

## R for Research Involving Children

Participation of Children in German Development Cooperation –  
in Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

Development cooperation requires data in order to plan its projects or programmes, to monitor them and to measure their results. A particular challenge is posed by the collection of data when children are the target group of the development cooperation measure. How can children's dignity, their wellbeing and protection be ensured whilst collecting data?

This publication describes the requirements for data collection involving minors as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and explains how they can be fulfilled in practice.

The term 'data collection' as it is used in this document describes the process of collecting and using qualitative and quantitative data.

### What does data collection have to do with children's rights?

Data collection involving children in the context of projects which affect children are relevant for children's rights in three ways:

- The focus of the research centres around the implementation of children's rights, such as the right to education and health, or protection against violence, exploitation and neglect;

- The consideration of children's opinions implements their right to participation;
- Amongst other things, children's rights prescribe the standards for the data collection process.

The focus of this publication lies on the last point mentioned: What are the requirements of a children's rights-based data collection process, and how must children's rights be considered in practice?

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"We are involved because it is important to consider the opinion of every individual. If someone's opinion is not considered, he or she will feel unsatisfied later on. This is why it's important to listen to the opinion of every member of our community."

Kyrgyzstan, 13-15 years old

"If we combine the interests of both adults and young people, we can achieve unity, a better future, and collective interests."

Serbia, 15-17 years old

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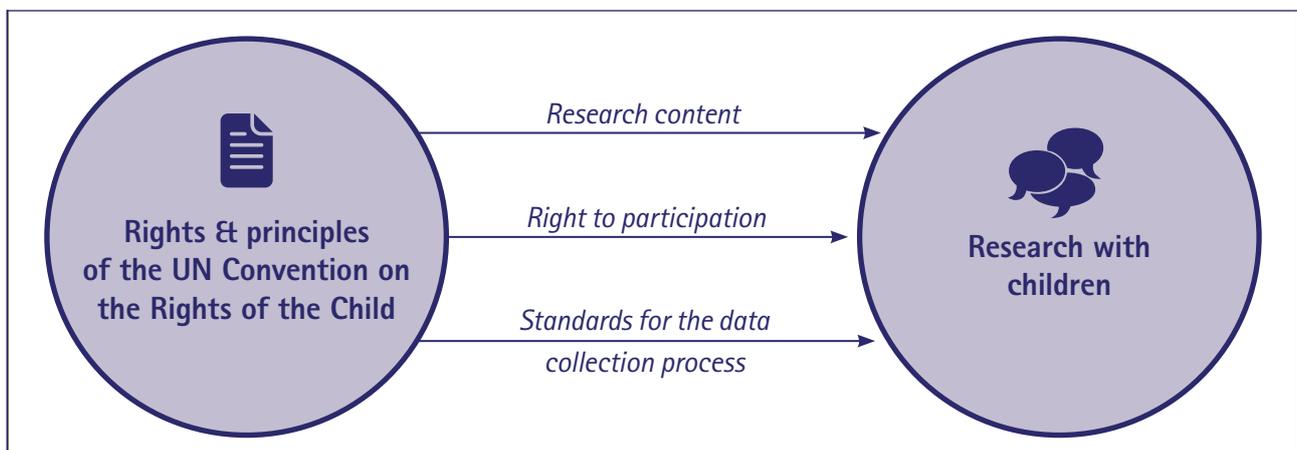


Figure 1: Requirements of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child for research with children

## Which advantages does a children's rights-based data collection process have for development cooperation?

Implementation of children's rights:

- The implementation of the children's right to participation as well as the consideration of their opinions is already a constituent part of the data collection process;
- Coherence between the human rights goals of development cooperation measures and the way they are implemented.

Quality improvement:

- Precise and genuine opinions of children on each project or programme;
- Basis for sustainable and effective programmes;
- The authenticity and accountability of the project is strengthened;
- Protection of the organisation and contracting entity against criticism for having collected data without full consideration of the dignity, wellbeing and rights of the participating children.

Strengthening competence:

- Involvement of right holders and duty bearers, thus generating widespread support for projects
- Increasing awareness of children's rights and their implementation amongst right holders and duty bearers as well as amongst the organisations carrying out the data collection and their contracting entities

## When is data collection involving children of interest to development cooperation?

Data collection involving children should be considered a part of development cooperation projects in the planning, monitoring and evaluation stages. Whenever these projects affect children, they have a right to participation and to be heard. The organisation carrying out the data collection also builds a better foundation for planning and decision-making if they are aware of children's perspectives on the project and their opinion on planned and/or realised measures. This is of particular importance in areas where children and young people make up a large proportion of the population and whose perspectives and opinions do not receive due consideration.

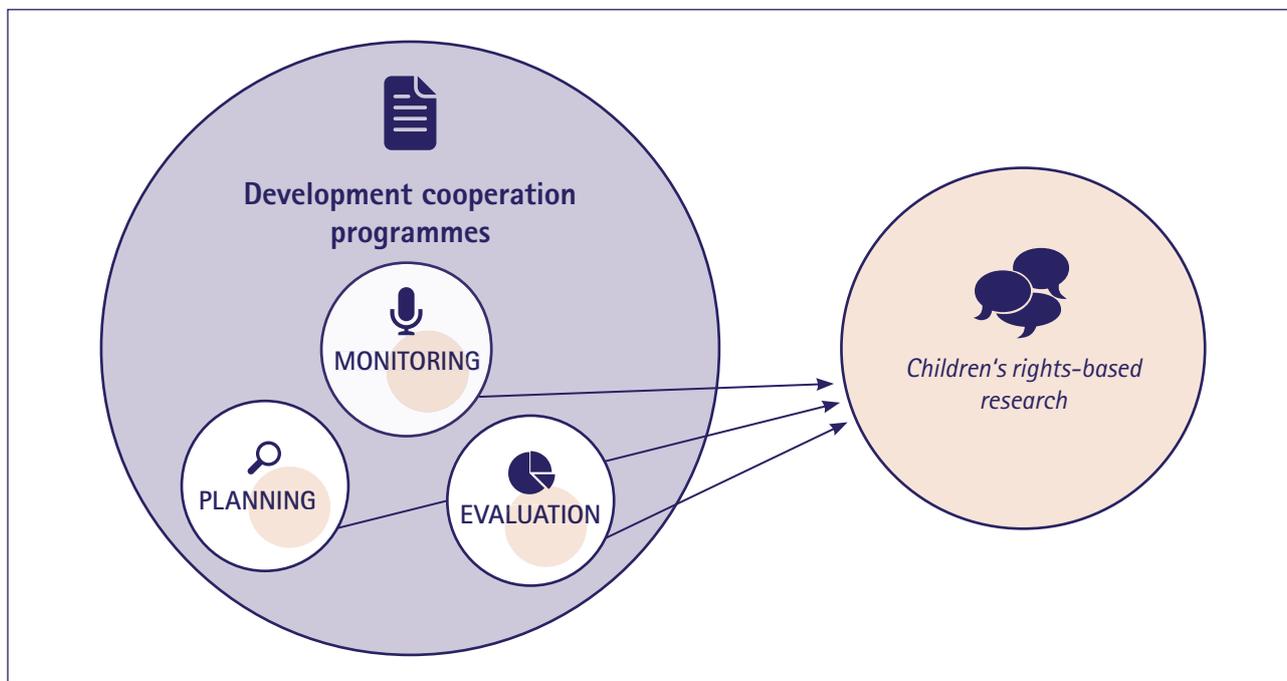


Figure 2: Children's rights-based research in development cooperation



## Children's rights-based standards for research involving children

### What characterises a children's rights-based approach for data collection involving children?

Whenever the aim of a development cooperation measure is to implement children's rights, the data collection methods used during the project should fulfil children's rights standards. Lundy and McEvoy (2012) suggest considering three basic principles when planning children's rights-based research:

- the aims of the research fulfil the requirements of the CRC;
- the data collection process fulfils the standards and general principles of the CRC;
- the data collection process and its results strengthen both the children's ability to claim their rights, and the ability of the organisation carrying out the data collection process to fulfil their obligations.

### Standards for research involving children

Children have the right to express their opinion on all matters affecting them. However, they do not always have a fully-formed opinion, backed up by relevant information, at the time research is carried out. This means that the persons collecting the data must first support children (art. 5 CRC) with information (art. 13 CRC) in order that they may form their own opinion (art. 12 CRC). Children should come into contact with a range of different perspectives to help them form their own opinion.

The following table contains a variety of the standards for research involving children as derived from the CRC.

CRC Article	Standards for research involving children
Art. 2 Non-discrimination	No child may be the subject of discrimination through his or her involvement in the data collection process or as a result of it.
Art. 3 The best interests of the child	Every child's best interests must be considered as a priority and must form the backbone of the research.
Art. 5 Rights and duties of the parents	Every child has the right to guidance appropriate to his or her age and ability from his or her parents or another responsible adult.
Art. 12 The right to be heard	Every child has the right to freely express his or her opinion in all matters affecting him or her, and to know that this opinion will be given due consideration. This applies both to the decision to participate in research as well as to the data collection process itself.
Art. 13 Freedom of expression and information	Every child has the right to freely express his or her opinion, to have access to the necessary information in order to shape this opinion, and to be able to choose the form of his or her expression. This too applies both to the decision to participate in research as well as to the data collection process itself.
Art. 16 Protection of privacy	Every child has the right to confidentiality of the treatment, storage and presentation of the data collected from him or her.

Summary 1: Selection of the standards for research involving children as derived from the CRC



## How can children be protected during the data collection process and how can their rights be implemented?

There is no one, single, obligatory strategy or method for children's rights-based data collection; in fact, methods must be adapted to suit the regional and social context in which the research takes place. As such, it is essential to continually reflect on the methods used during the data collection process.

Children's rights-based standards can be used as a point of reference for such reflection. The importance of selected children's rights-based standards in the various phases of the data collection process will be demonstrated under the following points.

### 1. Planning of the research

#### Participation of children

Children have the right to participate in the design and realisation of research which affects them. Children are often only then involved in research once the topic to be investigated has already been decided upon. In such cases, the participation of children can mean using the remaining scope for the project's design, e.g. for the formulation of questions or the methods used. Children may take on various different roles in the research process, including as:

- Participants who are asked about their opinion;
- Consultants whose opinions are considered during data collection;
- Researchers who are involved in carrying out the collection of data and who are empowered to make decisions.

The age and abilities of the children should not form the basis of the decision about whether children participate in the data collection process but rather how they participate in it with regard to the scope of the research and methods used in it.

Research into the topic (Lundy/McEvoy 2011) considers consultation groups made up of participating children of the same age as highly favourable. Following an introduction to the topic and methods of the research, these groups can advise the organisers on the contents, methods and ethical questions as seen from a child's perspective. This helps the research achieve the aim of empowering the children to exercise their rights.

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"Participation means making decisions. It means being a part of society. For me, it means being a part of something new right from the start."

Kyrgyzstan, 13-15 years old

"Young people and adults often have trouble understanding each other. It is easier for young people to understand each other."

Guatemala, 15-17 years old

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#### Measures for the protection of children involved in research

Those persons carrying out research involving children must take care to protect the children's wellbeing whilst they are participating in data collection. As such, an analysis of possible risks must be conducted in advance in order to look for ways to reduce these risks. If this is not possible, the conduction of the research must be called into question.

Examples of risks to the children's wellbeing involve (re-)traumatisation resulting from the data collection methods (e.g. children who may have been forced to endure repeated questioning by the police or border security agency) or punishment by third parties who do not approve of the children's participation in the research.

#### Choice of questions and data collection methods

The questions should be relevant from the point of view of the potential participants. They should be asked in the participants' interests and the participants should be in a position to answer them. Methods should always be chosen with regard to the context but should also be inclusive, encourage participation and favour the children's wellbeing. The methods must allow the children to express their opinions freely and must not distort these opinions.

Publications on participatory data collection methods, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Participation and Learning (PAL) and the 'Mosaic Approach' offer examples of methods which fulfil many aspects of the children's rights-based standards. What they all have in common is that they emphasise the active role of the participants in the design and conduction of the methods, as well as practical relevance and the use of diverse methods. The Mosaic Approach, which is also suitable for work with young children, focuses on



conversation and on photographs and pictures created by children in their usual surroundings. Subsequent discussion with the children allows a comprehensive understanding of the children's perspective to form.

In terms of children's rights, the question of how a method is implemented is the most relevant. The degree to which children are involved in decisions on the

design and realisation of the data collection process determines in part how participatory the finished research becomes. As such, a group discussion with a participatory design which is not properly prepared may fulfil fewer children's rights standards than research which has been developed and conducted together with children but which has less intrinsic participatory value.

Data collection methods	Children's rights assessment
Drawings, diagrams, cards, comics	<p>Using drawings allows children who cannot write to participate. On the other hand, this method excludes children with impaired sight.</p> <p>Drawings can be used as the basis for conversations about the drawings' meaning and interpretation, making it possible to get a more exact idea of the children's perspectives.</p>
Lists, essays, stories, diaries, poetry	<p>In contrast to oral exchange in a group, text-based methods allow children to maintain control over whom they share their thoughts with.</p> <p>Text-based methods are not suitable for children who do not have the necessary abilities required for participation.</p>
Role plays, drama, songs	<p>Some children find it easier to express themselves freely than to answer direct questions in an interview situation. Others may feel overwhelmed performing in front of an audience and therefore feel excluded.</p> <p>Such depictions may also be used for the communication of the research findings, for example as a way of informing other children about their rights.</p>
Photos, Videos	<p>As with drawings, photos and videos also offer ways for children to express themselves in a non text-based way. However, more so than with drawings, it is important to protect the privacy and anonymity of the participating children during the presentation of the research findings.</p>
Interviews	<p>One-on-one conversations in safe surroundings are suitable for research on sensitive topics.</p> <p>However, interviews represent a data collection method which is very much in the hands of the adult interviewer and which individual children may perceive as an intimidating situation. Semi-structured guidelines, or even foregoing guidelines, as well as the use of accompanying activities (e.g. drawings) allow children an improved level of participation in interviews.</p>
Group discussions	<p>Data collection methods with a group of children reduce the imbalance of power between the children and adults involved, because the attention in the situation is directed towards the interaction between the children themselves. Depending on the research, it must be decided whether groups should consist of children of the same age and/or children of the same gender so that all voices can be heard.</p>

Summary 2: Selected data collection methods and their children's rights assessments



### Skills required of those persons conducting the research

All those involved in conducting the research must be aware of children's rights. Those working with the children directly must have either completed appropriate training courses or have enough work experience that they are able to respect and protect children's rights in practice. They must also be able to deal competently with any ethical issues which arise unexpectedly.

## 2. Realisation of the research

### Selection of participants

Selection methods and the naming of the children's groups must safeguard the dignity, wellbeing and protection of the participating children. For example, giving a group a name such as 'AIDS Orphans' or 'Street Children' may stigmatise or shame the participants. As such, if the children have a particular way of describing themselves, the researchers must take it seriously.

### Consent

Ethical standards and the right to access to information require that the children first be informed about the content, methods and purpose of the research and the way it is organised, about the organisers themselves, the risks and benefits of the research, about confidentiality and use of the data to be collected, and about their rights. This information must be presented to them in a way which is suited to the children's ages and abilities. The children have the right to retract their consent to participate at any time and without any negative consequences.

Usually, the children's parents or guardians must be informed in order to attain their consent.

In some situations, however, children deliberately distance themselves from their parents, or their parents cannot be reached. In some cases it may not be in the children's best interests to inform their parents about their participation in the research, for example as part of studies on domestic violence. In such cases, it must be considered whether attaining the parents' consent can be waived.

### Privacy and confidentiality

Children have the right to withhold certain information; however, if they choose to disclose information, it must be kept securely and may only be shared with third parties about whom the children have been informed of in advance.

A challenge is presented by different parties' varying understandings of the term 'privacy', as well as the withdrawal of confidentiality where there is reasonable suspicion that a child's wellbeing is endangered. Organisations' internal child protection guidelines can help when making such decisions.

### Non-discrimination

Children have a right to participation in the data collection process, regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, language or health status, to name just a few factors. Adults must take care to involve all children who wish to participate and to listen to all of them equally. If the group of children is highly heterogeneous, data collection methods which are based on a number of different forms of expression are the best suited.

### Child protection

All persons involved in the data collection process must be able to identify the first signs of uneasiness in the participating children and must be able to deal with such situations appropriately. The organisation of suitable follow-up measures, the consultation of adults close to the child or seeking professional support are possible ways to react in these situations.

### Remuneration

Remunerating participation in research is controversial in terms of research ethics. The CRC gives children the right to be protected from exploitation. As such, each individual case must be examined for whether paying compensation is suitable, e.g. for a loss of income, missed lessons or other expenses.

### The role of researchers

As part of a children's rights-based approach, the person carrying out the data collection transforms from a 'scientist' to a 'facilitator' (Lundy/McEvoy 2011) who supports the children in forming and expressing their opinion, and thus in exercising their rights independently.

### 3. Analysis and interpretation

The involvement of children in the analysis and interpretation of the collected data is a necessary part of children's rights-based research. If the findings are to form the basis for measures which depend on the children's acceptance for success, it is essential to obtain the children's perspective on these findings.

Data collected from the children is to be given due weight; it must be analysed systematically, and may not be used as anecdotal evidence alone, or as apparently authentic voices for the illustration of other people's opinions.

### 4. Publication and impact

The content and type of publication of the research findings must not compromise the dignity, wellbeing or rights of the children. Reinforcing stereotypes, such as portraying children as victims, should be avoided.

The research findings must be anonymised. This might mean abstaining from the use of photographs of people who have not given their explicit consent, or of material which infers the place where the research was conducted.

The findings of the research should be shared with all participants, and must thus be presented using language which the children can understand.

#### Which steps can development cooperation take in order to conduct more research with children?

Increasing capacity for conducting research with children

- Education and sensitisation of professionals involved in the planning or conduction of research;
- Development of guidelines on children's rights standards for studies, monitoring and evaluation;
- Inclusion of local experts for research with children.

Step-by-step introduction of research with children

- Obtaining the opinions and needs of children in the design or evaluation of the individual measures contained within a project or programme;
- Research with children during audit missions and evaluations;
- Development of guidelines on research with children in the individual project phases.

Systematic inclusion of children in the design and conduction of the data collection process

- Inclusion of children in the design of the data collection process, its organisation and the methods used;
- Participation of children in results-oriented monitoring and evaluation which is conducted together with project partners and consultants.

## FURTHER LINKS AND RESOURCES

The young people's statements were collected as part of a qualitative study carried out by the German Institute for Human Rights on the participation of young people in the years 2013 and 2014.

### References

#### Basic Information

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#### Guidelines

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#### Links

- Publications and Forum: →Project Ethical Research Involving Children
- Brochures: →Involving youth in development policy research: lessons learned. Overseas Development Institute, Project Briefing No 56, June 2011 (PDF, 103 KB, not barrier-free)
- Video: →Presentation of the project Ethical Research Involving Children
- Info: →A Rights-Based Approach to Children's Participation in Research from the Centre for Children's Rights at Queens University Belfast (Northern Ireland)
- Presentation: →The right to be properly researched: How to do rights-based, scientific research with children. Knowing Children, Norwegian Centre for Child Research, World Vision (PPS, 12 MB)

## Imprint

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