



What You Said to the EU:

A Report to Participants of the Children's Consultation on the European Commission Communication Towards a Strategy on Child Rights"

November 2007

Thank you for sharing your views!

“There is no child rights without children. And for every decision made in the EU, children should be involved.”

- Respondents from Mikumi DA, Tanzania.

Thank you to everyone who participated in Plan’s consultation with children on the European Commission’s Communication “Towards a Strategy on the Rights of the Child”. Over 250 children from 10 countries shared their ideas with us.

We appreciate the time you took to conduct these consultations and share your views and we wanted to report back to you on what we did with the ideas we collected and what impact they will have on the European Commission.

This is a child-friendly report, meant for 13 – 17 year olds, on the consultation which took place between November 2006 and February 2007.

1. Why we did it

The European Union is a very important actor in the world. It is the largest aid donor; the Member States and the European Commission together give 50% of all assistance to developing countries. At home, there are over 800 million people in Europe and the European Union passes laws that affect all of them. For Plan, it is important that such a key player be a leader in the promotion and protection of children’s rights.

The European Commission produced a paper, called a Communication, which committed them to develop a child rights strategy which would affect children in and outside of the European Union. Plan Europe wanted to hear from the children in our programme countries what they thought of this paper and what they thought should be in a European Commission strategy on children’s rights, and then share this with the European Commission and the European Parliament to make your voices heard.

2. How we did it

Plan Europe developed two child-friendly versions of the Communication: one for 7 – 13 year olds, and one for 13 – 17 year olds. We sent these out to Plan Country Offices along with a questionnaire. First we conducted a pilot - a practice run to make sure everything was as clear as possible – in Vietnam and Sudan. Then after the input we received from the children, we refined the child-friendly version and the questionnaire and sent it out again. This time 10 Plan countries agreed to participate: Albania, Benin, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Thailand and Vietnam. We read all of your comments and put them together in a report which pointed out some key themes common in many of your replies.

3. What you said

With over 250 children participating, you had a lot to say, but some common ideas came out from all of your comments. The main issues you felt affect children and young people were **poverty, violence** (such as child labour and abuse), **exclusion** (especially of orphans and girls) and, to a slightly lesser degree, **health**.

You also said that you believe that **children are not being heard**, especially by their parents. You believe the lack of awareness about child rights is a huge obstacle to you realizing your rights, and you expressed a strong desire to see **awareness-raising as a key part of the European Commission's Child Rights Strategy**. You also said that laws must be strengthened to protect children from the worst child rights abuses.

You came up with the following recommendations:

1. The four main issues which came out from the consultation: poverty, violence, exclusion, and health, should be addressed adequately in the development and implementation of the Strategy and EC policies and programming in thirds countries.
2. Orphans should be a key part of the Strategy to improve the lives of children throughout the world as their lack of protection by parents makes them more vulnerable to exploitation.
3. Laws should be strengthened and parents/adults should be made aware of children's rights so that adults are deterred from engaging children in child labour, early marriage, and committing acts of violence against them. Stronger laws would deter perpetrators.
4. The best way to mainstream children's rights is to include children in decision-making processes so that they can give their perspective and opinions on how to make policies most effective. Information should be regularly disseminated to children and young people on the EU's work through the media. Children and young people should also be engaged through questionnaires and meetings for which all expenses must be covered.
5. Children and young people should be engaged in the training of adults and peers to raise awareness of certain child rights issues in order to deter violations from occurring. These are to be organised with the help of the EU and include the training of EU staff by children as in Objective 5 of the Strategy.¹ This will allow those working for the rights of children to be engaged with the issues affecting them at a practical level.

4. What we did

Your comments and recommendations were put together into a report which Plan presented to the European Parliament at a special Hearing on April 17th, 2007. The Members of the European Parliament were preparing a Resolution - their official statement to the European Commission - giving their recommendations for the Child Rights Strategy that the European Commission is proposing. The Hearing gave us to chance to share your ideas with them.

We then followed up with the Parliamentarians to push them to make sure that your ideas and recommendations were included in that Resolution. The European Parliament will vote for this Resolution in December 2007. The following of your points are also in the Resolution:

- Violence, poverty and exclusion as priorities
- The importance of children's participation, including in the European Forum (part of the decision-making process for the Child Rights Strategy)

¹ Objective 5 is: "Enhancing capacity and expertise on children's rights".

- Orphans as a specific vulnerable group to be considered; and
- Most importantly, it refers specifically to the consultation we conducted with you, and tells the Commission they must take your recommendations into account when they write their Strategy on Child Rights.

Both the European Commission and the European Parliament have recognized how important it is to listen to children, but they don't always know how. Organisations like Plan help you to make your voices heard, and help them to find you so that they can listen to you. This consultation was a good example of how this can work, and Parliamentarians were very impressed with what you had to say, so the process itself helped make sure that children's voices will be heard in the future as well.

5. What happens next

The European Commission is now supposed to write a strategy for how it will address the rights of children in its work inside and outside of Europe. They will start with an online consultation with as many people as possible to find out what they think the most important elements for this strategy should be, and what are the priorities for action.

Your comments will help shape the kinds of questions they ask in their consultation and have helped to convince the European Commission how important it will be to ask children. We will also use your recommendations as the framework for Plan's response to this consultation.

5. Was it worthwhile?

Yes! Because the European Parliament told the European Commission specifically that they had to include your recommendations when they write their Strategy on Child Rights.

Yes! Because of the input we received from you, the European Parliament told the European Commission that have to include children's participation when they write their Strategy on Child Rights.

Yes! Because the European Parliament was so impressed by the experience of consulting with children and hearing what you had to say, they will hopefully consult with children on more issues in the future.

Yes! Because we will use your comments again in upcoming consultations with the European Commission on the new EU Child Rights Strategy.

Word Bank

Child: Anyone under the age of 18 years old.

Communication: If the European Commission agrees on an idea for a new law or a new policy it produces a 'communication' paper to explain exactly what this new idea is.

Development Co-operation: This is what the European Union does to support poor countries so that there is enough food and better healthcare, education, housing and roads for the people who live there.

Discrimination: When one child or group of children is treated unfairly by another, usually more powerful group of people.

European Commission: This organization acts on behalf of all the countries in the European Union. It is independent of national governments. It proposes laws, policies, action plans and strategies. It manages the day-to-day business of carrying out EU policies and spending EU money. The Commission also keeps watch to see that everyone obeys the European treaties and laws. It can act against those who break the rules, taking them to the European Court of Justice if necessary.

European Union (EU): This is a group of 25 European countries which have formed a 'union' (it may be easier to think of this as a 'club' whose members have agreed that some decisions should be taken by the club and not the individual members) to make it easier to trade between their countries and to work together for 'peace and prosperity'. The original union had only six members and was created in 1957. Since then, membership has increased and many new European laws have been introduced which have changed the focus of the union and the way in which it works in order to achieve a real area of peace and prosperity.

Member States: These are the member countries of the European Union. 'Member States' is often used to mean the governments of these countries. There are currently 25 members: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Policy: Statements that explain what should or should not happen

Social Exclusion: When one child or their family suffers from a number of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown.

Violence against Children: when someone (an adult or another child) uses their strength or their position of power to hurt a child on purpose, not by accident. They can hurt a person's feelings, their mind or their general health and well-being as well as their body.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: This is a document, agreed by the United Nations, which explains exactly what rights children have. It is also an agreement between countries to obey the same laws about children. All but two governments in the world have agreed to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and have agreed to make sure all children get all their rights.