey. Institutionalization and the official circular on committee rules and regulations, and implementation guidelines for local managers have really benefited this initiative. Institutionalization also means that MoFSP allocates a committed budget to each committee. Challenges, however, include the high turnover in MoFSP and local-level staff, the lack of publicity/promotion around child rights committees by MoFSP, and the need for a more efficient monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

Overall, key lessons learned include the importance of:

- joint programming by the UNICEF Child Protection and Social Policy Sections, which has proven very beneficial
- seizing policy opportunities
- institutionalization, where possible

- having explicit mechanisms to target vulnerable children – in Turkey’s case, linking with existing social service mechanisms has proved beneficial
- strong and ongoing efforts to make child participation meaningful.

COUNTRY CASE STUDY D: ETHIOPIA¹

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Background

Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Africa after Nigeria, with a population estimated at about 99 million. More than 45 per cent of this figure is under 15 years of age, which makes Ethiopia’s population one of the youngest in the world.⁴

Local governance and decentralization framework

Ethiopia’s current constitution, ratified in 1995, established a federal structure that comprises nine autonomous regional states, with boundaries based on ethnic criteria,⁵ and two city administrations. The country’s federal system consists of a federal government (made up of ministries) and regional governments. Regions can be further divided into various zones, which comprise districts (woredas) and communities⁶ (kebeles or, as they’re known in the Tigray region, tabias).

¹ At the time of case-study development UNICEF Ethiopia was exploring options for child participations in local governance. The Ethiopia case study therefore focuses on key contextual issues to be considered in the design of child participation in local governance.

⁴ Megquier, Shelley, and Kate Belohlav, ‘Ethiopia’s Key: Young People and the Demographic Dividend’, policy brief, Population Reference Bureau, December 2014.

The federal government is largely responsible for strategic planning and direction setting, and its laws and regulations provide a legal basis for policymaking. Regional governments are responsible for implementing economic and social development policies. At the woreda level, councils consist of directly elected representatives of each kebele in the woreda.⁷ The woreda council is both accountable upwards, to zonal and regional executive committees, and downwards to its electorate. Woredas have a number of main duties and powers (*see Box 2*).⁸

Box 2. Woreda powers and duties

- Preparing and approving annual woreda development plans and budgets, and monitoring their implementation
- Collecting local taxes and levies
- Administering the fiscal resources available to the woreda
- Constructing and maintaining low-grade rural tracks, water points and woreda-level administrative infrastructure (e.g., offices, houses)
- Administering primary schools, health institutions and veterinary facilities
- Managing agricultural development activities and protecting natural resources

Kebeles, which have a population of about 5,000 on average, are the primary level of engagement for Ethiopian citizens.⁹ Kebele parliaments consist of elected representatives. Kebeles do not receive federal or state-level

⁵ Yilmaz, Serdar, and Varsha Venugopal, ‘Local Government Discretion and Accountability in Ethiopia’, International Studies Program Working Paper 08-38, Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, Georgia State University, Atlanta, December 2008.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

funding; instead, a kebele's development programmes are funded by budgets allocated by the woreda, combined with community contributions (mostly in-kind contributions). In some kebeles, NGOs provide significant contributions to kebele development programmes. Kebeles often form community-based committees, which work on key local issues such as health, education and agriculture. The main responsibilities of the kebele parliament include: preparing annual kebele development plans; ensuring the collection of taxes; organizing local labour and in-kind contributions for development programmes (through community-based committees); and resolving conflicts within the community.¹⁰

While Ethiopia appears to be highly decentralized, the ability of subregional levels of government to generate revenue and exercise autonomy in political decision-making must still be strengthened more.¹¹ Regions depend largely on block grants from the federal government, which are then distributed in smaller grant packages to various woredas. These formula-based grants consider factors such as population, development level and revenue generation efforts. While the current decentralization framework provides the woreda with a mandate for service implementation,¹² strategic decision-making in regard to the design and control of such services has yet to be decentralized.¹³ In practice, regional influence (stemming from national-level policy) may have a more significant effect on

local development planning and development initiatives than the framework suggests. Furthermore, while most community interaction is at the kebele level, decision-making and budget allocation takes place at the woreda level. As a result, approved woreda plans do not always end up reflecting community-level needs or concerns.

Community participation

Community participation has been a common theme in Ethiopia, especially subnationally. Community empowerment and ownership of development outcomes are encompassed in the national development goals of good governance and democracy, indicating national support for policies of local ownership and empowerment. The Tigray region in particular shows strong displays of local community participation and inclusion in planning and civic affairs.

These principles are reflected in the Integrated Community Based Participatory Planning (ICBPP) programme implemented by the Government of Ethiopia with UNICEF support. ICBPP allows for the integration of community input and consultation in the development of kebele and woreda government development plans. The programme began in Tigray (and now encompasses all woredas in Tigray) and has been scaled up to include selected woredas in all other regional states except Harari.

ICBPP has been an invaluable tool for the inclusion of community participation in local development planning in Tigray. It allows for a

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Local Development International LLC, 'The Role of Decentralisation/Devolution in Improving Development Outcomes at the Local Level: Review of the Literature and Selected Cases,' UK Department for International Development, November 2013.

¹² The Woreda Decentralization Policy (2001) provides woreda administrations with a legal, institutional and financial basis for managing local development. United

Nations Children's Fund, *Evaluation of Integrated Community Based Participatory Planning in Tigray Region, Ethiopia*, UNICEF, 2013.

¹³ Vaughan, S., as cited in 'Role of Decentralisation/Devolution in Improving Development Outcomes'.

combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches to planning, although top-down priorities sometimes take precedence within planning and budgeting processes. This is especially true when considering the influence of higher-level (regional) benchmarks and priorities on the activities actually implemented at the local level. ICBPP has facilitated greater integration of sectoral plans and also encouraged problem-solving and ownership of development outcomes among the local community. There is more localized planning (at the tabia level) which previously did not (formally) exist. Finally, ICBPP has helped to raise awareness of civic participation, mainstream community engagement, and build social cohesion.¹⁴

It is significant to note that ICBPP guidelines and materials call for the explicit inclusion of many groups, including women, yet children and adolescents are not explicitly included within ICBPP. The UNICEF Ethiopia Country Office is currently developing mechanisms that would call for the participation of children and adolescents within this participatory planning model.

Child rights framework

Ethiopia has a strong national rights framework dedicated to advancing development outcomes for children. This framework is largely informed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and even the Child Friendly Cities framework to some extent (though its principles have yet to be actualized at the local level, within local governments). The role of children in broader community participation in Ethiopia is slightly less clear. While child/adolescent participation is similarly

advocated by national strategy and policy (through the growth and transformation plan and annual development plans), it has not been implemented as visibly in subnational or local policy or action.

Child participation initiatives

Child/adolescent participation in local governance

It is difficult to ascertain the degree to which meaningful child participation in local governance is allowed, encouraged and actualized in Ethiopia. While participation has a strong history in the country, it is still a relatively new phenomenon and one that has slowly integrated the inclusion of women and vulnerable groups. Additionally, while communities certainly do participate, there remains some frustration with the pervasive top-down approach across the country, especially in regard to strategic planning and priority setting. Children and adolescents have not been given many opportunities to engage meaningfully thus far, but there is a strong opportunity to include children and adolescents within this framework for civic participation. For the most part, however, this opportunity has not yet been explored. Low education levels among communities and a lack of awareness of the basis for child rights and child/adolescent participation contribute significantly to this challenge.

Child/adolescent participation forums

Broadly speaking, children and adolescents participate in various sector development planning activities, at times directly through kebele development working groups, but more often indirectly, as others involved in development planning for various sectors consider child/adolescent perspectives and needs. At the kebele level, each sector-specific

¹⁴ Evaluation of Integrated Community Based Participatory Planning in Tigray Region.

development planning working group collaborates on the annual development plan with a tangential youth association group – which includes individuals aged 15–35 years. Hence, the direct involvement of children/adolescents as defined by UNICEF (aged 0–18 years) is not apparent.

Moreover, non-sector-specific participation of children/adolescents exists on paper but the mechanisms for it are largely non-functional. For example, in theory, each woreda has a child parliament, which is distinct from a school parliament and allows children to contribute to and oversee a range of public affairs. The Ethiopian Institution of the Ombudsman (traditionally a federal-level oversight office) instituted the child parliaments, but they were never fully implemented across all regions and those that were created have since declined in functionality and capacity due to loss of funding. Child parliaments have the support of various partners throughout the region, including NGOs, UNICEF (via support given to the Government of Ethiopia) and other government partners. Child parliaments may be better supported by the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, but their implementation is unlikely to improve or become more effective unless there is coordination between the Ministry and the Ombudsman’s office, and all ministries are clear on their mandate to support child parliaments. This highlights the importance of planning for the sustainability and continued funding of initiatives if they are to have an impact.

School parliaments, which are run entirely by the Ministry of Education and its subnational education bureau and desks, differ greatly from child parliaments. Perhaps because they are run by a single governing body and have a specific sector focus, school parliaments are highly functional, have the capacity to facilitate

participation and are well established in most regions. While school parliaments are more typical of secondary schools, both primary and secondary students also participate in various schools clubs, including mini-media clubs, girls’ clubs and drama clubs. The limitation of school parliaments (as well as parent-teacher-student associations) is that students are only empowered to make changes within the school system and participation ends at the school. Some school-based participation has the potential to indirectly affect communities, however. For example, students may bring home to their families and communities useful information from school, or they may work to support and mobilize resources for out-of-school children/adolescents.

In addition to school-based participation, some regions and districts offer youth centres, which are open to all youth including out-of-school children/adolescents and are often supported by the UNICEF Child Protection Section. Youth centre purposes include providing a place for meeting, recreation, information sharing and/or the provision of youth-friendly services such as skills training and reproductive health services, especially related to HIV prevention and including free voluntary HIV testing. It was indicated during the fieldwork that, through youth centres, children/adolescents also participate in development activities such as tree planting.

Finally, another dominant platform for child/adolescent participation is the Community Care Coalition (CCC). The NGO World Vision introduced CCCs to Ethiopia, and the Government of Ethiopia later scaled up the coverage of these groups with UNICEF support. Now widely established in kebeles, CCCs are voluntary and independent of the government, but serve in the vein of community resource centres for women and vulnerable groups such as the elderly. UNICEF funded the expansion

and implementation of CCCs throughout Ethiopia and continues to support CCCs with capacity building and technical assistance. In Tigray, the Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs holds the mandate for supporting CCCs (via capacity building and the development of guidelines). These groups address only the needs of *vulnerable* community members, however, and not the entire population. As such, CCCs mainly serve to address the needs of vulnerable children/adolescents rather than empower them and include them in meaningful participation. Furthermore, CCCs vary significantly in terms of capacity and functionality as well as from region to region (Tigray region has some of the strongest CCCs).

United Nations Children's Fund, *Evaluation of Integrated Community Based Participatory Planning in Tigray Region, Ethiopia*, UNICEF, 2013.

Yilmaz, Serdar, and Varsha Venugopal, 'Local Government Discretion and Accountability in Ethiopia', International Studies Program Working Paper 08-38, Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, Georgia State University, Atlanta, December 2008.

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