

# Children's participation in the *South African Child Gauge 2010/2011*



**Getting started:** Studying a copy of the *South African Child Gauge*



**Role playing:** Positive experiences of participation



**Content workshop:** What does participation look like in the family?

The *South African Child Gauge* aims to make academic research accessible to decision-makers in government and civil society. Yet, despite its emphasis on plain language, it is essentially a book about children by adults for adults, so thinking about how to involve children in a meaningful way has been both energising and challenging.

Given the time-consuming and stringent peer-review process, we chose not to involve children in the editorial team, and instead worked with a group of 18 children to develop a poster to promote children's participation, and artwork for the book.

**The children** came from five different children's organisations in the Western Cape: the Children's Resource Centre, Disabled Children's Action Group, Equal Education, Soul Buddyz and Resources Aimed at the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. The children were between 11 and 18 years old and there was roughly an even split of boys and girls. They came from Kensington, Lavender Hill, Mitchell's Plain, Khayelitsha and Mbekweni (Paarl).

**The poster development process** took place over four workshops that were facilitated by the Children's Rights Centre, the Children's Institute and UNICEF. In the first workshop children shared their experiences of participation. They described what it feels like not to be heard and considered what was needed to enable children's participation in families, schools, homes and communities.

The second workshop was held at Frank Joubert Art Centre, where the children drew pictures to illustrate what children's participation looked like in different settings. They also worked in pairs to act out what it looks like when adults respect and listen to children. These "power statuses" helped give shape to their clay sculptures, which are featured throughout this issue.

The third workshop was led by Designs 4 Development and introduced the children to the principles of poster design. The children used their own words and images to develop their own posters. Using good design criteria, they evaluated their own posters and other posters, including those from previous issues of the *South African Child Gauge*.

The adult designers then produced two alternative lay-outs using the children's messages. These were presented at a pick-a-poster workshop, where the children reflected on what they liked about each poster and which version they thought would be most effective for an adult audience.

Feedback from the children and the editorial team shaped the final design of the poster. The children elected two representatives who approved the final design with the editorial team.

**The poster** is double-sided. The image of a tree was produced by the adult designers, using the children's own words to describe the benefits of participation, what adults and children can do to make participation work, and where children are entitled to have a say in decision-making.

The poster is distributed with the *South African Child Gauge 2010/2011* to policy-makers, planners and practitioners. We hope it will stimulate conversations between adults and children and serve as a constant reminder about the value of including children in decision-making processes. The poster is linked to a set of exercises developed by Janet Prest Talbot (Child Rights Centre) that can be used to deepen children's and adults' understanding of participation.

**A child-friendly summary** of the book was compiled by André Viviers (UNICEF South Africa) after the children expressed the need for information in a language and format that is easy to understand – they thought the book was too wordy for children. The summary gives a short overview of each essay and is available for download. We encourage organisations working with children to share this with children and to use it with the poster to stimulate conversations between children and adults about the value of children's participation in decision-making.

**The launch:** As this book goes to press, preparations are underway for an inclusive and child-friendly event that will enable the children to participate. Gabriel Urgoiti, a children's participation consultant, will lead a two-day workshop to prepare the children for the launch and related media engagement.

There are plans for two closed sessions preceding the formal launch programme to give the children the opportunity to set the agenda by interviewing the keynote speakers and the media. The launch programme includes a formal presentation by the children; an exhibition to showcase the poster development process and the children's artwork. The children also plan to sign copies of the book, poster and child-friendly summary.

**Challenges and lessons** are valuable to reflect on for these kinds of processes. Ours was a process of consultation, where the adults on the editorial team and children worked together to meet a specific goal. There were two key challenges, both relating to planning and time.

Timing the children's process to align with the production of the book was a big challenge. The deadlines for the book and the launch slipped by almost two months, leading to a seven-week gap between the pick-a-poster and media workshops. As the children and their parents had consented to the original timetable, it was difficult to rearrange the workshops and it was not possible to schedule another one during the school holidays due to financial constraints. This meant that the children had to give feedback on the child-friendly summary before the conclusion of the book was written.

Outside of the workshops, liaison with the designers was done by the editorial team. It was not possible to include all of the children in the exchange of information via phone and e-mail. We had not foreseen the extent of the dialogue about the brief and the detail of the design; these conversations were not diarised and as such were invisible when planning. As adults much of our time is spent doing unscheduled activities, we need to understand our own work well if we are to partner fully with children.

**The poster, the accompanying exercises and the child-friendly summary are available at: [www.ci.org.za](http://www.ci.org.za)**



**Art workshop:** Creating sculptures at Frank Joubert



**Art workshop:** Drawing participation in different contexts



**Design workshop:** Working on initial poster designs



**Pick-a-poster workshop:** Giving feedback to the designers