Towards better investment in the rights of the child: the views of children

This is a summary of the results of a global consultation conducted with children and young people in 2014/15 on their views of public expenditure for children’s rights.[[1]](#footnote-1) A total of 2,693 children (aged 4-19) in 71 countries participated through online and face-to-face methods developed by researchers at the Centre for Children’s Rights, Queen’s University Belfast, with the support of the Child Rights Connect Working Group on Investment in Children,[[2]](#footnote-2) a Children’s Research Advisory Group and a Young People’s Advisory Group in Northern Ireland.

**Background and Context**

The lack of sufficient, efficient and equitable investment in children in many countries is one of the biggest barriers to realizing children’s rights. Many countries - rich and poor - fail to budget and spend adequately to realize children’s rights.

In January 2014, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child decided to develop a General Comment on Public Spending and the Rights of the Child to provide further guidance to the States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other non-state actors on how to address this gap to realize the rights of all children in a sustainable way.

In 2014, the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) also decided to dedicate its annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child in March 2015 to the issue of investment in children’s rights. The meeting included a panel discussion with experts from the UN, Member States and civil society and was followed by the adoption of a resolution, “Towards Better Investment in the Rights of the Child”.

A Child Rights Connect Working Group on Investment in Children is supporting the development of the General Comment on Public Spending and the Rights of the Child, and it was also engaged in the Human Rights Council annual full-day meeting on “Towards Better Investment in the Rights of the Child” (March 2015). To ensure that children’s views are heard and considered in these UN-processes, the Child Rights Connect Working Group asked a team of children’s rights participation experts from the Centre for Children’s Rights at Queen’s University Belfast to assist in developing methods and research instruments so that children across the world could provide their views and recommendations on investment in children.

**Methods for the Consultation**

The research team, in collaboration with the Child Rights Connect Working Group on Investment in Children, developed methods and research instruments to facilitate children’s engagement in the above mentioned UN processes through online and face-to-face consultations conducted with children globally.

*Children’s Rights-Based Approach*

The Centre for Children’s Rights adopts a children’s rights-based approach to all research that engages children and young people as participants.[[3]](#footnote-3) A core aspect of this approach is the involvement of a children’s or a young persons’ advisory group (CRAG/YPAG). For this consultation, the research team worked with a YPAG (seven children, aged 13-17; one male, 6 female) and a CRAG (5 children, aged 5-6; 2 male, 3 female) in Northern Ireland. The YPAG assisted the research team to identify the key issues that would be included in the online survey, advised on refining the face-to-face consultation tools and gave feedback on the draft survey before it was released online. The research team worked with the CRAG to develop and refine the face-to-face consultation guide for use with younger children (aged 4-10) and those with literacy difficulties. Once the data were collected and analysed, the YPAG worked with the research team to develop a child-friendly version of the report.

*Face-to-face consultation tools*

A pilot version of the face-to-face consultation guide was developed for use at regional and national events being held between July-October 2014. This was refined for wider distribution and used with children aged 10-18 at the end of 2014, incorporating feedback from children and facilitators at these events and the guidance of the YPAG.

Regional and national child rights organizations led consultations using the methods and facilitators’ packs developed by the research team. These were translated and adapted for use in the different contexts. Facilitators were provided with a structured feedback form to complete and return to the research team. Reports were received from 50 countries on consultations that involved 1,041 children.

*Online consultation tools*

In order to ensure that as many children as possible could participate in the consultation, a survey with online and paper-based options was developed. This was aimed at children aged 10-18 years and sought to engage the views of children regardless of their access to experienced facilitators or group-based discussions. This survey was available in English, French and Spanish on the Child Rights Connect website. It was also translated for use in paper-based surveys in Asia-Pacific and Western Europe. There were 1,153 valid responses from 41 countries (including 20 countries who also participated in face-to-face consultations).

The survey was not randomly or representatively sampled across each of the countries globally and it is therefore not possible to make generalisations to all children. However, the survey succeeded in providing an opportunity for a larger number of children to share their views in this consultation.

Each country was categorised by region, according to the UN regional groups, presented here alongside the total number of participating countries in each region:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Region** |  | **Total countries** |
| Africa |  | 18 |
| Asia-Pacific |  | 16 |
| Eastern Europe |  | 7 |
| Latin America and Caribbean |  | 16 |
| Western Europe and Others |  | 14 |

Summary of Key Findings

This consultation, involving 2,693 children from 71 different countries, demonstrates that children have clear views about how governments should spend money in ways that will realize children’s rights and that they are able and willing to share these views. While their views on where governments need to invest may vary by context, their common messages are summarized below. We submit this summary as an overview of advice from children and young people to governments about what constitutes good practice in sufficient, equitable and efficient public resource mobilization, budget allocation and spending to realize the rights of the child.

This summary report of children’s views is presented thematically with representative quotations from children’s responses included to illustrate the key issues.

**Why should governments invest in the realization of children’s rights?**

Children are entitled to benefit from investment.

* *There should be enough budget to provide for all the rights of children. (Asia-Pacific)*

Investing in children’s rights is an investment in all of society, now and in the future.

* *Investing in children is a long-term investment, and it brings a lot, so remember to think of it. (Asia-Pacific)*

Without investment to ensure that all children have an adequate standard of living, children cannot enjoy their other rights.

* *Before discussing money matters, concerned officials should understand the problems and issues first, making sure there will be adequate funding for all children’s needs*. (Asia-Pacific)
* *If you have good health, basic needs and integrity, you can go to school. (Eastern Europe)*

**Whom and what should governments invest in to realize children’s rights?**

All children should be included in public expenditure, especially children who are living in vulnerable conditions.

* *Every child should be able to eat good food not always rice porridge; but food that can satisfy them; once in a while they want to be able to savour food that is fancy. (Asia-Pacific)*
* *If you are not part of the National System of Identity, you do not have access to basic services, to live with dignity, to get a decent job. (Latin America and Caribbean)*
* *All children, not just a few or selected groups, should equally benefit from programs, projects or services. (Asia-Pacific)*
* *More funds should be allocated in the national budget to cover children in the very remote areas of the country so that they can equally enjoy their rights as those in the cities. (Africa)*

Investment needs to reflect and meet the requirements of children in the communities and localities in which they live.

* *We need a decent house to live. Provide funds for people who do not have any house and living inside slums or living on pavements. (Asia-Pacific)*
* *The central governments should allocate more resources to every distant region in the country, because children with disabilities do not have access to hospitals. (Latin America and Caribbean)*
* *Many girl children drop out of school because of lack of toilets and running water facilities in toilets in schools. Every school should have adequate number of toilets with running water. (Asia-Pacific)*

Investing in families enables investment in children.

* *If the parents have jobs with adequate wages then they will provide everything for their children. It is the responsibility of the government to ensure jobs for parents. (Asia-Pacific)*
* *If children don’t have realized the right to support when families cannot afford food, clothing or housing, they cannot have accessible healthcare and all of the other rights. (Eastern Europe)*
* *Health support for a child should begin when the child is in the mother’s womb … only when the child is given nutritious food he or she will be able to grow into his or her full potential (Asia-Pacific)*
* *It is important that governments invest in training parents and youths that enable them to obtain decent and sustainable jobs. (Latin America and Caribbean)*

**How can governments make good decisions about public expenditure to realize children’s rights?**

Governments should provide information about how they are spending money for children, including in ways that are accessible to children.

* *The government and the school committee should give us reports and budget allocation manuals, so that we will be able to know how much was allocated; how much resource allocated was used and what remained. (Africa)*
* *The minister could have a questions and answers hour on TV every week or every month, and they could answer questions posed by teenagers and inform people about matters. (Western Europe and Others)*
* *Keep a record of every cent we use and the public must have access to that information. (Africa)*
* *Stronger communication between those who make the decisions and those who ‘get’ the consequences of those decisions. (Eastern Europe)*

Governments should plan well and not waste or misuse public resources.

* *Not only keep records but also update them constantly because this will help them to determine if they are making progress or not. (Africa)*
* *Manage public funds properly. Do not steal and never use them for personal interests (Asia-Pacific)*
* *Gather information on the real needs of boys and girls… in order to get a real diagnosis. (Latin America and Caribbean)*
* *Avoid unnecessary duplication. (Asia-Pacific)*

Decisions about public expenditure should be made wisely to protect the rights of children now and in the future.

* *Resources should be allocated or reserved in cases of emergencies. (Latin America and Caribbean*)
* *If children are the future are you leaving them enough money to have a future? (Western Europe and Others)*
* *Don’t waste our money on something that is useless….BE EFFICIENT! SAVE MONEY! (Asia-Pacific)*
* *They will have the same needs we are having today. They too have rights. (Latin America and Caribbean)*

**Why and how should governments involve children in decisions about public expenditure?**

Children want to be included in decision-making about government expenditure, and they consider that their insight will help governments to make better decisions about investment.

* *We are our first defense; we have the right to be heard. If adults listen to us their planning will become more realistic and achievable. (Asia-Pacific)*
* *The government should recognize the rights of all citizens, both young and old, by listening to the people’s opinion on matters of governance. Decision-making should come from the citizenry. (Latin America and Caribbean)*
* *It can be better to support children’s groups and meetings to take place at grassroots level periodically to inform the national summit about the real situation of children on the ground. (Africa)*

Children need support from respectful adults who will help them to understand public spending processes and to express their views.

* *Governments should make summarized budget statement available to the children to help them analyze and determine if government is really doing its job. (Africa)*
* *Maybe they need to be trained to understand our views. (Eastern Europe)*
* *The main thing is to let children know, to inform them, Above all when a child has something to say, that it isn’t so complicated for him or her. (Latin America and Caribbean)*

Governments should work hard to ensure that children’s views are taken into account in decision-making processes.

* *The need to take our opinions seriously, and not just provide the space so as to meet the require­ment of listening to children. (Western Europe and Others)*
* *I think the government is belittling our capacities to learn and understand issues. (Asia-Pacific)*
* *It is impossible for them to invest in us if they do not ask us what to invest in! We know; they should ask. (Latin America and Caribbean)*
* *There should always be a space for children’s voices to be heard. (Africa)*
* *Create panels that truly represent young people (different age brackets, all social and economic segments of society). (Western Europe and Others)*
* *Government must consult children from minority groups, including those with a disability, when drafting the budgets so that their needs will be taken into consideration during the budget preparation process. (Africa)*

1. This summary is accompanied by the submission of the full report: Lundy, L., Orr, K., Marshall, C. (2015) ‘Towards better investment in the rights of the child: the views of children’, Plan International and Eurochild. Available at: <http://www.childrightsconnect.org/govtspendingsurvey/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. African Child Policy Forum, Child Rights Coalition Asia, Child Rights Connect, Defence for Children Costa Rica, Eurochild, International Baby Food Action Network, Redlamyc, Plan International, Save the Children and UNICEF. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See. Lundy, L., & McEvoy, L. (2012). Children’s rights and research processes: Assisting children to (in)formed views. *Childhood*, 19(1), 129-144. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)