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**Implementing Children's Participation at  
the Community Level: The Practices of  
Non-Governmental Organisations**

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**PhD**

**The University of Edinburgh**

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# **DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY**

I declare that this thesis is of my own compositions, based on my own work, with acknowledgments of other sources, and has not been submitted for any other degree of professional qualification.

Part of this work has been used to develop the following publication:

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Le Borgne Carine

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## ABSTRACT

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognised children's human right to participate in decisions that affect them. Yet, twenty-five years after ratification, children's participation remains frequently problematic in practice. This thesis examines the practice of NGOs that have been implementing children's participation at the community level for more than ten years in two specific settings: Tamil Nadu (in south India) and Scotland (UK). The thesis is an explorative study; it examines the findings through two case studies (one in each country). Each case study involved observations/informal discussions and semi-structured interviews with children and staff members from the NGOs. Relevant documents were obtained and scrutinised.

The analysis of the empirical data uses three concepts: competencies, child-adult relationships and influence to illuminate and analyse the implementation of children's participation within the two case studies. Firstly, the empirical analysis highlights that children within children's participation projects acquired knowledge and skills and then applied them in particular situations within the participation projects (personal and social competencies). Nevertheless, the two case studies showed that adults' crucial role in legitimising children's competencies can either facilitate or block children's participation. Secondly, the child-staff/adults' relationships were not enough to be considered as the hierarchy within the organisation's social order was needed to be analysed to have 'successful' participation projects. Thirdly, Lundy (2007) provides a model for how adults can be more accountable to children and enhance children's influence over decision-making in their communities, but some missing elements can undermine the extent to which children's views are appropriately acted upon.

Based on a modification of Lundy's model, this thesis proposes a tripartite collaborative and intergenerational framework involving the relationships between children and adults in power facilitated by staff members. The thesis contributes to debates about children's participation by arguing that implementing children's participation requires a relational and contextual focus on collaboration and intergenerational dialogue. The thesis makes recommendations for practitioners and decision-makers on how to deploy Lundy's modified perspective to implement children's constructive participation at the local level.



## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

CESESMA: Centro de Servicios Educativos en Salud y Medio Ambiente

CoSLA: Convention of Scottish Local Authorities

CRI: Child Reporter Initiative

CWC: Concerned for Working Children

CYPCS: Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland

FCMRP: Federation of Children's Movement for the Right to Participation

FGD: Focus Group Discussion

FPCP: Forum for the Promotion of Child Participation

FSM: Free School Meals

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

GIRFEC: Getting it Right for Every Child

HDI: Human Development Index

IFS: Institute for Fiscal Studies

ILO: International Labour Organisation

NCP: National Children's Parliaments

NCRP: National Commission for Protection of Child Rights

NER: Net Enrolment Ratio

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

NHS: National Health Service

OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

PPP: Purchasing Power Parity

RTE: Right to Education

UK: United Kingdom

UNCRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

VAV: Voice Against Violence

WHO: World Health Organisation

YIP: Young India Project





# CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 RECONSIDERING DILEMMAS IN CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

Since the adoption of *The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) in 1989, children's participation has been the subject of numerous initiatives, ranging from research and publications to conferences and projects. Article 12 of the UNCRC refers to children as having the right to take part in decision-making processes in all matters that affect them, and to be taken seriously while participating. Twenty-five years after ratification however, children's participation remains frequently problematic in practice. Many participatory initiatives have been developed, though sometimes without there even being a consensus on the definition of children's participation amongst the people involved (Moses, 2008; Sotkasiira et al., 2010; Lansdown, 2014). In 2009, the Committee on the Rights of the Child (a group of international experts who monitor the UNCRC) clarified the term 'participation' in a General Comment on the Right to be Heard by using words such as: 'ongoing processes', 'information sharing', 'dialogue between children and adults', 'mutual respect', 'feedback', and 'influencing decision-making'.

My interest in children's participation started in 2003 when I discovered children's participation rights through my Master of Advanced Studies in Children's Rights in Switzerland. I decided to write my dissertation on *Children's Participation: The Way to Apply Better Children's Rights in Chile*. Following completion of the Masters, I

volunteered as a Children's Participation Advisor for a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) in Kolkata (in northeast India) in 2005. My work involved reviewing the practices of the children's rights organisation on children's participation projects, and orienting staff towards greater awareness and understanding of children's participation. I later worked for five years in the field of children's rights and children's participation with a French NGO operating in Asian countries such as India and the Philippines, and acting as a children's rights and children's participation adviser for local NGOs. For instance, I worked in Tamil Nadu (South India), where, using a mixed method study (survey and focus group discussions), I coordinated a participatory evaluation of the impact of a children's group. The target for this evaluation was 245 children, 50 parents (mainly mothers), 20 teachers, 15 community leaders, and municipal counsellors. This work continued in Tamil Nadu with a national network of 120 local NGOs working on participation. With the help of a core committee, I identified children's participation models in Tamil Nadu through the use of a questionnaire and field visits. My work experience focused on children's participation as a group (collective decision-making). I documented eight instances of good practices in terms of children's participation models among the national network.

My work on children's participation in Tamil Nadu stimulated my curiosity and led to my desire to carry out a PhD on the topic. I wondered: Why were there still questions surrounding the implementation of children's participation? What was missing in the process of participation? Is there a future for improved implementation of children's participation? What does it mean to implement children's participation in the local context? I wanted to know how participation was practised in other parts of the world such as Europe, so I decided to use a second country in order to reflect and put into

perspective the Tamil Nadu experience. Having different contexts from two cases, such as the majority and minority worlds, was also critical to understand better the different ways how children's participation is implemented and how they apply in disparate contexts.

Due to the nature of the research in development work, as a white person from the minority world, I tended to be positioned as an 'outsider', as someone with resources or as a potential funder. However, I was already familiar with the Tamil Nadu context due to my work experience, so the living conditions were not a surprise, and I was familiar with the language and local community. In some ways, I was more of an outsider in the Scottish context because I had no similar work experience to draw upon. However, in both contexts I was a 'foreigner' due to my language and French origins.

This thesis is located within Childhood Studies, "the umbrella term for multiple disciplines working in the area of childhood" (Punch and Tisdall, 2012: 244). For Ansell (2014: 230), "the drafting of the [UN]CRC took place in parallel with the development of a new paradigm in the social sciences which became known as the "new social studies of childhood". The 'new' social studies or sociology of childhood argues that constructions of childhood have evolved over time. Tobin (2013), for example, explores this process from when the child was seen as the father's property and thus expected to be neither seen nor heard to the welfare model, under which children were recognised but expected to stay silent to the current paradigm that emerged with the implementation of the UNCRC, under which children have the right to be 'seen and heard'.

The ‘new’ sociology of childhood has emphasised the social constructions of childhood. Drawing on Ariès’ fundamental insights (1962), Prout and James (1990) discuss the construction and reconstruction of childhood in society, proposing that “a child’s immaturity is a biological fact: but how this immaturity is understood and how it is made ‘meaningful’ is a cultural one” (1990: 7). James et al. (1998) suggest a new paradigm for childhood:

Children are seen as capable and competent to make decisions in their lives, and as social actors exercising agency. They are active in the construction of their own lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. (1998:6)

Further, they declare that children are not simply waiting to become adults (1998: 14; *see also* Skelton, 2007: 177). This correlates with Article 12 of the UNCRC that recognises children have the right to take part in decision-making processes in all matters that affect them.

## **1.2 THE AIM AND SCOPE OF THIS STUDY**

The central question this research addresses is: how do NGOs implement children’s participation in the local community, I look at this in two contexts–Tamil Nadu and Scotland. My research aims to explore the processes, as well as facilitators and barriers to implementing children’s participation, through a NGO community project in each context. I focus on three core research questions that privilege the perspectives of children and staff members of the community project.

1. How is children’s participation understood, practised and experienced in the NGO projects?

2. What components enable or inhibit the processes of children's participation?
3. How can the processes of children's participation be improved at the local level?

Two case studies (one in each context) will explore the different perspectives of the participants, as such it is an explorative study. The overall research and research questions in this thesis privilege an in-depth study of actors' (children and adults) views and of local contexts in order to understand better the implementation of children's participation. Each case study involved observations, informal discussions and semi-structured interviews with children and staff members from the NGOs. Relevant documents from the NGOs were obtained and scrutinised. In total, 48 participants took part in the research project: 15 staff members, 28 children and 5 graduate members (only for the Tamil Nadu case study).

### **1.3 NOTES ON TERMINOLOGY**

#### **Child and children**

The terms 'child' and 'children' are used in this work to refer to children and young people under the age of 18, as defined in Article 1 of the UNCRC.

#### **Majority and minority worlds**

The terms 'majority world' and 'minority world' refer to what have traditionally been known as the 'Third and First worlds' respectively, or more recently as the 'Global South' and the 'Global North'. The terms acknowledge that the 'majority' of the population, poverty, land mass and lifestyles is located in the former which comprises

countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and thus seeks to shift Western perceptions that frequently highlight the importance of ‘Western’ and ‘Northern’ populations and issues (Punch, 2003; Panelli et al., 2007).

I am aware that these terms are contested, especially because of an overly simplistic dichotomy. Within either the majority or minority world there are inequalities and diversity between countries, and within countries. For instance, Holt and Holloway (2006) call for the ‘destabilisation’ of the minority and majority worlds’ dichotomy:

Children’s geographers too often dichotomise the world into the Global North and South, thereby under-exploring both the diversities of contexts within the North and South and the ‘glocalised’ interconnections between them. (2006: 137)

This binary has also been contested by the emergence of ‘rising’ economies such as China, India and Brazil (Panelli et al., 2007). Punch (2015) suggests, however, that the dichotomy can illuminate global processes through an exploration of the similarities and differences across the majority and minority worlds, and in providing new possibilities for learning across majority and minority contexts.

When I was working in Tamil Nadu, one of the directors of the national network of local NGOs told me that “in the UK they are not doing the same participation that we are doing here”. Here, the director suggests the comparison between contexts, intriguing to me as my own experience of participation was mainly from Asia. The dichotomy is often evoked in children’s participation literature, for example by Percy-Smith and Thomas (2010), Liebel (2012), Crowley (2014) and Johnson (2014, 2015). I follow Punch and Tisdall’s (2012: 244) call “for more work in childhood studies to establish dialogue between Majority and Minority World Contexts”. The dichotomy can

be useful to learn about implementing children's participation cross-culturally in two vastly different contexts.

## **1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS**

Following this introduction, the thesis continues with seven further chapters. Chapter two reviews the literature on children's participation and critically assesses how such participation is conceptualised. It identifies gaps in the existing literature such as: the lack of consensus on the meaning of children's participation and the diverse range of definitions available; the lack of impact of children's participation projects; and finally the lack of attention to relationships between children and adults in children's participation. Chapter three describes how the empirical research was carried out, including the methods used for data collection, the ethical considerations, the data analysis and writing-up process, as well as methodological limitations. Chapter four locates the study in the contexts of Tamil Nadu and Scotland, providing social and economic boundaries to the legislation, policies, and practices of children's participation that are in place.

Chapter five, six and seven analyse the empirical data. Chapter five focuses on children acquiring knowledge and skills and applying them in particular situations within the participation projects (personal and social competencies). The chapter considers how children use their competencies (learned, developed and practised) in school and family contexts.

Chapter six examines children's and staff/adults' relationships, particularly how they enable or inhibit children's participation. This chapter argues that participation should



be conceptualised as relational, and children's and staff/adults' relationships should be considered as interdependent and placed within the generational order. The chapter addresses staff members within the organisations' hierarchical social order, as influential on children's and staff/adults' relationships.

Chapter seven analyses how children influence change in their local contexts. Lundy's model (2007) is used to highlight how, in the two case studies, children's views were acted upon locally. Although Lundy's model is informative when considering the implementation of participation rights centred around four separate factors (*space, voice, audience, and influence*), I suggest a rethinking of Lundy's model with: a) a tripartite relationship including children, adults in power, and the facilitator in the same physical space; and b) the time element of the participation process.

The final chapter, Chapter eight, summarises the thesis, discussing the implications of the study's findings in terms of theory, practice and policy, and future research. The study concludes that implementing children's participation requires a relational and contextual focus on collaboration and intergenerational dialogue, without which participation risks of being 'tick-box' exercise.

# **CHAPTER 2 : UNDERSTANDING AND IMPLEMENTING CHILDREN’S PARTICIPATION— LITERATURE REVIEW**

## **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Two significant developments led to major changes in children’s participation. The first was the new conceptualisation of childhood that challenged traditional explanations of childhood, perceiving childhood as a socially constructed category and children as active social agents in the construction of their own childhoods (James, 2010). The second development was the recognition of children’s participation as a right with the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989. With the introduction of participation as a right, children have the entitlement to take part in decision-making processes in all matters that affect them individually and collectively (Article 12, UNCRC). As a result of these two developments, UN agencies such as United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and international development agencies such as Save the Children and Plan International declared their commitment to embedding children’s participation in their programmes (Boyden and Ennew, 1997; Save the Children Fund, 2001). In addition, a variety of projects have been developed worldwide to promote children’s participation (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010).

Despite considerable interest in children’s participation, there are still numerous difficulties related to how adults perceive children and childhood in practice (Lansdown, 2014). For Tisdall et al. (2014) the implementation of children’s participation across different contexts and countries has raised many challenges that frustrate children and

adults, such as “adult systems and adult behaviour failing to adapt in ways that enable meaningful participation with children and young people” (2014: 2). Johnson (2015: 159) argues that children’s participation “processes have sought to raise the voices of children and young people as an end in itself, rather than a means to achieve positive transformational change”. The ways in which children’s participation is enacted can weaken the impact of participatory activities.

As a consequence, a revised interpretation of children’s participation is needed. In this context, this chapter surveys the literature on children’s participation, critiques how such participation is conceptualised and identifies all gaps in the existing literature. Section 2.2 provides a brief discussion on the concept of participation and attempts to clarify the concept of children’s participation. Section 2.3 highlights the arguments of the critics of participation. Section 2.4 explains some new developments in children’s participation as being relational.

## **2.2 CONCEPT OF CHILDREN’S PARTICIPATION**

This section reviews the literature on the concept of participation in light of the UNCRC. It also examines the typologies of children’s participation, providing a critical overview of research into children’s participation activities.

### **2.2.1 Meaning of children’s participation in the UNCRC**

Children’s participation is not a new phenomenon. Historically children have participated at different levels within their homes, schools, communities, at work, and in wars (UNICEF, 2003: 3). Children protested against apartheid in South Africa (Pendlebury

et al., 2014). In India, the organisation *Concerned for Working Children* has been working with children who have been working on participation since 1985 (Nuggehalli, 2014). Nevertheless, what is new is that the UNCRC gives children a particular right to have their views considered (Tisdall et al., 2014). Article 12.1 of the UNCRC establishes the right for children to be heard:

State 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.

In order to adhere to Article 12, the views of the child must be given ‘due weight’ and, therefore, it is expected that children’s views be considered seriously. Therefore, Article 12 means not only the right to be heard but also that children’s views be considered seriously when decisions are made (Krappmann, 2010: 512). However, it does not mean that children’s opinions are accepted automatically (UNICEF, 2003: 4). Respecting children’s views does not mean that they can do or say whatever conclusion they themselves have come to (Lansdown, 2011: 82). There is general agreement that children do not determine the outcome of decisions single-handedly, but they can inform and influence the decision-making process (Couzens, 2012: 697; *see also* Gal and Duramy, 2015). Woodhead (2010) goes further and notes that participation is not only about listening to and taking into account the opinions of children. For him, the interaction implies children confronting adult authority, challenging adult assumptions about their competence to speak, and making decisions about issues that concern them. One of the solutions for Marshall et al. (2015) is face-to-face contact between children and decision-makers to discuss issues faced by children.

Along the lines of the issues discussed previously, the UN Committee on the Rights

of the Child (a group of international experts who monitor the UNCRC), through the General Comment on the Right to be Heard (2009), highlights that the clause “affecting the child” was introduced in order to make it clear that the child must be heard if the matter under discussion matters to the child (CRC/C/GC/12 para 26). This is not only applicable to matters that directly concern children but to all matters affecting them. For instance, children should have a say on measures taken by a State, such as planning laws, schooling, transportation, budget expenditure, urban planning, poverty reduction, or social protection (Tobin, 2013: 429–30; *see also* Lansdown, 2011). Moreover, this General Comment underlines that:

It is not necessary that the child has comprehensive knowledge of all aspects of the matter affecting her or him, but that she or he has sufficient understanding to be capable of appropriately forming her or his own views on the matter. (CRC/C/ GC/12 para 21)

As highlighted by scholars and in alignment with the General Comment on Implementing Children’s Rights in Early Childhood (2005), participation should start at an early age (CRC/C/ GC/7 para 14). Therefore, no matter what their age, children should participate. However, the level of how much it will be taken into account should vary according to the age and the evolving capacities (Article 12; *see also* Lansdown, 2005). Therefore, from the General Comment on the Right to be Heard (2009), an understanding of children should not be based on their age, but on the development of their capacity to form a view that is determined by information, experience, environment, and social and cultural expectations (CRC/C/GC/12 para 29).

Article 12 of the UNCRC directly relates to children’s participation, but this participation is also embedded within the other articles in the UNCRC. For example,

for children to express their opinions about issues that affect them (Article 12), children need information (Article 17) to make an informed comment and the opportunity to gather with other peers to discuss issues (Article 15). Moreover, without freedom of expression (Article 13) and thought (Article 14), children would not be permitted to have any say. Those articles are significant to understanding participation and its implementation.

### **2.2.2 Defining children's participation**

It is worthwhile to note that the UNCRC does not define the concept of participation, nor does it mention the words 'participation rights of the child' in any particular article (UN document CRC/C/GC/12 para 3). Nevertheless, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child include the term 'participation' in the 3Ps of the UNCRC (provision, protection and participation rights). They also include Article 12 as a fundamental principle of the convention along with Article 2 (non-discrimination), Article 3 (best interests of the child) and Article 6 (the right to life, survival and development).

Definitions of 'participation' vary between people and contexts, from a literal definition of participation, "as 'taking part' (with all the limitations implied) to the notion that participation is a concept that leads directly to self-determination and autonomy" (Crowley, 2012: 2). For Moses (2008), the concept of participation in the UNCRC is broad and includes a range of different practices:

It is variously used to refer to children taking part in adult-initiated and facilitated, formal and structured 'programmes' and interventions; adults consulting children; children's civic participation; children self-organising around informal activities; and children's independent and facilitated decision-making amongst others. (2008: 327)

Given this broad definition of participation, Moses suggests that the concept of children's participation needs to cope with questions such as "participation by whom? In what? For what purpose? And, under what conditions?" (2008: 328). In the same way, Cornwall (2008) highlights that it is vital to pay closer attention to who is participating in what and for whose benefit.

For Lansdown (2014), participation is still too often characterised by only seeking information from children that is related to a pre-determined adult agenda. Thomas (2012: 463) suggests that participation is not just about 'talk', or 'voice', but about shared action among children, young people, and adults (*see also* Percy-Smith, 2006, 2010; Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010). Other authors have proposed the use of words such as 'empowerment', 'negotiation' or 'partnership' to demonstrate how adults and children should be on a level playing field (Hinton, 2008: 287).

Several authors have discussed the normative character attributed to participation. For example, Sotkasiira et al. (2010: 176) argue that, "participation is a fuzzy and multi-faceted concept that needs clarification." For Leal (2007), participation is a 'buzzword' of the institutional development world that has different meanings and determines values of people within different organisations and communities. Sinclair (2004) argues that participation is a complex activity, which is often oversimplified by those seeking to implement it. For instance, Thomas (2012) notes that too often children's participation has been reduced to children and adults sitting together and talking without questioning whether this participation is beneficial.

There is also significant confusion between participation and consultation. Hill et al. (2004: 83) describe 'consultation' as "seeking views" and 'participation' as "the direct

involvement of children in decision-making”. Thomas (2007) explains that, from the typologies on children’s participation, which are discussed in the next section, consultation could be seen in two ways, either as a subcategory of participation or as a separate category. For Hart (1992), consultation is described as part of the participation process and, for Lansdown (2001, 2010), as a separate category. But for Shier, in consultation, children “do not participate at the stage where decisions are actually made” (2001: 113–14). Lansdown adds:

Ad hoc, one-off initiatives are not sufficient to give effect to a sustained and effective opportunity for children and young people to inform or influence the decisions that affect their lives. (2011: 119)

Later, Lansdown, in her work with O’Kane (2014), highlights that consultative participation can become more collaborative when confidence and understanding are established between children and adults. To illustrate this, Lansdown noted the example of a research project with children was more collaborative when, for instance, children identify the relevant questions. However, for her, consultative participation remains limited as children do not have any influence over the decisions and actions that affect their lives. Nevertheless, the UN committee talks about where the right to be heard is appropriate, such as in the family, health care, education and school, the workplace, play, sports, and cultural activities (CRC/C/GC/12 paras 89–117).

The Committee on the Rights of the Child defines the term ‘participation’ as follows:

Ongoing processes, which include information sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes. (CRC/C/GC/12 para 3)



The committee adds:

The concept of participation emphasises that including children should not only be a momentary act, but the starting point for an intense exchange between children and adults on the development of policies, programs and measures in all relevant contexts of children's lives. (CRC/C/GC/12 para 13)

Therefore, participation should be seen in both the private sphere (family) and public spheres (local communities, local and national government policy making). For Thomas (2012: 463), the term 'children's participation' can include "a wide range of different phenomena in different social settings: private and public, structured and unstructured, formal and informal".

To summarise, a diverse range of definitions of participation was acknowledged without a consensus on definition by the people involved (Moses, 2008; Hinton, 2008; Crowley, 2012; Thomas 2012). Although, the UNCRC did not define participation, the Committee on the Rights of the Child defines the term 'participation' by using words such as 'ongoing processes', 'information sharing', 'dialogue between children and adults', 'mutual respect', 'feedback', and 'influencing the decision-making'.

### **2.2.3 Typologies and models of children's participation**

A number of models have been developed in recent years that show not only different levels of participation where children had the opportunity to express their views, but also in integrating the context in which children are surrounded by participation. One of the well-known models of hierarchical levels of participation is Hart's (1992) ladder with its eight rungs going from manipulation, decoration, and tokenism to young people initiating, directing, and sharing decisions with adults at the top. The ladder became

a topic of debate between scholars. Hart commented on his own model, “it does not imply children should always be operating at the highest rung; children may work at whatever level they choose, at any stage of the process” (1997: 41). Treseder (1997) has reworked Hart’s model into a non-hierarchical circle and left out the first three rungs because manipulation, decoration, and tokenism do not count as participation (*see also* Shier, 2001).

In 2001, Lansdown categorised children’s participation in international projects into three categories: consultation, participation and self-advocacy. In 2010, Lansdown revised the model, still with three levels, but she labelled them differently. The first term, ‘consultative participation’, means that adults seek children’s views in order to build knowledge and understanding of children’s lives and experiences. For example, this type of participatory activity might be used in regard to legislation, policy, or services, or in decisions affecting individual children within the family, in health care, in education, or as witnesses in judicial or administrative proceedings. The second term, ‘collaborative participation’, is a partnership between adults and children with opportunities for active engagement of the child at any stage of a decision, initiative, project, or service. The third term, ‘child-led participation’, occurs when children have the space and opportunity to identify issues of concern, initiate activities, and advocate for themselves. The role of adults in child-led participation is to enable children to pursue their own objectives, with adults providing information, advice and support.

Notably, a crucial shift has occurred in considering children as social actors, as independent beings with their own rights, as part of social relations with adults, and as part of the contexts in which they are situated by adults (Punch and Tisdall, 2012). Johnson

(2011, 2014, 2015) emphasises the socio-cultural contexts in proposing a ‘change-scape’ model that links children to their social contexts through mechanisms that help them to negotiate power, and encourages decision-makers to start to consider children as agents of change. The model focuses on contextual and structural issues shaping transformational change, which are influenced by external forces (culture, politics, and policy as well as the physical environment) and internal forces (confidence, capacity, and commitment). Her model is based on linking children to their context and raising issues of power and space for participation as important features of children’s participation. Apart from the importance of creating spaces for children and adults to interact and increase communication and dialogue between children and decision-makers, the model seems not to differ that much from other models proposed by authors such as Lundy (2007) that is explained in the following paragraphs.

Lundy’s (2007) analysis of Article 12 encourages decision-makers to pay attention to children’s participation based on four key points in order to implement participation successfully: *space* (to express views), *voice* (to facilitate the expression of views), *audience* (to be listened to), and *influence* (to have views appropriately acted upon). She developed this by examining children’s participation in an educational context and considered the concept of ‘pupil voice’. The first component is to create a safe and inclusive *space*, where adults work actively with children and encourage them to express their views (as mentioned in Johnson’s model). Lundy focuses on giving children a safe space that allows children to express their views without fear of reproach or reprisal. The space must be inclusive: all children affected by the decision should be included to ensure that a diverse range of children express their views.

The second factor is *voice*: children's expression must be facilitated through the provision of various formats to help them express themselves. For that, they may need guidance and direction from adults to form a view. Lundy refers to Article 5 of the UNCRC that gives children the right to receive guidance and direction from adults in exercising their rights. She also emphasises Article 13 of the UNCRC on freedom of expression, which states: children should receive and impart information, but also have the opportunity to express their views freely in various formats, either orally, in writing or print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

The third factor is *audience*. Article 12 states that children's views are given 'due weight', so explicitly, children have the right to have their views listened to by adults who make decisions. For Lundy however, there is in practice no guarantee that children's views will be honestly communicated to adults in power or that those views will be taken seriously. Therefore, she suggests that the focus should be on ensuring that children have the 'right of audience', namely "a guaranteed opportunity to communicate views to an identifiable individual or body with the responsibility to listen" (2007: 937).

The fourth factor is *influence*. According to Article 12, the challenge is to find ways of ensuring that the adults in power are not only listening to children but also taking their views seriously. Moreover, for Lundy, children should be informed about how their views are taken into account by providing them feedback.

Lundy's model can be used to inform, understand and develop policy, and to assess existing practice (2007: 941). Lundy's model is useful because it includes process, and impact of children's participation (this theme is expanded upon in Chapter 7).

To understand and implement children's participation, different levels of participation where children have the opportunity to express their views have been emphasised (Hart, 1992; Lansdown, 2001, revisited in 2010), and a focus on the contexts in which children are located is also significant (Johnson, 2011, 2014, 2015). However, Lundy's model is original in that it takes into account the process and the impact of children's participation projects that involve children, adults working with children, and adults in power. In the next section, a critical overview of qualitative research into children's participation activities is considered in terms of methods and findings to reflect on how children's participation has been implemented so far.

#### **2.2.4 Research on children's participation**

In past decades, academics and researchers have studied the engagement of children in participatory initiatives and observed the impact of these initiatives on children's daily lives. There is a burgeoning literature on children's participation (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010), I have selected a range of research studies into children's participation that exemplifies common themes in the wider literature, such as the experience and impact of children's participation in both majority and minority worlds.

Hogan et al. (2015) examine how children are able to participate and influence matters affecting them in their homes, at school, and within communities in Ireland. The research gathered 108 participants: 74 children aged between 7 to 17 years, 14 parents, 11 Principals and teachers and 9 community stakeholders in three distinct geographical locations in Ireland. The data collection methods consisted of focus group discussions for children, and focus groups and interviews for adult participants. Some limitations of the data collection were noticed, such as the insufficient preparation of the children

in the focus groups due to the constraints of daily school routines and the demands of curriculum delivery. Similarly, the parent focus groups did not include fathers, despite attempts to include them.

The research revealed first that out of the three spheres explored (home, school and community), the home was the setting where children's voices were the most facilitative and participative. While the children wanted to have a say in family decision-making, there was also an acceptance that their parents had the ultimate authority. The key areas where children made decisions included consumption activities (e.g. food and clothes), leisure and friends. Generally, children felt that it was legitimate for parents to have greater influence over certain issues, such as the time they must be home at night and, surprisingly, about who their friends were, although they were more likely to negotiate these as they grew older. There was also evidence of some tokenistic practices as well as limited participation at home.

Second, the participation in school findings showed that most children were dissatisfied with their level of input into decision-making processes at school while, conversely, Principals and teachers expressed that children had many opportunities to contribute to the final decisions that affected them.

Third, the findings highlighted that children were either ambivalent or dissatisfied with their input into decision-making processes in relation to their local community. But children involved in youth clubs were more satisfied with participation than children not involved in youth clubs.

Martin et al. (2015) conducted another research project in Ireland. They explored the experiences and outcomes of participation for children who had joined Government

participatory initiatives held by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) during the previous ten years, such as the National Youth Parliament, local youth councils, and two national consultations. Participatory research methods were used, and children were trained as researchers and were involved in collection and interpretation of the data. Current (12 to 18 years) and graduate members of the Government participatory initiatives completed 273 questionnaires, and 40 participants were involved in eight focus groups. Then interviews were conducted for current and graduate members, staff members, decision-makers, and key policy-makers. Some methodological issues were noted, such as the challenges of contacting more marginalised past participants. Also the study focused more on older teenagers, meaning there was limited input from younger children and younger teenagers in the study.

First, the key findings showed that personal skills development was perceived by children to be the most positive outcome of their participation, followed by improved confidence and social skills, along with extended social networks.

Second, the emerging change in attitudes towards children among decision-makers was highlighted. While it is acknowledged that this change can be slow, there was a noticeable shift towards the inclusion of children's views in decision-making processes. A particular factor in this cultural shift in the recognition of children's views was the work of adult facilitators, or participation 'champions', in pushing the participation agenda.

Third, when looking at the impact of children's participation on their local communities, youth participants positively identified their improved ability to bring ideas and

problems from children in their community to the children's local councils. Adult participants also felt that there was a growing awareness of the work of the children's councils in most communities, and that this was strengthening adults' recognition of the valuable role of children in the community.

Hatton (2014) looked at the outcome of *Stay Safe*: a project that emphasised being protected from harm and neglect, one of the five outcomes from the national *Every Child Matters* initiative. The project involved over 200 children in England and consisted of three stages, including workshops in five secondary schools. To begin, artists worked with children in secondary schools to support them in using creative art activities to develop their ideas and to create a workshop around the 'stay safe' theme. Then, children led a workshop—a 'staying safe' children's event—to get views from other children. As a third step, children conducted the workshops at a 'staying safe' conference for adults where children presented their workshops and ideas, posed their questions about staying safe, and asked all practitioners to respond using creative art activities. The creative art activities used were hip-hop, animation, drama, sculpture, and creative art installations.

The initial focus of the research was to look at how effective this project was as a 'meaningful process', and the impact of using creative arts and media as a wider theme of 'participation', including the concepts of voice and listening. Hatton used participant observation, photographs, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. Her findings showed that although the project was based on an adult agenda, children's views were listened to and taken into account. Children were more actively involved and had more agency in the school workshops, learned collaborative skills by working



with the artists, and thought about the safeguarding theme more often. In actively leading the workshops at the conference, children felt that the adults were listening to what they had to say about being safe. The process was meaningful because the relationships between children and adults were evaluated according to the children's and adults' levels of enjoyment while working together during the dialogue. Part of the study showed that children aged 14–19 who participated in a focus group, expressed their views about the barriers that blocked their active participation.

As a result of this initiative, Hatton developed a model of participation practice to improve relationships and dialogue between children and adults. The model focuses on child-adult relationships and the use of creative and participatory activities through the stages of communicating, listening and responding.

Research by Shier et al. (2014) showed how children influence policy-makers in Nicaragua. The research project involved CESESMA (Centro de Servicios Educativos en Salud y Medio Ambiente) and the University of the North of Nicaragua. From an initial e-mail survey to over 50 organisations working with children throughout Nicaragua, the research team selected ten cases that demonstrated that children had influenced policy decisions. From this data, four contrasting case studies from different parts of the country were investigated. As part of the study in general, they conducted focus groups using children from each case study who had influenced public policy and adults who had facilitated the process. They also interviewed decision-makers. These research findings pointed out three key lessons: the first was to establish conditions that support children's influence on policy-makers (e.g. create coordination/alliances with the local authority and the wider civil society). Second, to supply spaces and ways

of organising to influence public policy (e.g. monitoring and follow-up to ensure that the politicians keep their promises), and thirdly, to facilitate the use of methods and approaches by adult facilitators to help increase children's influence on policy-makers, such as: making adults aware of the value of children's opinions in decision-making and enabling children to access the places where real decisions were made.

More research has compared participation in different settings and countries. Crowley (2012, 2014) evaluated the impact of children's participation on public decision-making. Four case studies were selected: two in Wales (a youth forum and a school council) and two 'international' examples (an advisory group comprised of six 'regions' of the world, but based in London, and a village forum in South India). The research considered what the children said in the forums at point A, and contrasted this with stakeholders' accounts of what changes had been brought about by the children's influencing activities, 9–12 months later, at point B. The primary data collection methods selected were semi-structured interviews with adults, focus groups with children, observations of each forum in action, and analysis of official documents relating to each of the forums.

Findings showed that, during the time period of the research in the Welsh setting, any resulting changes in policy and practice were difficult to discern, although these might emerge later. However, the forums' activities did have an impact on the children themselves as it was frequently reported and observed that their 'participation' in the representative structures of the youth forum and the school council resulted in increased confidence and social skills development. However, in South India, the National Chil-

dren's Parliament (NCP) in contrast, resulted in numerous outcomes linked to the matters discussed with the local council and the district-level government departments, such as the need for an approach road to the village, cleaning of the overhead water tank, and upgrading of a primary school. Children were encouraged by the adults who supported them to work on issues they had a chance of affecting, and to target local decision-making processes.

One outcome of this research was that children were more likely to have an influence when they were seen as 'rights-holders' and not as 'trainee citizens'; where they were supported and enabled to have an effective audience with people who could make the changes they wanted to see. The children in the NCP were seen as rights-holders and the NCPs worked to help these children improve their situation there and then. But in Wales, senior managers, forum sponsors, and support workers saw the forum as a space for 'citizenship training' and not an opportunity for real time transformation here and now.

In conclusion, on the one hand, the Welsh children were seen as 'little-people-in-the-making' who needed opportunities to 'practise' participation in order to become good future citizens, whereas in South India, children were viewed as social actors with their own perspectives and abilities to influence decision-making straight away.

These five research studies underline key components of children's participation and highlight the main challenges associated with theory and practice. For instance, from the two Irish studies, whether it be at the grass-roots' level (everyday life) as presented by Hogan et al. (2015), or the national level (institutional) as presented by Martin et

al. (2015), all children had positive experiences in participation with relation to expressing their voices and developing skills, but if negative adult attitudes regarding participation pervaded the process, children were not able to contribute to any decision-making processes (Horgan et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2015). Therefore, children involved in these latter studies did have a say, but they did not influence the decision-making process. In Martin et al. (2015), adult participation and facilitation, is necessary to ensure recognition of children's views.

From Hatton's research (2014), it emerged that although the project was based on an adult agenda, children's views were listened to and taken into account because of the creation of positive relationships between the children and adults, which included working together, enjoying the dialogue, and using creative art activities. With Shier's research (2014) in Nicaragua, constructive examples were identified as to how children can influence decision-makers. This study identified that adult facilitators did help increase children's influence on policy makers. Crowley's research (2012, 2014) suggested that children's views in South India, with the example of the National Children's Parliament, were more likely to have an influence when children were seen as valid rights-holders and not simply as citizens in training as they had been viewed in Wales during forum activities. Moreover, the adults in South India supported children's work on issues especially where they had a chance of affecting local decision-making processes. These outcomes supported Shier's research that confirmed the significance of the decision-makers agenda(s).

Thus, these research studies contribute a wider understanding of children's participa-

tion by saying that children having contributions can and do influence real-time decision-making in community life (Shier, 2014; Crowley, 2012, 2014). Crowley (2012) and Martin et al. (2015) revealed slower outcomes for children's participation in the UK and Ireland. They articulated that one of the stumbling blocks in children's participation is a negative perception by the decision-makers regarding participation (Horgan et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2015). In Nicaragua and South India, the role of the adult facilitator in the process of participation has been emphasised in order for children to influence decision-makers successfully (Shier, 2014; Crowley, 2012, 2014). To a lesser extent, in the Irish Study (Martin et al., 2015) the work of adult facilitators, or participation 'champions', in pushing the participation agenda promoted a small cultural shift in the recognition of children's views. Lastly, for Hatton (2014), creating positive relationships between children and adults working together is essential for implementing successful participation.

To conclude, this section has reviewed how participation is conceptualised in the literature on children's participation in light of the UNCRC; the typologies of children's participation; and considered diverse research studies in order to have a wider understanding of children's participation.

## **2.3 CRITIQUES OF CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION**

The concept of children's rights to participation is an innovative and progressive arena for study; however, it remains a most radical and controversial contribution of the UNCRC (Stern, 2006). In practice, children's participation rights are difficult to implement due to: low recognition of children's participation in formulating legislation;

differences between universal and localised understanding of childhood; the risk of participation being tokenistic; the lack of impact of participatory activities; and, most significantly, the barriers to constructive relationships between children and adults in participation.

### **2.3.1 Limited legislation on children's participation**

In reviewing numerous State Parties who have ratified the CRC, Lundy et al. (2012) find that countries have not yet developed comprehensive legislation to ensure children's participation rights within the national legal frameworks (*see also* Kilkelly, 2011). For Gal (2015: 452), "there is clear evidence that for child participation to become routine, there is a need for specific legislation making it the default option or at a minimum a preferred policy". Lansdown highlights that:

Children's participation will never become a reality without holding governments fully to account for introducing the necessary legislation, policy and practice to ensure that children are enabled to claim their right to be heard and taken seriously in all decisions affecting them. (2010: 11)

Article 4 of the UNCRC requires State Parties to, "undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognised in the present CRC". With regard to economic, social, and cultural rights, State Parties have the obligation to undertake such measures to the extent of their available resources. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child encourages direct and full incorporation of the CRC through legal measures such as direct incorporation (wherein the CRC is fully transformed into domestic law at either legislative or constitutional

level), indirect incorporation (i.e. the CRC has some effects in the domestic legal order), or by sectoral incorporation (that transposes relevant provisions of the CRC into relevant sectoral laws, such as those concerning education or family) (Lundy et al., 2012). In the same publication, authors add that non-legal measures can also be used to progress implementation of the CRC, such as: national strategies and action plans for children; children's rights impact assessments; the establishment of children's commissioners or ombudspersons; child budgetary allocation; children's rights training, awareness raising and capacity building for all those working with and for children; and improved monitoring of data on children's lives.

The UNCRC was unanimously accepted by the General Assembly without a vote and was the most rapidly and widely ratified international treaty in all of history (Burman, 1996). The UNCRC's broad appeal was attributed to the key role played by UNICEF in the drafting process from 1986, and the involvement of 40 NGOs who were active participants in the process (Twum-Danso, 2008).

For Powell and Smith (2009: 125), in State Parties that have ratified the CRC, "governments have promised to ensure children's rights are met and, to integrate the principles of the Convention into policy, law and practice". But, a difficulty arises with the UNCRC in federal countries. Indeed, a State Party may ratify the UNCRC but transfer responsibility to its regions for implementation of the convention in law, policy, and practice, since regions have the majority of responsibility for areas such as education, health, and social care. In such situations, the central government does not have a direct role with the implementation of the UNCRC, as often the central government has a limited role in monitoring and compiling data for the State member report (Lundy et

al., 2012).

To accommodate these federal considerations, the UNCRC set up mechanisms to implement children's rights and participation at the national level. However, for Tisdall et al., (2014: 15) participation challenges precisely how children are perceived in their communities and how they are addressed in government and policy. Lansdown explains that, "the last 20 years have been a period of both advocacy to promote and legitimize the concept of participation, and explore strategies for translating it into practice" (2010: 34).

### **2.3.2 Universal versus localised understandings of childhood**

For Tisdall et al. (2014: 13), "how children and childhood is constructed, within a particular context, is interlinked with their participation in decision-making". Several critiques have raised concerns about the UNCRC as a Universalist model and its consequences of defining childhood as universalist (Hill and Tisdall, 1997). The United Nations bodies, such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), UNICEF, World Health Organisation (WHO) and international NGOs, have been facilitating the export of the UNCRC globally. Thomas and Percy-Smith (2010: 1) have stated that "childhood is not a universal given, but varies in its construction, interpretation and enactment across different cultures and contexts". For instance, for Tisdall and Punch (2012), people working in the majority world have questioned the globalisation of childhood constructions and especially the notion of children's 'agency'. Similarly, local cultural practices may conflict with notions of the universal concept of childhood advocated in the UNCRC.



In recognition of this criticism of the UNCRC's universalist models, scholars have started focusing more on the cultural and social differences that exist. Wyness (2013) prefers to talk about childhood diversity rather than positioning non-Western childhoods negatively against a global standard. Scholars highlight that experiences of childhood are inevitably shaped by family, environment, and economic and socio-political conditions (Hart, 1997; Boylan and Dalrymple, 2009). For Morrow (2011), childhood is not the same for all children, and 'idealised' notions of childhood may be inappropriate and/or unrealistic. For Ansell (2014: 242), "the CRC is grounded in an idealized middle-class Western construction of childhood, characterised by innocence, dependence, and vulnerability".

For Balagopalan (2011: 291), "multiple childhoods" is not something that researchers within the field of childhood studies need to be convinced of, but Balagopalan's research has shown that concepts like biological age, adult-child differentiation, notions of child-care and children's work are not universal. So for Morrow (2011: 3), "it makes sense to speak of a diversity of children's experiences rather than a single universal phenomenon of 'childhood'". Furthermore, scholars such as Husain (2006) highlight the importance of cultural competence in care. She describes this as a system of care combining traits such as knowledge, awareness, and sensitivity that can be incorporated into all aspects of service development and delivery in order to produce more effective outcomes. Thus, cultural competence is a process by which the practitioner continuously strives to achieve the ability to effectively work within the cultural context of an individual, family, or community setting with diverse cultural or ethnic backgrounds. As she notes, 'cultural competence is not only about individual understanding of the complexities of cross-cultural interactions but also refers to the development

and provision of systems of support and care' (2006: 169). Thus, cultural competence is a useful concept to understand the criticism of the UNCRC's universalist models of childhood, because there is not universal childhood but a diversity of children's experiences (individual understanding) where the children grow up within their own society (cultural context).

From this section, the diversity within childhood across the world's cultures needs to be taken into account when participating with children.

### **2.3.3 Risk of participation being tokenistic**

Tisdall notes that:

The term 'participation' in the children's field tends to have positive associations, seen as inevitably a 'good thing', something to be promoted, something that should be beneficial to all involved. (2008: 421)

One danger that emerges as participation becomes popular is the potential for tokenism (Fleming, 2013). For Punch (2016: 188), adults still practise tokenistic behaviour because they continue to work within child development models, where children are more likely to be perceived as passive and vulnerable rather than as potentially competent social actors. According to Hart:

Tokenism is used here to describe those instances in which children are apparently given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating it, and little or no opportunity to formulate their own opinions. (1992: 9)

A think tank in Scotland (Barnardo's et al., 2011) discussed six challenges in the implementation of participation approaches and *tokenism* is one of them:

Children and young people may be consulted but their views have no discernible impact on decisions. The timetable of the policy process often leaves insufficient time to involve children and young people meaningfully. (2011: 1)

Thus, participation appears as a tokenistic process, a ‘tick box’ exercise without any real change and no impact on the actual decisions (Tisdall, 2008; Tisdall et al., 2014; Johnson, 2015).

Lansdown (2001) argues that children are often consulted in a tokenistic way to promote adult agendas. Moreover, children can be involved in dissemination events without any real understanding of the issues involved or the impact they have had on the decision-making process. Children’s activities labelled as ‘participation’ have increased when such activities match the agendas of the directors of organisations, and also, funders, policy-makers, or government agencies (Tisdall, 2008). Similarly, for White and Choudhury (2010: 45), “child rights NGOs felt increasing pressure to ‘produce’ children’s participation, particularly in their advocacy activities, to demonstrate their own internal and external legitimacy”. For Nieuwenhuys (2009), even if children are seen as ‘meaningful actors’ in bringing solutions, NGOs still decide the agenda and limit options for children’s views to be heard. For Hatton (2014: 46), “tokenism may occur through the need for organisations to include participation to secure funding, or unintentionally as a result of practitioners not fully understanding the issues”. Thus, some organisations promoting children’s participation still practise ‘tokenistic participation’ (i.e. consulted but having no impact on decision-making) because of a misunderstanding of participation and the need to match their agenda with funders or policy-makers, so as to be able to meet the requirements for children’s participation.

In the same way, Gal (2015: 454) argues that, “professionals frequently involve children in ‘tokenistic’ participation”. For instance, Marshall et al. (2015) and Tisdall (2015a) identify “peaks” as the effect children have on public policy in specific matters, rather than on a continual basis. Gal (2015) finds that ‘tokenistic participation’ may be more problematic than nonparticipation because the invitation to participation creates expectations that remain unsatisfied, leaving children frustrated, angry, or disappointed. Cornwall (2008: 280) uses the expression of ‘participation fatigue’ to illustrate that children have been consulted frequently without inducing any change. As a result, Cornwall (2008) notes that children self-exclude themselves to avoid wasting time once again. To avoid that, the *UN Committee on the Rights of the Child* reinforces that the decision-maker has to inform the child of the outcome of the process and explain how her or his views were considered. The feedback is a guarantee that the views of the child are not only heard as a formality but are taken seriously (CRC/C/GC/12 para 45).

#### **2.3.4 Lack of impact of participatory activities**

As was shown in section 2.2.4, research about children’s participation activities tends to show some impact, nevertheless there are different types of influence on this participation. For example, from Martin et al. (2015), personal skills development was the most positive effect of children’s participation, which was contrasted with a lack of meaningful impact on decision-making. Thus, participation processes led to an individual impact for child participants but less influence on decision-making. Moreover, some examples from minority worlds show that children in Wales and Ireland are less

influential in policy-making (Crowley, 2012; Hogan et al., 2015), as compared to children in the majority world, with the examples of children in Nicaragua and South India (Shier et al., 2014; Crowley, 2012).

Sinclair (2004) asserts, “it is questionable whether children’s views have been allowed to influence the direction of research, policy, and services persistently. For Tisdall et al. (2014: 2), one of the key frustrations across contexts and countries is solely “focusing on process rather than impact, so that children and young people may have positive experiences of involvement but their views have little to no impact on decision-making”. Similarly, Hart (2008) highlights that children’s participation in community development focuses more on activities and processes to do with participation than on accountability and impact (*see also* Valentine 2011). One of the reasons is that participation has been described as, “the process of sharing decisions which affect one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives” (Hart, 1992: 5). But for Tisdall et al. (2014), although Hart (1992) acknowledges children’s participation in everyday lives and in communities, the impact of participation on decision-making outcomes remains missing in his definition.

The National Youth Agency in the United Kingdom works to support children’s participation in services. They developed the *Hear by Right Standards Framework* to encourage sustained and effective participation by children (Badham and Wade, 2010).

Their principles are that:

Children and young people have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them; their participation is essential to improve services and respond to their needs; and that the shared aim of this participation should be change. (2010: 4)

However, for Johnson (2015: 159), “processes have sought to raise the voices of children and young people as an end in itself, rather than a means to achieve positive transformational change”. For Percy-Smith and Burns (2013), children ‘having a say’ is not enough; children need to be allowed to contribute in the community. Children should be given high-profile public roles when in local government councils, policy-making, planning, service development, data collection, and legislative development. They can be also given roles in international political events where adults seek to know about children’s concerns, experiences, and suggestions. To provide such opportunities, governments may establish mechanisms—such as children’s parliaments, youth advisory committees, national or regional consultations, dialogue with children through electronic media and focus groups on specific issues—to engage with children at the national level (Lansdown, 2011: 128). Successful examples have been seen throughout the world. For example, in 2004 in Bolivia, a Children’s Parliament was created and children’s representatives made regular formal recommendations to the adult National Assembly (Sarkar and Mendoza, 2005). The Government of Rwanda held a *National Summit for Children and Youth* around particular themes (Pells, 2010). The *Children’s Parliament* in Yemen influenced government policy on child labour in 2007 (Lansdown, 2011).

Nevertheless, to date, children’s involvement at the high levels of political events has been criticised as being ‘symbolic’, as tokenistic rather than ‘substantive’ with real change (Hart, 2008; *see also* Ennew, 2008). Local spaces at the community level need to be in position nationally and internationally. These local spaces provide opportunities to engage actively with children’s everyday lives.

Percy-Smith (2010) argues for the need to rethink children's participation as a more diverse set of social processes rooted in everyday environments and interactions (i.e. getting out of local authority structures). Thomas (2012: 463) postulates having local spaces, created alongside national and international ones, to provide opportunities to actively engage with children's everyday lives. Fleming (2013: 490) describes an example of children's participation in local authority structures during which children were frustrated by the slow pace of change, a lack of accountability and little feedback. For Farrar et al. (2010: 85), "it is imperative that all participation practice is able to identify what has changed as a result of the activity".

As Frick (2012: 32) notes, "governments should not only promote local youth or children's parliaments, but also encourage child-led initiatives and organisations" (*see also* the CRC General Comment 12, 2009: paras 128–29, Lansdown, 2010). As Theis echoes:

In many countries, children's clubs, parliaments and youth councils have been formed, and in some cases children have been able to influence public decisions and resource allocations. Despite these investments in children's participation, most children still do not participate in important decisions affecting them. (2010: 343)

Thus, more child-led initiatives and organisation activities at the local level need to be explored to understand children's participation.

### **2.3.5 Lack of relationships between children and adults**

In light of the typologies and models of children's involvement, participation practice has excluded or limited the role of adults play in allowing children more autonomy

(Hart, 1992; Lansdown, 2001, revised in 2010). Thus, the children's participation literature in child-adult relationships has been ignored. However, scholars advocate bringing adults back into the discussion to take a more relational approach to children's participation (Wyness, 2015; Mannion, 2010). Section 6.2 in Chapter 6 examines in-depth child-adult relationships in the literature.

This section has considered five critiques of children's participation that have emerged from the literature review: the limited children's participation legislation; the difference between universal and localised understanding of childhood; the risk of tokenistic participation; the lack of impact; and the lack of constructive relationships between children and adults during participation. To address these critiques of children's participation, new directions for participation as being relational will be explored.

## **2.4 NEW DIRECTION: PARTICIPATION AS RELATIONAL**

This section highlights participation as 'relational' through use of a collaborative approach, intergenerational dialogue, and being relational in the agentic approach.

### **2.4.1 Collaborative approach**

The collaborative approach in participation has been seen as the new direction to implement children's participation. Scholars acknowledge the need for a collaborative approach to children's participation where adults, who are in power of making decisions, and children participate together (Cockburn, 1998, 2005; Jans, 2004; Mannion, 2007). For Johnson:

Creating or using existing participatory spaces that encourage participation and dialogue



while employing mechanisms for communication and collaborative approaches can shift power dynamics, lead to better understanding of children's lives and change attitudes and behaviours. (2014: 98)

Percy-Smith (2006, 2010) talks about a process of 'community social learning' where children can come together both informally and formally with adults to exchange different views and experiences. He suggests that participation is best perceived as a 'relational and dialogical process' of collaborative social learning to enhance the quality of participation within and between community groups, in policy development, and in local decision-making processes. For Hatton:

A wider range of methods and approaches enables children and young people to communicate their views but also provided a collaborative way of working that engaged the adults in more informal dialogues with them, rather than being as authority figures...communication should be a collaborative process and a space that provides opportunity for a genuine dialogue that enables shared understanding, social learning and communicating meaning together. (2014: 50)

Nevertheless, for Percy-Smith (2006), moving forward to more collaborative approaches in participation raises the role(s) of adults when children participate. For example, Taft (2014) analyses a Peruvian movement of working children and notes that the organisation was deeply committed to the dual ideals of prioritising children's voices and creating collaborative intergenerational relationships, but that in practice, it was a continuation of adult dominance because of the implicit power in adult 'orientation' and 'guidance' in participatory activity. For West (2007: 126), "adults resist and control the development of children's participation often because it disrupts adults' established working patterns and challenges existing norms". Children do not

appear to be involved and engaged fully within the adult-constructed or adult-dominated societies, except (Lansdown, 2014), when children's views coincide with those of adults". Stasiulis (2002: 516) argues that, "the participation of children will always occur in dialogue that is fundamentally asymmetrical given the dependency of children, the duties and responsibilities of adults, etc."

Thus, scholars are promoting the collaborative approach to shift the power relationship between children and adults in participation projects to emphasise the relational dimension, but several challenges linked to the children's and adults' relationships have been highlighted.

#### **2.4.2 Intergenerational dialogue**

Many scholars relate participation to intergenerational dialogue. Indeed, one perspective is that adults not only take children's views into account, but also make a commitment to discuss and reach agreement with children (Moxan, 2014). For Hatton (2014: 53), "participation is the potential to bring groups and generations together to listen to one another, exchange ideas and negotiate a shared response".

Intergenerational dialogue is one methodology or approach to ensure meaningful and sustainable participation. One of the criticisms of participation is that children are frequently consulted in one-off activities but are not involved over time in ongoing, respectful dialogue (Tisdall, 2015a). Interestingly, the dialogue element is not emphasised in Article 12 of the UNCRC, which highlights taking into account the views of children. It is likely that this gap was noticed and that the Committee on the Rights of the Child sought to rectify it by clarifying the terms of participation in emphasising

the dialogue component: “ongoing processes, which include information sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect” (CRC/C/GC/12 para 3). In light of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Gal and Duramy (2015: 7) suggest that “dialogue means a mutual willingness to convince and be convinced, to be changed, and to give away one’s control over the decision”. For Graham and Fitzgerald (2010) inviting children into dialogue means a willingness to listen and to take the conversation seriously. Thus, the dialogue is going further than a simple discussion as it involves a serious discussion and has ‘productive potential’ (Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010: 354).

For Blanchet-Cohen and Rainbow (2006), age differences and unequal power relations between children and adults hamper intergenerational dialogue. One of the solutions to this challenge for Johnson (2014) is that the staff in an organisation be involved in changing adults’ attitudes towards children, and in generating more dialogue between adults and children in communities. Therefore, one of the next steps to promote the participation of children is “creating opportunities for bringing children and adults together around their joint concerns” (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010: 365). Thus, intergenerational dialogue provides an opportunity for adults to listen and reflect on children’s experiences and engage with children in concrete joint actions that could transform the community.

### **2.4.3 Relational in the agentic approach**

Tisdall and Punch (2012: 255) suggest that childhood studies that call for a view of children as competent social actors serve to, “counteract traditional views of children as passive dependents” (*see also* Qvortrup, 1994; Mayall, 2002; Esser et al., 2016).

Hammersley (2016) summarises that the idea that children have agency means that they play an active role in social life or can exercise autonomy. James et al. (1998: 6) discuss children as social actors in the following terms: “they are active in the construction of their own lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live”. For Valentine (2011: 354), “children’s agency is often discussed in the context of arguments for increased participation: if they are agents, they deserve to participate”. For Hammersley (2016: 7), treating agency in a dichotomous fashion in opposing a passive model of children to a model of children as wholly autonomous is unrealistic. Hammersley (2016) prefers to consider a middle position where the degree of autonomy, for either children or adults, must be seen as active in some respects and to some extent. Moss and Petrie (2002) argue for a relational approach where the child is not regarded as an autonomous and detached subject, but as living in networks of relationships, involving both children and adults.

The agentic approach has been criticised: McLeod (2008) argues that by over-emphasizing the agency of children, sociologists emphasise children’s autonomy as individualistic social actors within their social context. In the same line, Tisdall and Punch (2012: 259) question the focus on individuality and personal agency, and point to the value of considering relationships. For Punch:

...childhood studies has been so busy with the business of trying to get children’s voices heard and children’s issues on the policy agenda that there has been a tendency to over-emphasise children’s agency, resulting in an under-selling of the generational order. (2016: 189)

For instance, majority world critiques have highlighted the unhelpful practice of per-

ceiving children solely as individuals, rather than interdependent and living in networks of intergenerational relationships in their communities (Valentin and Meinert, 2009; Kellett et al., 2004; Butler and Teamey, 2014). In the same way, Punch (2016) argues that agency has not been sufficiently located within the generational order. She also notes that, “much of the research that highlights the relationality and nuances of children’s agency has emerged from majority world contexts” (2016: 187). Thus, one limitation of the agentic approach focuses on individuality and personal agency.

Some scholars have argued for the relational approach in the agentic approach. White and Choudhury (2010) emphasise the need for a more relational approach that maintains a focus on children’s agency, not as an autonomous phenomenon, but supported by adults. Thus, for Punch (2016: 187), the discussion is about ‘collective agency’ (with the support of adults) rather than individualised agency. For Valentine (2011), an understanding of the agency of both children and adults is needed.

For Leonard (2015), the concept of agency recognises children as agents who actively construct their own childhoods and in which children are surrounded by adults but argues that it is important to locate children’s agency within the positioning of childhood relative to adulthood. She finds that a consideration of how children and adults relate to one another is essential for understanding the opportunities and constraints under which children practise agency, and thus, can be considered as agentic. For her, their agency emerges from and operates within generational relationships.

Leonard (2015) suggests using the new terminology ‘generagency’, a combination of the two words generational and agency, to consider the structural positioning of childhood while simultaneously acknowledging children’s active agency in generational

relationships. These relationships occur across and within two core dimensions: through the notions of inter-generacy and intra-generacy. The former focuses on relationships between children and adults, while the latter looks at relationships between children from within their location in childhood. This blend acknowledges the need to move beyond the simplistic adult-child binary (Oswell, 2013). Insightfully, Leonard points out that this framework underlines the need to view agency as a relational process simultaneously occurring within and across generational relationships.

The scholarly debate has paid more attention to exploring a relational approach to counter the limit of the agentic approach, focusing on individuality and personal agency. Scholars (Leonard, 2015; Punch, 2016) emphasise the importance of investigating children's agency in the context of both inter-generational and intra-generational relations.

## **2.5 CONCLUSION**

The children's right to take part in decision-making processes in all matters that affect them (Article 12) has attempted to state, simply, that it is a right. However there remains a misunderstanding of what 'children's participation' is and means. Various typologies and models of participation have been developed, including models that consider not only different levels of participation where children had the opportunity to express their views, but also in linking children to their context and raising issues of power and spaces for participation as important processes of children's participation. However, Lundy's model (2007) is the most useful as it includes process, together with the impact of children's participation.

The research studies show children's participation is wider than 'having a say' and needs to be seen as influencing decision-making. One of the barriers in children's participation is the negative perception the decision-makers have regarding participation from a younger generation. Also, the role of the adult facilitator in the process of participation has been emphasised in research. And finally, creating positive relationships between children and adults is a pre-condition to implementing successful participation.

Challenges in the implementation of participation activities have been identified, namely: 1) limited children's participation legislation; 2) the difference between universal and localised understanding of childhood; 3) the risk of tokenistic participation; 4) the lack of impact of the participatory activities; 5) the lack of relationships between children and adults in participation projects. Alternatively, some scholars have argued for the importance of relational practices in participation as a new direction for children's participation, not only in using a collaborative or intergenerational approach, but also in using the relational approach within the agentic approach (Leonard, 2015; Punch, 2016).

For Crowley (2014: 30): "the principle of children's participation seems to be widely accepted but the practice has remained remarkably free from empirical scrutiny". This literature review has identified three gaps. First, a diverse range of definitions of 'participation' without a consensus of opinion for those involved alongside the second gap, the lack of impact of participatory activities while a lack of relationships between children and adults in participation projects comes in as number three. The next chapter will discuss how the research design for the current study addresses each gap in the

existing literature.





## CHAPTER 3 : RESEARCH DESIGN

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

As the previous chapter indicated, more investigation is needed regarding the practice of participation from both majority and minority world perspectives in terms of understanding and implementing children's participation. Central to this is a focus on children's and adults' relationships, and more effort to consider the outcome of participation.

The central question this research addresses is: how do NGOs implement children's participation in the local community. I look at this in two contexts– Tamil Nadu and Scotland. My research aims to explore the processes, as well as facilitators and barriers to implementing children's participation, through a NGO community project in each context. I focus on three core research questions that privilege the perspectives of children and staff members of the community project:

1. How is children's participation understood, practised, and experienced in the NGO projects?
2. What components enable or inhibit the processes of children's participation?
3. How can the processes of children's participation be improved at the local level?

However, the third question was not analysed as the participants in the research did not give enough comments to examine improving children's participation at the local level. This is explained further in section 3.6 of this chapter (data analysis and writing-

up).

This chapter includes the research design and the methodology applied to investigate these research questions. Section 3.2 outlines my epistemological approach; section 3.3 explains the case study design; section 3.4 describes the methods of data collection used; section 3.5 highlights the ethical considerations, section 3.6 considers the analysis and writing-up; and finally, section 3.7 outlines the methodological limitation of this study.

## **3.2 EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This section considers the epistemological approach that informs my research. The first thing I wanted to explore in my research were the views of the participants in order to understand their particular experiences. In other words, I wanted to examine their real life experience of participation from different parts of the world: a country in the majority world and a country in the minority world. As such, I considered my participants as a source of information—a well of knowledge—the ‘truth’ to help me to answer my research questions. Consequently, I emphasised the research subject’s perspectives, particularly their ‘experienced reality’ of participation. Thus, understanding the research subject’s perceptions and experiences produced the data for this research.

Epistemology is about ‘how you know what we know’ (Crotty, 1998: 8). There are different epistemologies: objectivism (reality exists regardless of our conscious experience of it), constructivism (truth/meaning exists in our engagement with reality), and subjectivism (meaning is created out of nothing, i.e. there is no independent reality)

(Crotty, 1998). “To know what we know’, there are multiple perceptions and/or experiences of social ‘realities’, rather than a singular ‘truth’” (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012: 4). Indeed, “there is no one truth, but the possibility of a plurality of truths associated with different constructions of reality” (Blaikie, 2007: 24-25). This research follows the constructivism epistemology.

Knowledge is not an absolute value discovered by the researcher, but rather, its construction is derived from everyday meanings and interpretations (Blaikie, 1993). The social world is constructed through people’s lived experiences, interactions and understandings. Therefore, I did not want to gain ‘knowledge’ only from children, I also wanted to learn from the interpretations of staff members who were involved directly and indirectly with children, in order to create a wider sphere of understanding of the processes of implementing children’s participation. My epistemological stance was essential to shaping the ‘truth’ primarily from the participants’ experiences (subject’s perceptions) and establishing what reality was constructed in the NGOs’ participation projects.

Moreover, I decided to align my research project with a qualitative research paradigm, adopting several methods of data collection. This allowed me to explore personal knowledge, experiences, and attitudes of the participants comprehensively (Ritchie, 2009). Qualitative research will help to answer the research questions, as:

Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry... They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. In contrast, quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not process. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003: 13)

Stake (1995) outlines the difference between quantitative and qualitative researchers as follows: “quantitative researchers have pressed for explanation and control; qualitative researchers have pressed for understanding the complex interrelationships among all that exists” (1995: 37). Additionally:

Quantitative researchers regularly treat uniqueness of cases as “error”, outside the system of explained science. Qualitative researchers treat the uniqueness of individual cases and contexts as important to understanding. (Stake, 1995: 39)

This suggests that qualitative research is:

Characterized by the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and a richly descriptive end product. (Merriam, 2002: 5–6)

Merriam adds (2002: 6), “qualitative research attempts to understand and make sense of phenomena from the participant’s perspective”. Thus, qualitative research allows us to understand how individuals experience and interact with their social world, and the meaning it has for them. In reference to that, my research project privileges participants’ perspectives and experiences, recognising the importance of how they construct knowledge and ‘truth’ about participation.

### **3.3 CASE STUDY APPROACH**

This section discusses the use of the case study approach as an appropriate method, the reasons for using multiple case studies, the units of analysis, and the selection and description of the case studies.

### **3.3.1 A qualitative case study approach**

A case study is when “the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded system (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (Creswell, 2007: 73). A qualitative case study approach was chosen because of the need for in-depth data collection with multiple sources of information (*see also* Yin, 2009), which provides insight into the implementation of participation. The research questions could be best answered by gathering the views and perspectives of different actors (children, staff members, and graduate members), as well as in-depth understanding of the contexts for the projects, in order to understand more deeply the implementation of children’s participation projects. The case study approach has the greatest potential for achieving this goal. Further, “case studies are the preferred method when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed” (Yin, 2009: 2). Two of my three research questions are ‘how’ questions, in order to explore the processes, facilitators, and barriers to implementing children’s participation in a collective decision-making schema within the NGO projects. My thesis proposes an in-depth study of the actors’ (children and adults) views and their opinions in an effort to better understand the implementation of children’s participation in a real-life context (Yin, 2009).

Leading authors on case study approaches present different typologies of case studies, with implications for what questions case studies can answer. For instance, Yin (1993) suggests three types of case studies: exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive:

An exploratory case study (whether based on single or multiple cases) is aimed at defining the questions and hypotheses of a subsequent (not necessarily case) study or at determining the feasibility of the desired research procedures. A descriptive case study

presents a complete description of a phenomenon within its context. An explanatory case study presents data bearing on cause-effect relationships—explaining which causes produced which effects. (1993: 5)

My case study approach is best described as explanatory. I sought to move beyond an exploratory case study, based on developing questions or procedural feasibility and mere description. I was seeking to answer research questions about cause and effect relationships, as Yin suggests. Stake (1994: 237) has a different typology to Yin's, in suggesting an alternative typology of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental or collective. An intrinsic case study helps the researcher better understand the particular case, but not to understand other cases or the general problem; an instrumental case study provide insight into an issue; and collective case studies are useful when researchers want to study a numbers of cases jointly, in order to inquire into the phenomenon, population. I was seeking to do more than an intrinsic case study. I was studying in detail examples in order to consider a wider issue or problem, using the case study as a specific illustration as suggested by Creswell (2007: 76). I undertook more than one case study – thus undertaking collective case studies – using parallel methods, for additional insight into participation processes. Yin's and Stake's typologies were thus useful to clarify that I was using a case study approach to consider cause and effect relationships, and I was using more than one case study, to be able to consider a wider issue or problem. The thesis is therefore an explorative study utilising two case sites.

A criticism of qualitative research is that findings cannot be generalised from or applied to different settings (Bryman, 2012: 406). However, this research does not intend to draw conclusions about all children's experiences of participation in Tamil Nadu

and Scotland. It aims deepen critical reflection on how we implement children's participation and understand it. Findings from this study can be compared with others to form a basis for other types of research.

### **3.3.2 A collective case study**

In my research, I undertook a collective (Stake 1995) or 'multiple case study' (Creswell, 2007) design with two case studies. This allowed me to learn more about the process of implementing participation in two distinct contexts rather than focusing exclusively on one context.

One of the main aims of selecting the cases was "to maximise what we can learn" (Stake, 1995: 4), to learn about the factors that enable and inhibit the process of children's participation. I saw benefits to learning from examples in the majority and minority world. The childhood studies literature has argued for far more cross-learning and dialogue between research in the majority and minority worlds. This is not to erase the considerable contextual differences – from socio-economic to cultural – but to use them as resources, to question taken-for-granted assumptions and to develop new ideas. For instance, Punch (2015) notes more work is needed to compare and contrast majority and minority world childhoods, or at last to have an effective dialogue between the two to enhance understandings of childhoods. Scholars have learned about children's participation from examining seemingly different contexts of participation, such as Shier (2010), who looked at the UK and Nicaragua. Johnson (2010) examines how context is linked in doing evaluation of children's participation between case studies in Nepal and the UK. Crowley (2012) considered the impacts of children's participation in policy making using the case study approach in the UK and Tamil



Nadu (South India). Crowley (2012), wanted to examine a country from the majority world to compare participation experiences of children there to children's experiences in the UK. Johnson (2010) also considers countries from majority and minority worlds: for her, lessons from one can be shared and made relevant to the other.

I considered having case studies in more than two countries, but I realised it was as not feasible, as I would have been unable to develop the depth of understanding to which I aspired within the time and financial constraints of my PhD research. Having determined that my research would be a collective case study approach with one country from the majority and one from the minority world, the next step was deciding on the units of analysis.

### **3.3.3 The units of analysis**

My research questions focus on NGO projects, rather than geographical areas. Thus logically my unit of analysis was the former rather than the later. I selected the unit of my case to be a non-governmental organisation (NGO) because the "NGO sector has eagerly adopted the core idea that children are not mere appendices of adults but should be approached as social beings in their own right" (Nieuwenhuys, 2012: 293). Additionally, NGOs were selected instead of governmental participatory organisations because they were one of the first to embed children's participation in their programmes following the UN Special Session on Children in 1990 (Boyden and Ennew, 1997; SCF, 2001). The unit of observation in each case study is a children's rights organisation, on the basis that their child rights approach conceives children as rights-holders and not as organisations in the field of child protection often do, that is as holding traditional ideas of children as being vulnerable and in need of adult protection (Punch

and Tisdall, 2012: 245). The research is limited to one unit of analysis in each country, as the goal is an in-depth study, rather than seeking breadth of information and knowledge. In the following section, I will explain how I chose the cases for this research project.

### **3.3.4 Choosing the cases**

To answer my research questions, I was looking for children's participation projects in the local community where children could influence decision-making about their lives, rather than high-profile political events at the national level that often achieve little outcome (see Chapter 2).

#### **Defining criteria for the NGOs and the research participants**

I developed further selection criteria for choosing the NGOs and the research participants as explained in the chart below.

**Table 1: Criteria for the selection of NGOs and the research participants**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Reason</b>
Work with the UNCRC approach	I wanted the organisations to have a specific approach to child rights, specifically I wanted them to perceive children as rights-holders.
NGO with a minimum of ten years' experience working with children, and at least three years' experience conducting a participation project.	I wanted to have an organisation that had worked in collective participation activities for at least ten years and had run the same participation project for at least three years, in order to view the evolution of the organisation's processes and changes regarding their vision, policy, and practice on participation.
NGO that implements children's participation at the local level (not at the national level), with contact with local decision-makers.	I wanted to see if participation projects had some impacts at the local level, if children influence societal change in communities through their experience of participation with the NGOs.
NGO with staff members that had at least two years of experience working in the participation field, either in their current organisation or in another one.	I wanted to capture the staff members' journey with participation work. I wanted to learn from the experiences of the staff members at different positions within the NGO (either working directly or indirectly with children).
NGO with children who experienced collective participation activities for at least two years between ages 13 and 16 years old.	I wanted to capture the experiences of children who were able to reflect on their journey and obtain their views on the implementation of participation.
NGO with graduate members (former members) involved in the organisation.	I was looking for an organisation that involved graduate members in order to have access to the first generation of children who could reflect on their experiences of participation, to gain insight into how they felt about their experiences.
NGO recognised as a children's participation expert.	I was looking for an organisation that already values children's voices, had good examples of participation, and would be able to reflect on their practice.

## Exploring case studies

I came to the research project with the experience of working on participation in Tamil Nadu, and was able to reflect on difficulties in implementing children's participation, as mentioned in the introduction chapter. In India, the NGO the *Concerned for Working Children* has been a source of research and publications to help better understand children's participation (Ratna, 2009; Lansdown and O'Kane, 2014; Harrison, 2015). Tamil Nadu has also been a popular place for researchers studying children's participation, as children are involved in discussions with the local council and influence decision-making (Crowley, 2012; also mentioned above and in Chapter 2).

In Tamil Nadu, the selection of the children's rights organisation was based on my previous work experience in the region. I previously worked for a national network of 120 local NGOs working on participation. Part of my job was to send a national survey to all of the members in order to evaluate their practice. From this evaluation, eight models were selected to document their practices vis-à-vis participation. Due to this experience, I had a good understanding of the work of the NGOs in the State. I was able to select the case study for this research, based on the previous survey, with considerable confidence that it met the selection criteria above on 'good practice' as well as the other more practical ones. Stake (1995: 6) notes that in selecting case studies, "the opportunity to learn is of primary importance". Moreover, revisiting previous employment sites is not unknown: Johnson (2010) revisited three evaluations in Nepal for her research to learn lessons from positive and negative aspects of children's participation evaluations and to share those lessons more broadly. There are benefits to the in-depth knowledge this provides, as well as the ethical issues of re-negotiating my

role as a research rather than employed staff and potential fieldwork and analytical issues that were aided by taking a reflexive approach (see section 3.5).

Regarding my second case study, I initially contacted *Save the Children Sweden* (experts in working on children's participation) to learn more about best practices regarding child-led organisations in Europe. They were clear that it was difficult to identify good practices of participation in communities in Europe, as for them, the good practices of participation were located in the majority world. I asked other children's participation experts in the UK to advise me, but they told me about participation projects at the national level, which did not fit my aforementioned criteria. I wanted to highlight implementation of children's participation at the community level in order to have an example to compare with the Tamil Nadu case study. I started to look for an organisation in Scotland that did fit the criteria by conducting informal interviews with practitioners from the voluntary sector, civil service, and academia. I also participated in different meetings and events connected to children's participation. For instance, I met *Together*, known as the Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights, umbrella organisation for the monitoring of the UNCRC in Scotland in an effort to gain a broad understanding of the voluntary sector. I realised there was no definitive list of NGOs involved in children's rights in Scotland, nor have their participation activities been comprehensively evaluated. Finally, due to my extensive exploratory research, I met with seven potential organisations from which I chose a children's rights organisation that met the selection criteria.

### **3.3.5 Description of the case studies selected**

Below I describe the two case studies selected and how they meet the selection. Further

details regarding the two case studies are provided in Chapter 4.

### **Case study 1: Tamil Nadu case study**

The first NGO I selected is located in Tamil Nadu (majority world) and works in an urban slum in a large city. The NGO is a non-profit community organisation, founded in the early 1990s. Ten years later, they introduced children's rights and children's participation rights through children's groups: a platform for children to express their views in the local context. The children's groups welcomed all children from the community and had links to the local authority through the petition process (described in detail in Chapter 7). The NGO was working in different locations in urban slum areas. I selected one area where the organisation had worked with children (10 to 18 years old) for over 10 years. This area was selected as it was situated in the city, and therefore more convenient to access. In this area, 120 boys and girls aged between 10 and 17 years old were members of children's groups. The children involved in the activities were Dalits (the lowest caste in Indian society) and lived in the urban slum area.

The organisation's structure had six layers of management: director, programme manager, project officer, field coordinator, organiser, and participation worker. In total, 70 staff members worked for the NGO at the time of the fieldwork, with four participation workers in each geographical area of work. A committee was set up for graduate members in an effort to strengthen the children's group meetings at the area community level. The aim of the committee was to provide information, explain new games, share their own experiences, organise training for the staff, and supervise events organised by children. The national survey (mentioned above) indicated that the organisation was recognised as having good standards of practice with regard to children's participation

in Tamil Nadu.

### **Case study 2: Scottish case study**

The second NGO I selected is based in Scotland (minority world). It is a non-profit children's rights organisation, also founded in the 1990s. Participants started the three-year participation project when they were 9 to 11 years old, continuing until the oldest were 14 years of age. The organisation carried out two similar participation projects of 20 children each over three years in the same regions in Scotland. Exhibitions were organised at the community level to show the result of participatory activities; adults, including local decision-makers, were invited. The organisation aimed to create opportunities for children's voices to be heard by adults and to bring about cultural change (influence perceptions and behaviour) in the small towns. At the request of some children, the organisation added an extra year with a project called the peer-education project: 20 children from those who started the project (9–11 years old) participated. The goal of this project was to develop children's skills such as communication and to increase awareness and understanding of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* in primary schools.

The organisation's structure had two levels of management: director and project workers. Ten staff members were part of the organisation. The NGO used art-based activities to give children the opportunity to voice their ideas, thoughts, and feelings—the focus was developing children's and staff members' relationships and getting to know the adults in a context of equality. These two elements (creativity and relationship building) are what makes children's participation good practice (Hatton, 2014). For the projects selected, the organisation worked with children living in small towns; they

were selected in school by teachers, and were from a range of socio-economic backgrounds.

### **Some caveats about the two cases selected**

First, the categories of children selected in both cases were different. In the Tamil Nadu case study, children were from marginalised and disadvantaged populations, the lowest caste in Indian society, and living in an urban slum in large city. In the Scottish case study, children came from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and lived in small towns. Second, children's access to the project was varied. In the Tamil Nadu case study, the project welcomed all children from the community. In the Scottish case study, participation was limited to a group of children from different schools. Third, the case studies differed in their extent of organisational hierarchy: the Tamil Nadu NGO encompassed six layers of hierarchy, while the Scottish NGO had two.

While such differences are contextually important, the similar purpose of the organisations (i.e. implementing children's participation) were a key commonality in answering the research questions. The NGOs in the case studies were selected because they met the selection criteria. Moreover, these differences did not pose a problem in answering the research questions. Liebel and Saadi highlight:

A cross-cultural examination must not try to evaluate differing concepts and practices of participation in terms of binary oppositions like 'advanced' or 'backward', 'modern' or 'traditional'. Instead, the point at issue is to investigate the prevailing practices and concepts of participation in their immanent content and their specific meanings for the persons living in the societies under consideration. (2012: 167)

The differences between the two organisations are relevant in order to explore how the contexts where children live can influence their opportunities to participate.



In short, due to the need for in-depth data collection with multiple sources of information - to provide insight into the difficulties of implementing children's participation within local contexts - a case study approach was most useful in answering my research questions. I used a qualitative case study method with two case studies, one from both the majority and minority worlds. Both were seen as a single unit of analysis in each country. I selected these two NGOs because they met the criteria of the research. I chose qualitative rather than quantitative research for my case studies in order to understand how implementation of children's participation is experienced and practised in communities (by current and graduate members as well as staff members). The input of participants (children and adults) enabled me to answer the research questions.

### **3.4 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

I collected data for the Scottish case study from November 2012 through to the end of January 2013. This was followed by four months of fieldwork in Tamil Nadu between February and May 2013. I then finalised the data collection in Scotland in June and July 2013. This section explores the selection of research participants, negotiating access, and the different methods of data collection (observation, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion, and documents).

#### **3.4.1 Selection of research participants and negotiating access**

I had access to my research participants through the two NGOs. I liaised with staff members so that the key people in the organisation were supportive of the research. First, I worked with the NGOs' directors, who agreed to be part of the research. For the Scottish case study, I introduced my research at a staff meeting and recruited staff

participants after this meeting. For the Tamil Nadu case study, the director introduced my visit to the staff before I had arrived in Tamil Nadu. As I knew the management team from my previous experience, the director in Tamil Nadu let me contact them directly and negotiate their participation in the research when I got there. One of the staff members in Tamil Nadu helped me select participation workers for the research. In both cases, staff members were the gatekeepers to the children.

I wanted to focus on children's experiences of their participation in the NGOs projects because I recognised children as 'subjects' rather than 'objects' of a research study (Tisdall et al., 2009). I also considered them as active agents of their lives, and that their views/opinions should be heard in a respectful, mutually beneficial way during the research (see for example, Christensen and Prout, 2002; James et al., 1998; Punch, 2002; Qvortrup, 1994).

I also wanted to include adults' voices, to capture their views on how they perceived and implemented children's participation in the NGOs' contexts. While scholars analyse children's participation solely from children's views and experiences, there is also a need for greater understanding of the complexity and diversity of adults' views and experiences, in order to progress children's participation in a direction that is meaningful for children and positively influential in terms of policy outcomes (Bessell, 2009).

The research considered different categories of participants, such as children (current and graduate members) and staff members (including the director). In total, 48 participants took part in the research: 29 in the Tamil Nadu case study and 19 in the Scottish

case study, (see Table 2). The next section will provide detail on the different categories of participants in the research.

**Table 2: The research participants involved in the research**

	<b>Tamil Nadu case study</b>	<b>Scotland case study</b>	<b>Total number of participants</b>
<b>Staff members</b>	9 →Management team: 6 (5 females and 1 male) →Participation workers: 3 (3 females)	6 →Staff members: 6 (4 females and 2 male)	15
<b>Children (13 to 16 years)</b>	15 →13-14years:7 (2 males and 5 females) →15-16 years: 8 (6 females and 2 males)	13 →13-14 years: 8 (6 males and 2 females) →15-16 years: 5 (2 females and 3 males)	28
<b>Graduate members (22-24 years)</b>	5 →22 years: 4 (2 females and 2 males) →24 years:1 (1 male)	-	5
<b>Total number of participants</b>	29	19	48

### **Staff members**

For the Tamil Nadu case study, I differentiated staff members by placing them into two categories depending on their hierarchical position within the NGO: the ‘management team’ (director, programme manager, project officer, coordinator and organiser), and ‘participation workers’ (staff on the front line who had direct contact with children). In the Scottish case study, the hierarchical position of directors and staff members was not as visible, as directors continued to conduct sessions with children due to the small structure of the organisation. Accordingly, I classified all participants as

‘staff’. This decision also respected the confidentiality of all participants without naming their position in the NGO.

In total, 15 adult staff members (directors and staff) participated in the research: nine in the Tamil Nadu case study (six from the management team: one of each hierarchy level) and three participation workers out of five who met the criteria and were selected primarily due to their availability. In the Scottish case study, six staff members were involved. I selected all staff members who were working directly with children in the Scottish NGO, not necessarily on the three-year participation project or the one-year peer-education project, but based on who knew the most about the projects and had at least two years’ experience in facilitating participation projects with children.

### **Children (13 to 16 years old)**

For the Tamil Nadu case study, I had planned to select all the child participants (13 to 16 years old) during a meeting organised by the NGO that gathered children who had experience of participation. These children were coming from different children’s groups in the area selected. Unfortunately, this meeting was joined by staff from another organisation, and children were asking questions about their activities. I realised that some of the children at the meeting came without having prior experience with the children’s groups, but they were encouraged to come because of the visitors. This reduced the number of the potential children for the research, from this organised meeting, as other children had been included who did not meet the research criteria.

Nevertheless, in this meeting, I identified potential girls who met the research criteria for participating and I explained the research to them. I went to other children’s meetings to observe and continue the selection. Because of school exam time, only a few

members came to the meetings. At this point, I realised that I could not select children participants on my own; I would need the help of the gatekeeper (the person in charge of the children's group for the area). Thus, the gatekeeper selected children, though only a few boys made it onto the list despite my mentioning that I would like parity between boys and girls. She (the gatekeeper) explained that, at this period, children were going to their relatives for holiday or on pilgrimages with their family, and as such the choice of participants was limited.

Moreover, she told me that boys were less interested in being part of children group's activities. When planning my fieldwork, I thought that children would be more available as it was the holiday period. I did not think that they would go to visit their relatives or go on pilgrimages with their parents. I did not anticipate that boys were less interested in being part of the children's group, as when I conducted the evaluation two years before, I had a parity of boys and girls. In the end, 15 children participated in the research, four of them boys.

In Scotland, I used the peer-education group (20 children aged between 13 to 16 years old) to access participants. This included children from the two earlier three-year-programmes. I met all of them during observation meetings where I explained my research before going to India for my fieldwork. I informed them that I would do the interviews when I was back in June, before the summer holidays. In total, in the Scottish case study, 14 children were interviewed but only 13 children were taken into account in the data analysis as a result of ethical considerations (see section 3.6). Unlike the Tamil Nadu case study, fewer girls were interviewed than boys (4 girls and 9 boys in the Scottish case study).

While parity between male and female child participants was the goal, in practice, I could not achieve it due to willingness and availability of children to participate. Nonetheless, a mix of boys and girls were involved in both case studies.

### **Graduate members**

I decided to include graduate members to have access to the first generation of children who could reflect on their experiences of participation, to gain insight into how they felt about their experiences of participating in the programmes. In the Tamil Nadu case study, the graduate members selected were aged between 22 and 24 years. They were part of a committee that supported the children's groups. I met the participants of the research when I worked with the NGO previously, so it was easier to (re)establish research relationships with them and to contact them directly, as they were now adults. Most of them had eight years of experience as members and two to three years' experience as a member of the committee.

Regarding the Scottish case study, I was considering children who had a one-year gap between their involvement in the three-year participation project and the one-year peer-education project. I thought that I could involve them as graduate members. However I realised subsequently that a one-year period was not enough distance to adequately reflect upon their experiences; they were still young (15–16 years old) compared to the graduates in Tamil Nadu. The NGO gave me the opportunity to contact older graduate members from a similar project conducted in another place in Scotland. I contacted some of them, but with the holiday period we could not manage to carry out interviews. I also realised that those graduate members had experience of participation in different contexts (different from in small towns), and I thus decided to not

involve graduate members in the Scottish case study. I kept graduate members in the Tamil Nadu study because their insights on participation were illuminating for the research but I recognise that my analysis does not have such reflective insights from Scotland.

### **3.4.2 Different methods of data collection**

This section will consider the various methods of data collection used for the research, as well as the limitations and strengths of each method and why they were selected. The primary data collection methods for a case study are: observation, interview, and documentary analysis (Stake, 2005). This case study method used all three methods, as well as focus group discussions.

#### **Observations/informal discussions**

Observation as a method in qualitative research is fundamental to the understanding of another culture (Silverman, 2005). Indeed, observation increases our understanding of the case (Stake, 2005). An advantage of observation as a research method is that “you do not ask people about their views, feelings or attitudes; you watch what they do and listen to what they say” (Robson, 2002: 310).

I used observation not only to witness staff meetings and meetings with children, but also children’s activities, for example capacity-building workshops in Tamil Nadu or children delivering workshops Scotland (see below, Table 3). I observed all the ‘gatherings’ I feasibly could during my fieldwork. I watched children or staff members’ participation in meetings or activities, listening to their answers. For the Tamil Nadu case study, I was accompanied by the interpreter.

I also used observation to create relationships with participants and had informal discussions. I decided not to start with interviews but to have an initial observation period of NGO activities, such as: children's meetings, staff members' meetings, and other activities. During these activities, I had informal discussions with the participants that helped me establish relationships. In both cases, traveling to the meetings with staff members was a good opportunity to get to know them better and build trust. Some of the children in Tamil Nadu wanted to practice their English with me, which I found was a good way to connect. As I am French, I connected with the Scottish children by exchanging a few French words with them (French being taught in school). Thus, in both case studies, I used natural opportunities to create relationships with participants; relationships refer to many connections between people involved in the research context (Graham et al., 2013).

Informal discussions are also part of ethnographic observations in the collection of field notes (Seale, 2004). During my observations, I had the opportunity to have informal discussions with staff members, and ask for clarification about the participation project. I had even more informal discussions with staff in the Scottish case study, as I did not know this project as well as the one in Tamil Nadu, and thus required further edification. I added informal discussions with the staff in Scotland when I came back from the Tamil Nadu fieldwork in order to gain additional information.

I took some notes during the observations themselves, but most of my field notes in both case studies were written after observations, I did so as soon as possible and always within 24 hours of attending meetings and events. My field notes were kept in a notebook with the date of the observation, information about the place, people present,



and comments about what I observed, alongside with reflections and general impressions. Fielding (2001: 162) suggests that writing field notes is, “not just of description but of first reflections on connections between processes, sequences and elements of interaction”. Thus, these observations also fed into my thinking about what questions and issues to explore in the interviews and which participants to select for further data collection.

**Table 3: Recap of observation**

<b>Observations</b>	<b>Tamil Nadu case study</b>	<b>Scottish case study</b>
<b>Staff meetings</b>	I attended 3 staff meetings (one at the area-level, the monthly staff meeting for all the staff members, and one meeting at the headquarters with the donor for the participation project)	I attended 4 staff meetings (where staff members gave highlights of their work)
<b>Children’s meetings</b>	I attended three children’s meetings: two at the area level gathering (included several children’s groups), and one at headquarters, which gathered members of different areas where children’s groups were established.	I attended three children’s meetings: one with all of the members and two meetings with children aged 13–14 years.
<b>Children’s activities</b>	I attended the capacity building camp: 2 days for the leadership camp, one day for the young facilitator training, and one day for the one-day camp (training for the new members and evaluation of the year.)	I attended two half-day workshops in school, delivered by children for the pilot project. I attended an event with children’s members and parents regarding the fieldwork project.

## **Semi-structured interviews**

This part will consider the interview format and structures, and then the process of the interviews and my relationships with the participants. I undertook interviews, so as to gain the individual perspectives from a range of participants, as the situation will not be seen in the same light by everyone (Stake, 2005). For this research, I developed ‘semi-structured’ interviews that involved a range of open questions, which allowed for interviewees’ reflections to significantly shape the discussion (Arksey and Knight, 1999) while also ensuring certain common themes were addressed by all interviewees. These semi-structured interviews allowed me to gather the views and experiences of individual participants (Gallagher, 2009a). The goal of the one-to-one interview was to give the participants the opportunity to express themselves individually.

### **Interview format and structure**

I conducted an initial interview with staff members to introduce myself, to gain their consent, to explain the recording process, and to create relationships with them. Thus, the first interview sought three types of information: first, the professional background of the staff members’ work and role in the NGO; second, how staff members had come to work with children, supporting their participation; and third, staff members’ experiences of participation with children through their work (including their best memory of doing so). The follow-up interview investigated the process as well as facilitators and barriers to implementing children’s participation in communities.

The content of the semi-structured interviews with adults was determined by the research questions and observations. The list of pre-set topics in the follow-up interviews included:

- Understanding of children's participation by the participants
- Motivation/interest to work on children's participation
- Examples of good practice within the project/benefit of participation
- Children's personal changes and impact in the communities due to the participation project
- Challenges for, or resistance to, children's participation
- Lessons learned from the children's participation project

This array of topics became the framework for the interviews. However, the questions asked during the interviews were not restricted to these pre-set topics. The questions were adapted to each interviewee's position (whether they were working directly or indirectly with children). I started the staff interviews in Scotland and, after a first analysis of the interviews, it was clear that the relationship between staff and children was a recurrent theme, so I decided to add this as a new theme in interviews for the staff members in the Tamil Nadu case study.

I conducted follow-up interviews with all of the staff members in both case studies, except one staff member in each case study. For both of these staff members, I was able to undertake a longer interview that covered all questions in the interviews guidance. Directors in both case studies were interviewed more often as I needed to gain information on the evolution of the projects, and they were involved from the beginning of the projects.

For children and graduate members, the following topics became the framework for the interviews:

- Their story with the children's group

- Best and worst memories with the children's group
- Understanding of children's participation rights
- Changes in their communities due to the project
- Personal changes since they have been involved in the project (what children get from being involved in the project)
- Participation in their family
- Participation in their school
- How the NGO can improve the participation project
- Lessons learned regarding their involvement
- Background of the child or graduate members

Doing follow-up interviews with children was harder to schedule than with staff members, due to the holiday period in Tamil Nadu or the school schedule in Scotland. I was able however to cover the range of topics with most children. In Tamil Nadu, I conducted three follow-up interviews with the 15–16 year old group. Usually, the interviews lasted between 40 minutes and one and a half hours with the interpreter. In the Scottish case study, I conducted only one follow up interview when I met the child conducting a workshop in school. The interview lengths varied from 15 minutes to one and a half hours; 30 minutes was the average. Two of the members interviewed were not very talkative. I checked with the staff and they reassured me that they were not talkative with them either, but they were active in participating in the activities in the project.

**Table 4: Recap of semi-structured interviews**

	Tamil Nadu case study		Scotland case study		Total inter-views
	1st interview	Follow up interview	1st interview	Follow up interview	
<b>Staff members</b>	9	12	6	7	34
<b>Children (13 to 16 years)</b>	15	3	14	1	33
<b>Graduate members</b>	5	2	-	-	7
<b>Total interviews</b>	46		28		74

### **Process of the interviews**

All interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants. I took notes during the interviews to record anything that arose and thought would be interesting for a follow-up question. I drew each interview to a close by asking participants whether there was anything else they would like to discuss which we had not yet explored. After each interview (always on the same day), I took more detailed notes regarding the context of the interview, any facial expressions and body language, hesitation, or anxiety that would not be recorded by the audio recording. I listened back to each interview on the day or in the following days to prepare myself for the follow-up interview (if there was to be one—determined by the interviewee’s schedule).

## **Focus group discussions**

A focus group discussion (FGD) is a qualitative data collection method in which one or two researchers and several participants meet as a group to discuss a given research topic:

The benefit of group interviews: they are relatively inexpensive to conduct and often produce rich data that are cumulative and elaborative; they can be stimulating for respondents, aiding recall; and the format is flexible. Some problems: the emerging group culture may interfere with individual expression, and the group may be dominated by one person; and ‘groupthink’ is a possible outcome. (Fontana and Frey, 2003: 73)

Staff member FGDs were conducted after the observation period and semi-structured interviews. The goal of the FGD was to introduce topics for discussion and to help the group participate in a lively and natural debate amongst themselves. In the Scottish case study, I conducted three FGD: I organised two discussion groups of two hours each with all staff members, and another one after my field work in Tamil Nadu. In the Tamil Nadu case study, I conducted only one session because of time constraints. Nevertheless, it was a session of four hours (including a break), and involved the management team and participation workers’ part of the research.

Topics discussed in both FGD in Tamil Nadu and Scotland:

- What is needed to do participation
- Children’s participation approach for the organisation
- Challenges/difficulties of children’s participation in the project
- Categorisation of adult-child participation relationship (Lansdown’s model, 2010)

- Nine standards for measuring quality of participation (General Comment, 2009)

In conducting the FGD, I realised that the Tamil Nadu staff members were reluctant to express themselves in front of the management team. Hierarchy in the organisation was more important than I expected. I would not have understood the dynamic of staff relationships without organising this FGD, and it produced rich data for the research project. However:

There is a danger in assuming that the FGD transcript should be analysed in the way as the transcript of an individual interview as participants influence each other, opinions change and new insights emerge. (Krueger, 1998: 20)

In light of this, I decided to use the FGD as observations note in the two case studies to understand better the dynamic between the participants (instead of using direct quotations from the FGD).

## **Documents**

Collecting documents is another method for the case study approach. Documents such as letters, e-mails, minutes of meetings, formal studies, evaluations, and newspapers articles can be used to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources (Yin, 2009). Indeed, “quite often, documents serve as substitutes for records of activity that the researcher could not observe directly” (Stake, 2005: 68).

Additionally:

It is essential to remember that these documents may not be accurate or lack bias, and that they have been written with a specific audience in mind, for a specific purpose... But they are important as another way to corroborate evidence derived from other sources.

They may specify events and issues in greater detail than interviewees can. (Burns, 2000: 467)

I collected documents during the observation phase to help myself understand the organisation better, especially for the Scottish case study as I was not familiar with their work. For instance, I collected their brochure describing different children's activities, the book from the photography project, training modules for the three-year-participation project, and papers on the organisational structure of the NGO. These documents gave me a broad understanding of their work. In Tamil Nadu, I collected the child participation policy for the NGO and the evaluation reports regarding the children's groups. These helped me to create prompt questions for the semi-structured interviews and discuss topics in the FGD.

### **Triangulation of the data**

Triangulation is used to strengthen the confidence of the research findings: "data triangulation means the use of a research design involving diverse data sources to explore the same phenomenon" (Arksey and Knight, 1999: 23). One of the major strengths of the case study research design is the triangulation of multiple sources of evidence, which makes the findings as robust as possible (Yin, 2009). The triangulation of multiple sources of evidence produces a valid account of a phenomenon (Yin, 2009) and minimises the chance of biased findings (Grix, 2001). This research refers to broader understandings of triangulation as a tool that allows the researcher to capture not only complexity and varying contexts, but also multiple sources of evidence (Fielding and Fielding, 1986).

This section shows the rationale for using a qualitative approach, and discusses the



choice and use of observations/informal discussions, semi-structured interviews, FGDs, and documents to gain an in-depth perspective from participants in the research. The four methods contributed to each other and allowed me to triangulate data. For instance, observations and documents allowed me to prepare the semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussions. They also allowed me to check contradictory information collected between what participants said in interviews and what I observed in my fieldwork or in the FGDs.

### **3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical considerations were considered throughout the entire research project; here I will summarise them. Indeed, “ethics concerns should be taken into consideration from the very start of an investigation and up to the final report” (Kvale, 2007: 24). Ethical approval was sought and accepted from the School of Social and Political Science at the University of Edinburgh. My research required the level 1 and level 2 Ethics form, according to the University of Edinburgh Research Ethics assessment. The research was considered to have potential risks to participants as it involved children. Thus, in doing research with children, specific ethical considerations were noted.

In this section, I outline how I have approached key areas of ethical concern in this research, specifically by using the framework of the *Ethical Research Involving Children* (ERIC) project (Graham et al., 2013, Graham et al., 2015). This project is a collaborative partnership between the *Centre for Children and Young People* at Southern Cross University, Australia, UNICEF’s *Office of Research Innocenti*, the *Childwatch International Research Network*, and the *Children’s Issues Centre* at the University of

Otago, New Zealand. The initial project involved 257 researchers across 46 countries, and provided insight into ethics-related issues and constraints in research with children. As a result, an *International Charter for Ethical Research Involving Children* was produced (Graham et al., 2013). The philosophy of the ERIC approach seeks to ensure the human dignity of children is honoured, and their rights and well-being are respected in all research, regardless of context. The ERIC framework is composed of four principles (harm and benefit, informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, and payment and compensation).

### **3.5.1 The four principles**

#### **Harm and benefits**

The most fundamental consideration in undertaking research involving children is deciding whether the research actually needs to be done, if children need to be involved in it and in what capacity. Accordingly, at the very outset of the research process researchers need to engage with critical issues regarding the purpose of the research and the impact that participating in the research may have on children in terms of potential harm and possible benefits. (Graham et al., 2013: 29)

When organising my research involving children, I first evaluated what the benefits would be if children were part of the research. It was clear to me that because I was doing a research on children's participation, children should be participants of the research, balancing adults' participation, so as to capture the children's 'truth' about their experiences and not only obtain adult opinions. It was important to give children an equal space to the adults who entered the research, as I mentioned in section 3.4.1 of this chapter.

I checked that children's participation in the research was relevant for them, and also

to ensure they would have a beneficial experience. However, research with children sometimes carries the risk of disclosure of abuse or harm during the process. In this research, while the nature of the topics seemed unlikely to provoke disclosures of a personal nature, arrangements were nonetheless set up to ensure that if children raised issues of concern, advice and support was available. I explained to the participants that whatever they told me was confidential, unless they told me that they themselves or someone else was at risk of serious harm.

In Tamil Nadu, there were no social care councils or child protection officers in place to specifically address issues of abuse and neglect. I had the contact information of alternative NGOs that provided support services to children, but I did not use it as I was not confronted with any disclosures. In the same way, in Scotland I was not confronted to any disclosures. However if a participant had disclosed information, I or a worker of the organisation would have paid attention respectfully of whatever information they had shared by listening carefully to them, reassuring them and talking to them about what action would have be taken. Ideally, I would have supported children to access support through the NGO's procedure on child protection.

By the end of interviews, I took the time to debrief all participants (adults and children) regarding their experiences in being part of the research and the benefits they perceived to have gained from it. Participants mentioned that the interview was a useful exercise for them to reflect on what they were doing in participation project. It was also the opportunity to tell them that they would get feedback on the research through the organisation.

I sought to be inclusive in my fieldwork. As discussed above, I sought to include both

girls and boys in my research. I asked the gatekeepers in advance if there were any particular issues, such as disability, to consider in organising my fieldwork. None were identified by gatekeepers, and I did not become aware of such additional support needs during my research.

### **Informed consent**

Obtaining consent from parents/carers and children is central to the research relationship and signals respect for the research participant's dignity, their capability to express their views and their right to have these heard in matters that affect them. Informed consent is an explicit agreement which requires participants to be informed about, and have an understanding of, the research. This must be given voluntarily and be renegotiable, so that children may withdraw at any stage of the research process. (Graham et al., 2013: 55)

Selection of the participants was done according to the criteria defined earlier, and subjects' willingness to participate. I sought informed consent of children's participants by giving details about the research, its methods and timing, and by means of an information research leaflet (Appendix 1 and 2). One issue regarding ethical clearance was to make sure that participants understood the process of their involvement in the research, and what I, the researcher, would do with the data. Researchers need to spend time verbally explaining the research to the future participants (Alderson and Morrow, 2011), to be sure that the potential participants have a good understanding. For "a requirement of ethical research is that participants are informed and have an understanding of the research activity, whatever research methodology is being used (Graham et al., 2013: 57). I made it clear to potential participants that they did not have to take part if they did not wish to do, and they could withdraw at any time in the process. I

explained that the goal was not to get ‘good’ answers from them, but to gain understanding of their experiences with participation. To explain the research in both countries, I had either a map of India indicating Tamil Nadu, or a map of the UK displaying Scotland, in order to allow them to visualize the two contexts and to express the wider perspective of the research (Appendix 1 and 2). In the Tamil Nadu case study, the gatekeeper selected and explained the research when I was unavailable to do so. At the start of every interview, I re-explained the research and again asked if participants wanted to continue being part of the research.

Staff members could not gain participants’ informed consent for the observation in advance, as the staff did not know who would be attending the meeting. So, before each session, I asked children for verbal agreement of my presence and observation as a group after I introduced myself and the purpose of my visit. I am aware that this might not have been the best option as I was already there, and thus it might have been more difficult for children to say no, but it was also an opportunity for children to get to know me directly and asked me questions. If I had felt my presence embarrassed or made the children uncomfortable, I would have left.

I did not have as much contact with some of the child participants in Tamil Nadu and Scotland as I would have liked; consequently, for the interviews, I confirmed that they had given their consent freely. Informed consent involves four aspects: it involves an explicit act (for example, verbal or written agreement); it can only be given if the participants are informed about and have an understanding of the research (for example a leaflet explaining the research in a child-friendly way); consent must be given voluntarily and without intimidation; and it must be renegotiable so that children are able to

withdraw when and if they wish during the research process (Gallagher, 2009b). I always took time at the beginning interviews to explain my research using the information leaflet, and to inform participants that they could withdraw at any time, as well as to give them the opportunity to ask for clarification.

In the Tamil Nadu case study, before going to the fieldwork, I had planned to record parents' verbal consent for their child to participate after explaining the process of the research. My research was organised in an area where parents are usually illiterate and suspicious of signing documents (Abebe, 2009; Clacherty and Donald, 2007). However, in being in Tamil Nadu, I easily gained signatures from parents, as they were used to signing consent forms when their child went to residential capacity training workshops with the NGO (Appendix 3).

In Scotland, the children's rights organisation has the consent of parents for the year, including participating in all activities on behalf of the organisation. The organisation first checked that children were willing to participate in the study before I started the observation period. At the start of the activity participants were asked to confirm verbally that they wanted to participate. Consent was renegotiable, and children could withdraw at any stage of the research process. When I was conducting observation, I explained my research to children and told them I would interview them when I returned from Tamil Nadu. Children consented to be part of the research. Then, the gatekeeper mailed a letter with information about the research to parents whose children were to be involved in the project, and parents gave their informed consent (Appendix 2 and 3). The gatekeeper then did a follow-up phone call to learn which children wanted to participate.

However, when I went to the secondary school, one child told me that the teacher had asked her to come for the interview but she did not know anything about it. She had stopped participating in the organisation three months prior (when I was in Tamil Nadu for my fieldwork). I asked her if she wanted to be part of the research as her experience was relevant, and though she agreed to do the interview, I noticed some behavioural signs of dissent, such as lack of eye contact with me, and repeated “I don’t know” answers (Keith-Spiegel, 1983). In this case, as the interview was conducted at school, it seems that the child’s consent was influenced by wanting to show respect to adults. Children in school settings are likely to view the researcher as a school visitor and feel obliged to co-operate (Gallagher, 2010; Hill, 2005). Indeed, it may therefore be difficult for children to decline the request to participate in research, and participation could be seen as an obligation (David et al., 2001). I asked her if she wanted to continue the interview and though she said yes, it was not a frank “yes”. I decided to continue the interview but stopped by the bell ringing. I did not take her interview data into account as I considered that she did not give full consent to be part of the research.

I also paid equal importance to children’s and adults’ consent. Indeed, “...the current enthusiasm for negotiating informed consent with children risks obscuring the issues surrounding the consent of the adults who are invariably involved at some level” (Gallagher, 2009b: 18). Regarding staff and graduate members, the consent form was signed on the day of the interview, but the research had been explained previously when I was organising interviews (Appendix 4).

## **Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity**

Respecting the privacy and confidentiality of children participating in research involves close consideration of several aspects: privacy with regard to how much information the child wants to reveal or share, and with whom; privacy in the processes of information gathering/data collection and storage that allows the exchange of information to be confidential to those involved; and privacy of the research participants so that they are not identifiable in the publication and dissemination of findings. (Graham et al., 2013: 73)

### **Privacy and confidentiality**

When doing research with participants, privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity are important aspects to maintain. No information may be given to other people without the consent of those involved (Gallagher, 2009b): The data collected should not be available to everyone. Locked filing cabinets, password-protected, or encrypted forms on a computer must be used to keep the participants safe (2009b: 20). My data were on my computer, which was locked with a password and kept in a locked drawer in my apartment (Tamil Nadu) or in a locker at the university (Scotland). Thus, all interview recordings and transcripts were securely handled.

In both countries, at the beginning of every session I discussed privacy and confidentiality issues with participants and explained that whatever they told me would not be attributed to individuals unless they shared that they or someone else was at risk of serious harm. At the end of some interviews, some staff asked me how the interviews with children had gone, and I always answered that it was not about good or bad, it was about children's experiences. I reiterated to interpreters the need to keep information confidential.



In the Tamil Nadu case study, sensitive issues emerged in the research as staff members referred to the hierarchical layers of the organisation. The staff members were fearful of the management team and preferred to stay silent instead of mentioning difficulties in implementing children's participation. This information was confirmed when I conducted the FGD. I reiterated to staff members that the information would not be attributed to them individually and their names would not be mentioned.

In order to mitigate tension and reassure participants, I explained in detail that, as a researcher, I am mandated to keep all information securely and as such all identifiers are removed. I was respectful of the fears of the staff members: for instance, I sympathised with their concerns, but at the same time encouraged them to speak, explaining how I was committed to ensuring safety and anonymity for everyone.

### **Privacy and anonymity**

Anonymity of the participants within the organisation and the community was taken into consideration as much as possible in my research so that 'the risk of harm to a subject [would] be the least possible. (Kvale, 2007:28)

It was difficult to keep the anonymity of the staff participants during fieldwork, as the organisation knew that I was focused on one area in Tamil Nadu. The anonymity of the children was also difficult to respect, as they came to the NGO office outside their local community with the staff members for the interviews for safety reasons. I could not organise interviews without having the staff members involved. Similarly, in Scotland when I organised the interviews, I needed the help of the gatekeeper to contact participants and organise the venue where the interviews were conducted. For both children and adult participants, one of my main ethical priorities was to protect the

individual identity of the interview participants by concealing their names. Additionally, any information that was deemed specific enough to certain participants and risked their identities being revealed was removed from interview excerpts. I also chose not to mention the names of the two NGOs. One advantage of this was that it further enhanced the individual anonymity of the interview participants.

I will produce a research briefing for the NGOs involved in my research, and to the wider public, in order to disseminate my findings. This will also protect anonymity of the participants, as I will not use quotations. Anonymisation emphasises that cases and individuals are illustrative examples, which can be used to develop broader conceptual insights (Nespor, 2000).

### **Payment and compensation**

Research participants should be appropriately reimbursed for any expenses, compensated for effort, time or lost income, and acknowledged for their contribution. Payment should be avoided if it potentially pressures, coerces, bribes, persuades, controls, or causes economic or social disadvantage. The guiding principles of justice, benefit and respect underpin the need for research participants to be properly acknowledged, adequately recompensed and given fair returns for their involvement. (Graham et al., 2013: 87)

Participation in my research may have had a financial impact on the children. Thus, the need for compensation was foreseen for expenses directly related to participation, such as transportation or meals. “This form of payment complies with the principle of justice, ensuring that research participants are treated fairly” (Graham et al., 2013: 88). I paid for the transportation fees of participants when they came to the NGO office especially for the interview. If they were coming for an event already financed by the organisation, I did not cover the cost of transportation. I also provided drinks and

snacks for children's and adults' interviews, and adults' FGDs in both case studies.

### **3.5.2 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is considered by some to be the hallmark of ethical practice (Davis, 1998; Gallagher et al., 2010). Being reflexive in an ethical sense means:

...acknowledging and being sensitized to the microethical dimensions of research practice and in doing so, being alert to and prepared for ways of dealing with the ethical tensions that arise. (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004: 278)

Reflexivity is also understood as:

...involving an ongoing self-awareness during the research process, which aids in making visible the practice and construction of knowledge within research in order to produce more accurate analyses of our research. (Pillow, 2003)

Reflexivity in research is a “process of critical reflection both on the kind of knowledge produced from research and how that knowledge is generated” (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004: 274). For Davis (1998: 331): “researchers are expected to be willing to engage with the people they study and to be willing to let this engagement tell them something about themselves as well as their respondents”. Indeed, for Pillow (2003) reflexivity increases attention to researcher subjectivity in the research process such as how does who I am, who I have been, who I think I am, and how I feel affect data collection and analysis. These elements will be considered in the following paragraphs.

The questions who ‘I am’ or ‘who I have been’ have been taken into consideration in the introduction. My research started with an interest in the topic, having been a practitioner for five years in the field of children's rights and children's participation. I used my work experience to note that I was expected to listen both to the good practices

of participation as well as why implementation of children's participation was difficult to achieve—both were in the interest of the research. I have used reflexivity to understand my role as researcher. During the first year of my PhD, I realised that I must be careful to differentiate my current position as a researcher and my previous work in children's participation. In order to keep this in mind, my supervisors advised me to maintain a reflective diary to help me to disassociate the two roles. Reflective discussion with my supervisors also helped me to position myself in the research. For example, I used to write recommendations for NGOs to help improve their practices with children. As such, I needed to change my practice, as the role of the researcher is to make people think and not to make people do (Belcher, 2009). Reflexivity was considered through the awareness of the research problematics by raising questions about the research process. In the Section 3.7 below I reflected on the methodological limitations such as: the limitation in the data collection, relying on the interpreters in the Tamil Nadu case study, and of being an outsider to the research context. Reflexivity was also considered while analysing the data. For instance, I immersed myself in reading and re-reading the data, to try and challenge myself to consider what was contained in the data itself rather than presuming my preconceived assumptions would be validated. This helped me gain new insight and knowledge on this topic.

Being reflexive required me to make explicit the decisions I took at every stage of the research, such as deciding to revisit an NGO for which I had previously worked. As mentioned in Section 3.3.4, I made this decision because it was an opportunity to learn more about children's participation implementation. Additionally, I was required to be reflexive when, in living the experience of the research, things did not always go according to plan, forcing me to accept the changes, and to reflect on them properly such

as not to gain parity with participants in the research. This supports Davis (2009):

Rather than trying to achieve a 'gold standard' of complete participation, it might be more helpful for you to look at what is realistic within your own context and see how this fits with your research objectives and your ethical principles. (2009:155)

I was also aware that the methods used in the data collection were not neutral, such as the interviews:

The interview is a conversation, the art of asking questions and listening. It is not a neutral tool, for at least two people create the reality of the interview situation... This method is influenced by the personal characteristics of the interviewer, including race, class, ethnicity, and gender. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003: 48)

On return from fieldwork, I co-presented at the 5th *International Conference in Celebrating Childhood Diversity*, in Sheffield in 2014 on the "learning from the diversity of the 'everyday': ethical issues while undertaking research in Scotland and Tamil Nadu (South India)". This allowed me to reflect on the practice of the signature for the informed consent for the parents and it seems it was not enough, as it seemed neither here nor there in fully ensuring informed consent. The way to get meaningful consent, in fact, would have been for parents themselves to live through the research experience, which would give them an informed view of the research from which they could either give consent or not. This would have been more relevant than a signature and would have made their consent more meaningful.

The reflexivity process was used not only during my fieldwork, but also throughout the research process. I agree with Graham et al. (2013) on the ongoing nature of reflexivity as follows:

Undertaking research involving children is important. Ethical research demands that

researchers continually reflect on their practice, well beyond any formal ethical review requirements. This requires ongoing attention to the assumptions, values, beliefs and practices that influence the research process and impact on children. (2013: 23)

To conclude, this section showed that reflexivity was adopted to reflect on who I am, the participants and the research context but also in relation to the research process with a continuous process of the interpretation of the data.

### **3.6 DATA ANALYSIS AND WRITING-UP**

This section considers the process of analysis and writing-up the data. I used thematic analysis, a method for identifying themes and patterns of meaning across a dataset in relation to a research question (Braun and Clarke, 2013). My analysis was both inductive (in that I sought to engage with themes that arose from the data) and deductive (as I was also influenced by existing theory and findings, as detailed in the literature review). As I sought to acknowledge that “analysis is always shaped to some extent by the researcher’s standpoint, disciplinary knowledge and epistemology” (Braun and Clarke, 2013: 174), recognising this as part of reflexivity in the analysis.

#### **3.6.1 The process of analysis**

Analysis entails classifying, comparing, weighing, and combining material from the interviews to extract the meaning and implication, to reveal patterns, or to stitch together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 201).

My process of analysis started during the data collection, as I listened to each interview carefully to prepare for the next one, and for a follow-up interview (when such interviews were possible). During this time, I took notes about important items to examine

later in analysis (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). I then fully transcribed all the interview recordings myself. I considered a full (as opposed to a selective) transcription to be essential; I was worried about fragmenting interviewees' narratives and also felt that I was unable to discern what was 'relevant' or not at such an early stage of the research. I knew that I could not transcribe interviews directly after conducting them, as I had time constraints in collecting the data. So for practical reasons, I transcribed interviews at the end of my fieldwork. During the process of transcription, I familiarised myself with the data and took note of items to explore further.

### **The coding process**

In outlining the research questions, I used thematic analysis to develop a typology of responses (Ezzy, 2002). In other words, I reduced the data to categories of words and patterns, explored relationships between concepts, coded those relationships, and mapped them out.

I started the coding with the idea of that "a code is a *word or brief phrase* that captures the essence of why you think a particular bit of data may be useful" (Braun and Clarke, 2013: 207). There are two major stages in the coding process: an initial stage of identification and labelling, variously referred to as first-level, initial, or open coding, and a second stage of refinement or interpretation to develop more analytical categories or clusters, known as 'focussed coding' (Saldaña, 2009).

I started to code the entire data set with open-coding procedures following the topics covered in the interviews, such as understandings, difficulties, and outcomes of children's participation. This was the initial stage (as mentioned by Saldaña). I used the NVivo software to code phrases and paragraphs across the interviews transcripts. I

regarded the software as a useful tool for managing my data and easily searching through it, rather than an essential tool for analysis.

For the second stage I identified recurring patterns for the different categories of participants in both case studies, and then clustered and quantified them in a matrix on a case-by-case basis using Microsoft Word document tables.

I cut and pasted the data excerpts and, then, in a Word document, summarised similarities and differences for each person. In doing so, I focussed more on coding and refining indicators such as knowledge and skills acquired and children's and staff's relationships. I looked at the similarities and differences for each respondent within the different categories/patterns.

With those same categories, I did a cross-case synthesis (a matrix in a Microsoft Word document) to compare the categories across the two case studies. The cross-case analyses is meant to establish if there are "patterns of association within cases that hold true across cases, without losing sights of the particularities of each case" (Bazeley, 2013: 285). In doing so, the robustness of my findings was enhanced. Moreover, the qualitative data from different sources (children, staff members, and graduate members) and the method of data collection (observation notes, semi-structured interviews, and documents) was triangulated. Triangulation was used to gain multiple perspectives on the issues being investigated in order to compare perspectives and see similarities and differences between issues. Triangulation was used to confirm (or contradict) patterns in the research.

I sought to be alive to differences by background characteristics, such as participants' gender or extent or length of experience of participation, in analysis. When these are



relevant to the identified themes, I have discussed them within findings chapters. Overall, I was surprised that gender was not a more significant issue, given the literature review. This could be an artefact of my methods, and particularly unequal numbers of girls and boys participating in the research.

At this stage, new categorisations emerged from the data, such as organisational structure (relations between staff members)—an issue raised by the participants—and they were consequently analysed. Then, the themes as “an outcome of coding, categorisation, and analytic reflection” (Saldaña, 2009: 13) were identified and related to the literature review. Thus, as analysis progressed, I focused on three themes that highlighted issues for the findings chapters and answered the research questions, namely: competencies, child-adults relationships, and outcome in children’s participation. Those themes were translated into three questions for each findings chapter:

Chapter 5: How do children practically achieve competencies in different settings?

Chapter 6: How do children and staff members interact with each other during the participation project process?

Chapter 7: How, if it at all, do children influence their local community due to the participation project?

To relate back to my three initial research questions mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, I realised that my data did not answer the third question: how can the processes of children’s participation be improved at the local level. From both case studies, when I asked children about how the NGOs could improve the participation project, most of them said that the organisation should continue what they were doing, with the proviso that more children should be involved in the activities, because for

most of them it was an amazing experience and they learned a lot by being involved. For the adults, I was hoping to gain answers through the FGD, in making them think together about the nine standards for measuring quality of participation (General Comment, 2009). However, for the Tamil Nadu case study, as explained earlier (Section 3.4.2), the hierarchy level impeded free discussion among staff. In the Scottish case study, I realised that I should have planned more time for the staff FGD session in order to be reflexive to the discussion and not limited by having to gain answers from the questions. With all this information, I decided not to include the third research question in my analysis of the data. However, I answer this question indirectly in the conclusion, as the section related to the implication of the research for policy and practitioners suggests how to improve children's participation in communities.

### **3.6.2 Writing-up**

The analysis interprets the data, connects it to the research question and, importantly, ties our data and analysis in to existing scholarly literature... it's about locating the analysis in relation to what already exists, and showing how your analysis contributes to, develop further, or challenges what we already know about a topic. (Braun and Clarke, 2013: 257)

I followed this advice: the empirical chapters have included quotations as a way of illustrating overarching themes and typical experiences; if a quotation reflects an account which is either unusual or an exception, I have indicated so. Points were illustrated with quotations to provide rich representation of the interviewees' accounts. I attempted to include an even selection of quotations from different interviewees, although some participants – particularly in the case of children (current and graduate members) and staff members—were quoted more than others. For the children, in both

case studies, some of the children were more articulate and talkative than and some were very brief in their answers, more reserved, and/or less willing to give details. As a result, the study includes more data from older children (15–16 years), as they were more profuse and there was limited input from younger children (13–14) in the study. This caused me to reflect on the age bias, as described in Section 3.7.1.

To summarise, the range of data collection techniques employed and the cross-referencing of data and analytic categories within and across observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentary analysis also helped me address the robustness of the data for my research.

### **3.7 METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS**

This section aims to reflect on the methodological limitations when collecting data during the field work, reliance on an interpreter, and being an outsider in both countries in which the studies took place. Attempts to achieve my method did not always work, as mentioned in Section 3.5.2 (reflexivity). I made every effort to fulfil my plans for participant recruitment, but they were not always successful. As it became clear that not all participants were easily accessible or that the particular timing of children's activities constrained access, I needed to adapt and maximise the opportunities I had. This section will reflect on such limitations as well as on how I could have better adjusted to such circumstances to strengthen this research project.

#### **3.7.1 Limitations in the data collection**

In both case studies, I identified behavioural signs of dissent with children aged 13 to

14 years old, such as lack of eye contact with me, repeatedly saying ‘I don’t know’, or playing with the paper provided. The study thus focused more on older children as there was limited input from younger children (similar to work by Martin and colleagues (2015) in Ireland). Indeed, there are differences between age groups. A common mistake is to consider children as a homogenous group, to not acknowledge differences among them, and choose methods that do not appropriately capture their experiences (Martin et al., 2015). In both case studies, I noticed most of the children aged of 13–14 years old were less comfortable with the interview format than the 15–16 year-olds, who were very talkative. I would have preferred to integrate the younger participants more, but I was confronted by children’s shyness and/or aversion to giving details and realise now that alternative methods may have been more successful.

I also realised that conducting interviews in schools was not helpful because of the school bell, time limits, and the issue of consent. The option to conduct interviews in school was decided upon because the participation project with the Scottish NGO had just ended and no further meetings were planned. It was straightforward to conduct the interviews in school with the help of the gatekeeper (staff), who liaised with the head teacher and children. I was not able to do follow-up interviews, save for one participant, as it was the end of the school year and children went on holiday.

I did not have access to one of the secondary schools for interviews, and I ended up conducting the interviews at the children’s home—their parents had offered me this option when I met them at the end of the project event. The relaxed environment with no time pressure at the children’s homes allowed them to speak more.

If I were to do this research again, I would prefer to collect all the data for the Scottish

case study first, and avoid the five-month gap with the children, as I did not have the opportunity to meet some of the children before conducting the interviews in school. For both case studies, I would have used creative visual methods for the interview process with the children aged 13–14 years, in order to generate respondent curiosity and maintain their interest in the research process (Gallagher, 2009a). My reasonable attempts to collect data did not always work, however this is usual for an ambitious and exploratory study of this nature undertaken for a PhD, wherein my resources, including time, were limited.

### **3.7.2 Relying on interpreters in Tamil Nadu**

Interpreters are fundamental to the research process when a foreign researcher who is not fluent in the language of study participants is working in a different ethno-linguistic culture (MacKenzie, 2016: 168).

Doing qualitative research as an outside researcher might be an obstacle. One of the threats to research is that the interpreter is not trained correctly and does not have a good understanding of the research project (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 1999). Indeed, “it is very important to hire experienced qualitative interviewers, preferably those who have experience conducting research with culturally and linguistically diverse groups” (Kosny et al., 2014: 844).

I used an interpreter in the Tamil Nadu case study only. I had previously spent two and a half years in Tamil Nadu, which gave me a good understanding of the culture and people. I was planning to take Tamil classes (as I have only a rudimentary knowledge of Tamil) in order to supervise the translation of the interpreter and to have some direct

contact with the interviewees. I was aware that interpreters can affect the data collection, especially when conversing with participants. However, due to delays in obtaining my visa I could only stay in Tamil Nadu for four months, and thus had no time to take Tamil classes.

I had already experienced working with an interpreter through my previous work in Tamil Nadu, so I was familiar with how to recruit interpreters and some pitfalls to avoid in the relationship between myself, the interpreter and the participants.

I hired three interpreters for the interviews, as the time schedules of each were limited. I took time to explain my research and about the confidentiality of the data. From my experience of working with interpreters, I knew to request that the interpreter be my voice, meaning that they would not take initiative and add questions, nor would they have side-conversations during the interview.

Interpreting in real-time is a difficult exercise (Murray and Wynne, 2001; Esposito, 2001). Ideally, I would have been fluent in Tamil and not have needed an interpreter. I would also have preferred to use the original version of the interviews and have an interpreter translate them in English after the fact. I did not have either the time or the funding to do so. I thus have full audio-recordings of the interviews, but I have transcribed the English content only. I sought to check the quality of interpreter translation, by asking a Tamil speaker from Tamil Nadu to consider a random sample of interview audio-recordings and the English translations. This Tamil speaker approved the accuracy of interpretation and helped me with some words that were difficult to translate. Because the translation was done using real-time interpretation, it was difficult to have the exact words fully translated. Indeed, “experiences, as described by the participant,

are filtered through the lens of the interpreter and can be simplified (or lost) in the process” (Kosny et al., 2014: 844). It is impossible for interpreters to provide an exact-match translation of the interview, especially in the context of an active interview (Choi et al., 2012). As such, I decided not to use direct quotations; instead I paraphrased what the participants said so as not to ‘pretend’ I was using a direct translation. For the findings chapters, I wrote ‘interpreter’ in brackets when I used an interpreter for the interview. I also used follow-up interviews to ask the participants to clarify answers if I found the translation was not clear.

Having an interpreter was additionally helpful, because I was fortunate enough to have a separate room in the NGO office in which to conduct my interviews with children and staff members. As such, I would not need to be concerned about staff hearing an interview with a child or with one of their colleagues—further protecting privacy. However, I found that the separate room was not helpful in making some children and staff members comfortable. When they were in their former NGO office, they were normally within a bigger room, with a mix of children and adults around. So having a third person, an interpreter, eased this sense of isolation for the child or staff participants. When an interpreter was there, the participants seemed much more comfortable.

### **3.7.3 Being an outsider in the research**

As I had previously lived and worked in Tamil Nadu, I knew how to behave and what to wear, which was significant in relation to understanding Indian culture more deeply. As such, I was not a complete outsider in the South Indian context, as I was used to engaging with the cultural issues in Tamil Nadu. This experience connects to Husain’s (2006) ideas of cultural competence through cultural knowledge, awareness

knowledge and sensitivity knowledge of the cross-cultural interaction. Like Husain (2006), I considered gaining cultural competence a continuous journey.

I also had Indian friends who supported me during my fieldwork and helped when I had cultural issues. In the case of Scotland, as I was doing my PhD at the University of Edinburgh, participants in the research easily identified me. Moreover, I had already spent one year in Scotland during the first year of my PhD, so I had some understanding of the context and of the Scottish accent.

Being an outsider also encouraged me to be more curious and meet extra people in order to better understand the wider context of children's participation, especially with academics (in both countries) and my interpreters in Tamil Nadu. Being an outsider also allowed me to ask questions that I might not ask if I were from that country, as I would have taken for granted some specific behaviour on participation.

Research participants might not be familiar with being interviewed by a foreigner, which can lead to children feeling uncomfortable speaking and sharing his/her experience. In the Tamil Nadu case study, it was not the first time children and staff had met a foreigner, as the NGO had regular volunteers from abroad, however for most participants, it was the first time they had been interviewed. As such, the presence of the interpreter was appreciated—having someone from the city facilitated the process. Although I found that being an outsider in Tamil Nadu was a slight barrier, the interpreters were largely an asset in establishing relationships and trust with the participants.

For the Scottish case study, being French was an asset for me, as some of the children and staff members asked me questions about my country, as they had experiences trav-



elling in Europe and in France. Thus, I created relationships with the research participants in Scotland as well.

### **3.8 CONCLUSION**

This chapter considered key aspects of my research design, and has justified the choice of Tamil Nadu and Scotland as contexts in a multiple case study approach. This chapter has also explained why focus group discussions, observations, interviews, and documents became the methods of data collection, and how they corroborated one another. Particular attention was paid to ethical considerations, my role as an outsider in both case studies, the need to rely on an interpreter, and on the methodological limitations.

The research was created to develop an in-depth understanding of how NGOs implement children's participation in their communities with regard to two specific settings: Tamil Nadu and Scotland. A case study approach was chosen using qualitative methods due to the need for in-depth data collection with multiple sources of information, as well as to provide insight into the implementation of participation. The purpose of the research design was not to generalise findings to other cases, but to explore themes, connections, and patterns relating to the implementation of children's participation in two specific contexts. Such explorations have theoretical generalisability and, as such, implications for policy and practice (Luker, 2008).

In this chapter I have conveyed my personal and intellectual journey through which this thesis came about. By justifying and making transparent my research design and analysis, I have demonstrated how my research was developed. Now, I move to present the contexts of Tamil Nadu and Scotland in order to provide background to the analysis

of the research findings.



## **CHAPTER 4 : CONTEXTS FOR THE CASE STUDIES IN TAMIL NADU AND SCOTLAND**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter contextualizes two case studies, by providing a snapshot of the children's lives in India and the UK, with a focus on Tamil Nadu and Scotland. Section 4.2 explores the social and economic contexts; section 4.3 considers the legislation, policies, and practices of children's participation; and section 4.4 provides an overview of the children's participation project for each case study.

The background in a case study research is significant, especially in an instrumental case study, where the contexts are scrutinized (Stake, 1994). The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child advocate for "an understanding of the socio-economic, environmental and cultural context of children's lives" (CRC/C/GC/12 par 134(c)). Gal adds:

Communities and societies also differ in their perceptions of childhood and the meanings of responsibility, capability, and rights. Such social constructions affect the inclination of various communities to allow child participation and the level and quality of such participation. (2015: 462)

The explanation of the contextual factors for this chapter is driven by two case studies where the focus is very much on the points that are relevant to understand each case. For instance, the topic of child labour is significant in the Tamil Nadu case study as it is one of the issues taken forward by the children's groups and the NGO that advocates

for a childhood free from child labour. In both case studies, the children who participated in the research were not the most privileged children in the society (as it is where NGOs get funding for a project): in this situation, aspects of economy, health and education become especially relevant to understand better the lived experience of children.

## **4.2 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXTS**

This section considers the social and economic conditions in Tamil Nadu and in Scotland. Both the Human Development Index (HDI), which combines economic, health, and education indicators, and the demographic component are considered.

### **4.2.1 Demographics**

India is a federal union of states comprised of 29 states and seven union territories, with a population of 1.25 billion in 2013 (UNICEF, 2015). The state of Tamil Nadu is located in southeast India (Appendix 5), and with a population of 72.14 million people, it is the sixth most populous state in India (Census India, 2011a). In 2013, 35 per cent of India's population was under 18 years of age and 9.7 per cent was under five years of age (UNICEF, 2015). However in the 2011 Census of India, Tamil Nadu's population under 18 is not mentioned. There is reference to the population less than six years of age being 9.56 per cent (Census India, 2011a). The religious census of 2011 reported that the population of Tamil Nadu was 87.6 per cent Hindu; 6.1 per cent Christian, and 5.9 per cent Muslim (Census India, 2011b).

The UK is composed of four nations: England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland,

whose combined population totaled over 63 million in 2013 (UNICEF, 2015). Scotland is located in the north of the UK (Appendix 6). With a population of 5.347 million people in 2014, Scotland was the second most populous nation in the UK after England (National Records of Scotland, 2015a). In 2013, 21.1 per cent of the UK's was population under 18 years of age, and 6.3 per cent under 5 years of age (UNICEF, 2015). In Scotland, population statistics for June 2014 showed there were 292,230 children under 5 years old, or 5.5 per cent of the population, and 1,033,183 children under 18 years old (19 per cent of the population). Over half (53.8 per cent) of the population in Scotland stated their religion as Christian; 36.6 per cent stated that they had no religion; 7 per cent did not answer; 1.4 per cent identified as Muslim, and 1.1 per cent of the population identified as either Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, or Jewish (Census Scotland, 2011).

#### **4.2.2 Economy, Health and Education**

The Human Development Index (HDI) combines three dimensions: economy, health, education indicators and ranks a country's progress according to these keys indicators.

The Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite index focusing on three basic dimensions of human development: to lead a long and healthy life, measured by life expectancy at birth; the ability to acquire knowledge, measured by mean years of schooling and expected years of schooling; and the ability to achieve a decent standard of living, measured by gross national income per capita (Human Development Report, 2015: 2).

This section will consider the three composites of the HDI in an effort to contextualize

the contexts of India and the UK, and more precisely in Tamil Nadu and Scotland. I have referred to the Source Human Development Statistical Annex 2015 for the data. Then I used the HDI index as it gives information on economy, health, and education for India and the UK. The HDI is also used to question national policy choices (Human Development Report, 2015).

### **Economy**

The HDI ranking is the level of a country's development, and uses a specific definition of development as proposed by the HDI. According to the HDI 2015, the UK ranks 14th and India 130th amongst 188 countries in 2014. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms shows the economic growth and the standard of living in each country. Not surprisingly, in 2011, the GDP in India (\$5,238) is significantly lower than in the UK (\$37,017).

However, India is the fourth largest economy in the world after the USA, China, and Japan, and the second fastest growing large economy (Corbridge et al., 2013). In India, the living standards of the middle class have been improving due to fast economic growth. Despite these achievements, wide disparities exist between and within states, and inequalities persist amongst different subgroups of the population, notably

amongst women and girls, castes, and tribes (Plan, 2013).<sup>1</sup> The caste system is still a barrier to social progress in India: for instance, the Dalit labourers' lives continue to be shaped by discrimination (Corbridge et al., 2013). In the same vein, Drèze and Sen (2014) report few perceived changes for people living in poor communities. Drèze and Sen (2014: 9) add, "the resources newly created have not been utilized adequately to relieve the gigantic social deprivation of the underdogs of society". India as a whole, including Tamil Nadu, still struggles against poverty, food insecurity, malnutrition, illiteracy, child labour, child marriage, and discrimination against girls (Saeed, 2014).

Tamil Nadu ranks ninth in the HDI ranking amongst the 29 Indian states according to the HDI (Suryanarayana and Agrawal, 2013). Tamil Nadu does well on sub-indices for income, as it is one of the most prosperous states and has the second largest per capita income in India (Suryanarayana et al., 2011). It is also the second largest economy in India, with a GSDP (Gross State Domestic Product) of US\$150 billion in 2014–15 (MSME-Development Institute, 2015).

By international standards, the UK is a wealthy country: it ranks 14th on the HDI 2015, as mentioned previously. However, the Gini Coefficient (with a range between 0 and 1, measuring inequality in households' incomes) indicates inequality in UK society.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "caste" refers to a strict hierarchical social system that is often based on the notions of purity and pollution, in which individuals placed at the bottom of the system may face exclusion and discrimination in a wide range of areas. The concept of 'caste system' is primarily associated with the South Asian region, where its existence is linked to the religiously sanctioned social structure of Hinduism, which identified four original and endogamous groups, or castes, called *varnas* (Human Rights Council Report A/HRC/31/56, par 26).

For Morrow (2013: 268): 'scheduled castes (SCs) are the lowest in the traditional caste structure and were earlier considered to be 'untouchables' (Dalits). SCs have been subjected to discrimination for years and had no access to basic services, including education. Backward castes or classes (BCs) are people belonging to a group of castes who are considered to be 'backward' in view of the low level in the caste structure. Scheduled tribes are indigenous communities, who are traditionally disadvantaged and live in the forests and mountainous areas'.



The UK's Gini Coefficient (0.34) positions the country at the rank of 28 out of the 34 OECD countries in the late-2000s. For 2010-2011, Scotland's Gini coefficient (0.30) was lower than that of the UK as a whole. From the World Development Indicators 2013, the Gini coefficient (a value of 0 represents absolute equality, a value of 100 absolute inequality) indicates more inequality in the UK (36 per cent) compared to India (33.9 per cent).

Scotland is a well-off nation: as an indicator of economic activity and standard of living, GDP per capita in Scotland in 2010 was US\$34,184 and in the UK as a whole was US\$35,715 (Scottish Government, 2013). The Quarterly National Accounts Scotland (2016) indicates that over the decade 1998–2008 the Scottish economy grew at an average rate of around 2.3 per cent per year. This period of growth ended in the second half of 2008 when the global financial crisis and recession affected the international, UK, and Scottish economies. There has been steadier growth since the start of 2013, and Scottish GDP is estimated to have returned to its pre-recession level during the first quarter of 2014.

## **Poverty**

Poverty is an important factor to consider as children who participated in the research were underprivileged, living in more disadvantaged situations than other children. In the Tamil Nadu case study, children were from the Dalit community, the lowest caste in Indian society, living in slum areas. In Tamil Nadu, 5.79 million people live in slums (Census India, 2011c). Chandramouli defined the basic characteristics of slums as:

...dilapidated and infirm housing structures, poor ventilation, acute over-crowding, faulty alignment of streets, inadequate lighting, paucity of safe drinking water, water

logging during rains, absence of toilet facilities and non-availability of basic physical and social services. (2003: 82)

In the Scottish case study, children came from a wider range of socio-economic backgrounds. The next section examines the poverty level in both contexts to understand the living conditions of the children who participated in the research and their local contexts.

In India, a new poverty line has been calculated that considers the normative levels of adequate nourishment, clothing, house rent, conveyance, education, and a level of other non-food expenses.<sup>2</sup> In 2011–2012, the poverty line was at Rs.972 (less than 10 pounds) per person per month in rural areas, and at Rs.1407 (around 14 pounds) per person per month in urban areas. In Tamil Nadu, for the same period, the poverty line was designated at Rs.1081.94 (around 11 pounds) in rural areas and at Rs.1380.36 (around 14 pounds) in urban ones (Government of India, 2014: 64). In Tamil Nadu, 22.4 per cent of its population was living under the poverty line, which was less than the national average at the time, standing at 29.5 per cent (Government of India, 2014: 66).

Drèze and Sen (2014: 174) analyse Tamil Nadu's commitment to comprehensive and universal social policies with a commitment to the principle of universalism that applies to public health, school midday meals, free uniforms, textbooks, stationery and health check-ups, childcare, employment guarantee, public transport, water and elec-

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<sup>2</sup> From the report of the Government of India (2014) : the Planning Commission commissioned the Expert Group (Rangarajan) to examine the estimation of poverty in India. Poverty lines estimated using the methodology provided by the Expert Group (Tendulkar) did not reflect the changing times and aspirations of the people of India.

tricity. However, the living conditions in slums are usually unhygienic and are an important factor in accelerating transmission of various air and water borne diseases (Chandramouli, 2003).

The UK is one of the world's largest national economies, nevertheless, 28 per cent of all children lived in low-income households in 2013–2014 (Department of Work and Pensions 2015). In the UK, people are considered as living in poverty if they live in households with less than 60 per cent of the median household income; the key measure used by the UK and Scottish governments. In Scotland, for the period 2013/14, 940,000 people live in poverty (18 per cent of the population); among them, 210,000 are children (22 per cent of all children) (Scottish Government, 2015). Recent modelling by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) suggests that by 2020, up to 100,000 additional children will be pushed into poverty, raising the proportion of impoverished children in Scotland to 26.2 per cent (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2014).

For the *Child Poverty Action Group* in Scotland, the key drivers of child poverty are: low pay and underemployment; worklessness (i.e. lack of suitable employment opportunities, a lack of suitable child care, caring responsibilities, ill health/disability, and employer discrimination); and inadequate social security benefits (despite being intended as a safety net against poverty, many families are living in poverty).<sup>3</sup> As mentioned by an NGO alternative report to the UNCRC (Together, 2015), the rise in costs of goods and services, including food and childcare, combined with welfare reforms and low wages, make it challenging for some families to afford the material resources and services that children need. In the UK and Scotland, a family can receive child tax

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cpag.org.uk/scotland/child-poverty-facts-and-figures> [Accessed 06/04/2016]

credit to help their children grow up. The UK social security schemes include the National Insurance Scheme (NIS), which provides cash benefits for sickness, unemployment, the death of a partner, and retirement. The child benefit and Child Tax Credit schemes provide cash benefits for people raising children.

Related to poverty, child labour still persists in Tamil Nadu. Children are often forced to work in order to supplement the household income (Amuthan, 2015). Children in Tamil Nadu are engaged in manufacturing industries like brick kilns, silk, seed, handloom and textiles, and in service sector jobs, such as work in tea shops, automobile shops, rag picking, and domestic labour (Amuthan, 2015). In India, legislation on Child Labour penalizes employers financially for employing children in factory or industries, as well in domestic work (Saeed, 2014). In Tamil Nadu, the number of children between 5 and 14 years engaged in such work, reduced from 419,000 in 2001 to 284,000 in 2011 (Aditi , 2015).

The Right to Education (RTE) Act, passed by the Indian Government in 2009, should be effective in abolishing child labour, as the Act guarantees the right of every child between the ages of 6 and 14 to free and compulsory elementary education. Similarly, the *Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act* of 1986 emphasises the interdiction of hazardous work for children below 14 years of age. Hazardous work is defined as being harmful to the health, safety, or morals of children (ILO, Article 3). The topic of child labour is important as it is one of the issues taken forward by the children's groups as mentioned earlier.

In Scotland, there is legislation limiting children's employment, such as *The Children*

*and Young Persons (Scotland) Act* of 1937, and restrictions on employment of children. Additionally, unauthorized school absences before the age of 16 are illegal. Under *The Education (Scotland) Act* of 1980 (Section 30), it is the legal duty of parents and guardians to provide sufficient education for their school-aged child or children. Parents and guardians failing in the above duty make themselves liable to prosecution under Section 43 of *The Education (Scotland) Act* of 1980. Parents and guardians who fail to meet this duty can face a fine of up to £1,000 or imprisonment, or both. Thus, in Scotland, parents are penalised if their child does not go to school, in significant contrast to the situation in Tamil Nadu.

To conclude, the poverty context in Tamil Nadu and Scotland is widely varied. While Tamil Nadu is the second largest economy in India, and although the state government promotes the principle of universalism, people continue to live in slums, and 22.4 per cent of the state population lives below the poverty line. Moreover, child labour in Tamil Nadu remains an important issue. Scotland, on the other hand, experiences a relatively high GDP per capita (US\$34,184 in 2010, close to the UK at US\$35,715). However, 18 per cent of Scotland's population live under the poverty line, 22 per cent of which are children. Scotland has a good welfare system with a security net for children: the child benefit and Child Tax Credit schemes provide cash benefits for people raising children.

## **Health**

The HDI health indicators show the overall mortality level of a population. In India, the life expectancy at birth is 68 years of age, around 12 years less than in the UK, where life expectancy was 80.7 years in 2014. The mortality rate for children under 5

years of age in 2013 was dramatically different between the two countries: in India the rate was 52.7 per 1,000 live births whereas in the UK it was 4.6 per 1,000 live births. However, the World Bank (2015) calculated the mortality rate for children under 5 years old at 57 per 1,000 live births in India and 5 per 1,000 live births in the UK in 2011. Thus, even if the mortality rate was still high in India in 2013, it is much better than in earlier times, and it is stable in the UK.

Drèze and Sen's (2014) mention that Tamil Nadu fares better than other states in India with regard to health. In 2011, the life expectancy (at birth) in Tamil Nadu was 69 years of age: 71 years for women and 67 years for men, similar to India as whole. However, the mortality rate of children under five years of age in 2011 was 25 per 1,000 live births, significantly lower than in India's average. Drèze and Sen (2014) note that the mortality rate for girls is due not only to female infanticide, but also to neglect of female children's health care and nutrition. As an example, Srinivasan (2014) who conducts research in Tamil Nadu indicated that:

Girls reported differential treatment vis-à-vis their brothers, mainly in food allocation and domestic chores. Boys were generally encouraged to eat better, and were given better food and food of their choice, whereas girls had to make do with what was available. (2014: 237)

Another explication of the differential treatment is that girls are not raised to stay at home as they will go to their future marital homes, whereas sons are seen as old-age security for their families (Srinivasan, 2014). Srinivasan (2014) indicates that there is also a dislike of daughters for economic and cultural reasons. For example, the non-negotiability of a timely marriage for daughters, the indispensability of dowry and the

burden of preserving a girl's chastity are main reasons for the female mortality.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1960s, Tamil Nadu was the first state to establish a nutrition programme at the state level with free and universal midday meals in primary schools (Drèze and Sen, 2014). The scheme was a pioneering effort to protect children from hunger and increase enrolment in primary schools, and as such, the nutritional status of children in Tamil Nadu improved significantly than in the rest of India: "The proportion of underweight children is 29.8 per cent whereas at the all-India level it is 40.4 per cent" (Diwakar, 2014: 172). In 2009–10, government schools provided 97.7 per cent of children with a midday meal (above the India-wide average of 87.5 per cent) during school terms. Furthermore, 94.2 per cent of the children in school had health check-ups (greatly above the India-wide average of 55.3 per cent).

Another consideration when looking at the health context in Tamil Nadu is the living conditions in slums. Chandramouli (2003) cites the main problems as access to drinking water, availability of electricity, latrines, and drainage facilities. This includes the slums in Tamil Nadu. Agarwal and Taneja (2005) highlight the differential health burden on children living in slums. For them:

Conditions differ with some slums having adequate water points, while people of other slums having to stand in queues to access poor quality water. Similarly, there are slums without any access to sanitation services. Some are lucky enough to have public latrines. (2005: 235)

In Scotland, for the period 2012–2014, life expectancy (at birth) was 79.1 years of age:

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<sup>4</sup> The dowry system requires payments from the bride's family to the groom or groom's family at the time of marriage as a condition of the marriage.

81.1 for women and 77.1 for men (National Records of Scotland, 2015b). The infant mortality rate was 3.7 per cent per 1,000 live births in 2012 (ISD, 2014). In Scotland, the National Health Service (NHS) provides healthcare and is largely free at the point of delivery. The NHS also provides medical, dental, and optical treatment. Liddell (2008) notes that, for living conditions for children, residing in fuel-poor homes is associated with a significantly greater risk of health problems, especially respiratory issues. Poor weight gain and low levels of adequate nutritional intake have also been found—the ‘heat-or-eat’ effect. A household is classified as being in ‘fuel poverty’ if, in order to maintain an acceptable level of temperature throughout the home, the occupants would have to spend more than 10 per cent of their income on household fuel use. The Scottish Government (2014) cites that the estimated rate of fuel poverty was 34.9 per cent; 78 per cent of households on low income are classified as fuel poor (Scottish Government, 2012). During the time of my fieldwork, Scotland had a targeted system of Free School Meals (FSM) means-tested according to parents’ income in primary schools during the school term.

To conclude, the health situations in Tamil Nadu and Scotland are divergent, however each locality struggles with its own problems. While Tamil Nadu’s citizens are in better health than those in other Indian states, partially due to the primary school nutrition programme implemented in the 1960s, child mortality rates are still high, especially female mortality rates. Health conditions in Tamil Nadu also suffer from the living conditions in slums, which are usually unhygienic. In contrast, Scotland benefits from the NHS, which provides largely free health care. Yet the local environment leads to issues of respiratory difficulties (as well as generally greater health risks) due to fuel poverty.



## Education

The HDI education indicators (2015) show that from 2005–2013, 62.8 per cent of the population aged 15 or older in India was literate, however no data were provided for the UK. The mean years of schooling in India and the UK indicates a large gap: in India, people completed 5.4 years of education compared to the UK: 13.1 years.

In the last decade, India has made dramatic progress in school enrolment (Singh and Bangay, 2014); most children are now spending their daytime in primary school. In Tamil Nadu, the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) for primary education from 2010–2011 had reached 98.15 per cent (Gupta, 2013). However, the number of pupils per teacher in India is 35 for the period 2008–2014 (HDI, 2015), which undermines the quality of education.

The Indian education system is extraordinarily diverse, and peculiar in that a comparatively small group of children from the privileged classes enjoy a high quality education, while the bulk of the population is confined to education arrangements that are, in many ways, poor or deficient (Dreze and Sen, 2014). For Corbridge et al. (2013) the main difficulty for Dalits (one of the lower castes in the Indian society) is not access to primary school, but remaining in the education system while experiencing disincentives to study, caste-based discrimination, and poverty. The UN Committee's concluding observations on India (2014) confirm that there has been persistent discrimination against children from Scheduled Castes and Tribes (CRC/C/IND/CO/3-4, par 31). Rampal (2008) notes that poor children in India are deprived of serious adult support and attention at school, and when they decide to stay, teachers denigrate them as 'backward'. A change might appear with *The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory*

*Education (RTE) Act of 2009*, which includes provisions against corporal punishment and makes a 25 per cent reservation mandatory for disadvantaged children in private schools. The RTE Act of 2009 provides a legal expectation of free and compulsory education for all children aged 6 to 14 years. The RTE came into effect nationally on 1st April 2010, however it took another 17 months to be adopted by the Tamil Nadu government (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2011).

There has been a vast expansion of private schooling in India. Private schools are perceived by many parents as being of higher quality than government schools and thus likely to lead to better job prospects (Galab et al., 2011; Woodhead et al., 2013). For Singh and Bangay (2014), data suggest that rising numbers of parents are turning away from free government schooling and sending their children to low fee private schools that supply poorer quality education. This is due to the perception by parents that all private schools are of a higher quality than government schools, and thus likely to lead to improved job prospects. However these low-quality private schools are mainly located in slums. The fee can be in the range of Rs50 per month (less than 1 pound) to Rs600 per month (approximately 7 pounds). The *Young Lives* research project in Andhra Pradesh reveals that even the poorest families, whose children study in government schools, are opting for after-school tuition sessions, in the hope that their children will have a brighter future (Singh and Bangay, 2014: 147). Tamil Nadu is one of the most advanced states in India in providing education. The state registered the literacy rate at 73.45 per cent, the primary school dropout rate is one of the lowest in comparison to other states (Amuthan, 2015: 530).

Between 2007–08, there was no marked bias against girls in education: 94 per cent of

boys and 93.8 per cent of girls aged 15–19 years completed five years of schooling for the period 2007/8 (Drèze and Sen, 2014; Table Part 3: Literacy and Education). Thus, gender disparities in education are not statistically significant in Tamil Nadu.

In the UK, including Scotland, the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) for primary education in 2013 was 100 per cent (World Bank, 2015). The number of pupils per teachers in Scotland in primary schools was 16.7 in 2015 (Scottish Government Statistic, 2015). In Scotland, *The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act* of 2000 says that, “the education is directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential”. Moreover, the national Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) (2004) was designed to provide a coherent, flexible, and enriched curriculum for individuals aged 3 to 18. It ensures that all children in Scotland develop the attributes, knowledge, and skills they need to flourish in life and work. The Curriculum promotes four capacities: successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society (Scottish Government, 2008).

Access to school in Scotland is different than in Tamil Nadu, as the majority of pupils attend State schools (Local Authority schools). State schools are owned and operated by local authorities that act as education authorities. Most education authorities allocate children to schools in their area by defining catchment areas for each school, but parents can also express a preference (OECD, 2015). There are also 100 independent, privately run schools in Scotland that provide education at primary and secondary levels (OECD, 2015: 10). All children who took part in the research went to State schools.

The governments and communities in Tamil Nadu and Scotland clearly conceptualize

the role and value of education differently. Education in Tamil Nadu seeks to help children to get a job in the future, whereas in Scotland, education is directed towards the development of children's full potential. A further, big difference between Tamil Nadu and Scotland is the quality of education. For instance, the student to teacher ratio in India is 35:1, while in Scotland it is only 16.7:1. Additionally, the majority of students in Scotland attend State schools even though private schools are an option. In Tamil Nadu, there is an educational disparity among social groups. Increasingly, parents turn from free government provisions and send their children to low fee private schools, though the quality of education is still lacking at these schools, driving parents to pay for extra tuition sessions after school.

To conclude section 4.2, Tamil Nadu performs better compared to others states in India, promotes the principle of universalism, applying it to public health, offering school midday meals, free uniforms, textbooks, stationery, health check-ups, child-care, guaranteed employment, public transport, water, and electricity. Nevertheless, there is a disparity among social groups in the education system, a high female infanticide rate, poor living conditions in slums, and a significant number of children engaged in hazardous, illegal work. In contrast, Scotland has an extensive welfare state, with programmes ranging from the *National Health Service* and *Free School Meals* (FSM), to compulsory primary and secondary schooling and a 'safety net' of means-tested benefits to provide a minimum living standard.

## **4.3 CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION**

Both countries accepted children's participation rights when they ratified the UNCRC in 1991 (UK) and 1992 (India). Nevertheless, the UNCRC has not yet become part of domestic law within either country. The approach taken in both the UK and India could be described as 'sectoral law reform', that is, examination of legislation concerning a variety of areas including education in order to make the changes needed to bring existing legislation into line with the Convention. The Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights, known as *Together* (2013) notes that the Scottish Government prefers a case-by-case approach to bring the UNCRC into Scottish policy and practice, with any risks being considered as piecemeal.

### **4.3.1 Legislation and policies for children's participation**

#### **Tamil Nadu**

There is no specific legislation for children's participation in Tamil Nadu, but the State is guided by India's Five-Year Plans within its national economic programs. In the current plan, a chapter on Women's Agency and Child Rights is included. National policies accompany the Five-Year Plans to reflect the developmental priorities and agenda of the government, paying special attention to children's needs in areas such as education or nutrition. The first Five-Year Plan was developed in 1951 for the period 1951–1956; India is currently in its twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012–2017).

Each Five-Year Plan co-exists with a *National Plan of Action for Children*. In the fifth

Five-Year Plan (1974–1979), the adoption of a *National Policy for Children* was a significant shift from a welfare to a developmental approach. This policy describes children as supremely important national assets and regards the State as responsible for providing basic services to children, both before and after their birth, and also during their youth and throughout all stages of the child’s development (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2011). In the tenth Five-Year Plan (2002–2007), a rights-based approach was included to ensure the survival, development, protection, and participation of children (Saeed, 2014). It was accompanied by the *National Charter for Children* in 2004, which included provisions for survival, health and nutrition, education, protection rights, freedom of expression, freedom of association, and peaceful assembly. In the following year, the *National Plan of Action for Children* (2005) recognised the importance of child participation, and has since laid out strategies that help promote child participation at all levels of planning and the implementation of programmes for children (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2011). In the *Concluding Observation for India*, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2014) notes:

There is a lack of information with respect to progress at the State and district levels concerning the development of their respective action plans, in line with the National Policy for Children, as well as of resources allocated to ensure the effective implementation of the policy. (CRC/C/IND/CO/3-4, para 13)

In the twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012–2017), the chapter on ‘Women’s Agency and Child Rights’ emphasises the fulfilment of children’s rights to survival, development, protection, and participation as the foundation of human development and as the driver of faster, more inclusive and sustainable growth. The ‘Child Rights’ section requests that children’s views should be mainstreamed into policy and programme formulation

processes, especially when taking into account viewpoints from girls and children from minority groups or marginalised communities. One of the priorities of this plan is to make information on child rights, laws, and policies available and accessible to all children in accordance with their age and maturity. Thus, the twelfth Five-Year Plan is promising to involve children and encouraging their participation in all decisions related to programmes and policies. There is no specific legislation on children's participation in Tamil Nadu, but the State has been prompted by the Five-Year Plans and the National Policies to implement children's participation. But for Saeed (2014: 91), "the role of participation to meaningful development policymaking and to catalyzing positive social change has been poorly understood". For her, welfare concerns are more predominant than participation, which is still not a priority for the government.

### **Scotland**

In 1998 when the UK Parliament devolved some powers to Scotland, the Scottish Parliament has been responsible for a number of areas that impact children and families, including education, health, social care, and justice. For Cohen (2003) 'devolution' in Scotland offers a unique opportunity for debate and legislation for children's issues. The Scottish Government's *Getting it right for every child* (GIRFEC) is the national approach in Scotland for improving outcomes and supporting the well-being of children by offering the right help at the right time from the right people. It supports the collaboration between practitioners and public authorities in their efforts to improve the well-being of children (Aldgate 2013: 4). A core component of this approach is putting children at the centre of all processes that concern them, ensuring that their views are listened to and that they are involved in decisions that affect them.

Following the 2008 examination of the UK Government by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Scottish Government was the first in the UK to publish an action plan to implement the concluding observations. ‘Do the right thing’ was the Scottish action plan, setting out its priorities for implementing the UNCRC. Over the last 25 years, many positive developments have emerged due to compliance with the Convention, including progress in children’s participation in education, strengthening of child protection laws, and enactment of legislation to end child poverty. However, any lack of compliance with the UNCRC means that some rights will be neglected, and therefore obligations to respect children’s views are acknowledged only in specific contexts (Davis et al., 2014).

The Scottish Government has passed several pieces of legislation ensuring that children’s views will be taken into consideration. For example, *The Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc. Act* of 2000 has a subsection requiring schools to duly regard children’s views in significant decisions about their schooling (S.2 (2)). *The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Scotland) Act* of 2003 defines the role of the Commissioner as co-ordinating, monitoring, and promoting issues affecting children’s rights and interests, including implementation of the UNCRC. The Scottish Parliament appointed the first Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People in 2004. Lastly, the Scottish Government passed *The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act* of 2014, and it has been in force partially since 2015. The 2014 Act places a duty on Scottish Ministers to promote awareness and understanding of the UNCRC, and introduces new reporting requirements designed to support increased scrutiny of the entire public sector’s approach to implementing the Convention. The 2014 Act also places a duty on Scottish Ministers to re-consider UNCRC as being under Part 1 of the



Act, Section 1. This means that Scottish Ministers must, “keep under consideration whether there are any steps which they could take which would or might secure better or further effect in Scotland of the UNCRC requirements” (Part 1, S.1). Through the 2014 Act, the Scottish Parliament extended the role of the Commissioner, enabling the Commissioner to undertake investigations and receive complaints in relation to the experiences of individual children.

#### **4.3.2 Implementation and practice of children’s participation**

Implementation and practice of children’s participation have been considered differently geographically. For instance, minority world States and communities show a tendency towards institutionalised participation and public sector decision-making, while in the majority world, there is a stronger orientation toward community-based participation (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010).

#### **Tamil Nadu**

Tamil Nadu’s government, in an effort to implement the Five-Year Plans and thus improve children’s rights and participation, has appointed two main bodies: first, the *Department of Women and Child Development* that is responsible for coordinating all activities related to the implementation of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, and second, a national independent monitoring body for the UNCRC, *The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights* (NCPCR) that was set up in 2007 under *The Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act* of 2005. The Commission is mandated to ensure that each and every child has access to all the entitlements of

the Convention. One of the core mandates of the Commission is to inquire into complaints of violations of child rights. Moreover, from the twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012-2017), the Indian Government mandated the NCPCR to undertake research to develop indicators of child participation that can be monitored, and document best practices in child participation (Planning Commission, 2013). In Tamil Nadu, a branch of the Commission was set up in March 2012; a Chairperson and six members were appointed (Imranullah, 2014). So far there is no evidence that any such work has been undertaken by the Tamil Nadu Commission.

Currently, UNICEF plays a significant role in supporting the *Child Reporter Initiative* (CRI), which is a collaborative effort of various state governments, local partners, and UNICEF (Ministry of Women and Child Development Government of India, 2011). This project involves helping children, particularly from marginalized communities such as Dalits, gain various media skills, striving to provide them with opportunities to articulate their views on issues facing them and their communities. In India as a whole, including Tamil Nadu, the government has not been seen as proactive in implementing children's rights and participation.

Initiatives linked to participation are mainly undertaken by NGOs; government-led projects are few and far between (Saeed, 2014). Local NGOs, in particular, take the lead in promoting the rights of street and working children: the NGO *Butterflies* in Delhi has helped street and working children form their own unions and initiated programs to empower marginalized children. Every fortnight, children meet for the *Bal Sabha* (children's council) in Delhi to discuss relevant issues, critique on-going activities, and plan future activities on themes such as education, police harassment, or

wages (O’Kane, 2003). Another example of the work of the NGOs and the culture of child-led movements is found in the State of Karnataka, where the NGO *Concerned for Working Children (CWC)*<sup>5</sup> supports children in mobilizing themselves to promote their rights and improve their lives through campaigns and other awareness activities related to education, basic facilities, personal problems, gender discrimination, disability, and child labour in their communities (Ratna, 2009). O’Kane (2003) emphasises how the *Young India Project (YIP)* supports the formation and the development of agricultural wage labourers in southern Andhra Pradesh. Under *Bal Sanghas* (children’s Unions), children have organised rallies and other activities, presenting petitions to the depot manager to secure bus transport for school; cleaning the village water tanks, and taking action to ensure teachers’ attendance in schools. These examples support Lansdown’s thought (2006: 153), “the most radical initiatives have evolved in the developing world”.

Tamil Nadu has a strong civil society with a progressive approach to children with public action. *The Forum for Promotion of Child Participation (FPCP)* is the adult partner organisation supporting and assisting *The Federation of Children’s Movements for the Right to Participation (FCMRP)* for the State of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, which is a Union Territory of India situated at the border of Tamil Nadu. Through this forum, children advocate for themselves in all local governance. As previously noted in Chapter 2, Crowley (2012) refers to the *Neighborhood Children Parliaments (NCPs)* in southern Tamil Nadu, where children from the same street or village estab-

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<sup>5</sup> Active since the late 1970s, *Concerned for Working Children* was one of the first organisations in India to focus on working children and their needs.

lish a Children's Parliament and elect their own Prime Minister and Council of Ministers, as well as create portfolios related to health, education, sports, law, social justice, etc. Representatives from the local level are then elected to be part of the NCPs at the block, district, state and national level. Saeed (2014: 106) notes that, "NPCs allow children and young people to voice local concerns and play an active role in finding their own solutions, with the help of elders and local authorities". Children's participation has progressed through the active intervention of NGOs to initiate and endorse children's involvement in the *CRC Monitoring and Alternative Reporting*. In-school and out-of-school children, from poor rural and urban areas, participated in consultations to assess and rate the performance of the government on its commitments and obligations to fulfil children's rights (Plan, 2013).

Child participation rights in Tamil Nadu have progressed through the active intervention of NGOs, with little support from the government of Tamil Nadu. The participation of children has tended to be more visible at the community level than in high-profile political events at the national level. In Tamil Nadu, projects on participation have emerged and flourished, confirming the 'NGOization' of children's participation (Saeed, 2014). However, Saeed (2014) adds that although the number of children's participation projects is growing in India, these do not necessarily create a culture of children's participation in society. Cockburn (2013: 201) notes that a reinvigoration of participatory forms of democracy can be seen amongst children in the majority world, where children's voices can be more clearly heard and recognised. Williams et al. (2010) highlight that the majority world have an interest in children's participation because it has bigger problems, like poverty and inequality, so children are encouraged to actively participate to solve these problems.

To conclude, the implementation process of children's participation in India as a whole is 'bottom-up', as it "starts with an analysis of the many actors who interact at the operational (local) level" (Najam, 1995: 12), while the initiatives for children's participation come from the NGOs and not the government, as the Tamil Nadu case study summarised in part 4.3 below.

## **Scotland**

The Scottish Government supports a variety of actors in implementing the UNCRC and furthering children's participation. There is no longer a Minister of Children and Young People but at the time of the fieldwork, there was one. Other actors such as Scotland's national education agency works with partner agencies to increase awareness and understanding of children's rights in schools across Scotland. Although school councils, also called pupils councils, are not mandatory in primary and secondary schools in Scotland, they are set up in 85 to 90 per cent of schools (Tisdall, 2007). Nevertheless, pupil councils are rarely involved in teaching matters, and communication between the pupil council and the wider community can be irregular and ineffective (Together, 2015). A survey of Scottish secondary school pupils (Tisdall, 2007) found that 40 per cent did not think their school council had given them a say in how their school was run. A review of the *Curriculum for Excellence* has found that children want a more active role around planning their learning, which includes partnerships with teachers, more personal choice, and pupil-led opportunities (Scottish Government, 2014).

*The Office of Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland (CYPCS)*, along with its team on Participation and Education, has been important agents to implement

children's participation. For instance, CYPSC published seven golden rules to working with children and young people: 1) understanding my rights; 2) a chance to be involved; 3) remember, it's my choice; 4) value me; 5) support me; 6) work together; 7) keep in touch.<sup>6</sup> Together (the Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights), an independent alliance of over 260 NGOs, academics, and professionals with an interest in children's rights (Together, 2014), is an important player in the implementation of the UNCRC in Scotland. For instance, they publish the annual *State of Children's Rights* report and monitor the progress made by the government and NGOs in implementing the UNCRC. Due to the work of these NGOs, children have helped to formulate policy at the national level. The Scottish Government has commissioned NGOs to consult children on children's rights and children's services in order to introduce or change legislation, policies, and practice. For instance, young people have been involved in advisory committees, such as *Voice Against Violence* (VAV), which engaged a group of eight young people to work with the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) as experts to help eradicate domestic abuse of children in Scotland (2009–2011). Young people were directly involved in policy networks and policy making of the Scottish Government's delivery plan on *The National Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse in Scotland*. Other examples include the *Youth Commission on Alcohol*, funded by the Scottish Government in 2009, and the *Scottish Borders Youth Commission on Bullying* (from July 2011 to March 2012). Lastly, the 2012 consultation on the Scottish Government's proposed *Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill* gathered the opinions of over 2,400 children (HM Government, 2014).

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cypsc.org.uk/education/golden-rules> [Accessed 05/04/2016]

These examples show the tendency towards institutionalised participation and public sector decision making in Scotland. As result, the government regularly commissions NGOs to consult children and listen to their opinion regarding national policies that adults think matter to children. However, the NGO alternative report recommends that:

The Scottish Government should put in place a clear strategy and implementation plan, informed by the views of children, to ensure that their voices are considered and taken into account in the development of policy that affects them in a coherent and systematic manner. (Together, 2015: 9)

Although the Scottish Government is willing to involve children in the development of policies, there are no systematic mechanisms in place to consult children. However, in the 2014 referendum on the independence of Scotland, 16-and 17 years old had the right to vote. These young people have been extended the vote for local and Scottish Parliament elections too.

Participation activities have proliferated in Scotland: there are a number of forums that support the ongoing participation of children at local and national levels. The *Scottish Youth Parliament* (SYP) has 150 members (aged 12–25 years) who are elected through their constituency. They undertake two national campaigns annually and develop a range of peer-education and outreach programmes to engage and involve young people across Scotland in the democratic process. Another example is the Youth fora that have been developed throughout Scotland to cover local government areas (Scottish Government, 2013). In addition, NGOs in Scotland have been active in promoting children's participation and in developing children's participation projects across Scotland, such as the Scottish case study outlined in section 4.3 below.

The participation of children in decisions affecting them has tended to be more visible

in social and public policy in the UK than in the everyday lives of children (Percy-Smith, 2010: 107). For Percy-Smith and Burns (2013) children need to move beyond simply expressing their views and become active participants and agents of change in their communities. According to children's interests in their everyday interactions and experiences, children identified issues such as producing guides to encourage more sustainable shopping behaviours, finding ways of improving travel to school, and exploring how to reduce energy consumption (Percy-Smith and Burns, 2013).

However, children face some restrictions on their actions: "young people may have their views on neighbourhood improvements expressed in a local youth forum and then go back into their community and get harangued for hanging out on the street" (Percy-Smith, 2010: 112). Williams et al. (2010: 287–289) note: "it seems that in the minority world, there is an assumption that young people do not have the capacity or ability to participate effectively without adult intervention or control". This process could be labelled as a top-down approach, as it is mainly prescriptive (Barrett, 2004: 254–55). Percy-Smith (2010) suggests that participation has been translated in the UK as, "having a say in decisions", and is thus restricted to consultation (p.107). In order to address this situation, NGOs have enthusiastically promoted children's participation (Tisdall, 2014), taking up children's participation as a lobbying issue within legislative and other policy initiatives. Thus, in Scotland, top-down and bottom-up approaches have been considered depending on the activities undertaken by the NGOs. Children's participation has become a funding stream for organisations through *The Children, Young People, and Families Early Intervention Fund* from the government, which supports



work with children, families, and communities in the area of prevention and early intervention (Scottish Government website).<sup>7</sup>

To conclude, the Scottish Government has been more proactive than the Tamil Nadu Government in terms of legislation and policies in participation. There has been positive progress and a willingness in Scotland to listen to children's views through school councils, special advisory groups, youth fora, and the *Scottish Youth Parliament*. The NGOs in Scotland have also been active in promoting children's participation in either helping the government in achieving and organising youth consultation or having their own activities involving children. In Tamil Nadu, the civil society has taken the lead in promoting children's participation due to the absence of the State in this field. The work of NGOs in Tamil Nadu has been significant in supporting children's groups efforts to promote child rights and improve living conditions, as well as in making children's participation a reality in their everyday lives.

#### **4.4 THE PARTICIPATION'S PROJECT WITHIN THE TWO CASE STUDIES**

The aim of this section is to provide information regarding the 'participation projects' within the two case studies. In doing so, the history and practice of the children's participation project will be considered. As mentioned in Chapter 3 on research design, the two NGOs have different organisational structures. For instance, Tamil Nadu's

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<sup>7</sup><http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/early-years/delivery/thirdsectorfunding> [Accessed 05/04/2016]

organisation is bigger than the Scottish one in staff numbers and is more hierarchical.

#### **4.4.1 Participation project in the Tamil Nadu case study**

The NGO started 20 years ago by opening centres for former child labourers, for all children in the slum area, in urban slums as transitional settings before children joined formal schooling. Evening centres were established to assist children with their studies and help them remain in school. After ten years, staff members organised fortnightly sessions at the evening centres to address special issues including moral values and an introduction to children's rights. Former child labourers became the members of the children's groups. The organisation works with children to give them an understanding of their rights and their ability to contribute to society.

Children's groups are implemented at three stages through the project: The first level is in the community; children meet twice a month after school to review and plan activities for the children's group. Decisions are reached through informal voting, and children are elected (as president, secretary, and treasurer) every six months. Meetings are led by the children with the support of the participation workers; I focused on this level for the research project.

Second, at the zonal level, children's representatives from different children's groups at the community level meet every three months to discuss events and programmes for the area in which they live. A zonal executive committee is elected from those attending, which reviews community reports submitted by representatives. They also serve as a go-between for the community and confederation network levels.

Third, at the confederation network level, representatives from the zonal levels and the

confederation executive committee meet every three months to discuss issues common to all areas.<sup>8</sup> This provides a forum for members to share their experiences, evaluate activities, discuss overarching issues such as a Convention topic, and develop a strategic plan.<sup>9</sup>

The children's group organises a number of activities—such as capacity-building and taking action on children's rights violations for and with children—aiming to support their effort to claim their rights.

First, capacity-building is a major part of the children's group activities, aiming to empower children by enhancing their abilities and knowledge of children's rights. The group also takes action on children's rights violations, which include the involvement of child advocates and a lobby to defend children's rights and improve their situation. The struggle against child labour is one of the main concerns of this children's rights organisation, but children identify other emerging issues in their community, such as lack of drinking water, transportation, and electricity in the community. Members of the children's group petitions adult decision-makers (such as local leaders and municipal councillors), then, participation workers arrange a meeting with these decision-makers at which the children or youth present their petitions and do the follow-up. This subject is developed more in Chapters 5 and 7.

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<sup>8</sup> The executive committee is composed of nine members plus the adviser (former president of the Confederation Executive Committee). The role is to advise the activities of children's groups.

<sup>9</sup> Convention gathers children from the children's group, civil society and policy makers to express their views on issues related to violations of children's rights.

#### **4.4.2 Participation project in the Scottish case study**

In similar ways to the Tamil Nadu NGO, the Scottish NGO also started 20 years ago and has a variety of participation projects underway. The project selected for the case study ran for six years with two successive groups of 20 children each; all of the individual children took part for three years. Participants started the three-year participation project when they were 9 to 11 years old, continuing until the oldest were 14 years old.

For the three-year participation project, two children from ten different primary schools—preferably one boy and one girl from each school—were selected by their teachers. Teachers made their selections based on whom they thought would benefit most from the participation project. The participants were a mix of children from middle and lower socio-economic groups. Children met once a month during the school day, outside the school premises, so as to not be in a school environment.

The aim of the participation project was to create opportunities for children's voices to be heard by adults, and to bring a cultural change (influencing behaviour) in the small towns, in other words, to change adults' perception of children. The first year of the project was about building children's confidence, developing their understanding of their rights, and getting to know the adults in a context of equality. This was done by working through the following six topics: who we are; where we live; health and happiness; freedom; feeling safe/being cared for; and having our say. The second year focused on children's lives, exploring how children would like to use the creative arts to inform adults, decision-makers, and other children about their views, as well as to influence adults. For example, children created an art mural: they drew stories, on

cardboard (3x2 metres or 10x6.5 feet), based on their first year of experience in the programme and their views on children's lives in Scotland today. The third year was negotiated and developed among the members of each group, and focused on something that the children could deliver. For example, a project at the community level showed children's perceptions of who they were and where they lived. They also organised a photo exhibition, and a book of the photographs was published.

Following the three-year participation project, a 12 month long, peer-education project was set up to develop their skills and to increase awareness and understanding of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* in primary schools. Twenty children from the original group of 40 participated in this project for a one-year, peer-education project and were interviewed for the research study. Children participated in this project voluntarily. Participants from different high schools met several times over the year, after school or during school time, to work on the project. As a result, they made short films and animations about children's human rights in order to start discussions with children for the workshop they delivered to primary schools.

These two organisations both implement participation at the local context, in children's everyday lives. In the Tamil Nadu organisation the participation activities promote children's rights by improving their daily life conditions, thus influencing decision-making processes at the community level. This occurs especially through the petition process, as children's voices are heard and taken into account. In the Scottish case study, the three-year participation project is seen not only as educating and developing children's skills, but also creates opportunities for children's voices to be heard by

adults, and brings cultural change in the small towns. The peer-education projects focused on primary school children's rights awareness.

## **4.5 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has given an overview of the contexts in the two countries: India (Tamil Nadu) and the UK (Scotland) that are two highly contrasting countries, as is made clear by their respective HDI ranks: 130th and 14th respectively. There is also a population disparity between the two regions: Tamil Nadu has a population of 72.14 million of people, while Scotland has a population of 5,347,600 people. The chapter has analysed the two contexts through the lens of the economy, health services and education.

First, in terms of economy, Tamil Nadu and Scotland are doing well when looking at per capita income compared to their respective country levels. In Scotland, the child benefit and Child Tax Credit schemes provide cash benefits for people bringing up children. Scotland does have children living in poverty based on the British standard, but these children face fewer challenges than children in Tamil Nadu, who experience hardships such as child labour, the unsanitary conditions of living in slums, or parents who do not have a financial safety net to help raise their children. Secondly, the health conditions in Tamil Nadu suffer as the living conditions in slums are usually unhygienic and thus optimal sites for the transmission of diseases. In Scotland, children living in fuel-poor homes have a greater risk of health problems, particularly respiratory problems. At the national level, Tamil Nadu and Scotland both set up free midday meals in primary schools. Thirdly, the quality of education between Tamil Nadu and Scotland differs in that the number of pupils per teacher in India is 35:1, whereas in

Scotland the ratio is 16.7:1. Additionally, in Tamil Nadu, there is an educational disparity among social groups, which is less visible in Scotland, where most of the children attend State schools.

In Tamil Nadu, the government has not been seen as proactive in implementing children's rights and participation. The NGO sector has mainly taken the initiative in promoting children's participation projects, as in Tamil Nadu, the NGO is creating space for children to claim their rights in their everyday lives. The Scottish Government has been more proactive than the Tamil Nadu Government in terms of passing and implementing legislation and policies related to participation. NGOs in Scotland help the government to achieve children's participation by organising either consultation with children or activities involving children. Thus, the NGOs in Scotland are active and have pushed the government to take children's voices into account. As result, the government regularly commissions NGOs to consult children and listen to their opinion regarding national policies that adults think matter to children. NGOs also initiate projects with children at the community level. The two organisations both implement participation at the community level that provides the children opportunities to engage actively in the issues affecting their everyday lives.

The following chapters will consider the findings of the research study, including how children's competencies and children's participation are understood in the two case studies (Chapter 5), how children and staff members relate to each other within the participation projects (Chapter 6), and lastly, how children influence their local context through the participation projects (Chapter 7).

## **CHAPTER 5 : COMPETENCIES AND CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 2, the literature review, concluded with Article 12 of the UNCRC, which enables children to take part in decision-making processes in all matters that affect them, however there remains a misunderstanding of what children's participation is and means. There is a diverse range of definitions of 'participation', and no consensus by those involved (Moses, 2008; Hinton, 2008; Crowley, 2012; Thomas, 2012). There is also a lack of understanding about the meaning of children's competencies and their relationship to participation (Ljungdahl, 2012). This chapter explores the relationship between competencies and children's participation in more depth.

The UNCRC does not explicitly use the terms 'competence' or 'competencies', instead, Article 12 states that children be allowed to participate when they are capable of forming their own views. However, for Lansdown (2011: 5), Article 12 is not expansive enough as children need to participate in the first place to build their skills, that is, their competence. There are numerous examples that showcase the fact that children develop competencies in a range of community participation initiatives, such as identifying issues in their communities (Couzens and Mtengeti, 2011; Shier et al., 2014).

Developmental psychologists have been blamed for creating a 'competence bias' by placing children at particular developmental stages, thus constraining adults' view of



their potential (Hinton, 2008: 293). In the developmental paradigm, a dichotomy has been highlighted between adults on one side, and children on the other. Indeed, “children and young people are constructed as incompetent, irresponsible, vulnerable *becomings* in opposition to adults as competent, responsible, robust *beings*” (Warming, 2012: 32). An alternative, the ‘competence paradigm’, has emerged in the sociology of childhood:

The competence paradigm seeks to take children seriously as social agents in their own right; to examine how social constructions of “childhood” not only structure their lives but also are structured by the activities of children themselves; and to explicate the social competencies which children manifest in the course of their everyday lives. (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998: 8)

In this chapter, I will use the term ‘competence’ or ‘competencies’ to describe a multifaceted view of competence, as children demonstrate their abilities in different ways: not only when displaying (or when they are required to display) personal competence, but also when they interact with others (social competence).

I aim to fill a gap in the literature, bringing the concepts of participation and competencies together by addressing how children achieve competencies in different contexts. This chapter is divided into three sections: Section 5.2 considers in more depth how the term ‘competence’ or ‘competencies’ is used in the literature; Section 5.3 highlights how children develop their competencies in the context of NGO participation projects; and finally, Section 5.4 examines how children use the competencies developed in the participation projects in their everyday lives, such as at school and in family contexts.

## 5.2 UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF COMPETENCIES

This section examines how the term ‘competence’ is used in the literature, and explains the relationship between participation and competencies.

While the terms ‘competence’ and ‘competencies’ are not used in the CRC itself, the notion of ‘competence’ is often raised within literature discussions about CRC participation rights. The CRC challenges the image of an ‘incompetent’ child, who is unable to participate or is too vulnerable to do so (Reynaert et al., 2009). Krappmann (2010) states this directly in relation to Article 12:

In fact the inclusion in processes of decision making clearly demonstrates that the idea of the child enshrined in the Convention differs from long-standing views, which stressed that the child is incompetent, lacking responsibility, in need of protection and therefore, still in a phase of preparation for life – in short: The child is an incomplete human being. Article 12 of the Convention definitely contradicts this conception. (2010: 502)

In the literature, scholars make the distinction between the competent and the incompetent child. When discussing ‘medical competence’, Tobin notes:

Where the evidence supports a finding that a child is competent or has the capacity to understand an issue, as is often the case with respect to issues like medical treatment, there is no longer a moral justification to treat the child differently to an adult. The special vulnerability that provided the justification for special protection ceases to exist. (2013: 429)

Tobin thus draws on legal decisions, where children who are judged sufficiently competent can make decisions on their own behalf, while children who are not considered

competent, cannot (*see also* Gillick vs. West Norfolk and Wisbech Area Health Authority and another [1985] 3 WLR 830). While courts are asked to make such judgments, Freeman (2007) points out that competence is more complex and fluid than is often assumed: indeed, no human is a wholly competent or incompetent person.

While children have the right to express themselves under Article 12, the ‘due weight’ given to their views is qualified by judgements of their age and maturity. The CRC itself does not elaborate on how maturity is to be defined and assessed, or precisely how it is to be weighed by decision-makers. The CRC General Comments on the Right to be Heard (2009) provide more explanation of maturity as the capacity of a child to express her or his views on issues in a reasonable and independent manner (CRC/C/GC/12, par 30). Adults remain in control; as Bacon and Frankel (2014) point out, participation rights are only given to children who are judged by adults to be of sufficient age and maturity (*see also* Archard, 2004; Cockburn, 2013).

Article 5 of the CRC encourages adults to understand the development of competencies as gradual; the concept of ‘evolving capacity’ is meant to provide appropriate guidance and direction to adults, particularly parents. The CRC General Comment on implementing child rights in early childhood (2005) explicitly links the notions of evolving capacity and children’s competencies:

Article 5 draws on the concept of ‘evolving capacities’ to refer to processes of maturation and learning whereby children progressively acquire knowledge, competencies and understanding, including acquiring understanding about their rights and about how they can best be realised. (CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1, par 17)

Article 5 does not explicitly refer to age, (unlike Article 12), although Leonard (2015) points out that ‘evolving’ implies that capacities develop as children grow up. Again,

while not explicit, the implication is that it is for adults to decide on children's capacity and thus the extent to which their autonomy will be recognised. Thus, in recognising children's participation rights, Article 5 specifically refers to parents and their changing relationships with their children.

Competence permeates discussions of children's participation but is not explicitly used in the CRC itself. Although it is used in the CRC General Comments, the term is not defined. The relationship between competence and participation is not clearly stated, although the determination of children's competence remains to adults, as a consequence that adults can either facilitate or block in children's participation. Thus, further interrogation of both the definition of competence and its relationship to participation is needed.

Ljungdalh (2012) reviews the qualitative and quantitative literature in a range of disciplines (psychology, sociology, and health), and similarly finds that competence is rarely defined, and its relationship to participation remains unresolved. In an effort to bridge this gap, Ljungdalh maps three types of relationships. In the first type of relationship, competence determines participation: children need abilities in order to partake in certain activities. For instance, children need a range of sensory motor skills to participate in particular educational programmes or in physical activity. The second type reverses this causality, and participation determines competence: through participating in educational activities, children develop academic, social, and personal skills or competences. If children participate in educational activities, the learning outcome is a competence. Thus, competences or skills are understood as outcomes of participa-

tion. The third type is a bi-conditional connection between participation and competence: participation influences the competences achieved, and at the same time, the competences influence participation. Ljungdalh (2012) creates a typology but does not assess which relationships are empirically sound, thus providing an orientation towards the issues but not a definite answer. Even through his broad overview of the literature, the relationship between participation and competences remains unresolved.

Educational literature starts with the first type of relationship, but includes the importance of context. Bjarnadóttir (2004) provides an overview of such discussions: she distinguishes between knowledge, skills, and competence. Competence is what people are able to do by using their knowledge or skills ‘*to do things*’ in particular situations. The ability ‘to do’, though, is dependent upon “*actual situations and social context*” (p.301). She refers to the literature on situated learning to point out that different competencies are demanded by different situations, thus experiences of one’s competence are themselves situated. This suggests that a child is not ‘competent’ or ‘incompetent’, but that competencies are multiple and context-dependent.

Hutchby and Moran-Ellis (1998) use the term ‘social competence’ to emphasise that competence is expressed socially and *in situ*, and is not an inherent quality. They further question the reliance of psychologists upon developmental stages in defining competence, indicating that social competence is a practical achievement derived from particular contexts, and is thus not dependent solely on age:

The social competence of children is to be seen as a *practical achievement*: that is, it is not something, which is accorded to children by adults, like a right, and can thus be redefined or removed. Rather social competence is seen as something children work at possessing in their own right, the display of which is an active, agentic achievement.

(1998: 14)

This achievement is not necessarily easy or straightforward, and can involve, “struggles for power, contested meanings and negotiated relationships” (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998: 16). Power and negotiation are thus integral to understanding social competence.

Building on Hutchy and Moran-Ellis’ work, at least two contextual dimensions can be found in the literature on social competence: the first is relational. As Wiemann and Kelly (1981) note, a person cannot be competent without a specific relationship or a set of relationships in which they can interact with people. Alderson also perceives competencies as, “more than a skill, [they are] a way of relating” (1992: 123) wherein such relationships can be affected by children’s own emotional and economic dependency on an individual (Hanson, 2012). The second dimension introduces broader social factors, such as cultural influences, the physical environment, political structures, and available economic resources (Alderson, 1992). Thus, both micro and macro contextual elements have an impact on children’s acquisition of social competence.

In summary, a large portion of the literature demonstrates the continuing use of competencies as a fixed concept. A child is regarded as competent or incompetent, the former view facilitating a child’s participation and the latter blocking it. Even if multiple competencies are recognised, rather than the fixed ‘competent/incompetent’ dichotomy, such capabilities can still be treated as inherent characteristics that a child either does or does not have. Adults’ power to make these types of judgements continues to determine children’s participation. Fluid understandings of competencies are more useful: competencies require knowledge and skill, but key is the ability to apply

such skills. There is thus a growing recognition that competences are realised *in situ*. This chapter considers how children's competencies are 'practically achieved', and how this is expressed and constrained in different contexts.

### **5.3 CHILDREN'S COMPETENCIES WITHIN THE NGOS' PARTICIPATION PROJECTS**

Children were asked what they 'got from being a part of' the participation projects and activities, and in response, they identified types of knowledge and information as well as a number of skills and situations in which they were practised. This section considers children's acquisition and contextual application of knowledge/information and skills gained through the participation projects. Note, I mention 'interpreter' in brackets in the following paragraphs when I used an interpreter with the participants.

#### **5.3.1 Children's knowledge and skills**

This section highlights first, how children gained knowledge and information through the participation activities, and second, how children gained skills such as communication and facilitation abilities. In addition, more specific skills were identified.

##### **Knowledge gained within the participation projects**

In the Tamil Nadu case study, most of the children aged 15–16, and all graduate members, said that they gained knowledge and information on children's rights and children's participation from attending residential capacity-building workshops. For this project, the NGO organised two-to-three-day training workshops outside the commu-

nity where children lived, so that the children were in another environment. For instance, Vijay (16 years old, interpreter) shared that during the children's group meetings (prior to the residential capacity-building workshop), kids were talking about children's participation and children's rights, but he did not understand what was being talked about. However, when he went to the young facilitator workshop (a three-day training workshop), he attained an understanding of children's rights and what they meant, as well as what the steps of participation were and what this meant for him. Vijay's comments emphasise the benefit of having appropriate training to learn about children and their participation rights. With the knowledge gained, he learned that he needed to be proactive in giving his opinion to adults, as they do not know what children need. Maalni (15 years old, interpreter), in going to the young facilitator training, said she learned more about the history of the children's group and the NGO, and that she started participating more in NGO activities. For Maalni, knowing more about the history of the NGO and children's groups gave her the motivation to stay involved in activities. Thus, Vijay's and Maalni's experiences exemplify the idea that children not only need knowledge in order to get involved in activities, but that participation in such activities is a knowledge-building exercise; Vijay and Maalni would not have gained such competence if they had not participated in the project (Ljungdahl, 2012).

All the staff members in Tamil Nadu acknowledged the knowledge/information that children received after taking part in the children's group. For instance, Saasna (management team, interpreter) shared that, after one day of training, children gained knowledge/information about what children's rights are and what children's participation means, after which they were able to plan for action in the community. Dahma (management team) explained the importance of providing information to children:



If they [the children] are going to campaign about education, they should know what it is. Without relevant information, going there and standing in a rally [demonstration] means that it's not effective participation. They should be well informed—that's how they are able to participate.

Dahma's emphasis on the notion that providing children with knowledge about education rights enables them to act and campaign supports the thought that the right to seek, receive, and impart information under Articles 13 and 17 of the UNCRC are prerequisites for the effective exercise of the right to be heard (Lundy, 2011). In the case of Tamil Nadu, children had to first learn about children's rights in order to campaign effectively for their education and influence positive change in their communities, such as children should go to school and not to work. Vijay, Maalni, Saasna, and Dahma illustrate how children used their knowledge—gained through the participation project—to act in particular situations (Bjarnadóttir, 2004).

Additionally, children from both age groups and most of the graduate members said that they gained specific knowledge about child labour issues by being involved in the child labourers' group (a group of children working alongside staff members to eliminate child labour in the community).

For instance, Balika (13 years old, interpreter) explained how staff members accompanied her and her friends when they went to convince parents to not send their children to work, but to instead send them to school, which, they argued, would lead to a brighter future for their children. This comment illustrates the opportunity—introduced through the staff members—that Balika and her friends had to discuss child labour issues directly with parents, potentially influencing future work and school decisions.

Like Balika, Divish (graduate member, 22 years old, interpreter) was also involved in a child labourers' group, and also came across new opportunities with the support of staff members. He shared that, before joining the children's group, he did not know that there were many child labourers in his community, but that with the group's support, he was able to identify and encourage child labourers to join the organisation's school project. He mentioned that being involved in the child labourers' group and acting to a better community made him feel very happy, and that he gained new knowledge through such participation. The experiences of Balika and Divish demonstrate how competence was in part the effect of participation, as the knowledge they gained came through community and activity involvement.

These examples from the Tamil Nadu case study exemplify two ways of learning: theoretical and practical/experiential. Children ascertained knowledge (theoretical learning) before and in order to get involved in activities (i.e. Vijay, Maalni, Dahma, and Saasna), and they gained knowledge through their involvement in activities (experiential learning) (i.e. Balika and Divish).

In the Scottish case study, staff members highlighted that children attained knowledge and information about children's rights through art-based activities. For instance, Greg (staff) explained that children attended a one-day session every month for the first year of the three-year programme, where they learned their rights through six themes: who we are, where we live, health and happiness, freedom, feeling safe/being cared for, and having our say. Art-based activities were used to explain each theme. Greg emphasised the personal process of the activities:

'Having your say' comes at the end for us, because until you go through the rest of the

steps, you cannot really inform what you want to happen for yourself ... you have to start with yourself and then think about with who you live with, your freedom, and then your relations with others and feeling safe and careful, come after, as they are quite sensitive topics. You need children to think about their safety and about love and who loves them. There is a plan to this process.

This narrative illustrates how the NGO designed a programme for children in which they could have a say in what they were doing. The process was initially personal wherein children needed to first learn about themselves and the environment in which they lived before being able to participate in the rest of the steps. In this case, theoretical knowledge was not a prerequisite for participation, as children constructed learning as part of their everyday life experiences, in direct relation to their lived realities. Thus, the acquisition of knowledge grew from experiential, critical, and creative activities, as well as due to the support of staff members.

Observing the peer-education project in Scotland, I noticed that children developed their knowledge of children's rights largely through art-based activities. The programme allowed them to write short film scenarios for a workshop in the primary school, handling issues such as rights to privacy and freedom. They did so by reflecting on their own experiences, and thus developed their knowledge by being part of an experiential learning activity.

Interestingly, while most children said that they had first learned about the UNCRC through the organisation, they gave only little detail as to the types of rights they had learned about, instead simply naming what the rights were (e.g. right to freedom, to privacy, to have a say, and to play). Some children did give particular examples: Alex (16 years old) said that he learned about climate change by being involved in a specific

project with the NGO, and Annabel (16 years old) added that, through the NGO, she not only learned about the UNCRC, but about the world in general, the place in which she lived, and about visiting different communities. Both Alex and Annabel attained new knowledge by being involved in experiential learning activities, indicating that competence is the effect of participation (Ljungdalh, 2012). Participation in NGO activities also allowed children to gain knowledge about children's rights earlier than they otherwise would have through school: Mary (15 years old) learned of the UNCRC at age 11 while participating in an NGO activity; her school taught children's rights when pupils were around 14 years of age.

Two different ways of acquiring knowledge within the participation projects have been considered. In the Tamil Nadu case study, children gained knowledge of children's rights and children's participation by going to the residential capacity-building programme. Children who received knowledge/information on their rights were able to accomplish a task and to act in the community afterwards. In other words, their competence determined their participation (i.e. theoretical learning) (Ljungdalh, 2012). Thus, children need certain competencies or abilities to be involved in particular activities. On the other hand, competence can be the effect of participation because, through participating in educational activities, children develop their knowledge (i.e. experiential learning) (Ljungdalh, 2012). In the Tamil Nadu case study, children were able to gain knowledge through the experience of researching child labourers, and in the Scottish case study, children acquired knowledge/information of children's rights and children's participation by doing art-based activities and reflecting on their own experience. Thus, children utilize both theoretical and experiential knowledge when

participating and building competence. As such, the relationship between competencies and participation is clearly visible through these two case studies.

### **Skills gained within the participation projects**

This section explores the skills that children in the case studies developed, specifically communication and facilitation skills, as well as leadership and writing skills in the Tamil Nadu case study, and art-based skills and interviewer skills in the Scottish case study.

#### **Communication skills**

In the Tamil Nadu case study, most of the children (both current and graduate members) developed their communication skills within the participation project. For instance, Roshna (15 years old, interpreter) said that while she was initially nervous about speaking in large meetings, staff members helped her learn how to introduce herself, how to convey her message, and how to share her opinion in an effective manner. The role of the participation worker was significant in developing Roshna's communication skills as well as in validating her skills.

The children in the Scottish case study also mentioned that they were able to develop their communication skills through the project. For instance, Mary (16 years old) emphasised the role of the organisation:

I remember when I started, I was really quiet, shy. I know it's hard to believe, and I found it difficult to speak in public, but [organisation name] made it easy for me... I don't know how they do it, they always manage to bring out the best in people.

Mary's communication skills and confidence flourished as she had the chance to make

public speeches; staff members' role in facilitating her growth was a significant element. In my fieldwork, I attended some events where staff members spent time with children to prepare them for the workshop in the primary school, which was important in developing their communication skills as they gained feedback from staff members. As in the Tamil Nadu case study, staff members helped children improve their communication skills and legitimise their newly acquired skills.

The two case studies highlight how children were able *to do* new things by using their communication skills in particular situations (Bjarnadóttir, 2004). They also recognised the help from staff members in developing such skills; staff members' support was significant for children to take on active roles. Thus, staff members' role of legitimising children's skills facilitated children's participation.

### **Facilitation skills**

In both case studies, children shared their experiences of facilitating sessions with their peers. In the Tamil Nadu case study, some of the children (aged 15–16 years), and all graduate members, shared their experiences of being part of the young facilitator team. Prati (graduate member, 22 years old, interpreter) said that she attended many leadership and young facilitator capacity-building workshops with the children's group, and that she facilitated workshops with the members on children's rights and participation. Due to this experience, she learned how to adapt to her audience (of children) by proposing different activities. The staff members recognised her facilitation skills and she became part of the young facilitator team for the organisation. This example illustrates that Prati developed her skills because she attended more than one capacity-building programme and was then able to practise her facilitation skills with her peers. Her

facilitation skills were not only recognised by other children but also by adult staff members, who honoured her skills by selecting her to be part of the facilitator team.

Similarly, in the Scottish case study, some children (15–16 years old) said they conducted workshops on awareness of children’s rights in primary schools as part of the peer-education project. For instance, Jack (16 years old) highlighted the need to make the workshops interesting, and learned that involving the children in the discussion was an effective way to do this: “Sometimes pupils are not interested in it, they are restless, but if you get them involved, they take it on board very well and you can have a good discussion”. Jack developed his skills in the context of his peers. Thus, as in the Tamil Nadu case study, facilitation skills were gained by combining knowledge and practice.

Both case studies highlight the role of the participation projects in enabling children to develop their facilitation skills through sessions with their peers. The role of the staff member in helping kids acquired facilitation skills was highlighted in preparation training. Staff members in Tamil Nadu not only assisted children but also interpreted children’s skills by selecting a few to be part of the facilitator team for the organisation.

Other skills developed within the participation projects Children in both case studies developed skills other than communication and facilitation, namely: leadership skills and writing skills (Tamil Nadu), and art-based and interviewer skills (Scotland).

### **Leadership skills and writing skills**

In the Tamil Nadu case study, some of the children (15–16 years old) and all of the graduate members mentioned the development of their leadership skills. For Sasiva

(15 years old, interpreter), the residential leadership capacity-building workshop was where she learned about leadership skills, and she decided to practise them by becoming president of her children's group. Thus, the knowledge of leadership skills in the residential capacity-building workshop allowed her to be an active participant in her group in the longer term.

Maalnila (15 years old, interpreter) explained how the trainers taught her useful techniques and skills to be a leader, such as the notion that a leader is more like a friend than a boss. She also learned that she had to work with children rather than make them work for her, which she experienced when she was president of her children's group at the area level. Thus, Maalnila gained the knowledge of leadership skills through training, and confirmed that knowledge through practice.

Graduate members and children (aged 15–17 years) stated that they developed their writing skills through the residential journalism capacity-building workshop, which prepared children for journalism and opportunities to acquire and refine their interviewing techniques. The NGO document about this programme shows that children were informed about the history of journalism, writing essays, stories, poems, drawings, interview techniques, and editing. For example, Vijay (16 years old, interpreter) mentioned that he went to the residential journalism capacity-building workshop and then, because he had developed his writing skills, joined the children newsletter group, where his articles were published. Puvina (22 years old, graduate member, interpreter) shared that she used to write poems for the newsletter. After going to the same residential programme, she was selected with ten other children to be part of the newsletter's editorial board, which published the newsletter every three months.



These examples illustrate that the NGO provided the space not only for members to develop their skills (by going to the residential capacity-building workshop), but also for the members to practise skills within the participation project. Redmond and Dolan (2016) highlight the need for authentic opportunities for young people to practise their skills, especially the leadership skills. Children in these examples were able to apply their specific skills in a conducive space, showing how competence leads to participation.

### **Art-based skills and interviewer skills**

In the Scottish case study, rather than acquiring knowledge through an organisation, children first mentioned that they developed skills via art-based activities. Most of the children referred to an art-based activity where, with the help of artists, they represented themselves in miniature (like a sculpture) with their dream jobs, such as boxer or journalist. This was linked to the theme 'who you are'. Some of the children said they learned not only about the art techniques, but also about how to identify their dream job, that is, who they wanted to be in the future. In addition, during an informal discussion, Beatrice (staff) explained that the activity was intended to inspire children to develop their current skills and to achieve their dream, helping them become more aware about who they are, which was one of the themes of the participation project. Other art-based skills, such as photography and film direction, were developed as well. For instance, Tony (14 years old) mentioned that he developed his photography skills after he spent a day with a professional photographer, taking pictures for the photography project. Jack (14 years old) explained that he learned about being a film director during a peer-education project in which the children made a short film with the help

of a professional film director. The experiences of Tony and Jack illustrate how they learned new skills in being with professionals during the activities.

These examples above also showed that children were able to learn new skills (i.e. photography, to be a film director) as well as learn more about themselves (i.e. sculpture) through art-based activities.

Second, some of the staff members revealed that children were able to develop their skills by recruiting new staff for the organisation. Martin (staff) shared his experience of being interviewed by children for the job: “We did some exercises and they asked me some questions about the six themes. Six or seven children were there. We were sitting in a circle; I felt the process was very creative.” This narrative illustrates that Martin recognised children’s skills in conducting the interview; as he said, “it was natural”. This supports the notion that, “children, considered as children rather than as apprentice adults, are just as mature, rational, competent and social as adults” (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998: 17). However, it is important to note that in this case, adults still interpreted the competence of children in recruiting new staff.

To conclude, two different aspects in developing children’s skills were acknowledged. First, in the Tamil Nadu case study, skills were developed by going to specific capacity-building workshops where, through staff members’ support, they practised the application of said skills in specific activities. In the Scottish case study, skills were mainly developed through art-based activities, by using children’s creativity, and through the support of staff. The development of children’s skills had an effect on their participation: children needed certain skills in order to be involved in certain activities, such as communication skills, facilitation skills, or writing skills (Ljungdalh, 2012).

Second, these skills were also the result of participation because, for example, while acting as president of the children's group in their area, children developed their leadership skills (Tamil Nadu case study), and by conducting job interviews children developed their interview skills (Scottish case study). Moreover, the role of staff members was significant in helping children to develop and to legitimise their knowledge and skills. Indeed, children's competencies arise from the willingness, the training, the mandate, and the talent of the adults who facilitate the activity with children (Jaffé and Wick, 1996).

### **5.3.2 Children's social competencies**

The social competencies of children are seen as a practical achievement (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998):

*...a practical achievement: that is, it is not something which is accorded to children by adults, like a right, and can thus be redefined or removed. Rather social competence is seen as something children work at possessing in their own right, the display of which is an active, agentic achievement. (p.14)*

In the Tamil Nadu case study, Aya (management team) described how adults and children are perceived in the community—the adults demonstrating supremacy and perpetuating their (negative) stereotypes of children, and continuing to impede children's ability to express their competencies. However, within the bounds of the NGO project, children were able to identify issues in the community and adults' perceptions and attitudes towards the children involved in the project improved. For example, most of the children (15–16 years old) mentioned the petitions process, in which they wrote a

letter to the local authority addressing issues in their area that they felt were particularly important. Kathira (16 years old, interpreter) shared that she and other children in her community were able to get the local authority to build toilets and provide access to drinking water in the slum by writing a petition. Kathira's comment illustrates that children, as a collective, claimed their rights to provisions and were able to make a change in their community. Thus, their competencies were expressed socially and *in situ* (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998).

Staff members acknowledged children's social competencies: Saasna (management team, interpreter) highlighted how children wrote petitions to the local authority about unsafe driving speeds in their area, and requested speed breakers in the street. Madhuri (participation workers, interpreter) added that children were able to ask their local authority to provide facilities that were not available in the community, such as street lights and drainage systems. The comment illustrates that, through the petition process, children were able to ask for and obtain concrete action on problems they had identified in the community.

Dahma (management team) emphasised an example of a children's initiative (different from the petition process) following a problem in the community, when the construction of a temple was started but not completed. She thought that the children should have undertaken something easier, as this was their first project, but they insisted. They met the leader of the community and organised a meeting with the help of staff members (participation workers). The leader in the community had collected only half of the funding needed to finish the construction of the temple, with the help of children, leader of the community got others to donate the rest to get the temple finished.

According to Dahma, this experience attracted a lot of recognition of the value of the children's group, as it displayed how children were able to identify an important problem in the community and, by interacting with adults, come to a smart solution. In addition, Dahma's story highlights that children were part of the discussion, and this enabled them to shift adults' mind-set about children's social competencies, such as children's contribution to bring the temple issue up for discussion in the community. However, children's petitions and the temple issue also demonstrate that adults' judgements of the children's competencies are still decisive because adults decide whether or not to interact with children. Admittedly, recognising competencies remains in the controlling hands of adults (Bacon and Frankel, 2014).

In the Scottish case study, Martin (staff) said that children had the opportunity to think about change or improvement in the community through a photography project. The project captured the participants' perspectives: who they were and where they lived, via a photo exhibition and a published book. The book analysis revealed that some of the children took pictures of issues they had identified in the community, such as the negative use of graffiti. Beatrice (staff) explained that a photo exhibition had been organised for decision-makers, parents, and other professionals working with children in the council to present the photography project as well as launch the book. However, no visible changes in the community (practical achievement) were seen after the exhibition. Power relations and negotiations with adults were less obvious, as the exhibition was more about showing children's communication skills through their presentation of the project. In this case, adults did not legitimise children's social competencies, but also children inadvertently blocked themselves by setting up a situation in which they could not negotiate with adults because no mechanism was in place for

formal interactions.

Power and negotiation are integral to understanding social competence (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998). In the Tamil Nadu case study, children achieved their competencies through negotiating and claiming their rights from, and in engaging in meaningful social action with, adults at the community level. The Tamil Nadu case is an example of the enhancement of adult-child relations as a positive outcome from participatory community projects; this is important, particularly as children develop their own interpersonal skills and engage in ongoing dialogue with adults in their communities (Ackermann et al., 2003: 25). Indeed, a person cannot be competent apart from a specific relationship or a set of relationships—the relational aspect being significant to developing children’s competencies (Wiemann and Kelly, 1981). The two case studies demonstrate that, because the determination of competencies is still dependent upon the opinions of adults, achieving social competencies requires a shift in adults’ attitudes.

To conclude this section, the two case studies demonstrated that both NGOs facilitated knowledge and skill production for children through residential capacity-building workshops and research experience (Tamil Nadu case study), and children’s rights-oriented art-based activities and personal experience reflective exercises (Scottish case study); staff support was integral in both case studies. The findings show that participants required knowledge and skills before being able to apply it in context, which is key to developing competence (Bjarnadóttir, 2004). However the case studies also made clear that a theoretical basis is not sufficient if children do not have the opportunity to express their knowledge and skills socially and *in situ* (Hutchy and Moran-

Ellis, 1998). For example, during the Tamil Nadu case study, children made practical use of their competencies through the petition letter and the temple issue, while in the Scottish case study, due to a lack of interaction with adults, there was less chance for children to showcase the full extent of their competencies through the photography project.

The two case studies also indicated that determinations of children's competencies by adults can either facilitate or hinder children's participation; adults remain judgemental gatekeepers of children's competencies. Adults have the power to treat children's multiple competencies as inherent characteristics instead of as skills gleaned from social situations, thus determining children's participation. For instance, the power of NGO staff members to attribute competencies to children was emphasised when staff members selected children to be part of the young facilitator team (Tamil Nadu case study), or when children were allowed to conduct interviews to hire staff (Scottish case study).

In the community, the power of adults in legitimising children's competencies was highlighted through the petition process and temple issues (Tamil Nadu case study), where adults facilitated children's participation. In contrast, the Scottish case study had no mechanism in place for children to engage in meaningful social action within an interactional context, adults in power did not validate children's competencies in any way, thus blocking their participation. Interestingly, the children also blocked their own participation in selecting unintentionally a situation in which they did not have the opportunity to negotiate with adults.

## **5.4 TRANSFER OF CHILDREN'S COMPETENCIES OUTSIDE THE NGOS' PARTICIPATION PROJECTS**

This section examines how children transferred their competencies (learned, developed, and practised) from the context of the NGOs' projects to their everyday lives. The children were interviewed about their participation at school and in family contexts following the NGO programmes.

### **5.4.1 Within the children's school context**

This section examines how children use the personal competencies (knowledge and skills) and social competencies acquired in the participation projects in the context of school.

#### **Children's knowledge and skills**

In the Tamil Nadu case study, the school context acknowledges children's personal competencies as most of the children shared how they used their personal competencies in this context. For example, Roshna (15 years old, interpreter) said that before joining the children's group, she did not take part in any activities in school and was afraid of talking in public. However, after joining the children's group and developing her communication skills, she decided to be part of a speech competition in school, and subsequently won a trophy for her speech about the former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. This also demonstrates that adults in Roshna's school recognised the quality of her communication skills after her public address. Thanks to her experience in the NGO, Roshna was confident to show her knowledge and skills through the speech



competition.

Sasiva (15 years old, interpreter), who was president of her children's group, was able to transfer her leadership skills to two different contexts in school: the classroom, when asked by the teacher, she facilitated a mathematics class, and sports, where she was captain of the volleyball team. Roshna and Sasiva were thus able to transfer their personal competencies—communication skills and leadership skills, respectively—to the school context. Teachers in school took into account the children's NGOs experiences (knowledge and skills) to apply them at school as well.

Equally, children in the Scottish case study were able to transfer their skills and knowledge to other settings. For instance, Olivia (14 years old) shared that, because she had been to the *Scottish Parliament* with the NGO, she was able to use that knowledge in class by contributing information when a boy was doing a talk on the parliament and politics. She realised that she knew quite a lot compared to other students who had not been involved with the NGO, illustrating that Olivia gained specific knowledge by being part of the participation project, and that she was able to use it organically in the classroom context.

Mary (16 years old) shared that her classmate had credited her personal competence by saying: "Some people in my school feel shy getting involved, so in my class, people will say: 'Mary is there, she is confident with stuff, she will do it, she speaks very well'". Mary was perceived as having strong communication skills and confidence compared to her classmates. Olivia's and Mary's experiences demonstrate the ability of children to transfer the knowledge and skills learned in the NGO project to a classroom context. Olivia used her knowledge to add information to a boy's presentation in

her class and children's peers in school recognised Mary's knowledge and skills came from her being involved in the participation project.

Both case studies demonstrate that personal competencies acquired in the NGO projects were used in the school context.

### **Children's social competencies**

In the Tamil Nadu case study, the school context did not encourage children to demonstrate their social competencies by taking concrete action. For example, Dahma (management team) described a particular incident where three members (15 years old) created a petition for the appointment of a new teacher—to address their concern about the lack of teaching staff—directed to the Chief Education Officer without informing their parents or staff members. The Chief Education Officer was highly angry when he received the petition because the children came on their own, and threatened to not allow the children to complete their exams. The children informed the NGO staff members about this incident, who then spoke with the children's parents and sent a letter to the Officer explaining that the children had gone to the City Municipal Corporation with the parents' approval. Both problems were solved: the children were able to take their exams and also secured a new teacher. However, it is clear that without the mediation of staff members (and ultimately parental approval), the children would have been blocked from claiming their rights. The children were also threatened in school when they attempted to claim their rights, and by going through the process without staff mediation they encountered roadblocks. This outcome supports the idea that achievement can involve “struggles for power, contested meanings and negotiated relationships” (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998: 16). This example highlights the idea

that power and negotiation are integral to understanding social competence, as mentioned earlier.

In the Scottish case study, some of the children (15–16 years old) who were interviewed mentioned that they found their school council meetings constrained by adults. For Annabel (16 years), the school council experience was not enjoyable because she felt she was not given the chance to create real change:

I went a couple of times, but I did not really enjoy it. I am not saying that it's a bad thing but they are trying to act like we are making decisions ... but they are doing what they wanted to do in the first place ... I don't want to waste my time ... I prefer to go and have my lunch. They will make the final decision anyway.

Her example shows that little negotiation was possible, as the decisions had already been made and there was therefore, no space to include children's contributions. From my fieldwork observation, the school knew which children had been part of the NGO activity, but Annabel's example shows the school was not given credit for her account of her NGO experience as being part of a participation project. In the school council, power relationships were already well established and the negotiations did not take the children's newer opinions into account (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998).

In both case studies, children were able to use their personal competencies (knowledge and skills) in the school context. Nevertheless, when children wanted to use their social competencies to influence schools, they were confronted with resistance by adults, including one with civil authority (Dhama's and Annabel's examples). The use of social competencies within a group of children was not welcome in the school context, and children were stopped from achieving their desired result. They were restricted in developing their social competencies in the 'here and now', or *in situ* (Hutchby and

Moran-Ellis, 1998), because adults remained reluctant to recognise children's competencies. This supports research conducted in Ireland, which revealed that most children were dissatisfied with their lack of input in decision-making processes at school (Hogan et al., 2015).

#### **5.4.2 Within the children's family context**

This section examines how children transferred both their personal competencies (knowledge and skills) and their social competencies within the family context.

##### **Children's knowledge and skills**

Satish (24 years old, graduate member, interpreter), a participant in the Tamil Nadu case study, noted family and generational hierarchy contexts limited the transfer of children's knowledge and skills within the family. He explained that adults did not ask if a child was competent, as children were *de facto* considered incompetent, and assumed to have no relevant opinions. Therefore, generally adults bypassed children, saying, "Go, sit down in a corner of the room because you don't know how to think about these things". For Satish, the generational hierarchy prevalent in Tamil Nadu impeded children's participation, thus limiting their competencies:

Patriarchal and hierarchical societies like India have traditionally construed and constructed children and young people as listeners and not as speakers, as family members to be seen but not heard. (Saeed, 2014: 92)

This supports the dichotomy between adults as competent and 'being', and children as incompetent and 'becoming' (Warming, 2012). Adults still underestimate children's competencies and so do not create opportunities for children to practise them in the

family context. Additionally, Satish noted that children were sent to the corner of the room when adults were present, establishing the notion that children are expected to be physically displaced from adult conversations.

However, children and graduate members alike stated that some improvements had occurred in their family's recognition of their new knowledge. For instance, Sasiva (15 years old, interpreter) shared that when her father was sick, her mother asked her directly which hospital would admit him. She shared that she learned this information in talking about issues in the community during children's meetings. Her mother saw her now as a source of knowledge.

Puvina (graduate members, 22 years old, interpreter) explained that, when she was a member of the children's group, her parents began asking her opinion on different topics for suggestions because she had been to residential capacity-building workshops and gained practical knowledge. Both Sasiva's and Puvina's parents recognised their children's competencies and began consulting them.

In the Scottish case study, Fiona (staff) noted parents' traditional attitude to their children in saying that adults in the family make all the decisions on behalf of children for safety or security reasons. This suggests that parents genuinely think that their children were incompetent and so saw making decisions on behalf of them to be necessary for their personal safety. Additionally, children were not encouraged to raise their voice or question adults. In England, (and this would likely apply to Scotland), the ability of children to speak in general remains a matter of adult discretion (James, 2011). In fact, in the UK, the traditional views of childhood as marked by dependency, innocence, irrationality, and incompetence echo the proverb, "children should be seen but not

heard” (Tisdall, 2014: 182). These examples thus emphasise that even when children are recognised by adults, their voices will fall on deaf ears.

However, some children said that their parents started seeing them as highly knowledgeable. For instance, Olivia (14 years old) mentioned: “We always have discussion and debate, I say [name of the organisation] told me this and that and they say ‘we are listening to an expert’”. Olivia was able to bring her knowledge into family discussions at home thanks to what she learned from the NGO, however she was only able to express herself when she said that she learned the information from that organisation. Thus, staff members’ role of legitimising children’s knowledge was also significant in the family context. Mary (16 years old) added that: “My parents ask my opinion about what's happened on the news ... they understand that I have more opinions”. Olivia’s and Mary’s comments link to Article 5 of the UNCRC, which refers to parents and their changing relationships with their children as they recognise children’s evolving capacities.

These two examples show that due to activities like the participation projects, parents started to change their mind-set towards their children, considering them more knowledgeable and as having relevant opinions.

### **Children’s social competencies**

In the Tamil Nadu case study, most of the boys and girls interviewed (aged 13 to 16 years old) who were part of the child labourers group, demonstrated their competencies in influencing their own parents’ decision not to send them back to work as a child domestic worker. For example, Adhir (13 years old, interpreter) shared his story that his father asked him why he was going to the children’s group meeting instead of going

to work as he had done before. He told his father that he wanted to study and therefore he could not go to work. Adhir said that he would tell staff members if he had to work again, because they told him explicitly that children should not go to work. His father listened to him and said that he would not go to work and could continue to go to the NGO. This story illustrates how Adhir was able to give his opinion regarding his own situation, and then succeeded in persuading his father, even though Adhir's plea was perhaps assisted by the threat of reporting the situation to staff members. In other words, Adhir did not influence his father alone as he referred to the staff of the NGO as an authority—as experts with knowledge on child labour—in order to be taken seriously by his father. He put adults in competition with each other and withdrew himself from the discussion.

Maalni (15 years old) was even more explicit than Adhir. She told her mother that if she went to work instead of school, staff members would go to the house where her mother worked and imprison her employers, and fine Maalni's mother for sending her child to work. After that, Maalni's mother told her that she did not need to go to work, illustrating that Maalni was able to influence decision-making in the family context by using legal arguments such as the risk of a fine with a jail sentence. Thus, Adhir's and Maalni's examples demonstrate how they influenced decision-making processes by mentioning the knowledge and authority of staff members and other adults in their negotiations.

Children in the Scottish case study did not mention examples of social competencies of children as practical achievement in their family, but Annabel (16 years old) explained that, while she was perhaps not consulted on matters of financial importance,

she did make decisions on matters that related directly to her life:

I don't think that it's really realistic for the whole family to ask: "What would you like to do today?" You know, it's more realistic that mum and dad will say, "This is what we are going to do today, it's going to be nice' ... I don't know to explain it, it's like, there is a big difference between having a bad family environment where there are no rights and having a good, pretty normal family. Children should not have a lot power because they are children. But when I was younger, maybe 10 years old, I was asking my parents what clothes to wear, what colour to paint my room, what to do with my room, what to do my hair, not what car should we buy ... I think that a lot of people would agree with that.

This comment illustrates that Annabel was happy with her parents making decisions about the family's outings. She did not expect to contribute in all matters, and acknowledged that she trusted her parents to make the best decision for her. This supports research that demonstrates that while children may want to have a say in family decision-making, they do not necessarily expect (or want) to make the decisions themselves (Hogan et al., 2015). However, Annabel influenced decision-making when it directly concerned her, such as about her room or hair. In the same way, Kian (14 years old) influenced his parents' decision about dinners and holidays. Indeed, the home is the most facilitative setting of children's voices out of the three spheres explored in the research—home, school, and community (Hogan et al., 2015).

In both case studies, the traditional family context was not considered a place where children could demonstrate competencies (Saeed, 2014; Tisdall, 2014). However, the competencies developed within the participation projects did tend to be recognised by adults, and change subsequently occurred at the family level. In the Tamil Nadu case study, children's competencies were highlighted by the fact that children had to refer to another adult authority in order to get their way. In the Scottish case study, some



parents welcomed children's knowledge, and some children influenced parents' decisions on topics such as their looks, food, and leisure activities.

To conclude this section, the findings demonstrate that children were able to express knowledge and skills at school and in family contexts, but expressing their social competencies remained constrained by adults' judgements. Children's social competencies were, however, expressed in the family context for both case studies. The reported changes in parental behaviour appeared when children mentioned the name of the NGO in the discussion (as in the cases of Adhir, Maalni, and Olivia). Thus, the change appeared more as a result of adults (staff members) being seen as competent and knowledgeable, rather than due to the expression of children's competencies when interacting with their parents.

## **5.5 CONCLUSION**

This chapter analysed the concept of competencies in developing knowledge and skills (personal competencies) as well as practical achievement (social competencies) in the participation projects. Drawing on Bjarnadóttir's (2004) definition, competence is what people 'are *able to do*', using their knowledge or skills '*to do things*' in particular situations. Competencies require knowledge and skills, but the key is the ability to apply them. This chapter confirmed the link between competencies, children's participation, and the importance of context (NGO project, school, and home) when viewing children's competencies as practically achieved. Thus, children's competencies are not seen as inherent characteristics, but as situated and relational.

Two questions were asked regarding the literature (section 5.2): how children's competencies are 'practically achieved', and how this is expressed and constrained in different contexts. This chapter highlights that the traditional family, school, and community contexts were not considered a place where children could demonstrate competencies, but with the NGO projects, some change began, especially in the Tamil Nadu case study.

Similarities and differences appeared in both case studies. The Tamil Nadu case study highlighted that competence is expressed socially and in situ. Children's social competencies were better achieved in the Tamil Nadu case study compared to the Scottish one, where the relational aspects were undermined to express social competencies. In the latter one, children had less opportunity to demonstrate their social competencies because they chose involuntarily a venue (the art exhibition) where there was not any platform or vehicle through which they could negotiate with adults.

In addition, in the Tamil Nadu case study, the support gained from identifying staff members was key to adults' recognition of children's competencies as practically achieved in three spheres: participation projects in the community, school, and the family. This facet also emerged in the Scottish case study, where, in the family sphere, parents referred to the knowledge their children had learned through the organisation. Thus, thanks partly to staff members, adults in the community or in the family were able to shift their mind-sets and recognise children's competencies.

However, adults remained in control of deciding about children's competencies; the case studies show that adults' determination of children's competencies can either facilitate or block children's participation. In the Tamil Nadu case study, as well as in

the Scottish case study, children's competencies were highlighted by bringing staff members into the conversation to validate children's knowledge and allow children to influence decision-making on issues that mattered to them.

Further, Percy-Smith and Burns (2013: 365) suggest adults recognise children's competence and provide support for children to play more active roles at school and in community life. They refer to the development of children's competence through the experience of new social relations between children and adults at school and in communities, as adult support for children's action challenges limited mind-sets about what children can do. This means, for example, in education, switching the emphasis from only learning traditional subjects to a more holistic approach that makes sense of experiences and interactions between individuals and the world, or encouraging project work, which extends beyond the school gates and involves community members.

The findings highlight the relational aspect of competencies, and the importance of emphasising social competencies through the participation projects. Indeed, scholars suggest that competencies should not to be seen as inherent characteristics of a person, but situated, relational, and contextual (Wiemann and Kelly, 1981; Alderson, 1992; Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998; Bjarnadóttir, 2004).

This chapter supports the general participation literature, wherein some scholars have argued for the importance of relational practices in participation as a new direction for children's participation. Moreover, linked to social competence as a practical achievement in particular contexts, the findings support the relational in agentic approach, as children were seen as agents rather than just participants in the community. In the same

way, “young people themselves can be drivers (radical agents) of, rather than just participants in, change as competent community builders alongside adults” (Percy-Smith and Burns, 2013: 326).

Having demonstrated the importance of staff members in supporting children’s competencies, and the importance of relational aspects in children’s participation, the next chapter will consider children’s and staff members’ relationships within the participation projects.



# **CHAPTER 6 : CHILDREN’S AND STAFF/ADULTS’ RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE PARTICIPATION PROJECTS**

## **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

One of the gaps identified in the literature (Chapter 2) was the lack of constructive relationships between children and adults in participation projects. Children’s and adults’ relationships have been largely ignored, as people involved in children’s participation have privileged individual autonomy and agency with “child-initiated and run activities” (Hart, 1992; Lansdown, 2001, revisited in 2010). The scholarly debate has paid more attention to exploring a relational approach to counter the limits of the agentic approach (Wyness, 2015; Tisdall and Punch, 2012; Mannion, 2010).

Scholars have argued for the importance of relational practices in participation as a new direction for children’s participation, not only in using a collaborative or inter-generational approach (Percy-Smith, 2006, 2010; Moxan, 2014; Hatton, 2014), but also in using the relational within the agentic approach (Leonard, 2015; Punch, 2016). Scholars promote relationships in participation because the “participation experience must create a climate that promotes relationships between participants, because they share a story and cooperate towards a common goal” (Agud et al., 2014: 17).

This chapter aims to explore the relationships between children and staff members in order to understand in what way these relationships effect children’s participation. This

chapter is divided into three sections. Section 6.2 discusses how child-adult relationships are understood within the literature. Section 6.3 uses the research data to examine child-adult relationships in the case studies, and particularly how these relationships enable or inhibit children's participation. Lastly, section 6.4 explores how the hierarchical social order within the NGOs enables or inhibits staff members' role as facilitators of participation.

## **6.2 UNDERSTANDING CHILD-ADULT RELATIONSHIPS**

The aim of this section is to examine child-adult relationships in the literature. Wyness (2015) highlights that children's participation has been promoted as one way of thinking, where children are autonomous and adults as invisible in participation. Through different models of children's participation (Hart, 1992; Lansdown, 2001, revisited in 2010), "child-initiated and run" activities have been privileged with a focus on individual autonomy and agency. Lansdown (2010) describes child-led participation as a situation in which children have the space and opportunity to identify issues of concern, initiate activities, and advocate for themselves. The role of adults is to enable children to pursue their own objectives, while adults provide information, advice, and support. Thus, some participation practice has excluded or limited the role of adults.

Tisdall and Punch (2012: 259) question the focus on individuality and personal agency, highlighting the importance of taking into account the value of relationships. Hatton's model (2014) of participative practice recognises that relationships between children and adults enhance participation of both groups. Similarly, some scholars advocate

bringing adults back into the discussion and taking a “more relational approach to children’s participation, recognizing the respective roles and positions of children and adults” (Wyness, 2015:133; *see also* Cockburn and Cleaver, 2009; Mannion, 2010). Indeed, Mannion (2007) suggests that the study of ‘children’s participation’ should be reframed as the study of the ‘child-adult relationships’.

Punch (2001: 23) argues that, “adult-child relations should be explained in terms of interdependencies which are negotiated and renegotiated over time and space, and need to be understood in relation to the particular social and cultural context” in which they occur. Certain scholars also advocate for the conceptualization of child-adult relationships as interdependent and negotiated between children and adults (Cockburn, 1998; Punch, 2001; Kesby, 2007; Mannion, 2007; Tisdall and Punch, 2012). Wyness (2015) points out the need to bring adults into children’s participation as collaborators and protagonists. For Wyness, adults are learning from children and children are working with adults. He notes that “more interdependent relations offer a range of possibilities in terms of the qualities of relationships that children and adults develop together” (2015: 140).

For some scholars, interdependence requires continuous learning (on both children’s and adults’ parts) (Jans, 2004). Percy-Smith (2006, 2010) talks about a process of ‘community social learning’ where children can get together, both informally and formally, with adults to exchange different views and experiences. Lansdown (2010) emphasises collaborative participation as a partnership between adults and children, with the opportunity for active engagement of children at any stage of a decision, initiative, project, or service. Percy-Smith’s work suggests collaborative participation for the



community development project.

Nevertheless, child-adult relationships can be problematic. Taft (2014) highlights that the implicit power in adult ‘orientation’ and ‘guidance’ is still prominent in participatory activities. For example, Taft notes that children emphasise that they listen carefully to the opinions of the adult facilitator because adults know more than they do. For Tisdall et al. (2014), Hart’s ladder implies that power rests either with children, or with adults, as though it were a zero-sum game. Kirby and Gibbs (2006), in their research on child-adult relationships, adapted Klein’s framework (2001)—eight facilitation roles within participatory projects—as follows: abstainer, observer, enabler, activator, advisor, informer, instructor, and doer (taking action on behalf of children). Similarly, as mentioned earlier, Lansdown (2010) emphasises that the role of adults is to provide information, advice, and support for children to pursue their own objectives in the child-led participation. From the description above, there is a lack of child-adult relationships as interdependent. Punch also notes:

...Childhood studies has been so busy with the business of trying to get children’s voices heard and children’s issues on the policy agenda that there has been a tendency to over-emphasise children’s agency, resulting in an under-selling of the generational order. (2016: 189)

Alanen (2001, 2009) argues in favour of generational order:

...there exists in modern societies a system of social ordering that specifically pertains to children as a social category, and circumscribes for them particular social locations from which they act and thereby participate in ongoing social life. Children are thus involved in the daily ‘construction’ of their own and other people’s everyday relationships and life trajectories. (2009: 161)

For Alanen, childhood and adulthood are produced and reproduced in the interactions

that take place between children and adults, through which adults and children produce the social structures of generations. Children co-participate in the daily reproduction and/or transformation of intergenerational practices. While scholars generally rest in two camps, one which conceptualises child-adult relationships as interdependent (Wyness 2015; Percy-Smith 2006, 2010), while the other favours the generational order (Alanen 2001, 2009), children's and adults' relationships are questioned and need to be investigated through the opportunities and constraints within which children and adults relate to each other.

The literature demonstrates that there has been a move towards considering participation as relational and 'in context'. However, the opportunities and constraints of a relational approach have not yet been fully explored. It may be premature to privilege child-adult relationships within the generational order (Alanen, 2001, 2009) or as an interdependent process (Wyness, 2015; Percy-Smith, 2006, 2010) without paying attention to the hierarchical social order of the NGO. This chapter considers child-adult relationships in the case studies, particularly how they enable or inhibit children's participation. From my research, I learned that merely reflecting on child-adult relationships was not enough: the hierarchy within the organisation's social order was also necessary to fully understand child-adult relationships.

### **6.3 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CHILDREN AND STAFF MEMBERS**

This section aims to explore children's and staff/adults' relationships, focusing on what enables or inhibits children's participation. The following sections highlight:

first, children's perceptions of how they interact with staff members, and second, staff members' perceptions of how they interact with children.

### **6.3.1 Children's perceptions on their relationships with staff members**

The following paragraphs consider children's perceptions of their relationships with staff members. In asking children (aged 13–16 years) about their experiences with staff members, I was aware of children's loyalty to them, and how this might automatically lead to praise for them. But from the children's comments, and what I observed during meetings between children and staff members, the answers did not seem exaggerated. In the Tamil Nadu case study, the staff and graduate members reported children's experiences with staff members, so I added them into this section, as it brings new elements to the discussion. I did not have the same kind of information from the Scottish case study. In both case studies, two themes emerged from the data when children were talking about their relationships with staff members: 1) listening and responding to children's concerns, and 2) encouraging children in the activities.

#### **Listening and responding to children's concerns**

In the Tamil Nadu case study, some children (15–16 years old) mentioned that staff members listened to them and responded to their concerns during children's group meetings. For example, Roshna (15 years old, interpreter) shared a discussion from a meeting about removing garbage in the community. In her conversation with me, Roshna expressed that the garbage area needed to be removed before a medical camp for children in the community could be set up, as there was no point in a medical camp

being alongside garbage. When she mentioned this in the meeting, children immediately applauded and said that they liked the idea. Roshna then mentioned that to the staff members who had agreed to organise the cleaning of the area. This illustrates that Roshna's suggestion to remove the garbage was listened to and taken into account by both the other children (who demonstrated this through clapping), and the staff members who agreed to take action and remove the garbage following the children's decision. In this situation, staff members were seen as facilitators, as they gave space for children to express themselves, and then responded to their request. This example also showcases the different roles adults have with children as both enablers and doers; in this case, the adults organised the garbage removal (Kirby and Gibbs, 2006).

However, staff members did not always listen to and respond to children. Dahma, one of the management team members, reported how the children felt frustration towards some of the new staff members (information gleaned from an evaluation conducted regarding the anti-child-labour day). Children reported that: "Staff were dictating to us, not listening to us...children were asking questions but the new staff were not able to accept it". The narrative illustrates that the new staff kept their position of 'adult-as-authority' in order to tell children what to do. The narrative went further as the new staff were neither ready to 'let go' of the children, so children could not take the lead in the activity, nor could they work collaboratively with adults. This supports Liebel's (2012) remarks about educators and social workers who applied for a job in the centre of the children's movement in Nicaragua:

Amongst adults who were allocated to the children and who wanted to advocate for their rights, the conviction was that children should not decide over adults, but adults over children, and should have the last words. (2012: 235)

Similarly, Orama (2009: 6) highlights that, “adult professionals tend to take for granted that they know what is in the best interests of children, often without even asking the children concerned”. Thus, these examples indicate that children-adults relationships are determined by adults with no place for children to express themselves. As a consequence, children are not able to fully develop their competencies as they are being constrained by adults.

Divish (graduate member, 22 years old, interpreter), based on his experience as a child in the participation project, came up with a clear idea of what the relationship between children and staff members should be: staff should provide information to children and then let children decide what they want. If children make the wrong decision, then staff members should explain why and in what way the children could have done things differently. Divish expected staff members to listen to children regarding their own decisions. Nevertheless, if children went down in the wrong path, the staff member should encourage children to think critically about the situation. Staff members in this context must be able to guide children as advisors and informers (Kirby and Gibbs, 2006).

Thus, the relationship between children and staff members, in both case studies, was not always harmonious. On the one hand, staff members were described as enablers and doers, organising the children’s decision, but on the other hand, new staff members perpetuated the practice of ‘adult authority’ by telling children what to do. As Divish asserted, staff members must be able to guide children as advisors and informers.

In the Scottish case study, some of the young people (15–16 years old) acknowledged

that staff members listened and responded to their concerns. Mary (16 years old) reported that staff members asked children's opinions and took them seriously. She said: "We were asked our opinion and my idea was to make a DVD on children's rights...they were not only taking my view but they took action." The quotation illustrates that staff members were not only listening to Mary, but also responding to her suggestion by organising the process of making a DVD. Again, this example demonstrates adults' roles as enablers and doers (Kirby and Gibbs, 2006).

Alex (16 years old) explained how he wanted to draw an art mural representing two worlds. He said that he thought that it was a good idea but was not sure that other children and staff members would agree, but they did. This comment illustrates that to validate his idea, Alex required the agreement of other children and staff members. Thus, it was not enough to be listened to and have his idea taken into account by staff members; other children's agreement was also important. This example indicates that it is not only about children's and adults' relationships (listening and responding), but about the importance of peers to listening and responding to each other.

William (14 years old) answered questions about his relationship with staff members:

*William:* Adults are adults and children are children, they are different.

*Researcher:* Do you have a connection with the staff member?

*William:* It's just a moment.

William emphasised the difference between the two social categories: children and adults. For him, the connection between children and staff members was only an ephemeral 'moment', as most of the time they were separated because of their different social position. Thus, as an explanation, the intergenerational relationship between the

generational categories does exist, but has not yet become part of routine (Alanen 2009).

Ludovic (16 years old) said he did not expect too much from adults, just that they listen, give advice, give ideas, and also that adults enjoy the activity alongside the children. Again, there is a link to the idea that staff members should be advisors and informers of children through participatory activities (Kirby and Gibbs, 2006). But for Ludovic, adults also need to enjoy the process of being with children. Thus, the gratification of staff members in participating with children is considered as a reliable indicator of children's and staff members' relationships.

Both case studies highlight how children's activities allow children to express themselves, both to their peers and to staff members. In both case studies, staff members were seen as enablers and doers; however, respecting children's views does not mean that children can do whatever they want or whatever conclusion they themselves have come to (Lansdown, 2011: 82). Divish (Tamil Nadu case study) and Ludovic (Scottish case study) expected staff to act as advisors and informers, however, negotiated relationships with staff members were limited. Children from the Dahma's example still considered adults 'an authority' with no chance for collaborative work. Thus, the power of adults in the children-adult relationships was still prominent.

### **Encouraging children to participate**

In both case studies, children agreed that staff members had encouraged them to participate.

In the Tamil Nadu case study, some of the children who experienced an elected position mentioned that participation workers had encouraged them to apply for the position. For instance, Sasiva (15 years old, interpreter), who was president of her children's group, said that participation workers motivated her to run for president, and they supported her when she conducted meetings with children by reassuring her that everything would be fine. For Sasiva, the participation workers' moral support was significant for her, as she was worried about how to conduct a meeting, so having an adult with her reassured her that she was not making mistakes. Sasiva recognised that, not only did the participation workers encourage her, but they helped her gain the necessary confidence to conduct meetings with children. Parimila (14 years old, interpreter) said that she used to be shy and would avoid going out. However, being in the children's group and being supported by the participation workers helped her participate in activities. Thus, Sasiva and Parimila clearly benefited from the individual support of adults.

In a similar example, Vijay (16 years old, interpreter) shared that he was scared to participate in his first meeting when he was 12 years old. The participation worker told him to stay five minutes; if he did not want to stay, he could leave at any time. He decided to leave directly. However, he went back and attended the next meeting after his friends encouraged him to try again. This time around, the participation worker engaged him and motivated him to participate in activities. He subsequently developed his speaking skills by going to residential capacity-building workshops. Vijay's story illustrates the importance of developing relationships with staff members in addition to relationships with peers.



Vijay was not the only one who mentioned the mix of children and staff members' encouragement. According to Roshna (15 years old, interpreter), children need encouragement not only from staff members to be able to express themselves, but also from their peers. Sanjay (graduate member, 22 years old, interpreter) reflected on his experience of joining the children's group at the age of 10. He attended a few residential capacity-building workshops and began to express himself during these sessions; he was only able to do so during these sessions because both children and staff encouraged him to speak up.

Divish (22 years old, interpreter), one of the graduate members, explained how when he was in the children's groups he got more opportunities to be involved in many activities. But nowadays, children were less involved and attended meetings irregularly because of the extension of school hours. This illustrates that time was significant in allowing children to participate in activities, and consequently to have contact with staff members. Without that, children missed the opportunity to build relationships and get encouragement from staff members.

These examples from the Tamil Nadu case study illustrate that children's and staff/adults' relationships are shaped not only by individual staff members' encouragement, but also by the children. Moreover, the time element was significant in establishing these relationships.

In the Scottish case study, some children emphasised the role of staff members in encouraging them to participate in activities, such as Olivia (14 years old): "They [staff] always make sure that children get involved. They pay attention, but do not force. They will try to give us a boost". This comment illustrates that Olivia recognised the skills

of the staff members in encouraging children to participate without being forceful. Children required encouragement from staff to stimulate their participation. Annabel (16 years old) noted that: “It is not formal. We can do what we like, they give us the space”, highlighting the freedom adults gave the participants.

For Alex, (16 years old):

I was talking to Fiona for the animation film, thinking out loud and an idea came... She picked it up, and she said: ‘It could be something, that's good’, I said: ‘Really?’ So I have been able to talk to her and it helps me to come up with my ideas. So having an adult to listen to you, really helps you come up with all the plans.

Alex highlights the role of Fiona as a good listener, an activator in enabling him to develop his ideas further and find his own voice, illustrating how children and staff members work together.

Thus, the examples from the Scottish case study highlight the importance of encouragement from staff without being forceful, or telling the children what to do. More importantly staff are required to be skilled listeners and supportive, encouraging children to talk and share ideas.

However, in both case studies, children noted that staff members had discouraged, or encouraged children less, when acting outside the NGO’s structure. In the Tamil Nadu case study, Sanjay (graduate member, 22 years old, interpreter) shared an example where children received information from an external resource about the *Right to Education Act* during one residential capacity-building workshop; they learned that fees in school should not be collected anymore. Children came back from the capacity-building programme and told the participation workers that they wanted to take action

in their schools, because the school fees were still being collected, but participation workers stopped them, telling the children that they would get in trouble with teachers if they took action. Sanjay concluded that participation workers were discouraging children to take action because of staff members' fears of reprisal on children.

Sanjay's comment demonstrates that the relationship between children and participation workers broke down in the face of protection issues, and as such staff would not let the children act of their own accord. Another interpretation of this scenario might be that participation workers were fearful of possible consequences for themselves, such as losing their jobs or damaging the reputation of the organisation. It seems that sometimes professionals do not take risks in children's participation in light of the risks to their interests (Gal and Duramy, 2015: 3). Moreover, this example shows that participation workers did not having the 'usual' role of facilitating the meeting, as it was an external resource worker who provided the information that complicated the relationships between children and participation workers.

Similarly, although less obvious than in the Tamil Nadu case study, staff in the Scottish case study also failed to encourage children to take action. Exceptionally, one child, Mary (15 years old), reported that: "We know that things do not happen suddenly; we need to be patient and [name of the organisation] teach us that things don't change overnight, we need to be patient". The quotation illustrates that Mary saw the staff as adults telling her how things work. Indeed, children have been shown to highlight the fact that they listen carefully to the opinions of the adult facilitator because adults know more than they do (Taft, 2014).

To conclude, what facilitated participation from the children's point of view was that

staff encouraged, listened to, and responded to children's concerns by acting as advisors, informers, activators, and doers. But interdependent child-adult relationships, such as adults learning from children or children and adults are working collaboratively, were absent. While in the Scottish case study some examples of working together (i.e. Alex) were mentioned, these were the exception rather than the norm (i.e. Ludovic and William).

Both case studies showed the role of staff members as facilitators of children's participation, but in practice, the protection issue overlapped with participation. This supports Lückner-Babel's (1995) notion that Articles 3 and 12 are contradictory. She argues that, on the one hand, Article 3 (the best interests of the child) of the UNCRC focuses on the adult position as educator and decision maker, knowing what is best for children, while, on the other hand, Article 12 (the right to be heard) focuses on the child's growing autonomy. Cantwell (1998) and Liebel (2000) support Lückner-Babel's position that Articles 3 and 12 of the UNCRC are in contradiction, with a tension between the power of adults and the rights of children to express themselves freely. However, for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, there is no tension between the protective approach of Article 3 and the participative approach of Article 12 (CRC/C/GC/12 para 74). Article 3 is seen as a framework for addressing the well-being of the child, and Article 12 is seen as a methodology to help determine what the best interests are in allowing the child to express his or her view (CRC/C/ GC/12 para 74; Zermatten, 2010: 496; Krappmann, 2010: 504).

This explanation is related to both case studies, as the relationship between children

and staff members showed tension between the power of staff and children in expressing themselves freely. Thus, in the two case studies, the best interests of the child (Article 3) prevail over the right to be heard (Article 12).

### **6.3.2 Staff members' perceptions on their relationships with children**

The following paragraphs consider the staff members' relationships with children. Two key points emerged from the analysis: staff members' role in providing guidance (Tamil Nadu case study), and in creating relationships with children (Scottish case study).

#### **Providing guidance**

In the Tamil Nadu case study, most of the management team and participation workers emphasised a common perception about their role with the children: "We must guide them". This was not surprising, as children prepared a definition of children's participation as follows: "Children's participation refers to children expressing themselves, taking decisions, planning, implementing, and evaluating their activities with guidance of the adults in matters concerning children". Rakha (management team, interpreter) added that the inclusion of 'guidance of the adults' came from the management team rather than from children, indicating the role of staff members as facilitators in the process of participation.

For Dahma (management team), it was clear that: "Staff members have to be with children, to provide the space to participate, to give them information that is needed, to develop their abilities, to enable them to make decisions". Dahma emphasises the role of staff members in the children's and staff/adults' relationships as 'facilitator',

guiding children to make decisions. In this case, the role of adults in child-adult relationships would be categorised as enabler, advisor, and informer (Kirby and Gibbs, 2006).

Dahma later added that it was sometimes difficult for staff members to be facilitators: “Sometimes, I see staff members saying, ‘we should be careful, we should not let them go beyond this’”. This comment reveals the hesitation of staff members, who, in most situations play the role of protector of children, and thus were not always ready to let go of their authority. As mentioned earlier, staff members have concerns about the best interests of the children and the risk of being involved in particular activities. This can be understood in light of the idea that “often perceptions of children as inferior, incapable, and “yet-to-becoming’ full persons coincide with conscious as well as unconscious fears of ceding power” (Gal, 2015: 454). This contributes to the suggestion that:

Initiatives often fail because the adults working with children do not recognise or promote children’s potential contribution and, consequently, fail to relinquish their control over children in favour of an approach based on partnership or collaboration (Lansdown, 2010: 16).

Some other management team members and most participation workers emphasised their guidance role as a teaching role vis-à-vis children. For instance, Medha (management team, interpreter) stated that the role of staff members was to correct children, because they were at risk of misusing the information provided. Medha’s comment illustrates that staff members could not set aside their role of teachers, presuming to correct children. Medha saw staff members’ role more as teacher and less as facilitator, much like in Indian schools, where learning is traditionally classroom-based.

In addition, Raj (management team) said:

We teach children how to communicate with the mayor of the city. They [children] should be clear about what they want to ask him [mayor], as well as how to ask him questions. If you teach that to children, they will be very active and they will develop themselves.

For Raj, the teaching part of guidance as a whole was significant in enabling children not only to communicate better with adults, but also to take action and develop their skills. For him, children learned those skills from adults. This example indicates how adults facilitate participation instead of blocking it.

In the same way, Madhuri (participation worker, interpreter) particularly emphasised her role in guiding children down the right path, keeping them within her control, giving them good advice, teaching them skills, and teaching them how to respect adults. Her description demonstrates that, by using her adult authority to control the children, and at the same time taking care of them (the 'right path') by knowing what was best, Madhuri played her role as 'teacher'.

Thus, staff members (management team and participation workers) saw their 'guidance' role as having a teaching function, supporting research that views the role of adults as instructors, e.g. checking if children had acquired the correct information, teaching them how to speak up, but also maintaining authority (Kirby and Gibbs, 2006). Thus, the influence of the education system on viewing learning as traditionally classroom-based impeded the child-adult relationships.

The staff's guidance through teaching was also confirmed by my fieldwork, where I observed that the relations between staff members and children were similar to the ones in the school system. For example, children referred to participation workers as

‘teachers’, even though the management team named participation workers ‘animators’ in their job description. Some of the meetings were similar to a classroom session: staff members would stand in front of the children delivering a speech and asking questions, and were pleased when children gave the right answers. Staff members also asked children to repeat sentences two or three times. This makes sense in light of information about schools in India, where “teaching methods are quite often dominated by rote learning, including repetition-typically and endless chanting of multiplication and others tables” (Drèze and Sen, 2014: 120).

Thus, even if the organisation promotes staff members’ role of providing guidance to children as facilitators of the process, in reality some staff members still perceived their role of guidance through the lens of ‘teacher’. Indeed, it is clear that it was difficult for some staff to remove themselves from traditional roles where “adults are expected to teach, guide, rear and provide for children, to take responsibility” (Johansson, 2011: 106, *see also* Blanchet-Cohen and Rainbow, 2006; Taft, 2014). This pattern emphasises the difficulty of staff members to have an equal relationship with children.

### **Creating relationships with children**

In contrast to Tamil Nadu, the case study in Scotland indicated that the staff members team spoke about the need to ‘create the relationships’ with children. Beatrice (staff) had a strong opinion on creating relationships:

You can have all the activities and the wonderful resources in the world, but actually, unless you get the relationship between children and adults right, it will be lost money. It's very few people who understand that... It's very simple, we just need to state it plainly—respecting children and respecting adults—it's not one over the other.



In Beatrice's opinion, the equal relationship between children and adults was a pre-condition before starting any activity, and the notion of respect was key to establishing a relationship. Thus, adults in the children-adults' relationships are based on adults' success in developing the quality of relations that they generate with children.

Most of the staff members emphasised how they established a close relationship with the children. For instance, Fiona (staff) insisted on focusing on the relationships before starting an activity. She said: "I just need to make a connection with children, make a connection at any kind of level ... to be here, or to sit next to them do something together". Thus, for Fiona, not only was the relational dimension significant, but so was the space to establish that relationship. The role of space is integral, as it promotes the relational aspect in participatory activities (Agud et al., 2014).

However, during the peer-education project (a follow-up of the three-year-programme), Fiona found that it was not always easy to create relationships with children:

I found it really frustrating to follow up work, as the younger children were forgetting the process, so we'd have to do a catch up, remind them why you do peer education...Some of the younger ones were a little disengaged.

Once Fiona perceived that children lost motivation, she felt that she needed to do extra work to re-motivate them during this project. She was also frustrated that some children did not always attend the sessions, and thus the relationships were further weakened.

Additionally, Fiona was frustrated with the time constraints: "We did not see the children regularly enough for me... it was always difficult to get everyone together". Similarly, for Martin (staff): "We need to find the balance between school, study time, and

activities. To be honest, I would like to go faster but time is against us”. Martin, too, felt that his work was impeded by the children’s busy schedule.

Lindsay (staff) pointed out that working together was a significant factor in creating relationships:

I have never been shy to say, 'I don't know'. If you have an honest conversation with someone who asks you a question and you say no, you talk through things together, and I think that it builds the relationship as well. Having an answer is also having power ... so it's more about finding it together, and having equal power. I have my own life experiences and you have your own life experiences, let's do it together.

This shows that not having all the answers to children’s questions provided for an honest and open conversation, which supports the idea that the educator (participation worker) “recognizes their role as a partner in and not as the leader of the experience, and who establishes a confidence-based and close relationship with the children” (Agud et al., 2014:18).

In contrast to the Tamil Nadu case study, staff members in the Scottish case study considered themselves different from teachers in school. For example, Alise (staff) said: “It’s more about practitioners who are open and create the environment for children rather than a particular lesson”. Alise contrasted her practice to that of traditional teachers: staff members did not focus on a specific topic but were flexible, and sought to generate the right space in creating a relationship with children. For Fiona (staff), when talking about the three years participation project, said:

Teachers have an agenda and they have to get to a certain point. We have more time and if something is not working, it doesn’t really matter because we don’t have to go through an exam.

Fiona suggests that staff members did not have the same pressure as teachers, such as preparing children for an exam. The three-years participation project was a good example of having enough time to build stable relationships, compared to the peer-educator project, which lasted for only one year and experienced significant time pressure (as mentioned earlier by Fiona and Martin).

Lindsay (staff) spoke about the notion of hierarchy in child-adult relationships in school:

I am speaking to them as John or Kate or whoever they might be, they call me Lindsay so it's an equal relation, there is no title, no hierarchy, it's very important for what we do here... it's different from traditional school teaching. However, I will respect them and they will respect me.

Speaking to children using their first names broke down the hierarchy between children and adults that is perceived as being present in the school system. Lindsay emphasised the qualities of relationships such as equal power and respect that children and adults developed together.

In the Scottish case study, staff members defined their role first in terms of creating relationships with children, and following that, in differing from teachers in the school system. This supports a study conducted by the Scottish Government (2014), which noted that positive experiences of participation were heavily dependent upon the attitudes that professionals had towards children and the quality of relationship that was established. As such, the notion that “more interdependent relations offer a range of possibilities in terms of the qualities of relationships that children and adults develop together” (Wyness, 2015: 140) is missing key components, as it is more about the willingness of adults to decide to create the relationship with children.

## **The anxiety and confidence of staff members working with children**

In the Tamil Nadu case study, most of the participation workers highlighted their anxiety in working with children. Aya (management team) described the recruitment process of the participation workers and their capacity-building:

We are recruiting the animators [participation workers] from the field. They are mostly either former domestic workers or members of self-help groups, they won't have experience about social work. Once we appoint them, they get an idea about the project, what the children's project is, the NGO's perspective about child participation, and how we are promoting child participation, but they need to know more about how to communicate with children. They also learn that one of the projects getting funded requires them to arrange a meeting, to organise children to go to leadership training.

Participation workers learned on-the-job about working with children, as their previous employment was usually not with children. Although the organisation provided information on participation, this was still seen as theoretical learning. This echoes Chapter 5 where children's experiences were not only theoretical as children needed actual experience to gain their skills. Aya emphasised the lack of practical training with staff members, such as how to communicate with children. This signals the need to develop participation workers' skills as facilitators and in how to create the partnership between children and adults. The training of adults should not only involve mastery of participatory strategies and methodologies, but adults should also have ethical training and believe in children's participation (Agud et al., 2014). Aya's example also supports that it is not enough to gather children and adults together and think that everything will be all right (Thomas, 2012).

To further understand the participation workers' anxiety, Shanvi (participation worker, interpreter) explained that it was difficult for her to interact with children, that she felt

unnatural asking them to sit down to have a conversation. Additionally, she felt she needed to be careful when speaking with them; if she used the wrong words it would negatively affect the relationship. For Shanvi, it was even more difficult to manage a group of children; she was afraid to interact with the children because she was worried about providing them with incorrect information. As Shanvi's example suggests, some participation workers were not confident in interacting with children.

This was echoed by some of the management team who recognised participation workers' anxiety about interacting with children. For example, Saasna (management team, interpreter) said that, in general, participation workers were scared of children because they were consistently told to use specific training tools and to act in a certain way towards the children. Saasna said this fear was compounded by their inability to instinctively handle a discussion with children. Participation workers' problems were thus twofold: they lacked the necessary skills to interact with the children in a productive manner, and they did not have the correct attitude toward the children. In fact, children gained more knowledge than participation workers did because they participated in more capacity-building activities. For Saasna, it was not enough to provide participation workers with training tools to interact with children, they also needed to learn how to be in these situations, because they did not have the proper skills to facilitate a children's discussion.

Shanvi's and Saasna's examples confirm the Protacio-de Castro et al.'s (2007: 118) conclusion that: "Adults may not only lack the attitude, but also the skills necessary to facilitate young people's participation and to work with them". Thus, facilitation's skills are something that adults need to acquire, they not inherent. To illustrate this

point, Chapter 5 has shown that children developed their facilitation's skills in going to the residential capacity-building workshops and in practising the skills with their peers.

In contrast to the Tamil Nadu case study, participation workers in Scotland were confident about interacting with groups of children. They found it natural to speak with children, as it was not their first experience in doing this. For instance, Lindsay (staff) shared that she was a volunteer youth worker while at university. Thus, for Lindsay, confidence came with practice, something the Tamil Nadu participation workers lacked.

Moreover, I observed that all staff members in the Scottish case study held qualifications relevant to the job. From the interviews, I gathered that they graduated with either a Community Education course, a Bachelor's Degree in Community Education, or a Master's Degree in Childhood Studies. Alise (staff) emphasised the NGO's induction as efficient because it was done through shadowing a couple of staff members' sessions with children and speaking to staff members about what they did in practice, instead of only attending a one-day training. Thus, for Alise, to be immersed in colleagues' real work was a strong start to working with children, rather than being provided with a solely theoretical induction. This example draws a parallel with the previous chapter where children in the Scottish case study developed their knowledge by being part of experiential learning activities. Additionally, new staff members, in shadowing other members before starting work, could see what child-adult relationships meant for the organisation, as staff worked to create relationships with children before starting activities.

To summarise, in the Tamil Nadu case study, most participation workers were anxious about interacting with children, and lacked the necessary skills to communicate effectively with them, which had a negative impact on their relationships with the children. In the Scottish case study, the combination of confident staff members and their professional experience, as well as the NGO's induction process, facilitated effective adult/child relationships.

To conclude, staff members viewed their role within the children and staff/adults' relationship differently in each study. On the one hand, in the Tamil Nadu case study, most of the staff saw themselves as providing guidance and facilitating the participatory process, but in practice, staff members saw their 'guidance' role through the lens of 'teacher'. On the other hand, in the Scottish case study, staff members sought to construct an alternative approach, having more equal relationships with the children by distinguishing themselves from the traditional education system. In the Scottish case study, the 'space' element and working together to find solutions shaped the relationships between children and staff, however the extent to which the child-staff relationship was interdependent was limited. Indeed, children's and adults' relationships were not considered as adults are learning from children and children working with adults (Wyness, 2015), nor as negotiated and renegotiated over time and space (Punch, 2001), and these facets were not emphasised in the examples above.

#### **6.4 HIERARCHICAL SOCIAL ORDER IN THE NGO CONTEXT**

This section aims to explore how the hierarchical social order can inhibit the facilitating role of staff members with children in the context of the NGOs. Staff members

identified three perceptions that impeded their facilitation in children's participation: their fear of the hierarchy level; their worry about funding not being renewed; and the lack of staff members in the participation projects.

#### **6.4.1 Management layer**

In the Tamil Nadu case study, the hierarchical social order of the NGO had six layers of management, from the director down to the participation workers. Most of the participation workers highlighted their anxiety about talking to the management team. For example, Teepa (participation worker, interpreter) said that she was afraid of being misinterpreted by the management team by saying the wrong thing. She mentioned that she and other colleagues had a strategy of keeping their mouths shut to avoid getting into as little trouble as possible. Thus, Teepa and her colleagues decided to talk less to secure their positions. Aya (management team) confirmed the participation workers' anxiety:

The children have spark, they don't have any fear, but as an adult we think about these things, so some staff members don't even open their mouth during our planning meeting even if they have some good suggestions...they think that some people might think their idea is wrong.

Aya illustrates an interesting comparison between children having no fear talking and staff members having a fear to speak. Aya was aware that participation workers were afraid of talking in the presence of other staff members—of being judged by other staff—particularly the management team.

I experienced the fear and anxiety of participation workers first-hand during my field-work. I grouped the management team and the participation workers together for a



focus group discussion during my research, and was surprised that the participation workers were not as talkative in the focus group as they were with me during the interviews I had conducted with them. In informal discussions with participation workers after the focus group, they confirmed that they were afraid to make a mistake in the presence of the management team. They only participated in the discussion when I personally asked them questions or when the management team asked them to give their opinions. This fieldwork observation confirms Teepa's and Aya's comments.

As a result, participation workers did not feel free to express themselves with the NGO management, fearing that they would be judged. Staff participation workers, then, were not sharing information about children's activities with the management team. This supports the idea of organisational inefficiency:

An organisation that operates with a strong hierarchy in which staff on the lower rungs do not feel able to voice their concerns faces a potential contradiction in this respect, is likely to find the progress of its work hampered as a result (Hart et al., 2004: 59).

Thus, the effectiveness of the organisation is at a disadvantage, as staff members could not express freely the problems encountered in the children's activities.

In contrast to the Tamil Nadu case study, an organisational hierarchy in the Scottish NGO was less obvious. First of all, there were only two layers of hierarchy: director and staff members. The management team had been in place since the creation of the NGO, and had focused on building relationships with children as a priority in their work. Staff members highlighted the friendly atmosphere in the organisation. For example, Lindsay (staff) said: "There is this kind of family aspect in [name of the organisation], but as we grow it could change slightly. It's very valuable in the organisation

itself". Lindsay highlighted that the small size of the organisation [10 people] enabled good working relationships. The hierarchy in the Scottish case study was blurred further as all staff members facilitated or helped children's sessions, regardless of their position in the organisation. During the focus group discussion that I organised, one of the staff noticed that all the team had a common understanding of their work with children. This confirms the individual interviews that I had with staff members, who said that they all shared the same values in relation to children and participation.

To conclude, the hierarchical social order (management layer) in the organisation inhibited staff members' facilitation of children's activities (Tamil Nadu case study). Teepa's fear of expressing herself freely with the management team explains why children's and adults' relationships were not developed more. As a participation worker, she did not want to take the risk of disappointing the management team and jeopardising her job. In the Scottish case study, the flatter management structure encouraged stronger relationships between staff, and the organisation was even considered a family by some.

#### **6.4.2 Dependency on funders**

The Scottish case study demonstrated that all staff members were afraid of lacking the funds meant to be provided either by the government or the local authority (external hierarchy), as the organisation was dependent on government funders to continue their work with children. For example, Greg (staff) expressed:

At the moment, we don't have funding beyond June 2013 and we are currently applying for the new funding application. After 20 years, we should be in a place where the government notes that we are doing something that is valuable ... But, there is the

funding scheme and we have to make ourselves fit in, so we feel a little vulnerable just now.

Greg highlighted the vulnerability of the organisation to funders and State appropriations even if they had extensive experience in working with children. Another staff member, Martin (staff), explained why he was in the process of quitting his job at the time I was doing my fieldwork:

Honestly the reason was the funding. It's not because I don't want to be involved any more, but we have short term funding with the local council until June, and we don't know what will happen, so my decision was purely based on the funding aspect.

Martin was reluctant to work in an organisation funded on a short-term basis and dependent upon the funder's continued willingness. The funder was seen as the 'boss' of the NGO, as it decided on renewing the contracts of the employees.

Fiona (staff) was also afraid of not performing well enough to secure funding:

Politicians must come to us in order to increase our plans, about what we tried to do ... It's about evidence. It's publicity. It's also gathering money... It's a horrible thing that you have to keep an eye on when you work at this kind of level, because it does not matter what you are doing here if nobody supports you.

Fiona was preoccupied by funders' influence on her work, and she insisted on showing results and marketing the NGO's children work to the funders. Indeed, in the new era of financial austerity, persuasive evidence needs to be shown about the benefits of children in participation projects; organisations and communities are needed if funding and political support is to be sustained (Crowley, 2013).

I observed that children were affected by the NGO's dependency on external funders.

I asked children what would be their next step with the organisation once the project ended. Aware of the funding challenge, children, from both the 13–14 years old and the 15–16 years old age groups, said that they wanted to continue and stay in contact with the organisation. For instance, Elise (14 years old) said that she was upset that the activities had stopped. Brice (16 years old) said that he hoped to do more workshops with children in the future, but that staff members could not give him an exact answer as they did not know if the programme would continue to be funded. Annabel (15 years old), after spending four years with the organisation, said: “Hopefully [they will stay in contact]... I gave them my number, I always want to do something with them”. These three examples showed that children depended on adults funding opportunities to continue their relationships with the NGOs.

I also asked staff members involved in the project about the continuity of the project with children, and again they referred to the funding issue. For instance, Fiona (staff) stated: “I could not respond to their [children’s] request as we didn’t know if we would get further funding to involve children”. This quotation illustrates that Fiona did not have an answer to give to the children’s request. An informal discussion with Beatrice (staff) revealed that the NGO needed to apply for funding for a new project. Because the organisation works on a project basis, funding is variable, and as such it is not easy to maintain consistent relationships with the children, even if children were demanding services as mentioned above.

In contrast to the Scottish case study, the dependency on funders was less evident (although still present) in the Tamil Nadu case study. For instance, Dahma (management

team) talked about the NGO's relationship with one of the main funders in the participation project:

It's more based on discussion and what is needed for the project, children also give ideas... Luckily, we don't have donors that dictate to us, or it would be very difficult... it's more a collective session... we have more than 10 years of partnership with the same donor.

This quotation illustrates that funders did not inhibit the continuity of the participation project because of the long-term partnership with a single funder. Dahma's quotation suggests that the organisation had the freedom to propose what they wanted to do with the money. This had a direct impact on the continuity of the child-adult relationships, as graduate members had the opportunity to stay in the organisation through the establishment of the central committee, as mentioned in Chapter 3, section 3.3.1.

To conclude, the Scottish case study points out how the hierarchical social order (in the context of having the funder as an external factor) impeded staff members' facilitative role with children. For instance, dependency on the funders challenged the organisation by raising fear that funding will not be renewed. This facet also has an impact on the continuity of the work with children who wish to continue to be involved with the organisation. This was less noticeable in the Tamil Nadu case study, as the organisation there has a long-term partnership with their funder, and was thus able to keep the involvement of the graduate members within the NGO.

#### **6.4.3 Lack of staff members in the participation projects**

In both case studies, participants alluded to insufficient staffing as an impediment to their relationships with children. In the Tamil Nadu case study, Aya (management

team) acknowledged the lack of necessary participation workers:

We are not able to question staff members because there are not enough staff members...they need to cover four areas...they don't have time to sit with the children to speak. Before, when they went for a home visit, staff would sit with the people and they would sit with the children and have the general discussion, asking 'How are you? How is your study going on? Do you have any problems at school? ... and so on. But now they simply deliver the message, the meeting is on the 22nd of the month at 3 o'clock. That's it. Staff are like postmen now.

While participation workers expressed a desire to deepen relationships, in practice they had insufficient time to do so. In the past, home visits were the space to create informal connections with children, such as inquiring about the latter's situation in school. Aya noted that this step no longer existed, as participation workers had to manoeuvre logistics in order to deliver messages to all the children. Thus, time constraints were seen as a major inhibitor to the participation workers' relationship with children, borne out of a dearth of participation workers within NGO projects.

Similarly, in the Scottish case study, Fiona (staff) emphasised the insufficient number of staff members. I asked her how she felt after Martin (staff) quit his job, and she told me that she was worried about managing the project as she now had more responsibility. Moreover, although the organisation had replaced him, the person was busy with other work and was not able to help her. Fiona added:

For the workshop to be carried out, my head was more on what we were going to do and how we were going to do it, rather than on the experience with the children... it was little bit disjointed with the [Martin] thing.

While Fiona's work was focusing on the experience of participation with children, her

role changed with the departure of Martin. Her work became more logistical than facilitative, as she needed to concentrate on the outcome of activities at the cost of the relationships with children. Thus, child-adult relationships were constrained due to the lack of staff members.

In both case studies, lack of resources, such as staff members and funding, impeded children's and adults' relationships. It restricted staff members' role to carrying out logistical work (delivering messages, creating plans for workshops, etc.) at the expense of establishing relationships with the children.

This section largely emphasises that the hierarchical social order can inhibit the facilitating role of staff members with children in the context of the NGOs. There were obvious constraints on staff members due to the organisation's hierarchy and funding sources: staff were anxious at the thought of being misjudged by the management team (Tamil Nadu), and felt vulnerable to the whims of funders (Scotland). To some extent, in both case studies, the lack of staff members limited the role of staff to logistics, rather than allowing the facilitating role to play out during the participation projects.

## **6.5 CONCLUSION**

This chapter explored children's and staff/adults' relationships, with a focus on factors that enable or inhibit children's participation. Enablers of children's participation were considered first through children's perception of staff members' relationships as listeners, respondents, and as the ones who encourage children. The second stream of positive influence operated through staff members' perception of needing to provide

guidance to children (Tamil Nadu case study), create positive relationships with children and have confidence in working with children (Scottish case study). Factors inhibiting children's participation were the lack of staff members in the participation projects, the lack of staff member's skills in facilitating children's participation, the resistance of the staff members to children's participation (Tamil Nadu case study), and also the lack of time to create relationships with children, due in part to the school schedule and children's activities after school, but also due to the lack of staff members.

Although the two organisations promoted children's and staff/adults' relationships within the generational order, the situation of staff members within the organisations' hierarchical social orders generated questions about those relationships. Organisational hierarchy had a negative influence in different ways in the two case studies. In the Tamil Nadu case study, the management layers were problematic, whereas in the Scottish case study, the issue was related to funding. In both cases, the hierarchical social order impeded children's and staff members' relationships. This chapter showed that it was not enough to consider child-adult relationships, but the hierarchy within the organisation's social order also needed to be taken into account in order to understand what enables or inhibits staff members' facilitation role with children, and for what is necessary to have successful participation projects.

The relational dimension still sits at the margin in participation projects. Through the opportunities and constraints within which children and adults relate to each other, this chapter highlighted the absence of the child-adult relationships as being interdependent, as staff members still define and decide their relationship to children. This chapter



confirmed the tendency to over-emphasise children's agency, resulting in an under-selling of the generational order (Punch, 2016). This chapter also supports the idea that children's participation has been promoted as one way of thinking of children as autonomous and adults as restricted from participation (Wyness, 2015). Thus, bringing adults back into children's participation as collaborators and protagonists, with respective roles and positions, still seems problematic and difficult to achieve.

This chapter has offered insight into the hierarchical social order of the NGOs. It argues that we should consider the situation of staff members within the NGO's structure in order to understand better children's and staff/adults' relationships. Thus, the findings go beyond simply bringing adults back into the discussion and taking a more relational approach, as mentioned by scholars (Wyness, 2015; Cockburn and Cleaver, 2009; Mannion, 2010).

Further, the empirical findings on the impediments to staff members' facilitation roles raises the question of creating safe spaces for staff members to share their anxieties or difficulties. Lansdown (2011: 155) suggests that, "staff [be] able to express any views or anxieties about involving children, in the expectation that these will be addressed in a constructive way". Thus, an open space would help the staff members express their difficulties in children's participation in a constructive way, rather than having staff members simply complain about children's participation while the situation remains in stasis.

Having demonstrated the importance of staff members in supporting children's competencies (Chapter 5), and exploring the relationship between children and staff mem-

bers within the participation projects, the next chapter will question if and how children influence their community due to their experiences in the participation projects .



# CHAPTER 7 : CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION & INFLUENCING CHANGE IN THE COMMUNITY

## 7.1 INTRODUCTION

The literature review (Chapter 2) indicates that under Article 12 of the UNCRC, children's views should have some impact in decision-making: recognising that the view of the child must be given 'due weight'. Indeed, "simply listening to the child is insufficient; the views of the child have to be seriously considered" (CRC/C/GC/12 para 28). This does not mean that children's opinions must be automatically accepted (UNICEF, 2003: 4); they are not 'outcome determinant', but children should inform and influence the decision-making process (Couzens, 2012: 697).

Lundy's model (2007) suggests that four conditions are required to implement Article 12 of the UNCRC (i.e. in order to implement meaningful participation): *space* (to express views), *voice* (to facilitate the expression of views), *audience* (to be listened to), and *influence* (to have views appropriately acted upon). In addition, Welty and Lundy (2013) provide an overview of Lundy's model through 12 questions for organisations or institutions, so that they might reflect upon how well they implement children's participation.

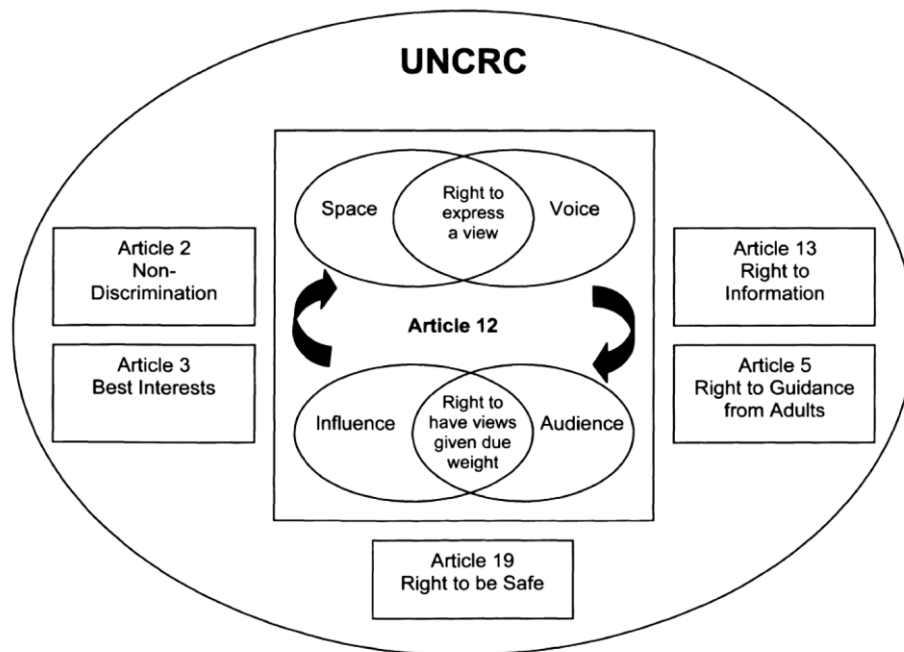
This chapter analyses how children influence societal change in communities through their experience of participation with NGOs. The chapter is divided into three sections. Section 7.2 presents Lundy's model (2007) and section 7.3 applies this model to the case studies, in order to consider how children influence their communities through

the participation projects. Finally, drawing on analysis from the case studies, section 7.4 reconsiders Lundy's model in an effort to explore how children could better influence their communities.

## **7.2 UNDERSTANDING LUNDY'S MODEL**

I selected Lundy's model (2007) to help understand the process and impact of children's participation, as it allows us to consider whether or not children's views are appropriately acted upon, and if they do in fact influence their communities. This section aims to emphasise Lundy's model, the 12 questions created by Welty and Lundy (2013) related to Lundy's model, and an overview of how scholars have used this model in their research.

Lundy (2007) provides a model for understanding Article 12 of the UNCRC, which helps duty bearers (such as educators or policy-makers) involve children meaningfully in decision-making. Lundy's analysis of Article 12 encourages decision-makers to pay attention to child participation based on four key points in order to implement participation successfully (*see* Figure 1). She developed this model by examining children's participation in the education context. The model also draws attention to the interdependence of Article 12 and the other Articles of the Convention, in particular Article 2 (non-discrimination), Article 3 (child's best interests), Article 5 (right to guidance from adults), Article 13 (right to information), and Article 19 (right to be safe).



**Figure 1: Lundy's model (2007), Conceptualising Article 12**

Chapter 2 highlighted the fact that scholars have suggested typologies and models of children's participation that involve adults' collaboration in the discussion. Johnson (2011, 2014), for example, proposes a 'change-scape' model that links children to their social contexts (environment) through mechanisms (discussion) that help them negotiate power, and encourage decision-makers to start seeing them as agents of change. This model includes the creation of spaces for children and adults to interact, and promotes greater communication and dialogue between children and decision-makers. Similarly, Lundy's model provides space for children, encourages their voice, and provides an audience to influence decisions affecting them, empowering children as agents of change in their education and beyond (Welty and Lundy, 2013). One asset of Lundy's model is that it incorporates three key actors: children, adults working with children, and adults in power. Johnson's model does not emphasise the involvement

of the adults working with children.

Although Lundy's model was developed within the sphere of education, research demonstrates that it can also be used to study how effectively children participate in their communities (Crowley, 2012 and 2014; Horgan et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2015). Lundy's model can be used to inform, understand, and develop policy, as well as to audit existing practices (2007: 941). Crowley (2012, 2014) uses Lundy's model to explore the processes that lead to children's views influencing public decision-making, with a particular focus on *audience* and *influence* in considering what is ultimately taken into account from what children say. The data suggests a more complex juxtaposition of power relations than Lundy's model implies in the contexts of youth fora, school councils, and advisory groups in the Welsh case studies. In South India, the impact of the *National Children's Parliaments* (NCP) were found to be linked to matters discussed with the local council and district-level government departments, such as the need for an approach road to the village, cleaning an overhead water tank, and upgrading facilities at a primary school. Lundy's model does not take into account the juxtaposition of power relations in the *audience* category.

Hogan et al. (2015) also use Lundy's model in their research on how children participate and influence matters affecting them in their homes, schools, and communities in Ireland. The findings highlight that children were either ambivalent or dissatisfied with their input into decision-making processes in relation to their local community. However, children involved in youth clubs or community projects had positive experiences of their voices being heard in those specific settings. Lundy's model showed that the model was a suitable framework to assess children's participation in family, school

and community and not only in a school context for which it was designed in the first place.

Lastly, Martin et al. (2015) use Lundy's model to highlight child and youth participation initiatives held by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). While youth participants mentioned a positive experience of *voice*, *space*, and *audience*, adult and youth participants alike agreed that *influence* needed to be developed. Building relationships with decision-makers so that children would be able to influence policy processes in the future was recognised as important. Lundy's model provides clear guidelines, enabling children and adults alike to identify weaknesses in children's participation with the DCYA.

Aiming to continue the work of Lundy (2007), Welty and Lundy (2013) translated the model into 12 questions (*see* Table 5 below) to help organisations or institutions implement better Article 12, possibly through using a children's rights-based approach to involve children in decision-making. Welty and Lundy's (2013) 12 questions also offer a suitable framework from which to reflect on children's participation implementation, and to consider if children working within the participation projects influence their communities.



*Table 5: Recap of Welty and Lundy's (2013) 12 questions, using Lundy's model (2007)*

**Space**

- 1) Have children's views been actively sought?
- 2) Is there 'a safe space' in which children can express themselves freely?
- 3) Have steps been taken to ensure that all children affected by the decision can take part?

**Voice**

- 4) Do children have the information they need in an appropriate format to enable them to form a view?
- 5) Have children been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express their opinion?

**Audience**

- 6) Who is the 'audience' for children's perspectives?
- 7) Is there a process for communicating children's views?
- 8) Does that person/body have the power to make a decision?

**Influence**

- 9) Were the children's views considered by those with the power to effect change?
- 10) What process is in place to ensure that children's views inform decisions that affect children?
- 11) Have the children been informed of the ways in which their opinion may impact decisions?
- 12) Have the children been provided with feedback explaining the reasons for decisions taken?

### **7.3 APPLYING LUNDY'S MODEL: CONDITIONS THAT INFLUENCE CHANGE IN THE COMMUNITY**

This section uses Lundy's model (2007): *space, voice, audience* and *influence*, through the lens of Welty and Lundy's (2013) 12 questions, in order to analyse the data from

the two case studies. I review the NGO's practices in implementing children's participation, and look for outcomes wherein children are influencing change in their communities.

### **7.3.1 Space (to express views)**

Lundy's model (2007) emphasises the need for a *space* in which children are encouraged to express their views without fear of reproach or reprisal. As such, the following enquiries answer the first three questions of Welty and Lundy's 12 questions:

1. Have children's views been actively sought?
2. Is there 'a safe space' in which children can express themselves freely?
3. Have steps been taken to ensure that all children affected by the decision can take part?

#### **Have children's views been actively sought?**

Lundy's model holds that adults working with children should encourage children to express their views with proactive steps: to invite and encourage children's input rather than simply acting as a recipient of views. In the Tamil Nadu case study, I attended a meeting during my fieldwork in which:

Participation workers asked children to identify the issues in their community linked to their needs to establish their yearly action plan. Small groups of children were formed and a participation worker held the role of facilitator in the discussion within each group. The groups with the more experienced members (15 to 17 years old) were talkative in expressing the problems in the community, but in other groups with younger members (11 to 14 years), participation workers were doing most of the talking and children were quiet. (Field notes, 10.05.2013)

It was easier for some participation workers who had been part of the children's group for a couple of years to seek children's views than it was for new staff members. Other participation workers tried to get younger children's views, but this appeared unsuccessful, and quickly reverted to being mostly about participation workers' input.

This observation was echoed by Dahma (management team) for whom some participation workers were still the ones deciding on the community's issues, rather than providing space for children to express their views. She highlighted:

Sometimes the community's issues are defined by staff members [participation workers]... it's not the children themselves who identify [the issues]. It is more about staff members' input, but we make the effort. We try make the children come out and take the lead, to plan and do it.

Dhama noted it was still difficult for some participation workers to encourage children to express their views. In making children decide on the issues, Dhama was quite clear that ideas needed to come from children and not from the staff members. The organisation encouraged children to express their views, but in practice, staff members' input occurred as some staff members did not know how to facilitate children's views, or because children did not have views, or (for some unknown reason) chose not to share their views.

Prati (graduate members, 22 years old, interpreter) reported that not all children were encouraged to express their views in the children's groups meetings. From her observations, she noted that only those children who were motivated internally talked, and other children did not express their views. This comment illustrates that members who were less motivated were less encouraged by staff members to express their views; discussion was not encouraged among all members, and as such only a few expressed

their views.

However, Divish (graduate member, 22 years old) referred to residential capacity-building workshops not only as a space to gain information, but also as a space where children had time to think about the information provided by adults. This comment illustrates that information alone was not considered sufficient: members needed time to incorporate the information they had been given to be able to express themselves.

Thus, from my fieldwork and interview examples, the most experienced and motivated children spoke more about the issues in their community, and participation workers mostly did not succeed in encouraging younger children to express their views. Moreover, it seems that the mere information was not enough; children needed time to assimilate the information so that they could effectively express themselves.

In the Scottish case study, regarding the three-year participation project, Greg (staff) stated that: “We start with quite a firm programme in the first year about the six themes and rights, and afterwards it becomes more relaxed and influenced by children’s interests, about what they want to do”. Greg noted the organisation did not always seek children’s views because, for the first year of the participation project, staff members controlled the process. However, after this stage, children were asked to take the lead.

Echoing Greg, Beatrice (staff) highlighted:

For [name of the organisation], we create an equal platform so children say ‘can I do this, or what about if we do this?’, and we can say ‘it’s a brilliant idea, how are you going to do that?’

These quotations illustrate that staff members not only encouraged children by giving

them the confidence to come up with their own ideas, but also stimulated children to come up with solutions to carry them out. To illustrate this, Mary (15 years old) gave an example of making a DVD on children's rights for the three-year participation project. Similarly, for the one-year peer-education project, children created a short film based on the UNCRC. These examples illustrate that the actions of the children were limited to the topic of the UNCRC and less to community issues. Fieldwork in the one-year peer-education project revealed that staff members sought children's views in the following manner:

Staff members gave the UNCRC leaflet to children, and asked which children's rights mattered to them. Children were in groups discussing which rights they wanted to focus on for the short films and animations for pupils in primary school. Staff members passed through the groups asking children if they had questions. (Field notes, 27.11.2012)

Staff members sought children's views by making children think without adults being part of the discussion. These examples illustrate that children were encouraged to talk about the issues in their lives within the scope of the UNCRC, while staff members facilitated the process without influencing the children's answers.

Children's views were encouraged differently in the two case studies. In the Tamil Nadu case study, the space was open for children to talk about issues in their community regarding their rights, but it was usually the most motivated and experienced children who expressed their views. There were instances where participation workers did not successfully gain children to express their views, and as such reverted to working with staff members' ideas. In contrast, the Scottish case study limited the discussion to the UNCRC, nevertheless, staff members created a space in which they facilitated the process without influencing children's answers.

### **Is there ‘a safe space’ in which children can express themselves freely?**

According to Lundy’s model (2007), a ‘safe space’ is one in which children are able to express their views without fear of reproach or reprisal. I went to a non-residential capacity-building workshop during my fieldwork in Tamil Nadu:

Children from different children’s groups met for the first time. I noticed that children were shy to speak even if the facilitator (a staff member from the management team) was doing all she could to encourage them. (Field notes, 15.05.2013)

Children needed more than an adult facilitator to help them express their views freely, especially when they went to a training session with other members they had not met before. Sasiva (15 years old, interpreter), who participated in this training programme, explained to me why children were too shy to express themselves. She said that in her view, because it was a new place for the members and the first time some of them had met, they were worried about saying something wrong and other children making fun of them as a result; consequently, children preferred not to talk. Sasiva’s story showed that children were more conscious of their peers’ reaction than the staff members. Thus, staff members should have been paying more attention to the peer pressure in the group in order to facilitate a space in which children felt comfortable expressing their views freely.

One of the graduate members, Sanjay (22 years old, interpreter), mentioned that children were also afraid of talking to staff members. He highlighted the need to create a space that would allow children to talk without fear to the staff members. Reflecting on his own experience with children when he facilitated a residential training workshop for the members with Divish (graduate member, 22 years old), Sanjay stated that,

in the morning, they talked individually with the children about their own family life, thoughts, and personal problems. He said this exercise was meant to nullify children's worries. After lunch, they sat together: Divish facilitated one group, and Sanjay another. Sanjay felt that children should have a friendly relationship with the trainer; they should not be afraid of him or her, and should be able to express themselves in a group. Based on his experience with Divish in conducting training, he believed the role of the staff member was to create a safe environment and friendly atmosphere by having personal conversations with the children in a space where children could discuss their preoccupations freely.

These examples illustrate that creating a safe environment is about creating staff-child relationships. Children gained encouragement from the staff to express themselves, but sometimes creating a safe environment through staff-child relationships also helped children feel comfortable around their peers.

In the Scottish case study, some of the staff members described how they had created a safe space with children. For instance, Lindsay (staff) said: 'The first hours of the session are just to get to know each other again, to talk about how things have been over the past month.' Having informal discussions about personal lives and feelings allowed Lindsay to re-connect with the children.

Fiona (staff) described her relations with children as: "I just feel like we are a lovely line of people moving together, rather than me being in front of them [children] because I know the stuff". Fiona did not refer to her adult knowledge (power) so as not to intimidate the children. The 'lovely line' between them suggested that children and adults were all part of the same line, working in the same direction without conflict.

This was confirmed by most of the children aged 15–16, and some of children aged 13–14, who reported that the staff members were “really friendly; we get on well; we laugh; we have fun”. Children noted their enjoyment and fun when commenting on their (positive) relations with staff members. By mentioning such child-friendly characteristics as ‘friendly’ and ‘fun’, it is clear that children were not afraid to express themselves freely, as they ‘got on well’ with staff members.

These examples illustrate that a friendly atmosphere was created by considering children’s and staff members’ relationships as being equal and friendly. The children I interviewed did not note peer pressure or a fear of talking with staff members as an issue, indicating that staff members managed to address these problems. This is in clear contrast to the Tamil Nadu case study, where the ‘safe space’ in which children should have been able to express themselves freely was more difficult to establish due to a lack of staff-child relationships, or because children did not feel safe enough to speak out among their peers. It is clear from the Scottish case study that an investment in creating positive relations with children was acknowledged and later beneficial.

**Have steps been taken to ensure that all children affected by the decision can take part?**

According to Lundy’s model (2007), all children affected by the decision who are part of the community should be included in the process to ensure that a diverse range of children are involved, rather than only having input from the most articulate and literate children. In the Tamil Nadu case study, six children’s groups were established in the area where I did my fieldwork. The organisation focused on Dalit children, boys and girls aged 10 to 18 years old. On average, 20 members were part of each children’s



group. Membership was officially open to all children in the community, however most members already had a connection with the NGO through their mothers, who were involved with affiliated projects such as the *Self Help Group* (SHG) or domestic worker groups.

In contrast, in the Scottish case study, children's membership was limited to two children from ten different primary schools, preferably one boy and one girl from each school. Teachers selected children who they thought would benefit most from the participation project. Those chosen were taken out of their own community to participate (children were not acting in their own communities) and started the process when they were between the ages of 9 and 11, continuing until they were 14. Participants were a mix of middle and lower class. The one-year peer-education project was extended for those who completed the project when they were 14 to 16 years old. Thus, the participation of children was exclusive, as the project selected a limited number of participants within a specific age bracket.

The two case studies indicate that the views of a diverse range of children were limited to a specific group of children. Both case studies involved the less privileged children in the community, but only children within a certain age group were part of the project. Moreover, in the Tamil Nadu case study, although the membership was officially open to all children in the slum areas, participation primarily involved those children whose mothers were already part of the NGO project. The Scottish case study experienced positive discrimination by teachers, who selected the children for participation.

To conclude the discussion about the *space* factor, first, encouraging children to express themselves was practised differently in the two case studies. In the Tamil Nadu

case study, children were encouraged to discuss issues in the community, whereas in the Scottish case study, children were encouraged to talk about issues in their lives that somehow linked to the UNCRC. Second, creating a safe environment to express views depended on the staff-child relationships. In the Tamil Nadu case study, the lack of staff-child relationships and peer pressure discouraged children expressing themselves freely, whereas in the Scottish case study, creating a positive relationship between children and staff members was emphasised, resulting in free communication by the children. Third, an inclusive space was difficult to implement in both settings due to the limited diversity of children involved within the specific age brackets.

### **7.3.2 Voice (facilitated to express views)**

Lundy's model highlights *voice*, as children's expressions must be facilitated for them to express a view. As such, the following paragraphs answer questions 4 and 5 of Welty and Lundy's 12 questions:

4. Do children have the information they need in an appropriate format to enable them to form a view?
5. Have children been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express their opinion?

#### **Do children have the information they need in an appropriate format to enable them to form a view?**

Lundy's model (2007) holds that children may need the help of others—in the shape of guidance and direction from adults—in order to form a view. In the Tamil Nadu

case study, the residential capacity-building workshops were a major part of the children's group activities, as the children not only received information in an appropriate format, but also guidance from adults. The members had the opportunity to participate in residential training workshops on topics such as children facilitation or leadership.

During my fieldwork, I observed one residential training:

A resource person [external person] came to give useful information to children on the Indian Constitution, but not all members were able to go to this residential capacity-building workshops. (Field notes, 3.05.2013)

Although the NGO organisation invited an expert to provide information to children on a specific topic, every child in the programme did not benefit, as not all were able to attend. I asked the participation workers why some children did not go to the residential training, and one of them (Shanvi, interpreter) mentioned that parents' permission was required in order for the children to participate. Shanvi commented that the parents of girls who had attained puberty did not want to let their daughters stay overnight in an unknown place. Another participation worker, Madhuri (interpreter), said parents were scared to send their sons to any residential training because they were afraid they would run away or eat something unhealthy, illustrating that parents were concerned about safety issues. Thus, due to such parental concerns, not all members had the opportunity to receive direct information from the expert, proactively limiting their understanding of the Constitution and thus their ability to form relevant opinions. These examples show that the organisation provided information (in the form of a resource person) through the residential training, in an effort to enable children to form their own views.

In the Scottish case study, staff members explained that during the first year of the participation project, children developed their understanding about children's rights through activities. I gained a concrete example from the NGO's manual on capacity-building. In a session introducing the six themes (who we are; where we live; health and happiness; freedom; feeling safe/being cared for; and having our say), staff members asked children to visualise a land in which they were all free, healthy, and happy. Children were asked to think about what they needed in their lives, and learned that some needs were so important they had become rights. At the end of the session, the children received a child-friendly version of the UNCRC. Staff members used visual art-based techniques, such as a *Tree of Life* prop, to help children better understand the UNCRC. They did not provide them with the list of the articles to begin with, instead, staff members gave children the opportunity to experience their rights using art-based activities. All members had access to the training, as the session was conducted during a school day (once every month). This example illustrates that the children gained an understanding of their rights through the six themes, enabling them to form a view on children's rights. For the organisation, it was important that children experienced their rights and expressed themselves through art-based activities to feel them by themselves first than to learn about their rights through the UNCRC articles as a classic way.

The information the children received from adults was divergent between the two case studies. In the Tamil Nadu case study, some children received appropriate information through a knowledgeable expert at the residential capacity-building workshop. In contrast, in the Scottish case study, all members attended the capacity-building workshop

(based on the six themes) during the first year, and learned, through art-based activities, about their needs and rights, rather than any one particular issue, as was the case in the Tamil Nadu case study.

**Have children been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express their opinion?**

According to Lundy's model (2007), a range of options to express children's views is highlighted in Article 13 of the UNCRC, which notes that children should have the opportunity to express their views freely and in various formats: "either orally, in writing or print, in the form of art or through any other media of the child's choice" (p.935). The children in the Tamil Nadu case study were provided with different options to express their views. During my fieldwork, I did not have the opportunity to observe the said options because of timing issues i.e. being within the children's exam period and the summer holiday. However, I corroborated with staff members to establish that the children were using the same range of options to express their views as when I had worked with and documented them two years earlier. It is this which I describe below.

The first option was a petition: after identifying issues in the community, members wrote petitions to adult decision-makers, such as local leaders and municipal councillors, to raise their concerns. The second option was a public march in the community: children organised an awareness march in the community and in the city and carried banners with slogans demanding their rights. Third, children organised a cultural programme with art-based activities such as drama, dance, and a puppet show to express their views for local leaders and parents in the community. Fourth, they distributed

handouts to people in the community, on which they listed their demands. Fifth, children took photos of problems in the community as evidence to report to adults in power, such as local leaders. Thus children used a variety of media to express their views in the community.

In the Scottish case study, multiple art-based undertakings were used by children to express their views. For instance, during an informal discussion, staff members told me that the second year of the participation project emphasised aspects of children's lives, exploring how they would like to use the creative arts to inform adults, and specifically decision-makers, about their opinions. Martin (staff) described how children had the opportunity to voice their ideas, thoughts, and feelings through an art-based activity: an art-mural. Children were encouraged to express their views by drawing on cardboard (3x2 metres, 10x6.5 feet), creating a mural that displayed both the story of their first year together, and a representation of their views on children's lives in Scotland today. Another example was the photography project and book mentioned in Chapter 5. These examples show that multiple art-based projects were provided for children to express their views.

Both case studies highlight that a range of options was provided to children in an effort to allow them to express their views. In the Tamil Nadu case study, writing petitions, marching, printing documents, taking photos, and art-based activities were used, whilst in the Scottish case study, multiple art-based activities were provided.

To conclude on the *voice* factor, children first received information in order to form a view through the training programmes organised by both NGOs. Nevertheless, in the Tamil Nadu case study, not all members had access to the information provided by the

expert due to parental restrictions. In the Scottish case study, this was not a problem as training was conducted within school hours, and the information received was based on children's needs and rights, and less on general information regarding issues in the community (as was the case in Tamil Nadu). Secondly, children were provided with a range of different options to express their opinions, especially in the Tamil Nadu case study. Fewer options were available in the Scottish case study, which focused only on art-based activities. Thus, in the Scottish case study, children received less general information about their community and they had a limited range of options to express their opinions.

### **7.3.3 Audience (to be listened to)**

According to Lundy's model (2007), there is a need to ensure that children are experiencing their 'right of audience' with adults in power, which Lundy defines as, "a guaranteed opportunity to communicate views to an identifiable individual or body with responsibility to listen" (2007: 936). As such, the following paragraphs answer questions 6 to 8 of Welty and Lundy's 12 questions:

6. Who is the 'audience' for children's perspectives?
7. Is there a process for communicating children's views?
8. Does that person/body have the power to make a decision?

In the Tamil Nadu case study, the target audience was local leaders and municipal councillors. As described previously, children had the option of expressing their views to adult decision-makers in different ways, be it through petition, awareness marches, etc. In the case of the former, children had the opportunity to pass their petition directly to their local leaders; a meeting was organised by participation workers so that children

could deliver the petition in person and, in return, obtain a signature from the local leader acknowledging that he or she had received it. The letter was photocopied as evidence of the children's work and to allow them to follow up. If children did not receive an answer from the local leader, they sent the petition to the municipal councillors and asked for the support of the community to sign their petition. The petition process here—similar to the adult mechanism for petitions in India—illustrates that opportunities were provided to children to communicate their views to adults in power (local leaders and municipal councillors).

However, Sanjay (graduate member, 22 years old, interpreter) mentioned sometimes local leaders did not listen to children, instead they just gave the children chocolates: “they thought that we were children that was it”. Local leaders giving sweets to children indicated that they were not taking children's opinions seriously.

In the Scottish case study, some of the children shared with me that they went to conferences and exhibitions to present their work. Mary (16 years old) shared that she volunteered with two other children to go to a conference to present their art-based activities. At the time she was 13 and quite scared because most people in the gathering were adults, such as teachers and people from the *Scottish Parliament*. These adults asked questions about the activity, and they were also very supportive: “They understood that we were quite young, and they asked questions that we understood and managed to answer”. Olivia (14 years old) said that she went to the *Scottish Parliament* to an exhibition of sculptures crafted by the children, she shared that children interacted individually with adults to explain their sculptures. For Annabel (16 years old), the conference provided the chance to speak to adults whom she had never met before,



adults who wanted to talk to her, which she said was exciting. These three examples illustrate that children's experiences of presenting at conferences or conversing with adults at exhibitions were seen as a chance for individual engagement with adults to discuss a project. However, it was not clear what the NGO or the children wanted from the decision-makers who attended the art exhibition or conference, or what adults and decision-makers would adopt from their discussions with children.

Beatrice (staff) shared that decision-makers and parents were invited to exhibitions in the community where children presented their project's results. However, she noted that it was difficult to ensure that the desired audience would engage with the children:

Adults are resistant because they feel that children are not fully formed and they think that they are almost like a 'vacuum' that needs to be filled ... When they are 15–16 years old, they are most interesting for the politicians because they have the potential to vote ... but under that age, people don't see any point to engaging with them, unless you believe in and enjoy the relationship.

According to Beatrice, adults/politicians (desired audience) were not willing to engage with children as they did not recognise the value of involving children in discussion. Indeed, this likely stems from the idea that childhood is a period in the course of life oriented towards the future (Prout, 2000: 305), and this traditional image of children has been shown to be an impediment to their participation in discussions about policies and services (Crowley, 2015).

Beatrice also stated that the younger children, below 15 years of age, who were politically disenfranchised, were not taken into account because adults under-estimated children's competencies and saw them as 'not fully formed'. This confirms the notion that some adult decision-makers view children's participation as a peripheral activity

rather than a core part of their work, and can undermine the value of children's participatory activities (Head, 2011).

To conclude, the *audience* factor in the Tamil Nadu case study, the audience included decision-makers such as local leaders and municipal councillors from the community. Decision-makers, such as politicians, were also the audience in the Scottish case study. The process for communicating children's views comprised petitions, meetings and marches (Tamil Nadu case study), and exhibitions and conferences (Scottish case study). In both cases, the target audience had the power to make a decision, and opportunities were given to children to interact with this relevant audience. However, sometimes local leaders did not listen to the children (instead just gave gifts of chocolate) and, in the Scottish case study, it was not clear what the organisation or the children wanted from the decision-makers who went to the art exhibitions, and how decision-makers would take on board, address and communicate the children's views. Thus, although the children were active, the adults were not necessarily acting on what they were listening to.

#### **7.3.4 Influence (to have views appropriately acted upon)**

Lundy's model (2007) highlights that children's views must be given 'due weight', that is, taken seriously. Along these lines, the following paragraphs explore questions 9 to 12 of Welty and Lundy's 12 questions:

9. Were the children's views considered by those with the power to effect change?
10. What process is in place to ensure that children's views inform decisions that affect children?

11. Have the children been informed of the ways in which their opinion may impact decisions?
12. Have the children been provided with feedback explaining the reasons for decisions taken?

In the Tamil Nadu case study, most of the children referred to the petition (mentioned previously) when asked how their views had been acted upon. For example, Vijay (16 years old, interpreter) shared the following example. He explained how adults complained about the lack of electric power in the community, but decision-makers had not taken any remedial action. However, with the support of the participation workers, children wrote a petition addressed to local leaders regarding this issue, stating that they could not do their homework in the evening due to the lack of electricity in the community. As a result of this petition, electric power was installed in the community, illustrating that when the children took action regarding their basic needs (electric power), they brought about consequences that supported their educational experiences.

Nevertheless, Senan (graduate member, 24 years old, interpreter) commented that sometimes the children also needed a strategy to get the petition heard by local leaders or municipal councillors. He said that children needed adults to join them, to make their voices louder and thus be heard. In the case of the electricity petition, children gathered signatures from adults in the community before going to local leaders, indicating not only that they required adult support, but that children had to convince adults that they needed to go through the children's petition to get electricity in the community.

Maalni (15 years old, interpreter) described a situation in which children had been

aware of employees in the rations shop that was known to sell goods on the black market. They photographed the shop shelves and sent them to the municipal councillor who regulated the situation, illustrating children's influence on adult decision-makers due to having this photographic evidence. The comment illustrates that children were able to influence decision-makers by bringing photo evidence when a situation was not right in the community.

Roshna (15 years old, interpreter), however, noted that local leaders had to consult their own leaders, and as such it could take two or three months for even one decision to be made. The comment illustrates that Roshna was aware that the decision-making process for petitions was not only based on one person: adults in power needed to discuss things among themselves before giving feedback to children, and accordingly, the petition process depended on adult agendas. Indeed, it was important for children to recognise that adults in power experience constraints such as political agendas and procedural barriers, but these constraints need to be acknowledged and communicated to children (Marshall et al., 2015).

The examples above showcase the different strategies the children had used to see that their opinions were acted upon. The Tamil Nadu case study also supports majority world critiques about the unhelpful practice of perceiving children solely as individuals, rather than as interdependent and living in networks of intergenerational relationships in their communities (Valentin and Meinert, 2009; Kellett et al., 2004; Butler and Teamey 2014). As a result, children were able to express themselves and have their viewpoint be taken into consideration by adults in their communities.

In the Scottish case study, *influence* was seen in a different light, as the aim of the

activities was to create a cultural shift by informing adults in power about children's views, rather than see immediate changes in the community. Beatrice (staff) stated that the aim of the organisation was:

To enable children's voices to influence what adults think, see, feel, and hear about children. It's an attempt to help create a cultural shift about how we think about children in Scotland, and about the value of children ... we give children opportunities, and adults also have the opportunity to engage.

Beatrice felt that the organisation should aim to encourage a change in adults' perceptions of children's thoughts and feelings. To achieve this cultural shift, the organisation emphasised the importance of working with children and then the opportunity for children to present their work to adults to show and discuss with them what they were able to produce.

Greg (staff) added that participation needed to be meaningful for children:

We are not a policy organisation or a campaigning organisation. It's about the experience of citizenship or participation.

Greg wanted the organisation to give children the opportunity to engage in participation, though not necessarily influence the community. This standpoint supports research conducted in Wales, where senior managers, forum sponsors, and support workers saw the forum as a space for citizenship training (Crowley, 2014). In this study, children were seen as 'little-people-in-the-making' who needed opportunities to 'practise' participation in order to become good future citizens (Crowley, 2014). On the other hand, in the case study of South India in Crowley's research (2014), children were viewed as social actors with their own perspectives and abilities to influence decision-making. This idea is reflected my research: children in the Scottish case study

were seen as ‘becoming’ competent, whereas in the Tamil Nadu case study, children were considered to ‘be’ competent (James, 2011).

Lindsay (staff) emphasised how adults perceived the organisation:

They do really good work with children in bringing their voices to the forefront ... exhibitions touch adults, they stick in people’s mind. They say: ‘I have seen this mural, and it was poignant’.

Lindsay thus notes that the organisation strayed away from a ‘traditional’ approach in talking about children’s rights, to something that would touch adults emotionally. Hence, through the art-based activities, the organisation wanted to bring a societal cultural shift in the adults’ perception of children by showing how children were able to express themselves.

In an informal conversation, Beatrice (staff) mentioned that there was a lack of commitment on the decision-makers’ part to participate during the process, so they only saw the end result without understanding the process of participation. Moreover, she added that there was no mechanism in place for children’s views to be taken seriously. For instance, the photography project was an opportunity not only to capture the children’s views on the positive things about where they lived, but also to think about things they would like to change or improve, as mentioned in Chapter 5. Children took pictures of their families, significant people or places in the community, and issues in their community, such as litter, graffiti, and alcohol in an effort to bring these issues to adults’ attention.

The exhibition to launch of the book was the result of the children’s activities and also marked the end of the project. It was also the main opportunity for children to have a

direct conversation with parents and decision-makers. However, within that forum, there was no formal setting or feedback mechanism organised for children and decision-makers to discuss issues in the community. For the Committee on the Rights of the Child, feedback is a guarantee that the views of the child are not heard simply as a formality, but are taken seriously (CRC/C/GC/12 para 45). Thus, the organisation promoted the cultural shift, but did not fit into the Lundy model, as children's views could not be thought to be seriously considered due to the lack of a feedback mechanism or visible evidence of further action by the community. Indeed, the Lundy model requires 'due weight' be given.

The two case studies had vastly different aims with regard to *influence*. In the Tamil Nadu case study, children's views were considered by those with power, and as such effected change in the community over the course of the petition process. Children used the petition process, photographic evidence, and face-to-face contact with decision-makers to present their concerns about the community. They also sometimes asked for the support of adults in the community to make their voices more significant. As it happens, "face-to-face contact can be a uniquely powerful means for decision-makers to confront (in the truest sense of the word) the issue faced by children and young people" (Marshall et al., 2015: 379). The Scottish case study showed that children informed adults in power about their activities through the exhibition as part of the push for a cultural shift. However, no formal mechanism was established to engage more effectively with decision-makers and to register any transformation.

### **Recap of the four factors**

To conclude this section, Lundy's model has been considered in an effort to understand

how children can bring about societal change in their communities: first, the *space* factor was acknowledged in the Tamil Nadu case study, where members were encouraged to talk about issues regarding their rights in the community. This contrasts with the Scottish case study, where children were asked about their needs in their own lives as it related to the UNCRC. In the Tamil Nadu case study, only the most motivated and experienced children expressed their views, as staff members failed to encourage the voices of the new and less experienced members. The rapport building among peers, and between children and some participation workers, demonstrated that additional effort is required in order to provide a 'safe' space for children to express their opinions, compared to the Scottish case study, wherein staff members had created a safe environment for children to express their views. In both case studies, inclusion of all children was limited to certain ages and/or by the selection process applied to gather the children.

Second, the *voice* factor showed that children, through capacity-building exercises, gained information that allowed them to formulate their own point of view. In the Tamil Nadu case study, children had the opportunity to attend a residential training to gain specific knowledge, however not all children had access to this information, provided by external resource people, because of their parents' reluctance, related to issues of puberty and safety. In the Scottish case study, all children gained information through a capacity-building programme during school one day, however it was more about their needs and rights and less about the UNCRC generally. In addition, children were provided with child-appropriate media: the Tamil Nadu case study for example, used a range of methods to express views, such as petitions, marching, printed docu-



ments, art-based activities, and photos, whereas in the Scottish case study only multiple art-based activities were provided, such as making an art mural or compiling a photography book.

Third, the *audience* factor demonstrated how children could act to no effect, as adults were not necessarily listening in examples from either case study. In the Tamil Nadu case study, children had access to adults in power in the community (local leaders and municipal councillors) through meetings with them, but they were not always listened to or taken seriously. In the Scottish case study, access to adults in power was limited: children had the opportunity to express their views through informal meetings (such as art exhibitions) with decision-makers, but they were not necessarily listened to, as decision-makers did not take on board or communicate the children's views.

Fourth, the *influence* factor in case study was given focus in different ways. The Tamil Nadu case study demonstrated that some decision-makers took children's views seriously, as exemplified through the petition process and the photographic evidence provided by children. In the Scottish case study, there was no specific mechanism in place for children to be taken seriously, except for an exhibition at the end of the project. That said, the Scottish organisation had, as one of its aims, the long-term intention to create a cultural shift in the local community by using creative arts to inform adults and decision-makers about children's views. Thus, the NGO hoped to change adults' views about children by encouraging dialogue between children and adults at the exhibitions, but as such there existed no mechanism for children's views to be appropriately acted upon. In the Scottish case study, the *influence* component came too late in the process, demonstrated by having the exhibition at the end of the project. And even

then, there was no mechanism in place for children to influence decision-making. But by the organisation's standards, the exhibition was a success, as the children did get to talk with adults. Honneth's theory of social justice (recognition and respect theory) is also informative in light of the Lundy model. In terms of understanding what happens vis-à-vis settings and processes of participation, Honneth developed three components: 'love, rights and solidarity' (Thomas, 2012, see also Houston and Dolan, 2008). Thomas argues that the three modes of recognition are essential for children's full participation:

Children do not engage fully if they do not feel a sense of warmth and affection; they cannot participate equally if they are not responded as rights-holders; and they will not have a real impact unless there is mutual esteem and solidarity, and a sense of shared purpose. (2012: 463)

Thus, Honneth's notion of social justice illuminates the Lundy model because children need to express their views without fear of reproach or reprisal (love), and they need to be informed of the ways in which their opinion may impact decisions (rights). When children influence decision-making there is a sense of solidarity between them and the adults as they work on a shared purpose (solidarity).

Lundy's model is useful because it cohesively presents the four factors needed to implement meaningful participation. However, results from both case studies stressed that it was difficult to give attention to all elements equally. For instance, *space* and *voice* were less emphasised in the Tamil Nadu case study (the process), whereas *audience* and *influence* (the outcome) were less provided for in the Scottish case study. From the analysis, a critique of both case studies is that more work needs to be done, especially on the factor of *influence*. In the Tamil Nadu case study, some examples

illustrated that the process was in place to guarantee that children's views were taken seriously, but only in few small instances. In the Scottish case study, no mechanisms were in place to take children's views seriously. This supports work by Martin et al. (2015), who use Lundy's model in their study of Irish children's views of the impact of their participation on decision-making:

While youth participants are very positive about their experience of voice, space and audience, the fourth strand – influence – is an area that both adult and youth participants agree needs further work and support. (2015: 5)

Lundy (2007) describes the different stages chronologically (*space, voice, audience and influence*), acknowledging that decision-making processes are rarely static. Nevertheless, the model highlights that once children are informed about the extent of their influence, the process may begin again, leading to circular (or sustained) practice. However, it is interesting to reverse the model and focus first on *influence* and *audience*. One of the frustrations across contexts and countries derives from solely “focusing on process rather than impact, so that children and young people may have positive experiences of involvement but their views have little to no impact on decision-making” (Tisdall et al., 2014: 2). The Scottish case study confirms this hindrance, as does the Tamil Nadu case study, though to a lesser degree.

## **7.4 TENTATIVE LESSONS FROM LUNDY'S MODEL**

In this section, I reverse Lundy's model, starting instead with *influence* and *audience*, and then considering *voice* and *space*. In order to gain a complete understanding of the implementation of participation projects and as consequence how children could better influence their communities, I will bring together issues discussed in Chapters 5 and

6. The lessons from the case studies entail exploring the model further by looking at the time element and tripartite relationships between children, adults working with children, and adults in power.

#### **7.4.1 Influence and audience**

I consider *Influence* and *audience* (outcome) through the lens of adults in power who make decisions regarding children's views. This part draws on comments from Chapter 5 regarding competencies, as well as the findings from this chapter.

The findings from Chapter 5 indicate how children *influence* local decision-making by applying their social competencies. In the Tamil Nadu case study, children achieved their social competencies through negotiation, and claimed their rights from adults at the community level by engaging in meaningful social action within an interactional context. In the Scottish case study, children's social competencies were less visible as they only presented their activities to adults in the community, without authentic dialogue with adults. Indeed, the dialogue is more than a simple discussion as it involves a serious discussion and has 'productive potential' (Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010: 354). This also supports the idea that having a space—a seat at the table—is not enough: "We need to do more than 'hear their voices'—we need to respond to their views" (Kelly, 2006: 44).

Moreover, in both case studies, generally speaking, adults were reluctant to recognise that children were competent enough to be part of discussions with adults. However, in the Tamil Nadu case study, children used their interpersonal skills to engage in on-

going dialogue with adults in their communities, as evidenced through the use of petitions and the temple issue. When adults in power engaged with children, they discovered children's competencies and found solutions to issues together, as with the temple issue in Tamil Nadu. Both children and adults benefitted from creating the space for discussion, as children were able to demonstrate their competencies, and adults gained a fuller understanding of those competencies, which led to changed adult perceptions of children.

The findings from Chapter 5 also indicate the central importance of having staff members facilitate the interaction between children and adults in power (*audience*). In the Tamil Nadu case study, staff members' role as facilitators between children and adults in power was significant in creating the space for discussion about community issues. This supports the notion that a particular factor in the cultural shift towards the recognition of children's views is the work of adult facilitators, or participation 'champions', in pushing the participation agenda (Martin et al., 2015).

Chapter 7 showed that, in having both the right to an audience and a mechanism allowing them to be listened to, children were able to demonstrate their competencies through dialogue with adults in power, and bring their contributions to the community. Staff members in South India supported children's work on issues where they had a chance to affect local decision-making processes (Crowley, 2014), thus supporting research results which indicate knowing the agenda of decision-makers was significant in bringing about change (Shier et al., 2014). In the Scottish case study, not all participation work wanted to affect immediate change, rather it was about adults in power experiencing a cultural shift.

### 7.4.2 Voice and space

I consider *voice* and *space* through the process of adults working with children. This section considers comments from Chapter 6 about children's and staff/adults' relationships, and summarises the findings from this chapter.

The Scottish case study highlighted that staff members let children decide what activities would be pursued, without expecting change in the community. Although in the Tamil Nadu case study examples indicated those children wanted to exercise their rights with adults in the community, some staff members remained reluctant. Indeed, staff members seemed to think they knew what was best for the children and took on a protective role. As a result, even if children gained knowledge through capacity-building workshops, they could not apply this knowledge because of staff members' reluctance to act.

The findings from Chapter 6 also indicate how the staff encouraged children to express themselves (creating *space*). In the Scottish case study, staff members provided the necessary space for children to use creative arts to inform adults/decision-makers. Staff members also emphasised creating positive relationships with children. In the Tamil Nadu case study, it was more difficult for some staff members to encourage children to express their views, as some of them still considered their role of guidance as a teaching role, and they lacked the proper attitude and skills for facilitating children's participation. The resistance of some staff members in the Tamil Nadu case study, and their role in directing the process, demonstrated the existence of obstacles to letting children express themselves freely.

In this chapter, children in the Tamil Nadu case study had access to a wider variety of

media to express themselves to adults in the community as compared to the participants in the Scottish case study, wherein children used only art-based activities. In the Tamil Nadu case study, children were more effective in creating change in their community because they had appropriate information and were able to identify and articulate the issues. In the Scottish case study, fewer opportunities were given to children to identify issues in their community and discuss them with decision-makers.

To conclude this section, Mannion (2010) points out that Lundy model's (2007) suggests a more relational process of collaboration between children and adults. Marshall et al. (2015) highlight:

Adults, including NGO staff members, facilitating young people's direct engagement with decision makers should also be clear about the expected outcome of the children and young people's involvement to inform them of the scope of their potential influence. (2015: 374)

Thus, at the beginning of any project, children should be engaged in activities that bring change in their community as shown through the Tamil Nadu case study, confirming that *influence and audience* need to be considered at the beginning of the participation project. For this to occur, adults in power need to be involved from the outset instead of entering towards the end.

### **7.4.3 The time element**

The findings in this chapter indicate that the element of *time* was a significant component in participatory activities, however it was not included in Lundy's model. For instance, in the Tamil Nadu case study, *time* to think and integrate the information learned in the residential training programme was an important element for Divish. In

the Scottish case study, for Lindsay, *time* was used to catch up with children at the beginning of each session to re-build the relationship.

Chapter 6 shows that, in both case studies, staff members pointed out that the lack of time was a constraint to establishing relationships between children and staff members. The school timetable was seen as a constraint for children taking part in the NGOs' activities: extending the school day (Tamil Nadu case study) and a lack of time to see children in the peer-education project after school (Scottish case study) hindered children's participation in the programmes. Thus, the *time* element challenges children's participation: it is necessary for adults to meet with children regularly, and for children to be able to spend more time with their project peers; both acts are integral to children's effective participation and competence building. This supports the idea that the process of participation takes more time and effort than planned (Theis, 2010; Cairns, 2001). Research on school councils and children's involvement in national decision-making processes confirms these challenges of children's participation in terms of *space* and *time* (Tisdall, 2015b).

#### **7.4.4 Tripartite relationships**

I adapted Lundy's model by reversing it, which allowed me to pay more attention to *influence* and *audience* from the beginning of the process, in order to effect more systematic influence at the community level. From the findings, I learned that the role of adults is not only to facilitate the process of preparing children, but also to create partnerships with adults in power. Additionally, staff need to work equally with children and adults in power to prepare the latter for interaction with the former. This can be done by shifting adults' mind-set, especially with regard to children's competencies



and adults' accountability role.

Lundy's model is enlightening, but it has some missing elements: the limited role of the facilitator in aiding discussions between children and adults in power in the *audience* and *influence* dimensions, and the lack of presence of adults in power at the beginning of the process in the *voice* and *space* dimensions. In addition, the notion of *time* needs to be taken seriously in children's participation. The involvement of the decision-makers needs to start at the beginning of the process (*space* and *voice*) in order for children's influence to be successful in any collaborative process, intergenerational dialogue, and face-to-face contact.

The findings suggest a rethinking of Lundy's model: first, with a tripartite relationship including children, adults in power, and a facilitator in the same physical space in an effort to have children's views appropriately acted upon. Second, the time element needs to be included in order to make the process more realistic. Recognising child-adult relationships is not enough; we need to recognise the diversity amongst adults and the roles of the facilitator in children's participation.

To integrate the tripartite relationships to help influence change in the local context, six points are suggested from the two case studies:

1. 'strengthen' the pivotal role of facilitator between children and decision-makers;
2. create a partnership between the NGO and the adults in power;
3. provide information for children to identify issue in their community;
4. discuss with adults in power their agenda regarding children;
5. facilitate face-to-face contact between adults in power and children, so that

- they may agree on a common agenda and implement it with follow-up action;
6. take into consideration the time element in the process of participation.

The six points support the idea that staff in an organisation can be involved in changing adults' attitudes towards children, and in generating more dialogue between adults and children in communities (Johnson, 2014). This also supports the view on, the 'humanizing' effect of having children and decision-makers in the same room discussing issues of mutual concern or interest, albeit from different perspectives" (Marshall et al., 2015: 379). Indeed: "participation is the potential to bring groups and generations together to listen to one another, exchange ideas and negotiate a shared response" (Hatton, 2014: 53). To summarise, the six points emphasise the need for more dialogue, direct contact, and intergenerational dialogue between children, staff members, and people in power.

## **7.5 CONCLUSION**

This chapter considers how children influence their local community due to their participation in NGO projects. The findings show that different types of influence occurred, such as immediate change as a result of the petition process (Tamil Nadu), and a push for cultural shift with the exhibition when the children had the opportunity to talk with adults. (Scottish case study). Lundy's model (2007) and Welty and Lundy's (2013) 12 questions were used to highlight how children's views are acted upon in their communities. Although Lundy's model is illuminating in how it describes the implementation of children's participation using four separate factors (*space, voice, audience, and influence*), I suggested a rethinking of Lundy's model with a) a tripartite

relationship including children, adults in power, and the facilitator in the same physical space; and b) the time element in the process of participation. Thus, this chapter and previous chapters encourage an expanded and improved model from the one proposed by Lundy. This chapter answered the concerns of Martin et al. (2015) about the lack of influence at the community level in highlighting the pivotal role of the facilitator between children and adults in power (the first of the six points) to better influence social change in communities.

This chapter has argued that there is a need for more relational practices in participation through using a collaborative approach to children's participation with facilitators, children, and adults who are in power (Cockburn, 1998, 2005; Jans, 2004; Mannion, 2007). As Lansdown (2010: 20) mentions, "collaborative participation provides opportunity for shared decision making with adults, and for children to influence both the process and the outcomes in any given activity".

This chapter also agrees on the need to develop mechanisms to strengthen capacity-building, communication, confidence, collaboration and children's evidence in order to hear children's views (Johnson, 2011). For Thomas (2012: 463), participation is not just about talk or 'voice', but also about shared action among children and adults (*see also* Percy-Smith, 2006, 2010; Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010). This supports the following:

When children's participation platforms are separated from those adults, children's participation is more likely to be tokenistic and to lack any impact, whereas joint projects have the potential of being more influential on policy. (Gal, 2015: 454)

This re-thinking of Lundy's model proposes collaborative intergenerational work

within a joint project between children and adults in power, facilitated by staff members from the beginning of the process. This chapter also argues that it is not enough to look at child-adult relationships. We should reframe children's participation as a tripartite relationship when looking at the different types of participating adults, such as staff members and decision-makers. Finally, the examples in this chapter argue for further research, such as action research on the tripartite relationships.



## CHAPTER 8 : CONCLUSION

### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter highlights the key themes from the research findings to answer my research questions. The central question the research sought to address was: How do NGOs implement children's participation in their communities with regard to two specific settings: Tamil Nadu (in south India) and Scotland (in the UK)? This question was broken down into three sub-questions, which privileged the perspectives of children and staff members. As explained in Chapter 3, only two questions were answered. They are as follows:

1. How is children's participation understood, practised, and experienced in the NGO project?
2. What components enable or inhibit the processes of children's participation?

Research question 3—how can the processes of children's participation be improved at the local level? was not empirically investigated but learning from the findings is addressed in this chapter. Section 8.2 of this chapter identifies the main themes that arose from the research, and seeks to answer the research questions in light of these findings. Section 8.3 discusses theory, policy, and practical implications of the research, and section 8.4 reflects on the implications of the research findings for future research on children's participation.

## 8.2 RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section summarises and discusses the key findings as they relate to the two research questions. Five themes have been identified:

1. individualised competencies and relational agency;
2. staff members' role in facilitating or blocking children's participation;
3. different types of impacts in participation projects;
4. children's impact on decision-making in the local community and processes leading to individual impacts for child participants;
5. contexts influencing participation of children.

Each theme will be considered in turn.

### **Individualised competencies and relational agency**

As seen in Chapter 5, the participation projects allowed children to acquire individualised competencies through the creation of knowledge and skills. For instance, in the Tamil Nadu case study, children who received knowledge and information on their rights were able to accomplish a task and act in the community afterwards (e.g. through a campaign or petition). In the Scottish case study, a photography project, which culminated in an exhibition and the publication of a book, enabled children to express who they were and what their community was like. Thus, children in both Tamil Nadu and Scotland were able to partake in new activities and adjust to particular circumstances by using their newly acquired knowledge and skills.

In the Tamil Nadu case study, children's competencies were not only seen as inherent characteristics, but also as situated and relational facets of their growth. In the Tamil Nadu case, children developed their interpersonal skills and used these skills to engage

in ongoing dialogues with adults in their community. In the Scottish case study, the individualised competencies (stimulated through the publication of the book and the exhibition) were used in superficial dialogue with adults, as there was no mechanism for further discussion with decision-makers.

Chapter 5, concludes that children's competencies are not inherent characteristics that children either do or do not possess, but are situated and relational. For example, relationships were facilitated by staff, between children's participants and local decision-makers in Tamil Nadu case study. Children were perceived as agents and drivers of change, and thus their competencies were recognised and utilised, with demonstrable impact as a result of children exercising their competencies. In contrast, in the Scottish case study, ongoing and influential relationships between children and local decision-makers were not facilitated and outside of the project. There was limited recognition and utilisation of children's competencies and limited impact on local decision-making.

Thus, considering competencies through the lens of the relational agentic approach supports work by scholars who have paid attention to exploring a relational approach to counter the limit of individuality and personal agency (Tisdall and Punch, 2012). New social relationships between children and adults in schools and communities need to be created (Percy-Smith and Burns, 2013) to further develop children's participation.

### **Staff members facilitate or block children's participation**

#### ***Staff members facilitate children's participation***

The findings from Chapter 5 indicate that, in both case studies, children recognised the help of staff members in developing their skills (communication and leaderships skills



were especially identified). Staff members' support was a significant catalyst for children to take on active roles in the participation projects. In the Tamil Nadu case study, staff members facilitated the interaction between children and adults in power, created the space for discussion through specific meetings. Children identified staff members as key in recognising and legitimising their competencies. Staff members were thus central to facilitating children's participation in three ways: developing and encouraging children to participate; facilitating interaction with key adults; and lending authority to children's participation.

Chapter 6 emphasises how staff members interacted with children significantly influenced children's participation. Children were enabled when the staff acted as listeners and respondents and encouraged children by acting as advisors, informers, activators, and doers. Children's participation was facilitated in Tamil Nadu case study when staff perceived themselves, and children also saw staff, as providing guidance to children. In Scotland, both staff and children recognised the importance of staff feeling confident to work with children, in a non-hierarchical way. The roles, or positioning, of staff was thus central to facilitating children's participation.

### ***Staff members block children's participation***

Chapter 6 highlights inhibiting factors for children's participation. First, the lack of staff in the participation projects restricted staff members' role to carrying out more logistical work (delivering messages or creating plans for workshops) at the expense of establishing relationships with children.

Second, the lack of staff member's skills in facilitating children's participation was damaging to relationships between children and staff members. In the Tamil Nadu case

study, this occurred when new staff members perpetuated the practice of ‘adult authority’ by telling children what to do. In the Tamil Nadu case study, staff failed to encourage the voices of the new and less experienced children, which blocked children’s participation. Participation workers explained they were anxious about interacting with children, and lacked the necessary skills to communicate effectively with them, which had a negative impact on their relationships with the children.

Third, staff were sometimes resistant to children’s participation. A number of staff members in the Tamil Nadu case study saw their ‘guidance’ role as akin to didactic teaching, one where they were strictly instructors and maintaining authority, another one when children in Tamil Nadu wanted to exercise their rights in the community, staff members were reluctant to support them. In both case studies, the protection issue overlapped with participation in practice. Staff members seemed to think they knew what was best for the child and subsequently took a protective and overactive role, taking charge where children should have had control.

Fourth, the hierarchy within the organisation’s social order inhibited staff members’ facilitation role with children. The negative influence of organisational hierarchy manifested itself differently in the two case studies. In the Tamil Nadu case study, the management layers were problematic because staff members could not freely express the problems they encountered in the children’s activities—they did not want to take the risk of disappointing the management team and jeopardising their jobs. In the Scottish case study, the dependency of the organisation on funders was a challenge for those who feared not having their funding renewed. As a consequence, the continuity of the work with those children who wished to be involved was threatened in the Scottish case. Thus, the hierarchy within the organisation’s social order in both case studies

was an inhibitor in participation as it had consequence on the implementation of children's participation.

### **Different types of impact in participation projects**

Chapter 7 indicates that children in the two case studies were able to impact their communities in vastly different ways. In the Tamil Nadu case study, children's participation could be directly linked to changes in their communities. This was often achieved by drawing on the local governance mechanism, of the petition, well-established and used by adults. In the Scottish case study, the staff members saw a cultural shift in valuing children's participation as the long-term community impact of the project. This was encouraged by children presenting photographic evidence and having face-to-face dialogue with decision-makers. There was no further, formal governance mechanism used for the children to influence local decision-makers.

The research showed a diversity of practices and experiences in the participation projects. Where, in the Tamil Nadu case study, children were encouraged to talk about their rights in their communities in light of every-day issues they faced; in the Scottish case study, children focused on needs and rights in their lives as they related to the UNCRC. Although, both of these cases follow—to a degree—the suggestion of practical steps to promote participation: children should have opportunities to participate in meaningful ways in their everyday lives (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010), the diversity of practices in their everyday lives showed different impacts in participation projects as explained below.

The findings indicated that different types of influence occurred in the two case study contexts. In Tamil Nadu, the focus was on immediate, tangible change in the local community, while in Scotland there was a push for an over-all cultural shift of adults'

attitudes towards children's participation. The two organisations also had differing notions of suitable project time frames. In Tamil Nadu, children acted in the 'here and now' to claim their rights at the community level, as is evidenced by their petition to obtain access to electricity. Their focus was on the short-term. In contrast, the Scottish case study emphasised the long-term impact of the participation project on cultural predispositions towards children and their role in society. The organisation hoped to change adults' views about children by encouraging discussion, and chose creative art projects as the main instrument by which to do so. While there was no mechanism for children's views to be appropriately acted upon in the 'here and now', by the organisation's standards, the exhibition was a success, as there was open discussion between children and adults.

### **Children's impact on decision-making in the local community and a process leading to individual impacts for child participants**

The findings indicated that, in the Tamil Nadu case study, children achieved their goals through negotiation, and claimed their rights from adults at the community level by engaging in meaningful social action within an interactional context (Chapter 5). In light of the Lundy model (2007), this case study seems to address all components (though there were instances in which children were not taken seriously). In the Scottish case study, the project's promotion of which can have a cultural shift did not fit well with the Lundy model, which is based on children's views feedback mechanisms or further action in the community; indeed, the Lundy model requires 'due weight' be given.

In both case studies, there were occasions in which children were acting, but adults were not necessarily listening (Chapter 7). In the Tamil Nadu case study, children had

access to adults in power in the community (local leaders and municipal councilors) through arranged meetings, but children were not always listened to (instead they were given chocolate). In the Scottish case study, access to adults in power was limited. Children had the opportunity to express their views to decision-makers through informal meetings at the exhibition, but they were not necessarily listened to.

In the Tamil Nadu case study, the children discussed good examples of how children's views had been appropriately acted upon when children acted collectively (through the petition process or photo evidence). Again, the Scottish case study focused more on the long-term benefits of individual informal exchanges with adults in power. The organisation in the Scottish case study viewed children's experiences as useful for their future citizenship. Martin et al., (2015) note that personal skills development for Irish children was the most positive impact on children's participation, which was contrasted with a lack of meaningful impact on decision-making. This research in Ireland relates to the contrast noted between the two case studies researched: in the Tamil Nadu case study there were examples where children influenced decision-making, whereas in the Scottish case study, the outcome of the project was focused more on the children's individual growth because the participation project did not set up external impact.

One of the frustrations across contexts and countries is "focusing [solely] on process rather than impact, so that children and young people may have positive experiences of involvement but their views have little to no impact on decision-making" (Tisdall et al., 2014: 2). Yet notably, children's participation in community development often focuses more on activities and processes than on accountability and impact (Hart, 2008; *see also* Valentine, 2011). There is a need to consider children's participation as

greater than merely having a say—children’s participation should also be about making a contribution and influencing decision-making (Percy-Smith and Burns, 2013).

### **Context influencing participation of children**

A large part of my research focused on the differences between majority and minority world participation. In Chapters 5 and 7, we saw that children in Tamil Nadu case were considered as ‘being’ competent, whereas in the Scottish study, children were seen as ‘becoming’ competent (James, 2011; Warming, 2012). This dichotomy supports majority world critiques about the unhelpful practice of perceiving children solely as individuals, rather than as interdependent and living in networks of intergenerational relationships (Valentin and Meinert, 2009; Kellett et al., 2004; Butler and Teamey 2014). Due to this perspective, children in Tamil Nadu case were able to express themselves and have their views taken into consideration by adults in their communities. This supports the idea that, “how children and childhood is constructed, within a particular context, is interlinked with their participation in decision-making” (Tisdall et al., 2014: 13).

Despite this outlook, children’s participation in Tamil Nadu has progressed through the active intervention of NGOs, as there is little support from the government. NGOs in Tamil Nadu have significantly supported children’s groups’ efforts to promote child rights and improve living conditions, as well as making children’s participation a reality in everyday life. The participation of children has tended to be more visible at the community level than in high-profile political events at the national level. Because of the reinvigoration of participatory forms of democracy amongst children in the majority world, children’s voices are being more clearly heard and recognised (Cockburn, 2013). Indeed, this is partly due to the fact that the majority world has overwhelming

problems like poverty and inequality, and as such children are encouraged to actively participate to help solve these problems (Williams et al., 2010).

In contrast, the Scottish Government has commissioned NGOs to consult children on children's rights and children's services so that they might have relevant information to introduce or change legislation, policies, and practice. In this minority world country, there is a tendency towards institutionalised participation and public sector decision-making. Accordingly, the government regularly commissions NGOs to consult children on national policies adults think matter to them. Thus, the adults are deciding what topics the children can voice an opinion on, rather than the children themselves expressing ideas on what they care about and want to talk about.

To conclude this section and summarise the answers to the two research questions, children in both Tamil Nadu and Scotland were able to join new activities and adjust to particular circumstances by using their newly acquired knowledge and skills. Children were seen as agents and drivers of change in the Tamil Nadu case study, rather than just participants in the local community, as was the case with children in the Scottish case study.

The research showed a diversity of practices and experiences in the participation projects. In the Tamil Nadu case study, children were encouraged to talk about their rights in their communities regarding everyday issues. In the Scottish case study, children focused on needs and rights in their lives as they related to the UNCRC. Additionally, in the Tamil Nadu case, the focus was on immediate, tangible change in the local community, while in the Scottish case there was instead a push for the over-all cultural shift of adults' attitudes towards children's participation. The two organisations had differing notions of suitable project time frames. In Tamil Nadu, children acted in the

‘here and now’ to claim their rights at the community level with a focus on the short-term (through the petition process or photo evidence). The Scottish case study emphasised the long-term impact of the participation project on cultural predispositions towards children and their role in society. The organisation hoped to change adults’ views about children by encouraging discussion, and chose creative art projects as the main instrument by which to do so. Thus, the two organisations viewed children’s participation differently: in Tamil Nadu, participation and capacity-building would empower children to act in the community to claim their rights and thus to have a direct impact on the children’s lives. In Scotland, participation and capacity-building was, in a sense, for the adults in the community. While the organisation of course wanted to build their participants’ capacities and ability to take part in decision-making processes, this was understood to be an effective way to turn the tide of adults’ negative attitudes towards children’s participation in the long-term, and was thus less oriented around the children themselves—there was always a broader goal.

One of the main components that enabled children’s participation processes was through staff members, who facilitated the interaction between children and adults in power, created the space for discussion through specific meetings (Tamil Nadu), and had the confidence to work and build relationships with children (especially in Scotland). An inhibitor for children’s participation was concerns over protection, which overlapped with participation in practice. Staff members seemed to think they knew what was best for the children and subsequently took a protective role. The lack of some staff members’ facilitation skills blocked children’s participation; this was especially the case with new staff members in the Tamil Nadu case study, who perpetuated



the practice of ‘adult authority’ by telling children what to do. Staff also failed to encourage the voices of the new and less experienced children. Participation workers explained they were anxious about interacting with children, and lacked the necessary skills to communicate effectively with them, which had a negative impact on their relations with the children. In both case studies, the lack of staff members in the participation projects restricted child-staff relationships. The hierarchy within the organisation’s social order inhibited staff members’ facilitation role with children.

The components of Article 12 of the UNCRC illuminate how children’s participation is practised, is understood in both case studies. For instance, in the Tamil Nadu case study, children expressed their views and had their views taken seriously by decision-makers. In the Scottish case study, the latter element was not taken into account. Thus, children informing and influencing the decision-making process was not visible in the Scottish case study. One of the reasons for this is that children in Tamil Nadu case study were seen as rights-holders and not simply participants in a project, as was the view in the Scottish case study. The role of the adults was also important: Lundy and McEvoy (2011: 130) emphasise that is a duty of adults working with children is, “to ensure that their right to express their views and influence their own lives is respected”. Moreover, the Tamil Nadu case study supported Woodhead’s (2010) understanding of children’s participation: that the interaction between children and decision-makers implies children confronting adult authority, challenging adult assumptions about their competence to speak, and making decisions about issues that concern them. The practice of participation in Tamil Nadu supports scholars’ suggestions that participation is not just about talk, but about shared action among children and adults—such as the petition and the temple issue (Percy-Smith, 2006, 2010; Percy-Smith and Thomas,

2010; Thomas, 2012). The practices of participation in the two cases correlate to the literature's idea of 'the direct involvement of children in decision-making in their local communities' (Tamil Nadu case study) and not only as 'seeking views' (Scottish case study) (Percy-Smith and Burns, 2013). Participatory activities need to go further than simple discussions with decision-makers; true dialogue with adults needs to be established to create serious discussion that has 'productive potential' (Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010: 354).

## **8.3 THEORY, PRACTICE AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

### **8.3.1 Theoretical implications**

By arguing that implementing children's participation requires a relational approach, this thesis supports the growing call for the bringing adults back into the discussion, taking a "more relational approach to children's participation, recognising the respective roles and positions of children and adults" (Wyness, 2015: 133). Indeed, this thesis has argued along the same lines as others (Moss and Petrie, 2002; Mannion, 2007; Hatton, 2014; Johnson, 2014), viewing the child as living in networks of relationships—which inherently involve both children and adults—solely perceiving children as autonomous and detached agents.

In promoting the relational aspect of competencies, Chapter 5 called attention to their development through the participation projects. As mentioned, scholars suggest that competencies should not to be seen as inherent characteristics of a person, but situated and relational (Wiemann and Kelly, 1981; Alderson, 1992; Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998; Bjarnadóttir, 2004). Yet, it appears that—when looking at children's and

staff/adult's relationships—the relational dimension is still a marginal priority in participation projects (Chapter 6). The research indicated that staff members maintained control and ultimately defined their relationships with the children. Staff also had a tendency to over-emphasise children's agency and less on interaction between children and adults (Punch, 2016); children's participation has been promoted as one way of thinking, where children are autonomous and adults are invisible in participation (Wyness, 2015). To have a more relational approach to children's participation, scholars and those involved in facilitating participation processes must recognise the respective roles and positions of children and adults (Wyness, 2015). Therefore, in order for children to influence societal change at the community level, I have argued (Chapter 7) the need for more relational practices in children's participation, primarily through collaborative approaches and intergenerational dialogue (Lansdown, 2011; Moxan, 2014).

The thesis also recognised other topics that need to be discussed in order to take a more relational approach. First, there needs to recognise diversity amongst adults (staff members and adults in power) involved in participation. Collaborative approaches in participation enhance the role(s) of adults in the process (Percy-Smith, 2006); however the current child-adult dichotomy is too simple. The diversity amongst adults needs to be considered: staff members and adults in power do not have the same positions in implementing children's participation. Second, awareness of the hierarchy and social order within the NGOs is necessary in order to fully understand the contexts in which staff members are working, and not privilege child-adult relationships within the generational order (Alanen, 2001, 2009). Consequently, this thesis has emphasised that it is too simplistic to consider the relational approach only through the lens of child-adult

relationships, but we need also look at the diversity amongst adults who participate in the project and the hierarchy within and outside of the NGO.

Lastly, the thesis calls for an understanding of the relational approach through the tripartite relationship—I proposed a joint project between children and adults in power to be facilitated by staff members from the beginning of the participation project—with a focus on dialogue and direct contact between children and adults: adults need not only take children’s views into account, but also need to make a commitment to discuss and reach agreement with children (Moxan, 2014). By re-thinking Lundy’s model (Chapter 7), I created room for a new understanding of collaborative intergenerational work. As such, this thesis stresses consideration of ‘tripartite relationships’ in children’s participation, breaking from current scholarship, which suggests that the study of ‘children’s participation’ should be reframed as the study of ‘child-adult relationship’ (Mannion, 2007).

### **8.3.2 Practice and policy implications**

The findings of this research have implications for practice and policy related to children’s participation in Tamil Nadu and Scotland. This thesis makes recommendations for practitioners and decision-makers on how to deploy the modified perspective of Lundy’s model in order to better implement children’s participation at the local level (Chapter 7). Four points are suggested to help practitioners reflect on the effectiveness of their work:

1. strengthen the skills of the facilitator;
2. create partnerships between NGOs and local decision-makers;
3. prepare children to define their own agendas and to interact with local decision-

makers;

4. apply the tripartite relationship in organising face-to-face contact between children and local decision-makers.

## **Practice implications**

### ***Strengthen the skills of the facilitator***

A need has emerged in children's participation—identified in both case studies—to strengthen the skills of the facilitator in children's participation. There is a clear shortfall of capacity-building opportunities for staff members on relevant topics should the tripartite relationship be adopted. Staff members need training on how to facilitate participative processes with children and decision-makers, how to support children in engaging with local decision-makers regarding community issues and vice versa, and how to use a range of media to help children and decision-makers alike convey their opinions to different audiences. In addition to capacity-building workshops, staff facilitator should shadow experienced practitioners in the NGO before starting the participation projects; interacting with graduate members to gain their insight on how they felt about their experiences is another option. Additionally, support from the management team in creating safe spaces for staff members to share their anxiety or difficulties from their work is vital to the success of staff as facilitators, and thus to the success the participation projects.

### ***Create a partnership between the NGO and local decision-makers***

The findings revealed that the role of staff members in making and sustaining productive relationships and exchanges with local decision-makers is crucial to ensure space for children to be heard and taken into account. Considering current mechanisms, such as the petition process used by children and adults to moderate success. The idea is not

to revert to having child-specific mechanisms, but adult mechanisms (which entail an existing structure and process) where children are allowed to express themselves and influence decision-making. In this way more than any other they will be recognised as rights-holders in their communities.

Gal (2015) notes:

When children's participation platforms are separated from those adults, children's participation is more likely to be tokenistic and to lack any impact, whereas joint projects have the potential of being more influential on policy. (2015: 454)

Further, there needs to be clarity in the purpose and objectives of children's participation projects, to help tease out contradictions and strengthen accountability.

Creating partnerships also means preparing local decision-makers to interact with children (and recognise children as competent). This was not always done in the case studies. Staff members should be involved in changing adults' attitudes towards children and in generating more dialogue between adults and children in communities (Johnson, 2014). The goal is to make decision-makers reflect on the dialogue between generations. Training local decision-makers to communicate more effectively with children would help them exchange opinions with the younger generation. Thus, it is important to give local decision-makers practical experience by allowing them to shadow the work of children and interact with them. Local decision-makers should also be provided with basic information on the concept of children's participation and on how children can contribute to effect change in the community. Further, staff members should discuss decision-makers' agenda regarding children in the community to ensure that children have a chance to effect local decision-making processes (Crowley, 2012; Shier et al., 2014).

### ***Prepare children to define their own agenda and to interact with local decision-makers***

The findings revealed the importance of creating positive relationships between children and staff members, a safe environment in which children can express themselves (taking into account peer-relationships), and having fun. Staff members' roles in providing guidance to children to enable them to participate—by providing knowledge and skills that children could apply in particular situations—was also a requisite condition for children to act in their communities. It is the role of the facilitator to assist discussion between the children so that they may decide collectively on meaningful social action to be discussed with local decision-makers. The research also indicates that when discussing issues with local decision-makers, evidence in the form of child-led research (e.g. petitions and photographic evidence) is an effective approach to take. Thus, staff must prepare children to use a range of media in order to effectively convey their message.

These suggestions are reflected in the organisation *Investing in Children* (Davis et al., 2014, *see also* Davis and Smith, 2012; Davis, 2011), working in various communities in the UK. Children were able to create a shared agenda for action and then explore what they wished to change about their community and potential solutions before meeting local decision-makers (Davis et al., 2014). Thus, the preparation of children to define their own agenda and to interact with local decision-makers is significant in participation projects.

*Apply the tripartite relationship in organising face-to-face contact between children and local decision-makers*

The findings showed the importance of face-to-face contact in creating opportunities for bringing children and local decision-makers together to discuss joint concerns (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010). My re-thinking of Lundy's model—which suggests collaborative tripartite work within a joint project between children and adults in power, facilitated by staff members at the beginning of the project—should not take too long, as the participation project and any collaborative work should start directly after this first face-to-face meeting. The goal is that, “the ‘humanizing’ effect of having children and decision-makers in the same room discussing issues of mutual concern or interest, albeit from different perspectives” (Marshall et al., 2015: 379), will ease the path toward collaboration and cooperation and create an opportunity for children to influence political agendas. The objective of the meeting is “to bring groups and generations together to listen to one another, exchange ideas and negotiate a shared response” (Hatton, 2014: 53).

Co-production is a useful lens through which to consider the tripartite relationship because “people who use services have expertise and assets, which are essential to creating effective services and good practice” (Needham and Carr, 2009: 16). Tisdall (forthcoming): co-production “promotes services users’ involvement in their own service delivery, it has been picked up in additional ways to encourage greater collaboration in knowledge production”. Thus, the tripartite relationship emphasises that children have skills, expertise, and are creators of knowledge, alongside facilitators and local decision-makers in the same mechanism.



However, to look only at the three actors in the tripartite relationship when implementing children's participation is not enough. Gal (2015) suggests that an ecological approach is needed in children's participation as many elements affect child participation: the child's perspective, parent-family relationships, professional considerations, state structures, cultural values, and universal human rights. Nevertheless, if there is not funding available the ecological approach becomes obsolete with political issue. For instance, in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act of 2014* more people and resources need to be allocated to make collaborative structure works. (Davis et al, 2014).

### **Policy implications**

Policy work is important as it ensures that issues that affect children's rights are included in political debate and legislation creation. Following the four steps described above, policy in Tamil Nadu and Scotland should involve greater attention to children, using adults' structures to express themselves and to establish the common agenda with adults. Both countries have ratified the UNCRC and their commitment to promote, protect, and fulfil the rights of children should be reflected in all relevant public policies and standards, taking into account the principles enshrined in the UNCRC.

A further key lesson for policy and policy-makers is that perceiving children as rights-holders creates a culture of children's participation in society, as children's voices are heard on matters that concern them in the contexts of community, family, and school. Thus, it is important that policy-makers take children's opinions into account when they are creating new legislation and policy. The policy frameworks should not only

recognise that children are independent and autonomous rights-holders who are entitled to the right to express their views freely, and that such views be taken into consideration on relevant matters, but also to acknowledge more relational approach and collaborative work between children and decision-makers in producing new legislation and policy.

In Scotland, the extent of children's consultation in an attempt to include their views in such policy making, has led to consultation fatigue (Cornwall, 2008). Policies should look away from simple consultation and emphasise community projects on participation. Collaborative intergenerational dialogue for children to express their views directly to policy-makers is crucial, as is having real dialogue on issues in the children's everyday lives. The tripartite relationship can be considered a possible solution to strengthening bottom-up process in children's participation. With impact demonstrated, children's participation will be purposeful and children not disenchanted by involvement without impact.

Even if local authorities in Scotland have limited domestic duties to implement the UNCRC (and thus children's participation), they can, through the *Children and Young People Act* (2014), report on what steps have been taken to further children's participation. This account of circumstances, which would reveal the impact of children's participation, could be included in the three-year report period to secure Scotland's application of UNCRC requirements, even though it is not compulsory. This would strengthen Scotland's commitment to a culture of children's participation.

In Tamil Nadu, NGOs could work collaboratively not only with the local decision-makers, but also with the Tamil Nadu Commission for Protection of Child Rights, to spread the practice of focusing on tripartite relationships.

In Tamil Nadu and Scotland, policy-makers could also be more transparent regarding their agenda on children's issues, thus providing the opportunity for collaboration with children. It will also be important to translate key policy pieces into child-friendly vernacular in order to ensure children to have access to information on issues relevant to them.

These implications are important because they confirm the new direction of children's participation by bringing the relational dimension of participation and adding in the importance of applying the tripartite relationship, especially when organising face-to-face contact between children and local decision-makers.

#### **8.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The UNCRC sets out general guidelines for implementing children's participation; however its lack of specificity is a challenge. One of the main issues facing children's participation rights today is the role of adults in the process. Children's participation does not exist in a vacuum, and attempts to separate adults are misguided and ultimately do children (and adults, for that matter) a disservice. This is especially the case when attempting to integrate children's participation efforts into the real world; children's participation cannot be expected to be effective or efficient if half of the equation is disregarded as unimportant to the process.

The findings of this research thus encourage attention to collaborative tripartite projects, which engage children and adults jointly in a process to work on a common agenda. Further and more specifically (with regard to the two cases explored in this

thesis), listening to and including local decision-makers in efforts to encourage children to influence the process, as well as having a better understanding of organisational changes relevant to the processes, may be helpful to consider when implementing children's participation. This section considers potential areas of further research: listening to local decision-makers, organisational change, intergenerational projects, and action research as a methodology.

### **Listening to local decision-makers**

While this research has focused on children and staff members, the findings indicate that a key omission in implementing children's participation is the lack of discussion with local decision-makers: their opinions on children influencing decision-making at the community level are crucial for successful participation. This research has identified cases wherein decision-makers have responded both positively and negatively to children's insertion into the 'political' process, yet all too often the positive responses are facilitated by staff—i.e. other adults—stepping in to smooth the way.

Prior research has included decision-makers in studies generally, Hogan et al. (2015) examined how children were able to participate and influence matters affecting them in their communities in Ireland. Martin et al., (2015) conducted an Irish research project that explores the experiences and outcomes of participation for children who had participated in Government participatory initiatives held by the *Department of Children and Youth Affairs* (DCYA). Research by Shier et al., (2014) showed how children influenced policy-makers in Nicaragua. However, future research might benefit by looking at children's participation from the perspective of decision-makers: why is there (often) so much 'push-back' by adults in leadership positions? Is there something

about allowing children to participate that is detrimental to their position of power? Do decision-makers—like many of the staff members interviewed in this research—find interacting and negotiating with children an uncomfortable experience? If so, is there scope to improve this experience and therefore their attitude towards children’s participation?

### **Organisational change**

The values and practices of the organisations that promote participation have not been examined extensively enough (Hart et al., 2011). A discussion about organisational change is necessary for the promotion of children’s participation, because the structure and practice of these organisations wields a huge influence on how participation works (Elsley and Tisdall, 2014).

The resource guide *Every Child’s Right to Be Heard* suggests that, “staff [should be] able to express any views or anxieties about involving children, in the expectation that these will be addressed in a constructive way” (Lansdown, 2011: 155). This research suggests staff need a safe space to share their anxieties or difficulties regarding both their relations with children and within their specific NGO context. Stronger organisational structures to support facilitation staff are necessary for the categorical implementation of NGO projects seeking to uphold the UNCRC. This could possibly take the form of safe spaces as well as capacity-building workshops, wherein staff would be able to explore and air attitudes and challenges faced when helping implement children’s participation.

Safe spaces should establish security and trust, allowing staff to talk about difficulties

in a constructive way and learn from mistakes without fear of reprisal by the organisation's management. Further research might look into this as well as what enables or inhibits staff member's facilitation role with children. Research can also look at the difficulties and anxieties of staff members when implementing children's participation within the NGO context.

### **Intergenerational dialogue in children's participation project**

Taft (2014), in analysing a Peruvian movement of working children and the collaborative intergenerational relationships experienced, notes that in practice such relationships were a continuation of adult dominance, because of the implicit power in adult 'orientation' and 'guidance' in participatory activity. As stated, the role of adults is crucial to effective children's participation, and therefore intergenerational dialogue is as well. The opportunity for dialogue between children and adults is significant because "dialogue means a mutual willingness to convince and be convinced, to be changed, and to give away one's control over the decision" (Gal and Duramy, 2015: 7). The dialogue should go further than a simple discussion, as it involves serious material and has 'productive potential' (Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010: 354).

Additionally, the tripartite relationship mentioned in Chapter 7 cannot function properly without such dialogue. Certainly, two thirds of the tripartite relationships are adults, and the functioning of the relationship relies heavily on effective communication. This means that intergenerational dialogue within the tripartite framework is important in two ways: between children and staff members, and between children and decision-makers. In the former relationship, children and decision-makers are on equal footing. The two parties exchange their views to come up with a common agenda,

avoiding the position of adult power that would otherwise develop. In the latter relationship, staff members' role is to facilitate the voice of children. Gallagher (2008: 397) provides an interpretation of Michel Foucault's conception of power, suggesting that power should not be viewed as something that can be owned or redistributed, but rather as a form of action that can be exercised rather than possessed. Thus, recognising the 'tripartite' relationship can lead to a sharing of power between adults and children, rather than conflict.

Further research might look at ways that children, staff facilitators, and local decision-makers can establish a common agenda, as well as develop guidance material with advice for practising participation through the intergenerational dialogue, and thus initiating more intergenerational projects.

### **Action research project**

The focus of action research is on addressing a specific problem in a defined context, and not on obtaining scientific knowledge that can be generalised. There are four basic characteristics of action research:

1. Action research is *situational*—diagnosing a problem in a specific context and attempting to solve it in that context.
2. It is *collaborative*, with teams of researchers and practitioners working together.
3. It is *participatory*, as team members take part directly in implementing the research.
4. It is *self-evaluative*—modifications are continuously evaluated within the ongoing situation to improve practice. (Burns, 2000: 444)

The action researcher and members of a social setting collaborate in the diagnosis of a problem and in the development of a solution based on the diagnosis. Action research is sometimes dismissed by academics for lacking rigour and being too partisan in approach (Burns, 2000). However, its advocates note its commitment to involving people in diagnosis of and solutions to problems, rather than imposing solutions on predefined obstacles (Bryman, 2016: 387). Action research is “a practice of participation, engaging those who might otherwise be subjects of research or recipients of interventions to a greater or less extent as inquiring co-researchers” (Reason and Bradbury, 2008: 1). It is a research approach that is designed to examine issues and produce practical knowledge that will have implications and uses in people’s everyday lives (Bryman, 2016: 5; Reason and Bradbury, 2008: 4).

The action research approach might have been more useful than the observations and interviews I carried out, as I could have better involved participants in diagnosing and creating solutions to participation implementation problems. As mentioned in Chapter 3, I was unable to answer all three research questions due to the limitations of my method of collecting data. Thus, using action research for future research on listening to decision-makers, organisational change, or intergenerational dialogue will likely produce better data, as participants will be co-researchers in the process.

## **8.5 CONCLUSION**

This doctoral research makes a contribution to the area of Childhood Studies on the topic of children’s participation, building on the work of academics that have focused on children’s participation at the community level. This thesis has demonstrated that



children can play an important role in decision-making at the community level (as active social actors) rather than merely expressing views in ‘matters affecting the child’. The most important message from this thesis is that children’s participation requires tripartite relationships to work on collaborative intergenerational projects. Children can effectively contribute to their community, and should not be restricted to only saying what do like or do not like. Children are essential to pinpointing what could be changed in the community, as was mentioned by *Investing in Children* (Davis et al., 2014). Indeed, children offer a unique perspective that adults should more seriously take into account. Thus, this thesis provides suggestions about the future of children’s participation in collective decision-making.

Collaborative tripartite projects could be developed, through strengthening the role and skills of the facilitator; involving decision-makers at the beginning of the process; children, facilitators, and decision-makers committing to the process and the outcomes; and children and decision-makers having time to interact with each other and willing to work together on a common agenda to bring positive change in the community. The element of time needs special consideration, as it is pivotal in making the process more realistic for the participation. Thus with these two elements, implementation of collaborative tripartite projects and time elements, our understanding of implementing children’s participation could be enhanced and also to avoid tokenistic participation.

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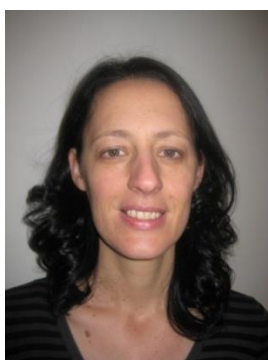


# APPENDICES

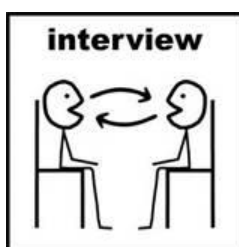
## APPENDIX 1: INFORMATION LEAFLET FOR CHILD PARTICIPANTS FROM TAMIL NADU

### Information leaflet for the research

#### Who am I?



My name is Carine. I am French and I am a student at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. I am doing a research project with [name of the organisation] and especially about this children's group. I came to [name of the city] from 2008 and 2010 and worked with [organisation] on an impact evaluation of [organisation] children's group. This time is different and it is not linked with the evaluation. I am collecting information for my research project with the University of Edinburgh.



#### What is my visit about?

I am inviting you to take part in an interview that will last around one hour. I would like to know your personal story regarding children's participation (don't worry I will have a translator to communicate together). I am doing the same with an organisation promoting participation in Scotland (see map below).

If it's okay with you, I will write notes during the interview and use a tape-recorder. It will be helpful for me to record the interview as I will not have time to write down all your comments.



At the end of the interview, you will have opportunities to say if you don't want me to note some of your comments. I will use your own words but I won't use your real name when I tell others about the research. So what you will tell me will be confidential. But if you tell me that you or someone else is in danger of serious harm, I need to arrange help for you or him/her.

**Do I have to do this?**

No, it's up to you and if you choose not to that is fine. It won't make any difference to your involvement with [name of the organisation].



**What's happens after this interview?**

I might ask you to have a second interview with me to clarify some information from the first interview. I will be in touch with you before I am leaving (end of May) to give you some feedback about the information collected.

**Do you want to do it?**

If you want to take part of the research project, I will ask you to sign the following consent form.

**Do you have any questions, or wish to clarify anything?**

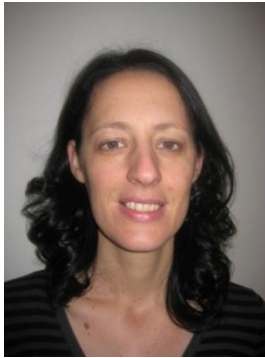
If you have any questions or would like to talk to me you can contact me at [my phone number] during the process. I will call you back using the help of the translator.



## APPENDIX 2: INFORMATION LEAFLET FOR CHILD PARTICIPANTS FROM SCOTLAND

### Information leaflet for the research

#### Who am I?



My name is Carine, I am French and I am a student at the University of Edinburgh. I am doing a research project with [*name of the organisation*] and especially about your children's group. I am doing the same project with children in Tamil Nadu (see map below).

#### What is the interview about?



I am inviting you to take part in an interview that will last around 1 hour. I would like to know your personal story regarding children's participation. I am doing the same with an organisation promoting participation in Tamil Nadu.

If it's okay with you, I will write notes during the interview and use a tape-recorder. It will be helpful for me to record the interview as I will not have time to write all your comments down.



At the end of the interview, you will have the opportunities to say if you don't want me to make a note of some of your comments.

I will use your own words but I won't use your real name when I tell others about the research. So what you will tell me will be confidential, unless that you tell me that you or someone else is in danger of serious harm.

### **Do I have to do this?**

No, it's up to you and if you choose not to that is fine. It won't make any difference to your involvement with [*name of the organisation*].

### **What's happens after the interview?**

I might ask you to have a second interview to clarify some information from the previous interview. I will be in touch with you before I leave at the end of May to give you some feedback about the information collected.

### **Do you want to do this interview?**



If you want to take part in this research project, I will ask you to sign the consent form.

### **Do you have any questions, or want to clarify anything?**



If you have any questions or would like to talk to me you can contact me at [phone number] during the process, and I will call you back.

## APPENDIX 3: PARENT CONSENT FORM



### PARENT CONSENT FORM

Research on children's participation

I confirm that I have been orally informed about the research area and the details of my child's participation with the information sheet.

I agree to allow my child to take part in the study. I understand that he/she would be asked a couple of questions regarding his/her personal story about children's participation with [name of the organisation].

However, I know that he/she can decide to withdraw from the study at any time if he/she wants to. Participation in the study or withdrawal from it at any point will not affect his/her rights and services that he/she receives from [*name of the organisation*].

I agree that the research data gathered and findings may be published, provided his/her name or other information that might identify him/her will not be used.

Participant Information:

Name of the child:

Name of the parent:

Date:

Signature:

Name of the Researcher: **Carine Le Borgne**

Signature of the researcher:

Date:

## APPENDIX 4: ADULT PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



### ADULT PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Research on children's participation

I have been orally informed about the research area and the details of my participation outlined within the information sheet.

I agree to take part in the study. I understand that I will be asked a couple of questions regarding my personal story about children's participation with [*name of the organisation*].

However, I know that I can decide to withdraw from the study at any time if I want to. Participation in the study or withdrawal from it at any point will not affect my rights and services that I receive from [*name of the organisation*].

I agree that the research data gathered and findings may be published, provided my name or other information that might identify me will not be used.

Participant role:

Name of the adult respondent:

Date:

Signature:

Name of the Researcher: **Carine Le Borgne**

Signature of the researcher:

Date:





**APPENDIX 6: MAP OF THE UNITED KINGDOM**



Source : <http://www.emapsworld.com/images/uk-political-map.gif>