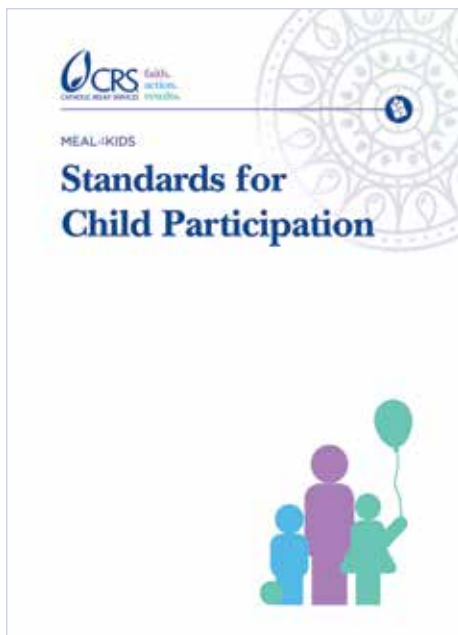




MEAL4KIDS

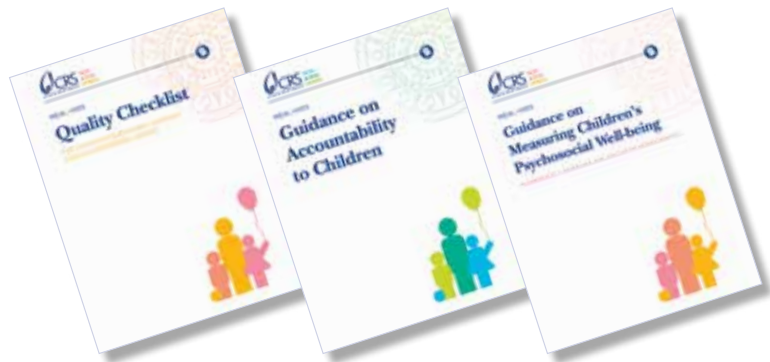
Standards for Child Participation





Adapted from *Children's participation in MEAL, Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Introductory Course*, Save the Children and Open University (2013) and *Every Child's Right to be heard: A resource guide on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 12*, Save the Children and UNICEF (2011)

More guidance from the MEAL4KIDS series:



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Introduction

Meaningful, appropriate, safe and ethical participation of children in monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) activities is the focus of this document. You can use the checklist (Page 3) to ensure your current work involving children in MEAL meets the basic requirements, or to plan for future child participation in MEAL. Please note that MEAL tools and methods should vary according to the children’s ages, capacity and cultural environment.

Participation means children and parents are able to meaningfully participate in and influence all stages of the program cycle. CRS listens to children and their parents, and incorporates their views into program decisions. In humanitarian programs, children’s participation may be neglected or be tokenistic. Meaningful participation gives children a genuine opportunity to express their views during data collection and to contribute to the design and monitoring of interventions. Establishing a safe and meaningful environment for children’s participation in MEAL minimizes the risk posed to children by their involvement, and ensures their views and considerations are taken seriously and integrated where possible.

.....
“I was waiting for a long time for someone to come and ask my opinions, to take a message about our needs. I want to express myself and what I can do!”

Akram (14 years)
Syrian refugee, Lebanon
.....

Why do we want to hear from and communicate with child beneficiaries?

Participation is a right: When organizations make decisions that affect children's lives—including implementing activities for them—children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account, in accordance with their age and evolving capacities (Article 12, [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)). Children have a right to give and get feedback on interventions that will affect them, and to contribute to both the planning and the continuous participatory monitoring and evaluation of the process.

Increasing program effectiveness: When children are able to share their unique views and concerns, we have the potential to design and implement better targeted, more innovative and more relevant services and activities that respond to their articulated needs, wishes and hopes. Research has shown that asking children directly about their views can lead to additional findings not mentioned by adult participants.¹

Promoting trust with children and parents: Actively sharing project information with children and their parents, and seeking out children's opinions from the beginning of a program cycle promotes trust between the organization and the children and their parents. Trust is the foundation of child safeguarding, and can also improve the community's acceptance of the organization in insecure environments.

Enhancing the protection of children: Including children's views, and ensuring that there is a means of listening to and acting on children's feedback and concerns, will help us to better prevent and respond to child protection issues and fulfil CRS' commitment to protecting children from harm according to the agency's [Protection Policy](#). Consulting children helps us to identify protection risks that may be unanticipated or underestimated by adults.

Building the personal development, empowerment and psychosocial well-being of children: Providing children with a platform to share their views contributes to their personal life skills development and actively promotes their capacities for civic engagement, tolerance, respect and inclusion.¹ Particularly during humanitarian emergencies and protracted crises when caregivers, teachers and community leaders face many additional challenges and stress factors, children often do not have opportunities to voice their opinions and may feel that they do not have control over any aspect of their lives. Evidence has shown that involving children builds their self-esteem and helps them to find ways to support themselves and others. Children's meaningful participation can ultimately enhance their well-being and resiliency.



Children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account.

Involving children builds their self-esteem and helps them to find ways to support themselves and others.

1. [Improving impact: Do accountability mechanisms deliver results?](#) HAP, Christian Aid and Save the Children (2013)

Child participation basic requirements checklist

Requirements	This means in practice:
<p>1. The opportunity to participate is transparent and informative Children must be given information—in a child-friendly and accessible format—about their right to participate. The information should include how they will be able to participate, why they have been given the opportunity to participate, the scope of their participation and the desired impact.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Are you providing children with enough information about the MEAL activity to make an informed decision about whether and how they may want to participate? ✓ Is the information—both written and oral—that you share with children in child-friendly formats and in language they understand? ✓ Are you clearly explaining to the children the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in the MEAL activity (staff, translator, notetaker, children, etc.)?
<p>2. Participation is voluntary Children must be able to choose whether or not they would like to participate and must be informed that they are able to withdraw from activities at any time. Children must not be coerced into participating or expressing their views.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Are you ensuring that children do not feel any pressure from adults to participate?* ✓ Are you informing children that they are able to withdraw their participation at any time they wish? ✓ * <i>Even if parents have given their consent, children also need to agree.</i>
<p>3. Participation is respectful Children should be treated with respect, and given opportunities to express their views freely and share ideas. Staff should also respect and gain an understanding of the children's family, school and cultural context.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Are you considering how children's time commitments (study, work, play) will impact their availability to participate in MEAL activities? ✓ Do staff value what children say, even if it doesn't fit within their agenda? ✓ Does the way staff interact with the children build self-esteem and enable children to feel their contributions are valid?
<p>4. Participation is relevant Participation should build on children's knowledge, and focus on issues that are relevant to their lives and local context.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Are you considering the best ways for children to communicate in a given context (e.g. would it be most appropriate for them to draw or tell stories or write or discuss)? ✓ Do the issues you are choosing to discuss with children have real relevance to their lives, experiences and abilities?
<p>5. Participation is child friendly Child-friendly approaches are used to ensure children are well prepared for their participation and are able to contribute meaningfully to activities. Participation approaches and methods should be designed or adapted according to children's ages and abilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have you chosen child-friendly data collection methods? ✓ Is the location for the MEAL activity child friendly, safe and accessible to all groups of children, including children with disabilities? ✓ Do your methods and tools for data collection reflect local preferences for children's interaction?

<p>6. Participation is inclusive</p> <p>The process must provide opportunities for marginalized children* to participate and should challenge existing patterns of discrimination. Staff must be sensitive to the cultures, backgrounds and different abilities of all children participating.</p> <p>* <i>Children with disabilities, working children, ethnic and religious minority groups, etc.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Are you giving girls and boys of different ages, backgrounds and vulnerabilities opportunities to participate?* ✓ Is the process that you use to select the participants for the MEAL activity inclusive and non-discriminatory? ✓ Are you conducting gender-segregated groups, where appropriate and necessary, to ensure the meaningful participation of boys and girls? <p>* <i>If only a selection or subset of children is needed for a particular MEAL activity, the children should be asked who they want to represent them. Additional children may be selected to meet representational or diversity standards, but only after considering the children's recommendations.</i></p>
<p>7. Participation is supported by training for adults</p> <p>Staff must have the knowledge and capacity to facilitate meaningful child participation. This may involve training and preparation prior to engaging children in activities, as well as ongoing support as required.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Are staff trained and coached in child participation, child protection, safeguarding and child-friendly approaches and methodologies? ✓ Are staff able to express their views, questions or worries about involving children in MEAL activities? ✓ Do staff have the capacity to use child-friendly approaches and methods? ✓ Does the team have sufficient understanding of how groups of children in your context might best interact? ✓ Are senior managers responding in a constructive and supportive way to the challenges staff face in involving children? ✓ If needed, do staff have access to psychosocial support services, especially when dealing with difficult child protection cases?
<p>8. Participation is safe and sensitive to risk</p> <p>Adults working with children have a duty of care and must take every precaution to minimize the risks of abuse and exploitation of children and any other negative consequences of participation in MEAL activities or other project activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have you identified the potential risks to and corresponding mitigation strategies for children participating in a MEAL activity for each location? <p><i>This includes: A location safety assessment and an assessment of ethical risks to children (e.g. Would there be any repercussions from the feedback or experiences they share, particularly in group settings? Could there be any negative psychological effects of children answering certain questions? Do you need to anonymize data collected?)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Are you asking for the minimum amount of personally identifiable information needed from children in your MEAL activity? ✓ Are you informing children and parents about the CRS Protection Policy and how to report any protection concerns, and who they can contact if they don't feel safe? ✓ Have all staff (including MEAL staff) and volunteers been trained on the Code of Conduct and Protection Policy and how to respond if a child discloses abuse?

8. Participation is safe and sensitive to risk (cont)

Adults working with children have a duty of care and must take every precaution to minimize the risks of abuse and exploitation of children and any other negative consequences of participation in MEAL activities or other project activities.

- ✓ Is **consent by children and their guardian** obtained for the use of all information collected from children BEFORE the MEAL activity starts? *This includes the use of any personally identifiable information and content.*
- ✓ Have you identified **data protection issues and risks**, and developed a strategy to ensure the confidentiality and safety of all sensitive data regarding children?
- ✓ Is all data collected from children **safely stored and managed**? *Is the data destroyed once it is no longer needed or required for compliance with donor, local law or CRS?*
- ✓ Are you ensuring that **photographs of children** are not taken without their consent?
- ✓ Are you ensuring that photographs of children are not published without the guardian's **written consent** for a specific use?

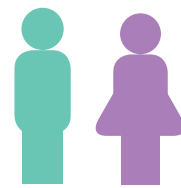
9. Participation is accountable

Following their participation, children must be provided with feedback and/or follow-up on how their views have been interpreted and used; how they have influenced any outcomes; and, where appropriate, the opportunity for them to contribute to follow-up processes and activities.

- ✓ Are you enabling children to contribute to **all phases of your project** (assessment, design, implementation and evaluation)?
- ✓ Are you asking children about their **satisfaction** with having participated in a MEAL activity and how it could be improved?
- ✓ Do staff **take children's views and feedback** seriously and act upon them?
- ✓ Do staff explain to children **who will read their feedback** and how it will be used?
- ✓ Are staff providing children with **responses and explanations** to their suggestions and feedback?
- ✓ Are staff **using lessons learnt** to improve future MEAL activities in which children participate?

Practical tips for child participation

- To ensure the meaningful participation of vulnerable groups of children, please allow for sufficient time and resources for consulting:
 - ✓ **Working children.** These children may not be available during office hours and may only be available to participate during evenings or weekends.
 - ✓ **Children with specific needs,** such as hearing or speech impairments. This might mean identifying community volunteers or specialized staff that can facilitate the discussions.
 - ✓ **Adolescent girls** (10 years and older). This might mean that these children need to participate in a girls-only group if culturally required. Special consideration may also be needed in terms of the gender of the facilitators that lead focus group discussions, interviews or other direct engagement with children.
- If you are unsure whether girls and boys should be interviewed separately, ask the parents *and* the children. Experience from CRS programs has shown that sometimes even when parents allow girls and boys to be grouped together, the children themselves feel more comfortable speaking in gender-segregated groups.
- If individual interviews are to be conducted with children, ensure that **no staff member is ever alone with a child** in a location where no one else can see them, in adherence with the CRS Protection Policy. Either ensure two adults are present, or that the staff member and child sit in a quiet spot visible to others (e.g. in a room with the door left open).
- In case there is a potential for children to raise sensitive issues in a group setting, make it clear to them, as part of an introductory session, that there is a dedicated person they can speak to separately if they prefer, rather than talking in front of the whole group.



Experience from CRS programs has shown that sometimes even when parents allow girls and boys to be grouped together, the children themselves feel more comfortable speaking in gender-segregated groups.

For more information on child participation in research, please see the following resources:

- [Ethical Research Involving Children](#) (ERIC)
- [Ethical Guidance: Privacy and Confidentiality](#), ERIC
- [Informed Consent Form Templates](#), World Health Organization

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