

# **Zimbabwe's Child-Friendly National Action Plan for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children: Adding Value by Facilitating Child Participation**

Author: Carolyn W. Fanelli, CRS Zimbabwe

**Presented at the World Congress on Communication for Development  
Rome, Italy  
25-27 October 2006**

## **ABSTRACT**

Children have the right to participate in the implementation of national policies for children, and their participation adds value to the policy implementation process. As a result, enabling and enhancing child participation in national policies is an important aim of communication for development. However, a significant challenge to facilitating child participation in policy implementation is how to communicate policy details to children of varying capacities. After all, how can children meaningfully participate in the implementation of policies if they can't, to the best of their ability, understand the policies themselves? In order to facilitate child participation in the policies that affect them, this paper argues that it is critical to communicate policy information to children in a child-friendly way and to create these child-friendly communication tools through a process that itself embraces child participation.

To make its argument, the paper uses as a case study the Republic of Zimbabwe's development of a child-friendly version of its National Action Plan (NAP) for Orphans and other Vulnerable Children (OVC). The paper begins by providing background information on the NAP. Next, it draws upon human rights documents and the child participation literature to examine the concept of child participation. The paper highlights the reasons why providing children with information they can understand is so central to realizing child participation in policy implementation, and why children should be involved in the process of providing this information. These insights are then used to explain Zimbabwe's decision both to create its Child-Friendly (CF) NAP and to use a child participation methodology in the development process. The paper describes the child participation methodology used in the development of the CF NAP, and the insights gleaned from this experience.

The paper concludes by offering recommendations to stakeholders in Zimbabwe for how to maximize the CF NAP's value-added, and to organizations and governments in other countries for how they could approach developing their own child-friendly communication tools. It is important that Zimbabwe's initiative inform countries at all stages of the OVC policy-development process about how critical a child-friendly communications strategy is for ensuring child participation in their policy, and how they can start implementing such a strategy by developing a CF NAP.

---

## **ACRONYMS**

ACRWC – African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

CBO – Community-Based Organization  
CF – Child-Friendly  
CPC – Child Protection Committee  
CRC – Convention on the Rights of the Child  
CRS/ZW – Catholic Relief Services/Zimbabwe  
FGD – Focus Group Discussion  
GoZ – Government of Zimbabwe  
NGO – Non-Governmental Organization  
NAP – National Action Plan  
OVC – Orphans and other Vulnerable Children  
SCN-Z – Save the Children Norway in Zimbabwe  
UN – United Nations  
UNGASS – United Nations General Assembly Special Session  
UNICEF – United Nation’s Children’s Fund  
WPO – Working Party of Officials

## ARTICLE

“Anything for us, without us, is against us”. So declared children from across the Republic of Zimbabwe at two conferences organized to discuss the country’s National Action Plan (NAP) for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children (OVC). The spirit of the children’s slogan is rooted in Article 12 of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which guarantees children’s right to express an opinion on “all matters affecting the child” and their right to have these opinions duly considered. Its message is also affirmed by years of community development work, which have demonstrated that programs and policies are stronger and more sustainable when developed and implemented with the full participation of community members.

This paper builds upon the understanding that national policies for children, such as Zimbabwe’s NAP, are “matters” that affect children as a community. Child participation in the implementation of these policies is a child’s right, child participation adds value to the policy implementation process, and, as a result, enabling and enhancing child participation in national policies is an important aim of communication for development. However, one central challenge to child participation in policy implementation is how to communicate policy details to children of varying capacities. After all, how can children meaningfully participate in the implementation of policies if they can’t, to the best of their ability, understand the policies themselves? In order to facilitate child participation in the policies that affect them, this paper argues that it is critical to communicate policy information to children in a child-friendly way and to create these child-friendly communication tools through a process that itself embraces child participation. To make this argument, the paper uses Zimbabwe’s development of a child-friendly version of its NAP for OVC as a case study.

This paper comes at a crucial juncture. Having a national OVC policy is one component of the Declaration of Commitment signed by 189 State parties, including Zimbabwe, at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on the global HIV/AIDS pandemic in 2001 (UNGA 2001). The UN is reviewing countries' progress towards fulfilling their commitment this year, and Zimbabwe will be the only country with a child-friendly version of its OVC policy. It is important to use Zimbabwe's initiative to inform countries at all stages of the OVC policy-development process about how vital a child-friendly communications strategy is for ensuring child participation in their policy, and how they can start implementing such a strategy by using a child participation methodology to develop a Child-Friendly (CF) NAP.

## **OVERVIEW**

The paper begins by providing background information on the development of Zimbabwe's NAP and the role that children played in this process from an early stage. Section II then draws upon the CRC, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and child participation literature more broadly to explain the concept of child participation. The paper highlights the specific reasons why providing understandable information to children is so central to their participation in policy implementation and why children should be involved in providing this child-friendly information. Section III describes how this reasoning informed Zimbabwe's decision to create its CF NAP, and the consultative, participatory methodology used to develop the document. It presents the ways that children's input made the final CF NAP a stronger document, as well as some initial findings about the value of the CF NAP for facilitating child participation in NAP implementation.

In Section IV, the paper provides stakeholders in Zimbabwe with recommendations for how to build upon the value added by Zimbabwe's Child-Friendly NAP. It also gives recommendations to organizations and governments in other countries about the reasons to craft child-friendly policy communication tools, and how and why to use a child participation methodology in developing these tools. Many of these recommendations are based upon lessons learned from Zimbabwe's experience developing its CF NAP. Finally, the paper concludes by arguing that enabling and enhancing child participation is an important aim of communication for development. In particular, the development of child-friendly materials is critical to child participation in national policies, and should be a component of all national OVC policies.

It is important to acknowledge here that creating child-friendly policy documents is itself not a new idea. UNICEF uses a child-friendly version of the CRC, Save the Children and the Global Movement for Children published a child-friendly version of the 2002 UN Special Session on Children outcome document, and South Africa has a comic book-style version of its Constitution. What *is* new is viewing such documents as strategic communication tools designed to enable

and enhance child participation in national policies, and the recognition that children themselves must participate in the development of such tools.

## **SECTION 1 – Background: The NAP and Its Development**

Motivated by Zimbabwe’s UNGASS commitment, in June 2003 more than 300 people met in Harare for a national stakeholders’ conference aimed at drafting an NAP for OVC.<sup>i</sup> The participants included 50 children, as well as representatives from government ministries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), donors and international organizations. The child participants lobbied for ongoing child participation in the development, implementation and monitoring of the NAP (Nkomo and Masau, personal communications, 2005). They also created and recited a slogan, noted above, that made their position on child participation clear: “Anything for us, without us, is against us.”

The children’s message was taken to heart during the development of the NAP, as children were represented in the Working Party of Officials charged with crafting the policy. Many months and meetings later, in August 2005, more than 300 children repeated their slogan during a Children’s Summit to introduce the final NAP, which the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) officially launched on 8 September 2005.

The policy’s vision is “to reach out to all orphans and other vulnerable children in Zimbabwe with basic services that will positively impact on their lives” (GoZ 2004: 5).<sup>ii</sup> Its seven main objectives are to:

- Strengthen the existing coordination structures for OVC programs;
- Increase child participation as appropriate in all issues that concern them from community to national level, considering their evolving capacities;
- Increase the percentage of children with birth certificates;
- Increase new school enrolment of OVC while ensuring retention of OVC in primary and secondary schools;
- Increase access to food, health services and water and sanitation for all OVC;
- Increase education on nutrition, health, and hygiene for all OVC; and
- Protect OVC from abuse, violence, exploitation, discrimination, and loss of inheritance and reduce the number of children who live outside of a family environment (GoZ 2004: 17).

The NAP acknowledges that Zimbabwe, as a signatory to the CRC, is committed to upholding children’s right to participate in the matters that affect them (GoZ 2004). Thus, increasing child participation in decision-making is an objective, the theory of child participation is a guiding principle and, most importantly for this paper, the NAP’s implementation strategy embraces child participation as a methodology (GoZ 2004; GoZ 2005). Through its focus on strengthening the community-based initiatives – including child-led initiatives – that support OVC, the NAP emphasizes the community’s participatory role in policy implementation.

Several institutions have been established to implement the NAP, and children are represented in almost all of them. First, there is a National Secretariat based in the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare. This National Secretariat supports the establishment of district- and provincial-level Secretariats, which in turn are helping to create village-, district- and provincial-level Child Protection Committees (CPCs) and village-level Children's Committees. All children can be members of their village Children's Committee, and it is this committee that elects child representatives to the CPCs and advises these representatives on children's issues, challenges and needs. The CPCs are charged with NAP implementation, coordination, and monitoring and evaluation activities, and their members include a wide range of stakeholders, such as members of the police, community-based organizations (CBOs), village headmen, health workers and children. Finally, the Working Party of Officials (WPO) consists of representatives from seven government ministries, the National AIDS Council, UNICEF, CBOs, international NGOs, faith-based organizations, the National Association of NGOs, the Zimbabwe Red Cross Society, donors, the private sector and children. Among the WPO's terms of reference are to monitor NAP implementation and to ensure child participation both in the WPO and in NAP implementation (GoZ 2004).

It is clear from this brief overview that child participation has been a priority in the development of Zimbabwe's NAP from the beginning. This commitment is reflected in the NAP's language about how the policy should be implemented. Children are to play a meaningful role as members of the NAP's implementing institutions, and child-led groups are one type of organization that these institutions could work with in their implementation efforts.<sup>iii</sup>

As first published in June 2004, and as launched in September 2005, the NAP is a 60-page document written in English for an adult audience with a high level of literacy. It is printed in small type with no graphics or colours.

## **SECTION II – Child Participation: Applying Its Basic Tenets to Policy Implementation**

This section begins by outlining the basic tenets of child participation, drawing upon rights-based documents and child participation literature. It uses this information to explain why providing understandable information to children is so central to integrating child participation into policy implementation, and also why a child participation methodology should be used to craft this information.

As noted earlier, child participation is a right of all children. This right is most clearly articulated by Article 12 of the CRC.<sup>iv</sup> Article 12 states that:

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Other key “participation rights” in the CRC include children’s rights to: seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds (Article 13); freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 14); freedom of association (Article 15); and access information important to their well-being (Article 17) (UNICEF 2005).

In the African context, it is important to look at how child participation is conceptualized in the ACRWC.<sup>v</sup> The ACRWC recognizes children’s “responsibilities” within the social and economic life of the family, community and country (Article 31) and says that children, as “beneficiaries”, have the right to participate in the “planning and management of a basic service program for children” (Article 14).

Based on these two documents, it is clear that if a policy affects children or is intended to benefit children, then children have the right to be involved in its planning and implementation and that their viewpoints must be given “due weight”. Taking a meaningful role in the social and economic life of their family, community and country is not just children’s right, but also their responsibility. Using a child participation methodology to develop and implement policies for children, therefore, requires regular consultations with children to gather and duly consider their opinions.

The writings of child participation experts help to further refine and explain the concept of child participation. For the purposes of this paper, their most important findings deal with the intersection of children’s rights to information and participation, their understandings of children’s “capacity to form a viewpoint”, and their view of the role of child participation in effective policies and programs.

Experts note that the rights in the CRC are indivisible and interrelated (Mason and Cohen 2001). Thus, children’s right to participate is inexorably linked to the realization of their other rights, and vice versa. Bringing together Articles 12 and 17, authors argue that information is critical to enabling children to decide whether or not they want to participate in an initiative (International Save the Children Alliance 2003). The literature also stresses that it is the responsibility of adults and the government to ensure that children have “access to relevant information prepared in a child-friendly way”, so that they can form viewpoints to the fullest extent of their capacities (International Save the Children Alliance 2003: 13).

In determining which children are, as Article 12 says, “capable of forming their own views”, the literature supports a broad interpretation of capacity. Some experts go so far as to say that even children in early infancy have been found to express preferences (Hart 2002), and “an age barrier below which child beneficiaries possess no important information does not seem to exist” (Phillips 2000 cited in Ackermann et al. 2003: 15). The literature also focuses on the important role participation plays in further developing children’s capacity to participate (ECPAT International 1999; Lansdown 2004). Lansdown (2004: 6), for example, argues that, “the most effective model for developing competencies is one where children work collaboratively, each serving as a resource for others, and taking varying roles and responsibilities according to their understanding and expertise”.

Beyond being a right, child participation also enhances the quality of policies and programs. Lansdown (2001) argues that child participation strengthens decision-making, and Tolfree and Woodhead (1999) say that listening to children makes policymakers more effective because they can avoid assumptions about what children want, think and need and can engage with children as valuable partners in social development.

What does this brief overview of the child participation literature mean for policy implementation? First, it means that children must have information about a policy to decide whether or not they want to participate in it and to participate to the fullest extent of their capacities. Second, children have a right to participate in realizing their right to receive, impart and access policy information. Third, since all children have some level of capacity, policy information should be as accessible as possible to the broadest range of children as possible. Finally, it suggests that the participatory process should give children of different capacities the chance to work together.

Based on this overview of child participation, it is clear that the GoZ and other stakeholders were upholding children’s rights and creating a foundation for quality policy implementation by facilitating children’s meaningful role in the development of the NAP and by deeming child participation an implementation strategy. However, it is also clear that, to ensure the success of this strategy, there must be a way for children of varying capacities to access updated, accurate policy information that they understand. In addition, stakeholders must guarantee children’s right to participate in the process of imparting this information.

### **SECTION III: The CF NAP – Conception and Development**

This section explains the decision to create the CF NAP, the consultative, participatory methodology used to develop the document, and how children’s input made the final CF NAP a stronger document. In addition, it provides some

initial findings about the value of the CF NAP for facilitating child participation in NAP implementation.

In early 2005, the WPO outlined its priority activities for the year in support of NAP implementation. Recognizing the need to raise stakeholders' awareness of the NAP, the WPO made plans to produce "simplified versions" of the NAP in Ndebele and Shona, Zimbabwe's two major local languages, and to host a National Children's Summit and an official NAP launch (GoZ 2005).

The goal of the Summit was to educate child representatives from across the country about the NAP, so that they could return to their communities and share what they had learned with other children. This information-sharing, WPO members believed, would be critical to facilitating children's meaningful participation in NAP implementation, particularly through NAP institutions such as the CPCs and Children's Committees.

However, as the WPO and the National Secretariat began preparing for the Summit, they realized they could not simply present the dense NAP policy document to children and expect them to understand the policy, nor could they expect children to use such a document to tell their peers about the NAP. Instead, they needed a child-friendly communication tool that would effectively acquaint children with the NAP and help children share information about the NAP with their peers. This need was a topic of discussion among WPO members, including Catholic Relief Services/Zimbabwe (CRS/ZW) and Save the Children Norway in Zimbabwe (SCN-Z). Building upon the idea of "simplifying" the NAP, CRS/ZW and SCN-Z proposed developing a child-friendly version that would explain the main features of the NAP using simple, straight-forward language, appealing graphics and creative formatting.

The CF NAP idea was quickly approved by the WPO and the National Secretariat. It was to be written in English, with a view towards developing local language versions at a later stage. Once finalized, the CF NAP would be submitted to the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare for approval and would become an official government document.

CRS/ZW and SCN-Z began collaborating in June 2005, and their first step was to select and hire a consultant, Justine Smith.<sup>vi</sup> Smith's role was to facilitate all child consultations; use feedback from these sessions to "translate" the NAP into child-friendly language; liaise with an artist engaged to draw simple, appealing illustrations; and co-manage, along with CRS/ZW and SCN-Z, the final design and publication of the document by a professional design/printing company. At the very start, CRS/ZW, SCN-Z and Smith (hereafter referred to as "the team") made some initial decisions about the goal of the CF NAP, its design, its content, and the process of developing the document.

First, they decided that the primary goals of the CF NAP would be to 1) provide the information necessary to inspire, motivate and make possible children's participation in NAP implementation and 2) serve as a tool children could use to share the NAP with their peers. To meet these goals, the team decided to include critical content from the original NAP, as well as interactive activities that would encourage children to think about both how they could become involved in NAP implementation and how government agencies, organizations, community members and children may already be involved. In addition, the CF NAP would include a resource page that children could use to contact key NAP institutions. A secondary goal of the CF NAP was to give all community members – CPC members, peer educators, teachers, NGO representatives, etc. – a tool they could use in their work with children to help share information about the NAP.

Second, the team made the design decision to create one CF NAP that catered to different levels of children's capacities instead of multiple CF NAPs for differing levels of capacity. This one document would appeal to children of all ages and feature a variety of entry points for children to access information. Thus, children with less capacity could simply flip through the CF NAP and engage with the pictures, while more advanced users could read the fine print and complete the activities. The team also thought having one document would encourage children of differing capacities to work together to understand the NAP.

In terms of content, the team decided to craft the CF NAP around two child characters – Tendai (a Shona name) and Sibongile (an Ndebele name) – whose personal stories would help tell the “story” of the NAP's objectives and implementation activities. The team also invited two youth who had participated as children in the 2003 national stakeholder conference to write an introduction to the CF NAP. This introduction explained that children had been involved in the policy from its very early stages and encouraged children to continue this involvement by participating in NAP implementation. A third content decision was to create a special “acknowledgements” section listing the names of each group of children that participated in the process of developing the CF NAP.

Finally, the team designed a three-stage development process using a child participation methodology. This decision was grounded in the belief that children have a right to participate in imparting information to their peers, and that such participation would ensure that the document was accessible and appealing to children and met their information needs. The three stages of the development process were initial child consultations, working draft child consultations and a field test with children. Two additions to this original plan were a working draft consultation that included adults as well as children and an extension to the field test stage – Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with selected field-test participants. The plan was to have content and basic design close to finalized before the field test stage. At this point, the team would engage a professional designer/printer to enhance the document's “child-friendliness” with color, creative use of text and easy-to-follow layout.

The team also made the decision to include as many types of “vulnerable” children<sup>vii</sup> as possible in the consultations and field tests, to strive for gender balance, and to consult with a diverse range of children in terms of age, geographic area (both majority Shona and majority Ndebele areas), and rural/urban area. Along the way, the team also planned to solicit feedback from the WPO members and the Secretariat. The draft CF NAP was continually modified based on feedback received from all sources.

This paper will now look at each stage of consultation in more detail and examine what the team learned in these stages, the challenges faced, and how children’s input strengthened the final document.

### ***Initial consultations***

Initial consultations were held with two groups of children, one rural and one urban. The goal was to gain insight into how children understood the NAP, particularly the seven NAP objectives, and the words they would use to explain the NAP to their peers. The consultant began each session by providing an overview of the NAP, the reasons behind the CF NAP’s development, the consultation process, and how children’s feedback would be used. Using prepared flipcharts, the consultant then explained each NAP objective in more detail, and discussed these objectives with the children. She also asked the children to define “orphan” and “vulnerable child” in their own words. Then, working in pairs, the children designed posters that would explain one of the NAP objectives to a friend. After this exercise, each pair displayed their poster and explained it to the group.

Key findings from this stage of consultations were that children could articulate both general and specific definitions for “vulnerable children”. In general terms, they defined “vulnerable children” as “children who need to be helped to improve their lives” and “a child with disadvantages in his or her life”. They also noted specific categories of vulnerability, such as destitute children, street kids, child-headed families, and disabled children. Thus, the final CF NAP includes a list of specific categories of vulnerable children, as well as a general definition for OVC taken almost verbatim from this first consultation.

Based on the children’s posters, it became apparent which NAP terms were familiar to children, and which terms were not. For example, “co-ordination”, one of the NAP’s objectives, was an unfamiliar term to many children. However, after some discussion, the consultant learned that “working together” was a concept children understood. This definition of coordination appears in the final CF NAP.

It also emerged that several NAP objectives addressed topics quite familiar to children, namely, the importance of children having birth certificates; accessing education, health care, food, water and sanitation; and receiving education on nutrition, health and hygiene.

### ***Working draft consultations***

Armed with feedback from the initial consultations, the consultant wrote and laid-out an initial working draft of the CF NAP. This working draft was used in four consultations to gather feedback on the document's style, layout, understandability and use of pictures, and to gauge how much information about the NAP children absorbed after reviewing the CF NAP. One of these consultations was held with both the adult and child members of a village CPC in order to gather the group's input on whether the CF NAP would help them share the NAP amongst children in the community and, if so, how the document could be improved. Another consultation was held at the Children's Summit, where the working draft was also used, as intended, to introduce child to the NAP.

At the Children's Summit, children reviewed the CF NAP and shared their feedback using a specially-designed form. At the other consultations, Smith made a short presentation on the NAP and the process of developing the CF NAP. The children (and adults, in one case) were then asked to assemble in groups of three or four to look through the working draft. The consultant assigned each group a specific section to review in detail, and the group members provided feedback on this section to the rest of the group. During one consultation with younger children (10 and below) at a children's shelter, the consultant only asked the children to review and offer feedback on the pictures.

Overall, the response to the working draft was overwhelmingly positive. All participants commented that the document was simple and easy to understand, and that the pictures, stories and exercises were interesting to children. Specific children commented that:

- This booklet is easy to understand because it is written in simple English and there are pictures drawn to explain what is happening.
- It is easy for us to understand, but could be difficult for primary level, because they haven't been involved in child participation before (but they will understand through the pictures).
- The stories help to explain the NAP because they deal with how children live in the community.
- The stories are informative and also tell us where people get help.
- The exercises show children that they can also do what is being shown in the book.

Without explicit directions, some groups even started completing the interactive activities on their own. Children and adults alike also readily engaged with the two characters. For example, they often gave personal examples of how the NAP might affect them by referring to Tendai and Sibongile. Younger children were able to correctly describe what almost every image depicted. At the end of the session, children's level of recall of NAP content was very high.

The main suggestions that emerged from the working draft consultations were to include comic-strip cartoons and to ensure that the document was translated into local languages. Children also had suggestions for how to improve the pictures, for example by having them depict a wider age range. Young children, especially those who had only lived in urban areas, could not correctly identify a chief who appeared in one drawing. Comic strips were added to the next draft, and the illustrator addressed children's concerns about the age range depicted and the chief image. In addition, children at the Summit expressed concern that the CF NAP would stigmatize them, since it only applied to OVC and not to all children. Although the CF NAP development process could change the NAP's target beneficiaries, the team did take away the important reminder that OVC are, fundamentally, children. For this reason, "OVC" is never used in the CF NAP, in order to avoid labeling a varied group of children with one acronym.

### ***Field test***

The goal of the field test was to discover how children reacted to the CF NAP in a "real world" situation, and whether or not they found the document user-friendly and informative. The team also was interested in learning more about how partner organizations might use the document to engage children with the NAP.

In the field test, eight CRS/ZW and SCN-Z partners who work with OVC were given copies of the most recent working draft, instructions for how to test the document with children, and feedback forms. The field test had three steps. First, the eight partners tested the CF NAP with children. Then, the partners recorded their own feedback and the feedback they had gathered from children, and submitted these forms to the team. Third, the consultant held follow-up FGDs with three of the groups.

Via their feedback forms, partners reported that children were quite likely to read the document on their own, that the style of English was appropriate, that the pictures and stories were helpful, and that children were likely to complete the activities. According to the partners, children tended to discuss the pictures and stories amongst each other, especially when they recognized scenarios similar to their personal experiences, such as not having a birth certificate. Partners also reported that the document's definition of an orphan consistently sparked discussion because some children disagreed with the definition, and also that children found the page depicting the NAP's institutional structure confusing. In addition, although younger children typically focused on the pictures and stories rather than the main narrative, the partners found that older children often helped younger children read the document. The team was largely encouraged by these results, but was concerned that debate over the definition of "orphan" and confusion over the institutional structure might distract children from the main parts of the document. This issue was flagged as an issue to follow-up on during the FGDs.

The consultant held FGDs with three partner organizations located in very different geographical areas of the country. The aim was to gather additional, first-hand details on the information reported on the feedback forms and to get a sense of what children remembered about the NAP. The FGDs were held between 2 and 8 days after the conclusion of the field tests.

During each visit, the consultant spent 2-3 hours discussing the CF NAP with the children and testing their recall. Children were also asked to comment on two fully-designed print samples of the document. However, due to delays in the professional design process, only three pages of the designed document were available for feedback, meaning that children's input was largely limited to feedback on the colour scheme and the document's page size, and only two of the three groups had the chance to participate.

Overall, the response to the draft CF NAP was once again very positive. Children demonstrated a high level of recall about the NAP and engaged well with the characters in the booklet, often citing examples of what had happened to Tendai or Sibongile in their discussions. The children also found the style and level of language appropriate, with one child noting that the vocabulary was similar to what students learned in the lower grades.

As reported in the feedback forms, one area of the draft CF NAP that caused consistent confusion was the institutional structures section. The team, in direct consultation with the Secretariat, responded by restructuring this page to be more child-centred. The final document focuses on the main institutions children will be interacting with on a local level, namely the CPCs, instead of attempting to give a detailed picture of all the NAP's institutional relationships.

Also reinforcing findings from the feedback forms, the FGDs featured a lot of debate over the definition of "orphan". The key issue is that the NAP defines "orphans" as children who have lost both parents, and includes children who have lost one parent in its definition of "vulnerable children". In other words, both single and double orphans are part of the NAP's OVC target group, however only double orphans are defined as "orphans". In contrast, the definition propagated by the UN and accepted by many NGOs and children is that a child is an orphan if one *or* both of his/her parents have died. During the FGDs, the consultant found that the NAP's definition of orphan, which was reflected in the draft CF NAP, was quite upsetting to some children who considered themselves to be orphans, but now found they were outside the NAP's definition.

The team discussed ways to overcome the problem of having children upset and/or distracted from the main content of the CF NAP due to confusion or disagreement over this definition. Since the NAP applies to all OVC equally and never differentiates between orphans and other vulnerable children in its objectives or implementation activities, the team decided to combine the definition of orphan and vulnerable children into one definition in the CF NAP. As

noted earlier, this definition was derived from feedback received from children in the first stage of consultations: “Orphans and other vulnerable children are children under the age of 18 who need some extra help to live better, healthier lives”.

Children’s feedback regarding the three professionally-designed pages of the draft CF NAP was conflicting. There was no consensus about what colors children preferred. And, while some children favoured a more compact, “portable” page size, others felt this made the document look more “wordy” and preferred larger, less crowded pages with a bigger font to increase readability.

### ***Initial findings***

The final CF NAP was published in early 2006. Thus, it has not been available for a long enough time to give concrete examples of its impact. However, findings gleaned from the consultations indicate that the CF NAP will meet a true need and will be well-used. At the Children’s Summit, for example, children requested extra copies of the draft CF NAP to take home and share with their peers. During the field test, partners reported that they would use the CF NAP to engage children with the NAP, and would encourage peer educators to do the same. In addition, two groups involved in the consultations included Junior Council members<sup>viii</sup> and they expressed great excitement about sharing the document with other children as part of their council work. These children also had been involved in the NAP’s development, and they said that with the CF NAP they would finally have a way of sharing the policy with others. One child went so far as to say that the CF NAP would now be the Councillors “bible” for their work with children! To capitalize on this enthusiasm, as well as the sense of ownership created through participating in the CF NAP’s development, CRS/ZW and SCN-Z ensured that children who took part in the consultations and field tests were among the very first recipients of the final CF NAP.

## **SECTION IV – Recommendations**

This section presents recommendations for stakeholders in Zimbabwe about how to build upon the value added by Zimbabwe’s Child-Friendly NAP. It also provides recommendations for organizations and governments in other countries about why they should develop child-friendly policy communication tools, and why this development process should use a child participation methodology.

### ***Recommendations for Zimbabwe stakeholders***

The CF NAP is an important step in establishing a communications strategy in which child-friendly materials enable and enhance child participation in policy implementation. However, it is just the start. To continue to uphold children’s right to participate and to build upon the value added by the CF NAP, the National Secretariat and the WPO should continue to make child-friendly communications a priority. In this way, more and more children will be

introduced to the CF NAP and children will be kept informed of implementation progress and challenges.

First, as the team heard from children throughout its consultations, the CF NAP should be translated into Shona and Ndebele. A Braille version should also be considered, especially since visually-impaired children are among those the NAP considers “vulnerable”. Second, to ensure that the CF NAP is introduced to children in a variety of settings, a selection of discussion guides should be developed, including one for peer educators, one for CBOs that work with children, one for teachers and one for CPCs. These discussion guides would provide ideas for how to introduce children to the CF NAP within each setting. For example, the teachers’ discussion guide would suggest strategies for integrating information from the CF NAP into the regular curriculum.

Third, creating updated child-friendly communications should be an ongoing activity of the NAP institutions charged with implementing the NAP, and children must continue to play a central role in this information-sharing effort. For any report or document that emerges from an NAP institution, adult and child representatives should discuss whether there needs to be a child-friendly communication tool developed and, if so, how children themselves will be involved in this effort. Child-friendly communication tools should not be restricted to the written word. In fact, Article 13 of the CRC guarantees children’s freedom to “seek, receive and impart information and ideas...either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice”. In Zimbabwe, song in particular might be an effective way of sharing information about national policies with children, as this is a natural medium of expression.

Fourth, new child representatives, as part of their training, should learn strategies for communicating with the full range of children they represent, including very young children and children living with disabilities. It is facile to assume that children automatically know how to communicate with all other children, when “children” is such a diverse group. Past child representatives are probably best suited to conduct such trainings.

### ***Recommendations for other countries***

For NGOs, CBOs and government officials in countries developing an NAP, or planning to develop an NAP, there are several recommendations. The primary recommendation is, of course, that developing a child-friendly communications strategy is essential if a national policy aspires to involve children in its implementation – which it should, since participation is a children’s right and will improve the strength and sustainability of implementation activities. A CF NAP is the initial step in such a strategy because children must understand a policy in order for them to participate in its implementation. However, as noted in the recommendations above, a child-friendly communications strategy cannot stop with a CF NAP. Just like other stakeholders, children need to be kept up-to-date

on policy implementation, including progress, priorities and new developments. Child-friendly communications are essential to this effort.

The team involved in the CF NAP's development also learned a number of lessons about consultations, the planning process and children's expectations, and these lessons would apply to the process of developing child-friendly communication tools more broadly. These lessons also serve as recommendations for stakeholders in other countries interested in crafting a child-friendly communication strategy. They are:

### *Consultations*

- 1) **There is no substitute for meeting directly with children to gather their feedback.** Although each team member had worked with children in the past, they found that, when developing child-friendly communications, no amount of experience working with children can substitute for consulting directly with children and gathering their input.
- 2) **Child consultations were more effective with small groups than larger groups,** such as the Children's Summit participants. Children needed direct facilitation to ensure they understood the purpose of the exercise and the nature of the feedback required.
- 3) **Existing kids' clubs and other children's groups generated the most valuable feedback during the consultations.** These children already knew each other and knew how to work together, and could more quickly begin to discuss the document and provide feedback.
- 4) **Ensuring a wide variety of children (e.g., different ages, geographical areas and ethnic groups) participate in the development process is time-consuming, but worthwhile.** It would have been much easier for the team to simply plan all the consultations in and around Harare. However, the different feedback gathered from, for example, children in rural areas versus urban areas, made it clear that consulting with the widest possible range of children will, in the long run, increase the value of a child-friendly communication tool intended for all children. It is important to remember that all children have some capacity to form a viewpoint, and groups such as very young children and children living with disabilities should be not overlooked.
- 5) **The consultation facilitator must be prepared with strategies for focusing the discussion.** The team found that children sometimes wanted to discuss the specifics of the NAP policy itself rather than the effectiveness and clarity of the CF NAP as a communication tool. One of the team's strategies for focusing discussion was to ensure that children had a clear idea of the scope and limits of their participatory role – specifically, that the document itself was not currently up for debate, even though it had been previously developed with children's input. Meanwhile, other children were inclined to give "correct" answers that they thought the consultant, as an adult, might want to hear. For example, one child commented that the drawings should show children sitting at desks and

- paying attention when discussing the issues that affect them. Again, the consultant must be prepared to re-focus discussion on what children think, rather than what children believe adults want them to think. One option for future projects would be to train children themselves to facilitate or co-facilitate the actual consultations and to report back on what they have learned. This strategy might help overcome the issue of children framing their answers based upon what they think adults want to hear.
- 6) **Starting with an English-language version of the communication tool made the document less accessible to children whose native language was not English.** Even though the consultations were held in local languages, the draft document was written in English, which likely constrained the ability of children with limited English skills to offer their feedback.
  - 7) **Evidence from the consultations suggests that creating one CF NAP document, rather than different documents for different levels of capacity, did encourage children of varying capacities to work together.** As noted in Section II, such experiences help children develop their capacities, and ultimately enhance the quality of their participation.

#### *Planning*

- 8) **It is important to build sufficient time into the project workplan for the professional design and printing process, and for the designer/printer to be committed to synchronizing their design process with your consultative process.** The team experienced delays with the professional designer/printer hired. As a result, the consultant had to conduct the FGDs before the document was at a stage where children could offer meaningful feedback on the professional design. Fortunately, however, the consultant's basic, original lay-out of the document proved quite effective, and the final design does not vary substantially from that of the draft document used throughout the consultations.
- 9) **The illustrator and designer/printer must be very familiar with child-friendly design concepts and committed to the goals of the communication tool.** Images and design are critical to engaging children with the document's content, especially younger children.

#### *Challenges*

- 10) **Among some children, a child-friendly policy communication tool raises their expectations that the policy commitment will be fulfilled.** During several child consultations, the team found that the CF NAP raised children's expectations for how community members, organizations and the government were going to work together to address the needs of OVC. In one way, this result was a good thing, as it indicates that the CF NAP can play a role in galvanizing children to advocate for fulfilment of the NAP's commitments. At the same time, however, the information in the CF NAP gives children hope that situations very close to their personal

experiences – such as the difficulties they face in obtaining a birth certificate – will change for the better. This situation highlights an ethical and practical question that must be asked before undertaking development of child-friendly communications – does there appear to be sufficient political will and resources to implement the policy? If not, then it might not be ethical to create a child-friendly document that raises children’s expectations that their lives will be improved and that they can be involved in the process. Practically speaking, unfilled policy commitments could create disillusionment among children and might decrease the likelihood that they will invest the time and energy to participate in policy implementation efforts in the future. This result could have negative repercussions for civic engagement for many years to come.

- 11) **Among other children, a child-friendly policy communication tool must overcome cynicism that any action will actually happen.** The team also found that some older children were immediately cynical about whether the NAP would actually impact their lives. For example, one feedback sheet from the Children’s Summit said in regards to the NAP’s objective to improve health and sanitation: “how can you talk about sanitation when there is rubbish lying everywhere?” This cynicism points to a limitation of child-friendly communications for facilitating child participation: older children are likely only to want to invest their time and energy in participation if they feel that they might actually be able to affect change, and that there is political commitment to implement the policy. The main way to overcome this cynicism is beyond the scope of impact of the CF NAP itself, for it means that stakeholders must fulfill their policy commitments. Within the CF NAP, one small step is to help children think of ways that they can contribute to NAP implementation at a local level.

The last two lessons mentioned above might appear somewhat contradictory, for, on one hand, they suggest not raising children’s expectations beyond the reality of political will and resources, while, on the other hand, they recommend addressing children’s cynicism that the policy will improve their lives. It is a fine balance, and achieving this balance is not a task that can be generalized. However, it is important to highlight that expectations and cynicism are issues that people and organizations who develop child-friendly policy communications will need to address, especially in order for the tools to effectively inspire child participation.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper began by discussing the development of Zimbabwe’s NAP for OVC, highlighting children’s important role in the development process and how the NAP itself emphasizes child participation as an objective, guiding principle and implementation strategy. In Section II, the paper outlined the concept of child participation, with a focus on children’s right to participate in matters that affect

them – such as national policies for children – and their right to impart and receive information. The paper noted that children’s rights are interrelated, meaning that children have the right to participate in the imparting and receiving of information by other children. Child-friendly communications are vital to supporting both children’s right to participate, their right to information and the nexus between the two. This section said the child participation literature indicates that all children have some capacity to participate, and that children’s capacities are developed when children of different capacities work together. The literature also argues that child participation enhances the quality of policies and programs.

Section III applied these findings to the implementation of the NAP and the decision to develop the CF NAP. It explained how it became clear to the WPO and the Secretariat that, in order to inform children about the NAP and enable their meaningful involvement in the NAP and its institutions – as the NAP itself requires – a child-friendly version of the NAP was critical. It described how and why a child participatory methodology was used to develop the CF NAP, and provided a number of insights into how the final document was strengthened through this consultation process.

Finally, this paper offered recommendations to both stakeholders in Zimbabwe, and stakeholders in other countries where an NAP exists or is being developed. These recommendations centre around the idea that the CF NAP is an initial step in a child-friendly communications strategy, and that such a strategy should be crafted for all national policies for children. A range of lessons learned by the team that developed the CF NAP were also presented.

To work towards development goals, it is critical for information to be communicated in a way that enables child participation. This means that information needs to be understandable and accessible. In order to enhance the quality of children’s participation, the information should meet children at their level of capacity, while also giving them the opportunity to build this capacity. Zimbabwe’s creation of the CF NAP – as the first step in a child-friendly policy communication strategy – demonstrates how vital child-friendly communications are for enabling and enhancing child participation in policy implementation. This case also shows that child-friendly materials such as the CF NAP can and should be developed using a child participation methodology, both to ensure the quality of the document in terms of its appropriateness for and accessibility to children and as part of the specific commitment to child participation enshrined in children’s rights.

## REFERENCES

- Ackermann, Lisanne, Thomas Feeny, Jason Hart and Jesse Newman (2003), *Understanding and Evaluating Children's Participation: A Review of Contemporary Literature* London: Plan Ltd and Plan International (UK).
- Dhlembeu, N. and N. Mayanga (2006), "Responding to the orphans and other vulnerable children crisis – development of Zimbabwe's National Plan of Action", *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 21(1): 35-49.
- ECPAT International (1999), *Standing Up For Ourselves: A Study on the Concepts and Practices of Young People's Rights to Participation* Manila: ECPAT International.
- Fanelli, Carolyn W., Reuben Musarandega and Lorraine Chawanda (2006), "Child participation in Zimbabwe's National Action Plan for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children: progress, challenges and possibilities", Accepted for publication in *Children, Youth and Environments* 16(2).
- Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) (2004), *National Plan of Action for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children* Harare: Government of Zimbabwe.
- Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) (2005), *National Plan of Action for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children Priority Activities for 2005*, Draft, Harare: Government of Zimbabwe.
- Hart, Stuart N. (2002), "Making sure the child's voice is heard", *International Review of Education*, 48(3-4): 251–258.
- International Save the Children Alliance (2003), *So You Want to Consult with Children?: A Toolkit of Good Practice* London: International Save the Children Alliance.
- Lansdown, Gerison (2001), *Promoting Children's Participation in Democratic Decision-Making*, Innocenti Insight series, Florence: UNICEF.
- Lansdown, Gerison (2004), *Evolving Capacities and Participation*, Prepared for the Canadian International Development Agency Child Protection Unit, Victoria, Canada: Institute for Child Rights and Development.
- Mason, Sandra Prunella and Cynthia Price Cohen (2001), "Children's rights in education", in *Children's Rights in Education*, S. Hart, C. Price Cohen, M. Farrell Erickson and M. Flekkøy, eds., London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Save the Children UK (2000), *“Our Right to be Heard”*: Voices from Child Parliamentarians in Zimbabwe Harare: Save the Children UK.

Tolfree, David and Martin Woodhead (1999), “Tapping a key resource”, *Early Childhood Matters: The bulletin of the Bernard van Leer Foundation*, 91: 18-23.

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) (2001). “Declaration of commitment on HIV/AIDS: Global crisis – global action”, A/RES/S-26/2, 8th plenary meeting, twenty-sixth special session, 27 June 2001.

UNICEF (2005), “The Convention on the Rights of the Child: Participation rights: Having an active voice”, available at: [www.unicef.org/crc/files/Participation.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Participation.pdf).

## ENDNOTES

---

<sup>i</sup> For a more detailed account of the meetings, reports, conferences and commitments that inspired the NAP's development, see Dhlembeu, N. and N. Mayanga (2006). "Responding to the Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children Crisis – Development of Zimbabwe's National Plan of Action". *Journal of Social Development in Africa* 21(1): 35-49.

<sup>ii</sup> The NAP defines a child as a person below the age of 18 years, and an orphan as a child whose mother and father have both died (GoZ 2004: 7-8).

<sup>iii</sup> For a more detailed reflection and analysis of child participation in the NAP, please see Fanelli, C., R Musarandega and L. Chawanda (2006). "Child Participation in Zimbabwe's National Action Plan for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children: Progress, Challenges and Possibilities". Accepted for publication in *Children, Youth and Environments* 16(2).

<sup>iv</sup> Zimbabwe ratified the CRC in 1990.

<sup>v</sup> Zimbabwe ratified the ACRWC in 1995.

<sup>vi</sup> CRS/ZW's funding contribution came through its Support to Replicable, Innovative Village/community-level Efforts (STRIVE) project for OVC and SCN-Z's funding came through its Light the Children's Path project.

<sup>vii</sup> The NAP defines vulnerable children as children with "unfulfilled rights", such as children with disabilities, children infected with HIV/AIDS, street children, working children, and children in conflict with the law (GoZ 2004: 7-8).

<sup>viii</sup> Zimbabwe has a well-established system of "junior" or "child" members of Parliament, in addition to child mayors, governors, and local counselors. These structures, created in 1990, are coordinated by the Zimbabwe Youth Council and the Ministry of Local Government. For more information on Zimbabwe's Child Parliament, see *Our Right to be Heard: Voice from Child Parliamentarians in Zimbabwe*, published by Save the Children UK in 2000.