Facilitating Children's Participation in Displacement for Sustainability: Theoretical Perspectives

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INTRODUCTION

Armed conflict-related displacement has significant effects on the children (Alderman, Hoddinott and Kinsey, 2004; Verwimp, 2005; Bundervoet and Verwimp, 2005; de Walque, 2006; Shemyakina, 2006; Justino, 2006). Displacement often leads to the simultaneous destruction of assets and serious reductions in nutritional status of children (Alderman, Hoddinott and Kinsey, 2004; Bundervoet and Verwimp, 2005). Displacement affects important human capital determinants namely education and health. The disruption and destruction of infrastructure caused by violence often results in severe cutbacks in states' capacity to provide services such as education and health care (Stewart et al., 2001a, 2001b). Significant reductions in social services reinforce further the inability of households and children to fall back on state support in times of crises (e.g. safety-nets). Thus, displacement is associated with the destruction of lives of children (Dewhirst, 1998; Woodward, 1995). Displaced families and children are found amongst those living under the most difficult forms of socio-economic exclusion and deprivation.

In situations of armed conflict and displacement, children have often been identified and acknowledged as victims (OECD, 2001). Children's roles and contributions to their families and communities are generally unrecognized and often undermined (Lansdown, 2005; O' Kane, 2003). Recently, the importance of engaging with children as social actors and the need to understand and respond to the political and social reality of children's lives has been highlighted (Hart and Tyrer, 2006; Boyden, 1997; Kemper, 2005; O' Kane, 2007). Children's participation is not always an easy process. It often involves challenging children's traditional roles in society and transforming the relationships of power between adults and children. These changes are not always welcome at first, but through education and practical implementation, the benefits of child participation shine through (O' Kane, 2003). Children have their own valuable perspectives and priorities, which are often different to those of adults. Children living in displaced camps faced more abuse and harassment and suffered domestic violence (Brown, 2005). Children's priorities are mostly their day-to-day concerns and challenges rather than future worries. The rules of war have also changed. Schools, which have been traditionally safe places, are targeted, and children are often attacked while on their way to or from school. (Guha-sapir D,D'AoustO 2011) In many armed conflicts, schools and educational facilities are used by combatant forces, including government forces, as bases for combat and to recruit children. The result is reduced school enrollment, high dropout rates, lower educational attainment, poor schooling conditions, and the exploitation of children. . (Guha-sapir D,D'AoustO 2011) Similarly,(Poirier T. 2012) attacks on both government and nongovernmental health facilities and mobile clinics are increasingly prevalent. These attacks violate the Geneva Conventions and result in the death of patients and health workers, the

destruction of health infrastructure, and increasing barriers to care because of people's fear of being injured or killed while seeking treatment.

Definition of Armed Conflict. There are three types of conflicts that are recognized by international humanitarian law: international armed conflict, internationalized armed conflict, and non-international armed conflict(Getrude C.Chelimo 2011)

The armed conflict is also defined as any organized dispute that involves the use of weapons, violence, or force, whether within national borders or beyond them, and whether involving state actors or nongovernment entities. Examples include international wars, civil wars, and conflicts between other kinds of groups, such as ethnic conflicts and violence23,ff associated with narcotics trafficking and narco-gang violence.

In displaced settings, it is vital to understand how young children are affected by armed conflict and displacement, which of their rights are being violated, what participatory roles they take on, what they learn from participation and how they feel their participation can be supported. It is equally crucial that their views and experiences are heard and their participation be promoted to protect their own rights and to develop the community. Thus, there is need to understand children's perspectives on displacement and participation and respond to priorities based on their roles and responsibilities within families, communities and in broader society. In the present paper, an attempt has been made to document the experiences of young children in displaced settings and the importance of their participation to express their views and experiences, so that these can be heard, listened to and acted upon to protect and promote their rights. The paper highlights the contributions of children in their own protection, development and wellbeing as well as improving the overall environment of community, which has serious ramifications for child focused policy and programmatic interventions in displaced settings.

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DISPLACEMENT AND CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

The impact of armed conflict and displacement on the children has been devastating. Displaced children are inevitably viewed as victims and thus need protection. However, displaced children are not inherently vulnerable. They have strength and capacities for coping with adversity. Girls are commonly seen as especially vulnerable to abuse in situations of displacement. But they are made vulnerable not by inherent qualities but through the attitudes and behaviour of others. Besides, all "children" are not vulnerable. No group of children is homogenous in terms of the risks that they face. Age, gender, class, education, language, and particular setting place children differently with respect to the risks (and opportunities) created by displacement. Discrimination and marginalization are sources of risk that obviously affect certain children more than others.

Displacement affects the lives of the young children due to its impact on social structures, infrastructure and services. In displaced settings, health and health services are adversely affected. Increased poverty, higher incidence of disease and exposure to abuse are potential consequences of displacement. Displacement typically disrupts community practices and family life, all of which are implicated in the protection of children. In displaced settings, the family, the school and the community will not be able to play their expected role in mitigating the threats to children's wellbeing. The family home may well be the scene of abuse and neglect by parents. For example, the high incidence of alcoholism in displaced communities which will inevitably impact upon the ability of adults to offer appropriate care. Teachers, whose lives are subject to the same stresses as the rest of the community, are also known to inflict various forms of violence, for example, sexual violence directed by male teachers towards female students.

i. Children and Potential Changes Associated with Displacement

The changes resulting from armed conflict and displacement compel us to think about the empowerment of young children (see Box 1). Armed conflict and displacement commonly result in children participating more fully than ever in economic, social and political activities.

Box 1: Potential Changes due to Conflict and Displacement

Potential Changes	Explanation
Lack of service provision and inadequacy of infrastructure	Armed conflict and displacement commonly result in the loss or reduction of children's access to properly functioning health and educational services. Not only is existing infrastructure often destroyed but the development of service provision that might otherwise take place is usually slowed down.
New or expanded roles for children within the family and community	New roles may often include greater involvement of children in economic activities, in domestic duties and care-giving, in the physical, moral and emotional support of siblings, peers and adults. Whilst not all of the new responsibilities and duties need necessarily entail risk for children, there is often a greater exposure to exploitation and to involvement in hazardous activities.
Exposure to more diverse and acute risks to their well-being	Armed conflict and displacement commonly exposes children to greater physical, social, emotional and psychological risks. Physical harm can result from increased risk of malnutrition and the lack of adequate healthcare, through abuse and harassment, and so on. The loss of educational and recreational opportunities, the experience of bereavement and displacement, increased social marginalization and isolation are some of the factors that may pose a risk to children's sense of wellbeing and their healthy psychosocial development.
Challenges to family, community and society	Familiar social structures and institutions are often seriously affected by armed conflict and displacement. Well-established values (intra-community and intergenerational relations and gender) may be brought into question and prescribed practices may be partially or wholly abandoned. In such a situation, social cohesion may be lost and networks of support and care severely reduced in their capacity. This clearly holds risk for children. At the same time, it is also possible that opportunities emerge for them to renegotiate social relations and established practices in an advantageous manner.

ii. Motivations of Children's Participation

Children occupy a status less powerful than adults. However, they are still able to contribute to their own development and influence others. Clearly, their role for protection and development of self and community will depend not only on their personal character and competencies but also on the opportunities and constraints that exist in their environment. Displacement may create additional constraints upon children – they may, for example, be forced into various hazardous activities, including child labour. Or, out of fear for their wellbeing, parents may severely limit children's engagement with society beyond the home. Displacement often creates additional possibilities for children to contribute their ideas, energies and skills in ways that enhance personal development and contribute significantly to the wider society. In displaced settings, children are not simply passive recipients of adult action but can positively contribute to their own wellbeing and their environment (see Box 2). They may develop participatory strategies – individually and in concert with others – for protection from the various risks associated with displacement. Thus, children's participation in development programming has also been promoted to humanitarian initiatives.

Box 2: Motivations of Children's Participation

Motivations	Explanations
Right to Participate	Realization of children's right to participate is seen both as an end in itself *and* as the means to realize other rights expressed within the UNCRC.
Ensure Greater Relevance and Efficacy	Children's participation helps to ensure the greater relevance and efficacy of projects and policies. Since the outlook, concerns and aspirations of children are likely to differ from those of adults, even of primary caregivers, it is important to engage directly with them, and not rely solely on others.
Harness Children's Energies and Creativity	A participatory approach enables children's energies and creativity to be harnessed for the good of themselves and their communities. Particularly in politically unstable settings, the failure to provide such opportunities for meaningful engagement in social action may lead children to engage with armed groups in order to alleviate the frustration that arises from living in oppressive and unjust conditions.
Enhance Growth and Development	Meaningful participation enhances children's growth and development. Participatory approaches offer children the encouragement to actively engage with their environment advocacy, training and research.
Enhance Skills of Communication and Expression and Self-Confidence	Skills of communication and expression, self-confidence and a sense of personal efficacy are commonly enhanced. Furthermore, a participatory approach often enables children to acquire new insight into their situation and knowledge of practical relevance that may be helpful to themselves and their families.
Develops Collective Processes of Problem-Solving	Equip with knowledge as well as the greater understanding that develops from collective processes of problem-solving. Children's participation can also change community and adult views of children's capacities and in this way can inspire hope and greater trust.
Understand Democratic Principles	By involving children in projects and processes that are govern on principles of freedom of speech, equality and mutual respect, children will absorb the values and understanding required to ensure the democratic principles

iii.   Practical Standards in Children's Participation

The framework for children's participation provides some standards to ensure consistent and high-quality child participation practice. It gives guidance and direction to adult facilitators in continuously improving their participatory practice (see Box 3).

Box 3: Practice Standards in Children's Participation

Standard	Explanation
Transparency, Honesty and Accountability	Adult facilitators are committed to ethical participatory practice and to the primacy of children's best interests
Relevant and Voluntary	Children participate in processes and address issues that affect them – either directly or indirectly – and have the choice as to whether to participate or not
Friendly, Enabling Environment	Children experience a safe, welcoming and encouraging environment for their participation
Equality of Opportunity	Child participation does not reinforce existing patterns of discrimination and exclusion and encourages those groups of children who typically suffer discrimination and who are often excluded from activities to be involved in participatory processes
Staff Effectiveness and Confidence	Adult facilitators involved in supporting/facilitating children's participation are trained and supported to do their jobs to a high standard
Safety and Protection of Children	Child protection policies and procedures form an essential part of participatory work with children
Follow-up and Evaluation	Respect for children's involvement is indicated by a commitment to provide feedback and/or follow-up and to evaluate the quality and impact of children's participation

iv.   Stakeholders in Children's Participation

In displaced camps, the lives of children and their families are characterized by insecurity and marginalization. . For peace to be sustainable, the adults of tomorrow need to feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the creation and maintenance of a climate of peace. Likewise,

adult support to children's contributions to the development and strengthening of their own initiatives is crucial. Children will benefit from encouragement and practical support from their parents, teachers, community elders, NGOs and government agencies (see Box 4).

Box 4: Role of Stakeholders in Supporting Children's Initiatives

Stakeholders	Role
State Agencies	Strengthening the role of local police to protect and fulfill children's rights Protecting from abduction, abuse, hunger and disease Providing access to education and health services Supporting families to relieve poverty, fair distribution of aid and assistance
Children	Building own resilience and make changes in their lives Sharing experiences and expressing views to increase strength and life skills and self-confidence Rebuilding social relationships and structures Enhancing security, rebuilding education, the economy and livelihoods
Adults	Supporting, establishing and strengthening of structures such as children's groups Facilitating children's groups to meet together and develop community development initiatives Provide children with practical resources, relevant information and skill training

v. Outcomes of Children's Participation

Children's participation is operationalized in different ways such as trainers and facilitators of child rights protection and community development, researchers in child focused participatory research, educators in child rights, basic life skills, HIV/AIDS, sexuality, etc and advocates and awareness campaigners regarding child rights, HIV/AIDS, etc. Children's participation in protecting their own rights and developing local community is more likely to have beneficial and sustainable outcomes. The strength and experience gained through participation enhances young children's engagement in policy development. The outcomes of children's participation in local community are highlighted in Box 5.

Box 5: Outcomes of Children's Participation in Local Community

Outcomes	Explanation
Self Improvement	• Increased self-esteem, confidence, resilience and social responsibility • New friendships • Increased enthusiasm to address issues for benefit of peers and community • Improved communication, negotiation and team work skills • Improved analysis and presentation skills • Developed more positive relationships between children and adults • Improved educational performance
Empowerment	• Reduction in discrimination • Increased school enrolment and attendance • Increased teacher attendance and quality of teaching • Improved school facilities and accessibility • Protected from child abuse and harassment • Prevented child marriage and trafficking • Prevented illegal sale of alcohol in their communities • Increased birth registration • Improved health and sanitation practices • Improved environmental protection practices • Improved play and recreational facilities • Increased mobility of children (particularly girls) • Increased awareness and information on child right issues • Developed indicators to monitor child rights
Self-Respect	• Increased status of children and their voices • Recognized as social actors • Challenged discrimination in the family, school and community • Changed teacher behaviour and more child-centred teaching methods

Tolerance and Values	• Increased values, skills and knowledge of democratic functioning • Empowered with knowledge of their rights • Increased tolerance and values of inclusion
Space in Governance Structures	• Adults accept children's representation and views • Social changes in adult's attitude and mindset • Increased accountability and accessible quality services to all children • Increased commitment among adults to work with and for children • Provided practical, innovative and inclusive solutions to children issues • Established linkages and networking for child rights • Recognized by development and relief agencies
Planning and Decision Making	• Expressed own perspectives and understanding of problems, solutions and priorities • Government agencies at different levels priorities children's issues, and allocate budget • State level acceptance of children participation in policy dialogue
Media Coverage	• Raised awareness and mobilized action on child rights issues • Mobilized mainstream media to write on child right issues
Networks of Children's Groups	• Increased bargaining power for advocacy on child rights issues • Exchange of learning and organizational development

vi. Challenges of Children's Participation

Effective children's participation is time consuming process in which girls and boys are given space to express their views on matters that concern them. Children's participation in practice means supporting children to form groups in their local communities, within their schools or in other settings so that they can come together and talk about real issues that affect them. To begin with, support from community adults is important to create space for children to express their views within their communities and to build local ownership of their participation initiatives. Local child focused non-government organizations (NGOs) often take on the role of facilitators to prepare adults (for example, parents, community and religious leaders, teachers) to take children and their views seriously. Adult support and guidance is also important to help children assert their rights. Children can be supported to build their capacity to speak out (to lose their 'fear' of participating), to analyze issues of importance to them and to take appropriate action (see Box 6).

Box 6: Challenges of Children's Participation

Challenges	Explanations
Excuse to Offload Responsibility	Sometimes participation is used as an excuse to offload on to children responsibility that should be borne by adult caregivers and service providers. Safe and effective participation generally requires a good deal of support.
Identify and Minimize Potential Risks	In unstable political environments, adults must work hard to identify and minimize potential risks arising from children's participation in organized activities.
Reluctance to Curtail Authority	Maintaining power relations between adults and the children is not always a comfortable process and many "participatory projects" fail to fulfill their promise due to the reluctance of adults to curtail their authority.
Require Flexibility	Meaningfully engagement as partners or collaborators requires flexibility on the part of adult facilitators with regard to timing, process and outcomes.
Risk of Open Discussions	In displaced settings, encouraging open group discussions might lead to the revelation of information that can put individual children, their families or the entire community at risk. Adults may often feel unable to voice their ideas and concerns freely and without fear. Therefore, it is likely that they will fail to appreciate or will even actively oppose the creation of opportunities for children to speak up.
Fail to Take Account of Power Relations	Participatory activities can end up being dominated by a few relatively privileged or forceful individuals whose views carry excessive weight. These might be children with particular skills, a higher level of education or those whose families are more powerful or economically better off. The result for other children could be alienation, sense of inadequacy or the reinforcement of low self-esteem.
Not Fully Embrace Spirit of Participation	If adults involved do not fully embrace spirit of participation, children can end up disappointed and demoralized. Self-confidence of children can be adversely affected by a so-called 'participatory' project that turns out not to be such.

V.   Challenges of Sustaining Children's Participation

There are many practical issues and challenges involved in promoting children's participation in displaced settings. This is possible by developing child-friendly information and participatory tools such as poetry, drama, and songs; making sure that children have the space to express their own views and ensuring that adults do not dominate, dictate or manipulate these views; exploring discrimination and ensuring non-discrimination; ensuring child protection issues appropriately and sensitively; ensuring children face no harm as a result of their participation; and ensuring wider accountability and preparing adults to acknowledge the capacities of children, and to respond and act upon them. Additional efforts may be required to encourage groups of children who typically suffer discrimination - non-school-going children or children with different abilities/disabilities - to have equal opportunities to be involved. Children themselves should be encouraged to reflect on who is included in, and excluded from, their participatory protection and development initiatives.

i.   Children's Top Concerns in Promoting Participation

The initial phases of developing children's groups presented challenges. A general lack of support from parents was an obstacle to the children's participation and the children had no meeting place. The children struggled to find time for children's groups activities while attending school and extra tuition classes, and wanting some free time to play. The cultural barriers also made it difficult for the children to encourage parents to let their daughters attend the children's groups.

Children often play a vital role in the enhancement of their own protection and good participatory projects can facilitate this further. The main motive of children's participation is to ensure that their own experiences, concerns and aspirations have bearing upon the decisions taken that affect their lives. In displaced settings, young children have to play expanded roles and responsibilities. However, it must be ensured that individual children are not exposed to undue risk. If such risk appears likely then it may be necessary to consider how the views and concerns of children can be represented without their direct involvement in person. In whichever way it is achieved, the benefits from establishing functional linkage between child-led initiatives and the institutions and processes of governance need to be understood and explored further.

The accountability of adult facilitators to children's concerns and priorities is required to ensure the fulfillment of children's rights to protection, participation, development and survival.

The development of comprehensive child protection systems, including the formation of child protection committees in communities would also enhance holistic, sustainable efforts towards children's care, protection and participation. Children's groups are desirous of establishing a network of such groups in other displaced camps to share their experiences. . As children gain experience and exposure through participating in consultation and decision-making processes, their skills and knowledge as trainers and facilitators on child rights and children's participation should be recognized.

ii.   Promoting Children's Participation in Local Governance

To create an enabling environment for children's participation in governance, there is need to strengthen their involvement in the decision-making processes of schools, organizations and local governance. The mobilization and organization of children's groups and promoting their networks would increase their negotiation and bargaining powers with local administration. Through power base of their organizations, children's groups and their networks will demand effective delivery of basic services like education, health, water and sanitation, integrated child care services and basic infrastructure. Enabling children's participation in governance requires that local authorities should share some of the power, create space in their structures and take children's views seriously.

iii.   Promoting Children's Participation in Programming

Realizing the importance of children's participation in all stages of programming, capacity building sessions on children's participation should be organized for adult facilitators enabling them to facilitate space and opportunities for children's participation in all areas of decision-making. Children's participation in programming should focus on the following

activities: (a) education - influencing the management and running schools; (b) life skill education - getting feedback in designing curriculum; (c) vocational training - selecting trades and managing training centres; (d) income generation programme - selecting beneficiaries; (e) alternative support - organizing child fairs and competitions for children; (f) awareness generation - forming children's groups and involving community based organizations on issues of child rights, abuse and rehabilitation; (g) advocacy - involving children's groups in community consultations and sensitizing adult duty bearers by sharing their experiences; and (h) evaluation - selecting criterion for analyzing programme impact.

iv.   Promoting Children's Participation in Development Policy and Programmes

The following suggestions should be considered in promoting children's participation in the development of child focused policy and programmes: (a) involve children from the start and encourage their involvement throughout the process; (b) provide all the relevant information on children's issues in simple language; (c) use 'child-friendly' approaches to encourage children's participation; (d) be open about resources that are available to support the process; (e) ensure all young children as part of the processes, including marginalized children; (f) make the process of children's participation as fair and honest as possible; (g) make sure that the adult facilitators are trained in child rights and know how to support children's participation; (h) children need to know more about how programmes work and how they can contact the right people – who, where and how?; (i) make sure that all children know about available channels of communication; (j) remember to deliver on commitments; (k) allow follow up on consultations to let them know next actions and progress made; (l) moral and financial support for children to stay involved; (m) training of adults facilitators to give them the confidence and skills to encourage children's involvement; (n) supporting peer (child-led) research to produce evidence to support children's advocacy; (o) producing child friendly versions of key documents; and (p) follow up on government promises and hold governments accountable.

CONCLUSIONS

Young children living amidst armed conflict and displacement are often at risk from frustration, isolation and hopelessness. They have a potentially vital role to play in enhancing their own protection and that of their peers, especially when regular family and community life has been disrupted. Children's participation in social action that empowers them to better protect themselves should, therefore, be considered as an emergency measure, and not as an option to be explored when circumstances improve. In displaced settings, children's participation in social action and programming should be operationalized by taking into account the following suggestions: (a) develop a sound understanding of socio-cultural conditions, especially with respect to the involvement of the young children in social action and decision-making processes; (b) start any project through baseline survey undertaken together with children and other community members; (c) ensure that the safety and wellbeing of children and adult facilitators remains the primary concern at all times; (d) be prepared to suspend activities or make alterations in light of changing circumstances; (e) adopt a gradual approach to the development of activities and allowing time to gain trust and confidence as children begin to articulate their ideas and build a solid network; (f) open up the space for children's participation by gaining the understanding and support of parents and community members; (g) develop close collaboration between community and local agencies, since they have a complimentary role to play in ensuring the success and safety of participatory projects and facilitating the efforts of children to make contact with governmental and other bodies; (h) provide adult facilitators and children with ongoing need-based training activities to build their capacity; (i) encourage children to take responsibility at every possible opportunity and in each stage of the programming; (j) offer continuous support to children's activities through community based resource persons, ready to advise and assist when requested; and (k) link existing child-led projects to the wider context of civil society and local governance.

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