

Children and young people's views on public expenditure to realize children's rights

This should take about one hour (or more with role-play) and you may need some paper and pencils or crayons for drawing.

- **Step 1: If children are not familiar with rights, introduce them to the UNCRC. If they are familiar with the UNCRC, ask them to discuss briefly what they know about children's rights.**
- **Step 2: Read the information sheet (page 14) with or to children and ask children who choose to take part to sign the consent form. Please ensure that parents' consent has been obtained where necessary.**
- **Step 3: Go through the five questions and activities with the children.**
- **Step 4: Record the main points from each question, including any quotations from the children, and provide a summary along with any photographs or copies of any writing or drawings.**

Child-suitable explanation of the process

Adapt any phrases or language to those that the children understand. Give a copy of this to the children and then read it through with them, checking if they have any questions. Read through the Consent Form enclosed and ask children who want to take part in the consultation to sign it.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is a set of promises that almost all of the world's governments have made to children (up to the age of 18) in their countries.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Council examine how well governments are doing to make sure that all children in their country are enjoying their rights.

Both of these groups are working together to **give governments advice on how they can spend money in ways that will help them to keep their promises to children.**

They know that children have a right to be heard on important issues like this and are very keen to hear what you have to say.

This is why we are seeking your views.

We will collect views of children all over the world and send them to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Council.

They promise to take these views very seriously and to include them in their advice to governments.

Questions for Focus Groups

What do you think governments should consider when making decisions about spending money on children's rights?

Question 1: What should governments spend money on in order to support children's rights?

Children have many rights, and we have listed some here:

- Right to have views taken seriously
- Right to accessible healthcare, such as doctors and hospitals
- Freedom to have the religion of your choice
- Right to survival and the promotion of physical and emotional development
- Right to access information suitable for children
- Right to play in safe places
- Right to privacy
- Right to an education
- Right to support when families cannot afford food, clothing or housing
- Right to be protected from harm

Adjust the list above to be relevant to your context and easily understood by the participants.

Write the topics on cards and then ask the participants to rank them, putting those that they consider most important for realizing children's rights at the top. Record this and the reasons for their choices.

Option: ask them to identify which three should never be cut when there isn't enough money to do everything.

Question 2: How can governments make sure that all children enjoy their rights equally?

Give an example from your local context of when resources may be needed to make sure that all children enjoy their rights equally.

NOTE: Examples might include building safe and secure roads for children in rural areas to attend school or making sure a translator is available in hospitals for children who speak minority languages.

Ask participants to identify the children in their country or communities who do not benefit equally from government spending (include local and national government in the discussion). How could public resources be used to make sure all children were enjoying their rights equally? What are your views on government giving fewer resources to some groups of children?

Record the discussion and reasons for their answers. Some children might prefer to answer this question through drawings.

Question 3: How should government make decisions about spending for children?

This section invites children to role-play or create a dramatization of poor decision-making for children's rights.

Choose as many of the scenarios as you have time for and read the background section to the children. Where appropriate, encourage the participants to act out the scenarios, or read the dialogue to the group. Ask the group to discuss the questions that follow each scenario, especially what *should* have happened.

Record the key messages that come from these discussions, including any quotations from children.

Scenario 1:

Background: There are no safe places for children to play in your community. Children have wanted a new park to be built for a long time, and you have learned that the city council will be discussing the city budget in a meeting next week. The city council will decide whether to spend the money on a park at this meeting, and you are interested to hear about the discussion. You and your friends ask if you can attend the meeting with your parents.

Child: 'We would like to come to the meeting next week to hear you discuss the building of a new park.'

City councilor: 'Children are not allowed to attend our meetings! We will make the correct decision about how to spend money in our city without you or anyone else from the public in the room.'

Child: 'Will you write down the notes from your meeting so that we can read about why you have made your decision?'

City councilor: 'It would take too much effort to write notes about how we make the decisions in our meetings, and no one would want to read these anyway. You should not try to interfere in our business.'

What are your views about this conversation? What should the city councilor have done? What is your advice to government?

Scenario 2:

Background: You see a politician on the news, and he is speaking from the capital city about how the government has invested a lot of money in your local community. He says the government has improved the schools, built more houses and made the community safer from crime. You and your friends see that nothing has changed. You want to learn what the government really spent the money on, but it is very difficult to find out. When your local councilor visits your school, you ask him to help.

Child: 'I have looked everywhere to get information about what the government spends money on, and I cannot find it. I looked in the library and on the Internet, but I cannot find any reports about this.'

Councilor: 'The government does not write reports about what it spends money on. You should trust your politicians to spend money well. Children should not be so nose-y.'

What are your views about governments not keeping a record of how they spend public money? Why would it be important for children to be able to see this information? What is your advice to government?

Scenario 3:

Background: You are the mayor of your town, and you decide to have a public meeting to discuss the budget for the next year. Your brother owns a construction company, and he wants you to give him a lot of money this year to build new office buildings. You are not sure whether it is a good use of the public's money to build offices because you know there are not even enough houses for everyone.

Mayor: 'Brother, I cannot give you the money without discussing this with the people in our town first. I have to make decisions that benefit everyone, not only some.'

Mayor's brother: 'But, you are my brother, and you should want to help me to make money for my family.'

Mayor: 'Well, I do want to help your family. Ok, I agree, you can take the money to build the offices as long as no one knows about this deal.'

What are your views about this conversation? Who else should be involved when decisions about public money are made? What is your advice to government?

Question 4: How can government best involve you (children) in decision-making about public spending?

Tell the participants that governments should be consulting with children about how it spends public money. Give them any local examples that you know about. This discussion can relate to local or national government.

Ask the participants to imagine that government is consulting with them about public spending. First get them to draw and talk about what a bad consultation about this would be. Then ask them to describe a good consultation in which they would feel that they understand the issues involved in public spending and were being taken seriously.

Record the things that they think that adults need to do to ensure that children can be involved meaningfully in discussions about public spending.

NOTE: Here are two examples given by children that may be used by facilitators who do not have a local example:

In Croatia, children are consulted on the city budget and are informed about how budgets are spent. The children's council consults with other children about the city budget, and they inform the city council of these views. The children on the children's council also discuss the budget of the children's council and how this should be spent.

The children's parliament in Cyprus meets twice per year. In order to contribute to government's decision-making, the children's parliament has sent a letter to the government with general requests to meet children's rights. However, the government has not responded to their letter or provided any feedback, which means the children do not feel their views have been listened to or taken seriously.

Question 5: What advice would you give to the Minister for Finance?

Read this to the participants:

'You have a five minute meeting with the Minister for Finance. You have some suggestions to make about how the Minister could improve the way the government uses public money to keep its promises to children. You only have time to offer 2 key points. What would you say?'

Ask them to write down their advice. Some children may prefer to do this as a dramatization.

NOTE: Here are two examples given by other children that may be used to help generate ideas:

'Please consult children before you set the budget for child-related issues, because they are the ones who understand their needs the most.'

'Spend more funds benefitting disabled people: specific facilities and education for disabled children.'

Facilitator Response Form

Use these forms to make notes on each of the activities conducted. Where possible, please attach photographs of the children's work, e.g., flip chart notes, drawings, etc., conducted during these activities

| | |
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| Date | |
| Facilitator's name | |
| Facilitator's organization | |
| City, Country | |
| Number of children involved (include number of males/females) | |
| Age range of children | |
| Other useful information (include whether the children have experience participating in budgeting decisions) | |

***Note to facilitators, do not record any child's name – all information must be anonymous.**

Question 1: What do you think governments should spend money on in order to support children's rights?

| Results of exercise, most common areas prioritized and reasons given | Highlight interesting exceptions | Notes from discussion, including key quotations |
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Question 2: How can governments make sure that all children enjoy their rights equally?

Please summarize the discussion and the reasons.

Question 3: How should government make decisions about spending for children?

| Results of exercise, highlight key points from activity | Highlight interesting exceptions | Notes from discussion, including key quotations |
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Question 4: How can government best involve children in decision-making about public spending?

| Results of exercise, highlight key points from activity | Highlight interesting exceptions | Notes from discussion, including key quotations |
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Question 5: What are children's main messages to the Minister for Finance?

Information Sheet for Child/Young Person

Children and young people's views on how governments should spend public money to realize children's rights

Dear child/young person,

Please read this information with your parent/ guardian.

We are a group of International NGOs working with Queen's University Belfast (in Northern Ireland) to help the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Council give advice to governments on how they spend public money. To do this we would like to gather the thoughts and opinions of children from across the world.

Below is some more information about this work. After you have read this, and if you agree to take part, we will ask you and your parent/guardian to sign a consent form.

But first please read the information below...

Why are we doing this?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is a set of promises that almost all of the world's governments have made to children (up to the age of 18) in their countries. The Committee on the Rights of the Child checks whether each government is keeping its promises to children. Another United Nations group - the Human Rights Council – also examines how well governments are doing to keep their human rights promises to children.

At the minute, both of these groups are working together to **give governments advice on how they can spend money in ways that will help them to ensure that their promises to children are kept**. They know that children have a right to be heard on important issues like this and are very keen to hear what you have to say.

This is why we are seeking your views.

We will collect views of children all over the world and send them to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Council. They promise to take these views very seriously and to include them in their advice to governments.

Do you have to take part?

No, you do not have to take part if you do not want to. It is completely **voluntary**. If you want to, and if your parent/guardian agrees, then you can take part. If you do decide that you want to take part, we will be very grateful. Even if you do decide to take part you can decide to stop being involved at any stage.

What will I be asked to do if I decide to take part?

If you agree to take part, we will ask you to participate in a discussion with a group of other young people. During this discussion we will ask you to discuss a range of issues all about how governments spend their money. An adult will be there to guide the activities and discussions.

The adult will make notes about what happens during the activities, as well as some notes about what members of the group have said. If you agree, they may also take photographs/videos of some of the work you are doing during these activities, for example, if you make notes/ drawings on paper.

What will happen to the information provided?

The adult guiding your activities will share the information they collect with the wider project team. They will also send it to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Council. However, they will not send anything with your name on it - everything will be **anonymous**. All information gathered will be stored securely. Eventually, the team will write up the learning from this project – this will be published as reports and in journals, but again, no children's names will be included in any publication.

How to contact us to find out more about the study

If you would like to find out more about this project, please ask the facilitator of your discussion today to get in touch with us.

Consent Form
(For child/young person to sign with parent/guardian)

Children and young people's views on how governments should spend public money to realize children's rights

Please tick each box to provide your consent and sign below.

| | Child | Parent |
|--|-------|--------|
| I have read the information sheet, which explains the project. | | |
| I agree to (my child) taking part in these discussions/activities. | | |
| I understand that all the information gathered about me/ (my child) will be kept strictly confidential and that my/ (my child's) name will not be included in any reports. | | |
| I understand that me/ (my child's) participation is voluntary and that I am (he/she is) free to withdraw consent at any time. | | |
| I understand that this research will be published as a report and in academic journals. | | |
| I understand and agree to (my child) potentially appearing in photographs or videos taken during this research. | | |

Parent/guardian - please tick one of the following boxes to show whether you agree for your child to take part:

I have read the information sheet and understand all of the points above.

I **AGREE** to let my child take part in the research I **DO NOT AGREE**

Parent's name: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Child/ young person - please tick one of the following boxes to show whether you agree to take part:

I have read the information sheet and understand all of the points above too.

I **AGREE** to take part in the research I **DO NOT AGREE** to take part in the research

Child's name: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____