

UNICEF's new framework for adolescent participation: Experience and reflection



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Overview



1. UNICEF's "Adolescent Country Tracker"
2. International Expert Group, New York January 2017
3. The new draft framework
4. What is an adolescent and why does it matter?

1. The Adolescent Country Tracker



- UNICEF believes that:

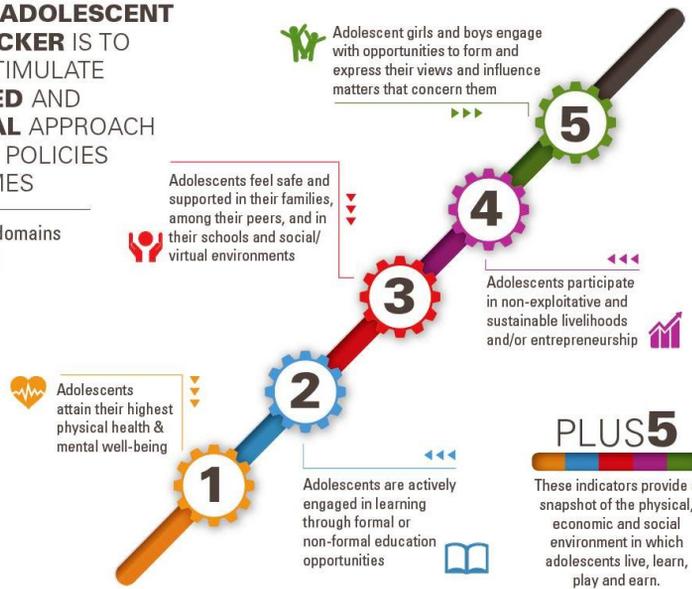
“Advocacy and action for adolescents have been hampered by the lack of a concrete results framework that can be used to describe the state of the world’s adolescents and serve as a basis for setting goals and targets”.

(UNICEF 2016a)

- So UNICEF has been working on an outcomes-based framework to describe the wellbeing of adolescents across the world, the “Adolescent Country Tracker” (ACT).
- The ACT will provide a set of global indicators closely linked to the Sustainable Development Goals.

THE AIM OF THE **ADOLESCENT COUNTRY TRACKER** IS TO SUPPORT AND STIMULATE A **RIGHTS-BASED** AND **INTERSECTORAL** APPROACH TO ADOLESCENT POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

The ACT highlights five domains of adolescent wellbeing



ADOLESCENT COUNTRY TRACKER (ACT)

5X5 PLUS 5

	Health and Wellbeing	Education and Learning	Protection	Transition to Work	Participation and Engagement	PLUS 5
5X5	All cause mortality rate	Proficiency in reading and mathematics*	Child marriage (by 15 and 18)*	Time spent on economic activities	<i>Uh-oh! So what indicators are we going to use for the 'Participation and engagement' domain?</i>	Adolescent population
	Suicide mortality rate*	Youth literacy rate*	Homicide mortality rate*	Time spent on unpaid household services*		Adolescents living below the international poverty line*
	Adolescent birth rate*	Completion rate for primary education	Intimate partner violence*	Information and communication technology (ICT) skills*		Use of improved drinking water source and sanitation facility*
	Prevalence of underweight and overweight	Completion rate for lower and upper secondary education	Violent discipline*	Adolescents not in education, employment or training*		Gini (inequality) index
	Substance use	Out-of-school rate	Experience of bullying	Unemployment rate*		Social institutions and gender index
Country Specific Indicators						

* SDG indicator

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Not only do we not know what are the appropriate global indicators for adolescent participation

... on further reflection we don't really know what "adolescent participation" means.

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A new challenge...

The Search for the True Meaning of Adolescent Participation

- Hire a top consultant to lead the search.
- Form an International Expert Group to guide the search.
- Gather the International Expert Group in New York for two days of intense discussions.
- Draft a new Framework Document.
- Consult widely on it.
- Finalise Framework Document.
- Use new Framework to generate indicators to complete the Adolescent Country Tracker.



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2. International Expert Group Meeting, New York, January 2017



Mixture of UNICEF people from different sections and countries, experts from other UN agencies and leading INGOS in this field, and a few academics.

(It was recognised that adolescent voices needed to be heard too, but it had been decided that this was not the best time or place for that).

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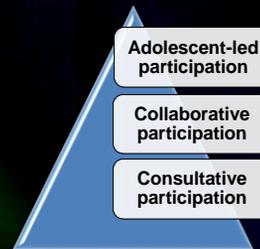
We explored many models:



Shier (2001)



Lundy (2007)



Lansdown (2011)

But were left with a few minor issues still to resolve...

- What adults support ↔ What adolescents themselves do
- Ladders/levels of participation ↔ Non hierarchical approaches
- Rights-based ↔ Outcomes-based
- Benefits the young citizen ↔ Benefits the whole society
- Power-sharing with adults ↔ Adolescents with autonomy and independence of action
- Creating structural conditions ↔ Enabling personal and collective agency
- Traditional ways of organising ↔ Online, connected, cyber-participation
- Strengthening institutions ↔ Making revolution, overturning institutions
- Pro-social, constructive participation ↔ Anti-social, delinquent or disruptive participation

(UNICEF 2017)

The Participation Tree from Nicaragua

By the 'Building a Children's Rights Culture' working group, CODENI, Nicaragua, August 2007
Translated from the original Spanish

To understand the tree, start at the roots.

The fruits: Respect, equality, respect for human rights, development, peace

The leaves of the tree: Children and adolescents empowered

- Children and adolescents as community educators
- Children and adolescents in community development
- Children and adolescents supporting others in difficulty
- Children and adolescents as defenders of children's rights
- Children and adolescents reporting abuse and exploitation
- Children and adolescents in educational policy and planning
- Children and adolescents as renewers and defenders of traditional culture
- Children and adolescents as spokespeople and representatives in local democracy
- Children and adolescents as protectors and defenders of the environment
- Children and adolescents in their own groups and organisations
- Children and adolescents in direct action for social change
- Children and adolescents in media and communications
- Children and adolescents as mediators of conflict
- Children and adolescents as a new generation of community leaders.

The branches of the tree are the various activity groups and spaces in which children and adolescents gradually develop their active and pro-active participation in tune with the growth of their knowledge and experience

The seed from which the tree grows is the family home, the first setting where the child learns to participate and be a part of the community



The trunk: The strong central trunk that holds up the whole tree is made up of all the learning processes through which children and adolescents gain awareness of their rights, raised self-esteem, awareness of themselves as members of society and rights-holders, as competent and capable of achieving anything in life; ability to express themselves and to organise.

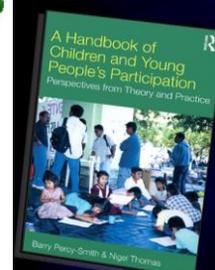


The growing seedling is strengthened by attendance at organised activities outside the home. That's to say, the child becomes a "Participant".

Fertile soil: Participation is rooted in the children's rights focus and the legal framework that guarantees these rights: Children's Rights Code, UNCRF



First published in Spanish in Medio Ambiente and Urbanización (Shier, 2008)



English translation appears in the 'Handbook of Children and Young People's Participation' (Shier, 2010)

CLOSE-UP ON...

The leaves of the tree: Children and adolescents empowered

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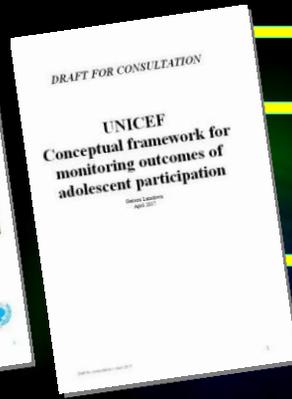
On Day Two, we tried to identify essential elements of the new framework.

I took all the participants on a trip through a time portal that allowed them to visit a parallel future world where adolescent engagement and participation had been fully realised.

While there they were able to travel around and observe many aspects of life in that world, before the portal closed and they returned home to our own world.

Back in our own world, the group discussed and reflected on their experiences and this became their starting point for identifying the essential features they wanted to see in the new framework.

The final report appeared a couple of months later, along with a first draft of the new Framework Document



1. Participation as a human right.
2. Participation in Practice: This looks at all the models, levels, spheres, enabling factors, types, forms and features of participation.
3. Monitoring and accountability: Starts to look at how we might meaningfully measure and evaluate adolescent participation.

But ...

- We have not been able to agree on the meaning of “adolescent”.
- Nor have we reached a consensus on the meaning of “participation”

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4. What is an adolescent and why does it matter?

In defining “Adolescence”, UNICEF have gone for a neuroscience perspective, and adopted the WHO definition as 10-19 (i.e. from your 10th birthday to the eve of your 20th birthday).

From a human rights perspective it would have been better to define adolescence as from 13-17 (eve of 18th birthday) – which is also the standard legal definition throughout Latin America.



The path chosen by UNICEF means:

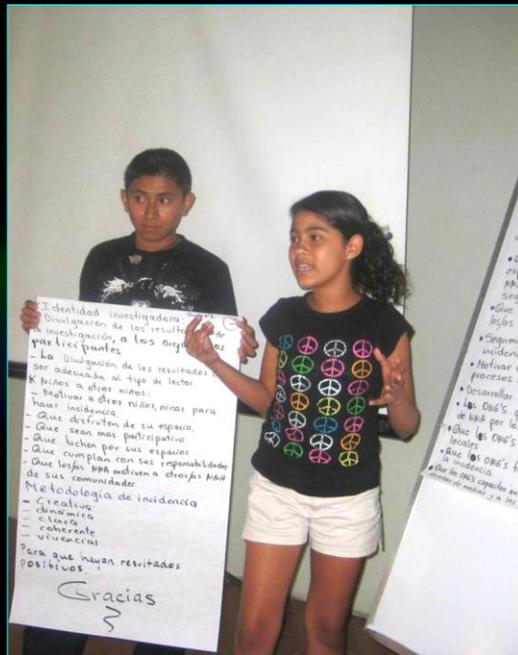
- Only 80% of adolescents are UN-defined children with CRC rights. 20% are adults and so have no rights at all under the CRC, but have full adult autonomy and the civil and political rights that go with their adult status.
- This makes any meaningful discussion of adolescents' human rights unnecessarily complicated and often confused.
- It also makes any discussion of the relationships that exist between adolescents and adults complicated and confused.



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What happens now?

- Expert Group members have sent back feedback on the draft Framework Document, and it is currently undergoing further revision. We hope to see a final version published soon.
- UNICEF will then go ahead with determining the missing indicators from the ACT matrix.
- And there will be an international piloting phase.
- UNICEF is currently recruiting a consultant to design an "Interactive Dashboard" to show live ACT data for all countries on its website.



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A final thought

- So much effort devoted to what is essentially an act of defining.
- As researchers we have to define our terms.
- Definitions can limit our ideas and set boundaries to what we can conceive of...
- In the case of adolescent participation, we don't want a definition (or indicators) that limit or constrain what is possible.
- On the contrary, we want to expand possibilities, allow for new and different thinking, break chains and cross frontiers...

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(For unpublished papers or where no URL is given above, you can contact me for copies)