

Child participation as a core philosophy

Butterflies, India



¹ Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of India, 7 July 2014, CRC/C/IND/CO/3-4.

THE MODEL

Child participation has been a core value for Butterflies since its inception in 1989. Butterflies is a child rights NGO that works to protect and empower street and working children in Delhi, India. Its goal is to educate and impart life skills to vulnerable children to support them to become self-reliant.

Butterflies integrates a cooperative model across all of its programmes. Following cooperative principles, programmes are inclusive and democratically run; participation is voluntary; and children share ownership and responsibility for the design and development of the programmes' values, goals and rules. Staff and children receive training which involves a process of unlearning the societal norms regarding interactions between children and adults, such as children obeying their elders. This is achieved through workshops and on a constant basis through practical implementation of the cooperative model. Children often grasp the nuances of cooperatives much faster than adults.

Children also play a key role in Butterflies' decision-making. A Children's Council meets every month to resolve issues relating to different programmes, as well as the wider community. Children also monitor and evaluate Butterflies' work and input into its annual review process, helping to shape the organisation's future strategy.

Butterflies' key programmes which are based on the cooperative model include a children's bank, a children's newspaper and radio programme, and the Delhi Child Rights Club. While children are in charge of the programmes, the approach is not simply about them taking the lead; children also learn to understand democratic values and respect differences, with staff playing an important facilitative role.

Learning cooperative values is empowering and transformative for children.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Children's Development Khazana (CDK) is a cooperative bank that teaches children financial management skills; the name, khazana, means treasure in Persian. With just 1 rupee, children aged between 9 and 18 can set up current or savings accounts and request advances, to pay for school books or clothes. Children are elected as volunteer managers who receive training in basic accountancy and communication skills and receive guidance from adult facilitators.

Butterflies Broadcasting Children (or BBC!) brings children together to share their perspectives on community and national issues. Every week they broadcast a 15 minute news programme on national radio and are supported by children all over India who act as news correspondents for the programme.

The Delhi Children's Times newspaper covers a range of topics such as food security, women's issues and natural disasters, through articles written by children. It also gives recommendations on government programmes and reports on the situation of children's rights across the country.

The Delhi Child Rights' Club is a forum of children from over 20 organisations in Delhi. Together they research and advocate on ways to improve Delhi as a child-friendly city, engaging in dialogue with local government on issues such as making Delhi's green spaces accessible to children.

7 Cooperative Principles

- Open and Voluntary Membership
- Democratic Member Control
- Members' Economic Participation
- Autonomy and Independence
- Education, Training, and Information
- Cooperation Among Cooperatives
- Concern for Community

OUTCOMES

- 1 44,000 children in 7 states in India and 7 countries across the world are involved in CDK.
- 2 Many children have helped take their families out of poverty thanks to their improved financial management skills learned through CDK.
- 3 Butterflies' media projects develop children's confidence and provide opportunities for training and real world experience.
- 4 Learning the values of participation and cooperation is empowering and transformative for children. Communication skills improve and many have successfully negotiated with their parents to continue their education, including those who are first generation school goers.
- 5 Butterflies see positive changes in children's behaviours and attitudes, their acceptance of difference and how they learn to take collective responsibility for a common purpose.

CHALLENGES FACED

- 1 It can be very challenging for staff to go through the process of unlearning required for the cooperative model to work effectively. Butterflies supports staff to reflect and question their own values.
- 2 The process of learning and unlearning for children can also be slow at first. It is a gradual process that is best learned through doing.
- 3 It is not always easy for children to negotiate with their parents and communities as there is a lack of widespread understanding of children's rights and agency.

LOCAL CONTEXT

The United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognises children's right to express their views freely and to have those views taken into account. India has ratified the CRC and has since implemented a number of initiatives to increase children's participation in society, such as the Child Reporters Initiative.

However, despite this progress, in 2015 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern that children are generally not perceived as rights holders by society. Their participation in the public sphere and opportunities to have their voices heard in the family, schools, community and at the central level were deemed to be insufficient. The Committee therefore recommended that the Government of India conduct research and run awareness-raising programmes to promote meaningful and empowered participation by all children and ensure regular assessment and evaluation of these activities.¹

ABOUT BUTTERFLIES

Butterflies is a non-governmental organisation in New Delhi, India, working to protect and empower street and working children since 1989.

Its work includes education, health care and media programmes as well as operating a child helpline. Butterflies' projects reach 1,500 children across Delhi at points where there is a high concentration of street or working children, for example markets or railway stations. The organisation believes in the right of every child to protection, respect, opportunities and participation in his or her own growth and development.

Find out more about Butterflies: www.butterflieschildrights.org or contact Rita Panicker, Founder and Director: ritapanicker@butterflies-india.org

FURTHER INFORMATION

Family for Every Child is a diverse membership network of civil society organisations based around the world.

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