



Children's views on public expenditure to realize children's rights

Children's consultation

These consultation materials are intended for young children (aged 5-10) or children/young people with literacy difficulties. The recommended time is 40 minutes, (2 x 20 minute sessions), with a break in between. It is advised that each activity lasts no longer than 5 minutes and that facilitators are aware of the children's interest levels and adjust their schedule accordingly.

Note that these sessions were developed alongside a Children's Research Advisory Group (CRAG), involving children aged 5-6 from Northern Ireland. Throughout this document key lessons learned from this CRAG are **highlighted in green**.

Information/ consent

Prior to conducting the consultation, informed consent to participate should be obtained from both the child and the parent. Example forms are attached (see page 11). These forms represent best practice in terms of the ethical guidelines we operate within. We highly recommend that these practices (e.g., around anonymity, voluntariness and confidentiality) are adopted. We also recommend that this information is read to any child who is unable to read themselves.

Resources required

In order to conduct this consultation, the following resources are required:

- **Play mat** depicting key services, for example, a fire/ police station (safety), a hospital (health), a school (education), a fun park (play), and infrastructure/roads (accessibility). See **Figure 1** for example mat. If a play mat is unavailable, this can be created with a large sheet of paper and crayons. Ask the children to draw the necessary pictures of a school, hospital, roads etc.
- **Toy money.** (if unavailable this can be drawn)
- **Pictures of food.** Note that during the CRAG fish were used. The children stated that they did not like fish and so got distracted by choosing a food they did like, i.e., pizza. It is advised to begin with a food type that is both culturally relevant and liked by children.
- **Needs/ wants cards.** Cards depicting items children need, for example, water, food and shelter, and items children may want, for example, a bicycle, sweets, and holidays. Lessons from the CRAG highlight that it is best not to use images that might be distracting or confusing for children, such as images of gifts. The children in the CRAG argued that these were ‘needed’ to make children happy. Therefore, it is recommended to use images of non-distracting, essential needs, those which are obviously distinct from the wants.
- **Facilitator response form** (see page 7) for recording the information obtained from the consultation (note: it is not necessary to record feedback from Activity 2).
- **Lego figures and cars/ ambulance etc.** (optional)

Figure 1: The play mat



Session 1 (20 minutes)

Ice breaker/ introductions

For example, play the name association game: ‘My name is Karen, and I like Kittens’.

Explain why you/they are there

Ask the children if they understand what ‘research’ is? *We found that few younger children understood the term ‘research’, however, they did understand the idea of searching for answers.* Therefore, the process could be explained as:

‘We are here to get your views. We are searching for answers to some important questions and we are asking children from all around the world to help us... To help us find the answers we are going to ask you some questions and play some games.’

Who are the government?

Ask the children if they know who the government is and what they think the government does. If they do not know, advise them. *For example, after some help from the facilitators, the children involved in the CRAG in Northern Ireland explained that the government is: ‘people in charge of the country... they make decisions about important things like hospitals and schools’.*

Government spending

Activity 1: Where to spend money? (Please record responses)

Aim: To help the children appreciate that the realization of rights costs money and that the government has to make important decisions about how the money is spent.

Instructions: Place each child into one of two groups. Assign each group with three notes of money. Ask them to consider all the services/ facilities on their play mat (e.g., the hospital, school, park etc.) and in their groups discuss and decide where the money should be spent. The facilitator should question and probe to encourage the children to think through their decisions, e.g., if they place money on hospitals but not on schools question ‘where will the nurses and doctors learn how to do their jobs’. The facilitator should record the results.

During the CRAG we also played with Lego toys (characters, ambulances, vans, placed on the play mat etc.) in order to depict a scenario whereby a boy (Lego character) falls, which then requires assistance from the ambulance and the hospital. Playing out this scenario was fun for the children and also reinforced how all of the services cost money.

What are rights?

Activity 2: Needs/ wants card sorting (Do not need to record responses)

Aim: To help develop awareness around rights by prioritizing between needs and wants. Note the English word 'rights' resonated with 'writing' and 'right versus left' etc. Nonetheless, the core ideas around rights were established, regardless of the language used.

Instructions: In two groups, offer each group a set of needs/wants cards, some depicting needs and some depicting wants. Ask the children to place all the needs together and all the wants together. The facilitator should probe around decisions made and record this information as data. The facilitator can explain that when children really need something, the government should make sure they can get it and that means the children have a right to it (this is based on the simple assumption that needs and duties equal 'rights').

BREAK

Session 2 (20 minutes)

Review

If necessary (for example, if sessions 1 and 2 are taking place on different days) review who government is and how they are responsible for deciding how money should be spent.

Fair spending

Activity 3: Fair spending role play (Please record responses)

Aim: To gather children's views on issues related to how government can spend money wisely.

Instructions: This activity will use role play techniques to raise issues around transparency, corruption and discrimination. During the role play activities (during the CRAG, we referred to 'pretending' as opposed to 'role play') the facilitator acts as a government official, holding all the money, then the following scenarios should be explored.

Scenario 1

The children ask the government official/ facilitator how much money is being spent on one area of the play mat (parks/ safety/ hospitals etc), which the government official/ facilitator refuses to disclose. Gauge the children's reaction and then stimulate conversation around their views, i.e., do they think they should be told and why/not? The facilitator should record the responses.

Scenario 2

The government official/ facilitator distributes money in a way that is more favorable to boys than girls, e.g., new park equipment that only boys are allowed to use. Stimulate conversation around the fairness of this. The facilitator should record the responses.

Scenario 3

The government/ facilitator is again distributing money. This time a child acts as the child of the government official's friend/ neighbor. In distributing the money, the government official/ facilitator gives more money to their friend/neighbor's child than to any other child in the group. Again stimulate conversation around fairness. Then ask one of the children to act as the government official and ask them to distribute the money in a way they feel is fairer. The facilitator should record the responses.

During the CRAG, the child played the role of the government official's own child. However, it proved difficult for the children to argue why a mother should not give more money to her own child. Therefore, it is advised to avoid close relations when playing out this scenario.

Sustainability

Activity 4: Food distribution

(Please record responses)

Aim: To gather children's views on issues around sustainability in the use of resources

Instructions: Split the children into two groups, one represents the 'children of today' and the other the 'children of tomorrow' (the latter should be a larger group). Then lay out the food, e.g., pictures/ depictions of culturally relevant and likeable food types. Ask the 'children of today' to take the amount of food they think is right, considering that they are hungry, but that there are 'children of tomorrow' who will also need the food at a later date. Record the discussion that emerges from this activity.

Concluding discussion

Activity 5: Advice to government

(Please record responses)

At the end of the session, assign one child to the role of the government official and offer each of the other children some of the toy money. Ask each child to give their money to the 'government official' with some advice as to what they think it should be spent on to make sure all children are happy and well. Record the advice offered.

Practical guidance for facilitators

After working with the CRAG, we suggest:

- If conversation goes off topic (as it will do with young children), it is important let the children talk as they wish, whilst also trying to return to the consultation topic
- The children may not have detailed opinions or answers, but it is still important to afford them the opportunity to offer whatever input they may have. Please record as much of their discussions as possible.
- Ensure the consultation is culturally relevant/ appropriate
- Keep the activities short
- If Sessions 1 and 2 are being conducted over two different days, try to arrange two consecutive days (or at least days in the same week), to keep momentum.

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

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.**

Data recording

Activity 1

Where to spend money?		
Where was money spent?	Reasons offered	Interesting observations

Activity 3

Fair spending role play activity	
Scenario 1 key notes	
Were they surprised by the government official not disclosing this information?	
Did they find it fair?	
Why/ not?	
Other notes	

Scenario 2	
What was their reaction?	
Did they find it fair?	
Why/ not?	
Scenario 3	
What was their reaction?	
Did they find it fair?	
Why/ not?	
How was the money redistributed by the child acting as the government official?	

Activity 4

Food distribution activity	
Key notes/ observations	

Activity 5

Advice to government	
Advice offered	

Information Sheet for Children

Hello! Our names are (insert facilitators' name and picture (optional) here)

We work at... (insert organization name and picture)

We would like to invite you to take part in our research, where we would ask you some questions. These questions are all about how the adults in your country decide how to spend money for the good of children in the country.



We will visit you (insert where the discussion will take place). We will ask you questions for about 40

minutes (highlight if this is over 2 occasions), and we promise to try and make it fun!

Children from all over the world are being asked the same questions.



When we ask you these questions, we will write things down so that when we go home we will be able to remember what you told us.



We will send this information to a team of researchers who are helping us with this project. They will read this information and write a report.

This report will help the adults in government make decisions about how they should spend money.



When the report is written, no names will be included.

You do not have to answer our questions if you do not want to.

Even if you do decide to take part, you can still stop at any time.

If you would like to take part, please complete the form that comes with this letter and return to **(insert facilitator's details)**.

Also, if you have any questions, please ask an adult to contact **(insert contact details...)**.

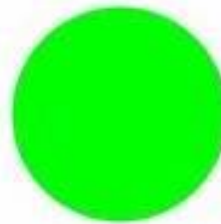
Do you want to take part?



My Name is

Please put an 'X' in the
box

Yes I would like to take part



No I do not want to take part



Thank you!

Information Sheet for Parents/ Guardians

Dear parent/guardian,

My name is (insert name and organisation). I am working with 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 child 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 children have to say.

This is why we are seeking your child's 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.

Does your child have to take part?

No, it is completely **voluntary**. Even if you (and your child) agree to your child taking part, they can stop being involved at any stage.

What will my child be asked to do?

With your own and your child's permission, we will ask your child to participate in a discussion with a group of other children. During this discussion we will ask the children to discuss a range of issues about how governments spend their money. An adult from (insert organisation name) 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 the children are doing during these activities, for example, if they 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. Researchers from Queen's University in Belfast, Northern Ireland will write up the information provided during the discussions – this will be written up in a report. The information will also be shared with the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Council. However, they will not send anything with your child's 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 contact (insert details).

Parent/guardian consent form
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.

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 my child will be kept strictly confidential and that my child’s name will not be included in any reports.	
I understand that my child’s participation is voluntary and that I/ they are 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:** _____

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