

# **Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation**

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## Introduction

Adolescence is a defining time in the development of a child that is characterised by rapid physical growth and neurological development, the onset of puberty, and sexual maturity – but these changes are not uniform. Puberty can occur at different ages for boys and girls and brain functions develop at different rates. Individual children therefore reach maturity at different ages. Adolescence is thus not easily defined: it is a social construct with different meanings and definitions for different children and in varying contexts. This paper, in line with UNICEF’s mandate, adopts the approach taken by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in its General Comment No. 20 on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence, focusing on the period of childhood from 10 years until the 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Accordingly, it focuses on this older cohort of children within the definition of Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Adolescence is now increasingly recognised as a significant period in human development. While historically, investment in health and development has focused on under-fives, there is now growing understanding of the rapid and critical changes that take place during the second decade and the imperative for affording it greater attention. In particular, it is a period when children typically begin to move out from the boundaries of the family and emerge to embrace a wider range of social networks, engage with new cultural influences, and forge powerful associations with peers. It is also a life stage when they begin to engage more actively in the exercise of their rights and to seek to influence more of the decisions that affect them. The right to express views on all matters affecting them, and to have them given due weight, commonly described as participation, is embodied in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in Article 12, and applies to all children capable of forming a view. However, its impact and implications take on additional and differing significance during adolescence. The evolving capacities and increased drive for engagement associated with adolescence necessarily lead to involvement in a greater range of issues and decisions, in an increased number of environments and in a wider variety of forms.

As a fundamental human right, commitment to participation should not be contingent on arguments relating to its external impact. It must be respected in and of itself. Nevertheless, a powerful case can be made to support efforts to foster participation.<sup>1</sup>

- i. **Improved services and policies:** Adolescents’ unique body of knowledge about their lives, their needs and concerns, together with ideas and views which derive from their direct experiences, can lead to more effective, relevant and sustainable decisions on policies adopted and services provided, which in turn lead to improved wellbeing and quality of life.
- ii. **Greater accountability:** Participation strengthens accountability: access to policy-makers, courts and complaints mechanisms provide vital avenues for ensuring that rights are upheld and elected officials held to account in their role as duty-bearers in relation to children’s rights.
- iii. **Enhanced protection:** Having both the right and the space to be heard in safety acts as a powerful means through which to challenge situations of violence, abuse, threat, injustice or discrimination. In many societies, adolescents have no avenues through

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example: O’Kane, C., ‘Children and Young People as Citizens: Partners for social change’, Save the Children South and Central Asia, 2003; Inter-Agency Working Group on Children’s Participation, ‘Children as Active Citizens: A policy and programme guide. Commitments and obligations for children’s civil rights and civic engagement in East Asia and the Pacific’. Bangkok, 2008; Committee on the Rights of the Child, ‘Day of General Discussion on the Right to Be Heard’, 2006; Rights respecting schools, <https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2017/01/RRSA-Impact-Report-2016.pdf>; Children’s and adolescents’ participation and protection from sexual abuse and exploitation Clare Feinstein and Claire O’Kane, Innocenti Research Centre, 2009; Crowley A, Is anyone listening in International Journal of Children’s Rights, Vol23, Issue 3, pages 602-621, 2015; Adolescent participation in Latin America and the Caribbean, UNICEF, 2010,

which to report abuse, and, in any case, fear that if they do, they will not be believed or will be further punished. This traditional silencing of adolescents affords impunity to abusers. Building a culture of speaking out, together with effective channels for so doing (mechanisms for both complaints and redress), will empower adolescents to challenge and expose violations of their rights. Adults can only act to protect adolescents if they understand their concerns and the risks they face – and often, it is only adolescents who can provide that information.

- iv. **Capacity development:** Meaningful participation enables adolescents to acquire knowledge and skills, build competencies, extend aspirations, and gain confidence. Participation promotes adolescents' capacities for civic engagement, collective organisation, tolerance and respect for others. Societies require citizens with the understanding, skills, and commitment to promote accountability and good governance. Participation enables adolescents to develop those capacities – starting with negotiations over decision-making within the family, through to resolving conflicts in school, contributing to policy developments at the local or national level, and developing their own clubs, councils and parliaments. Enhanced capacity can also contribute to reduced drop-out and enhanced employability.
- v. **Contributing to communities:** Adolescents have a major contribution to make to the communities in which they live. Their energies, skills, aspirations, creativity and passion can be harnessed to strengthen democratic discourse, challenge injustice, build civil society, engage in peace-building and non-violent conflict resolution, and explore innovative solutions to intractable challenges.

Considering its significance since the adoption of the CRC in 1989, there have been a wide variety of approaches taken, in countries throughout the world, to give effect to Article 12. Many organisations have contributed to the thinking, understanding and practice of participation. However, despite more than quarter of a century of investments and innovation, there remains, to date, a gap in the capacity to capture the outcomes associated with that work, or to develop sustainable approaches to hold governments accountable for their obligations under Article 12. The absence of an agreed framework articulating the potential outcomes of participation is the first major hurdle and a critical precursor to any efforts to define which elements should be measured and how. To make progress in this regard, it is first necessary to elaborate clearly what is meant by participation, what it comprises, the enabling conditions for its realisation and criteria for quality participation, before seeking to identify the critical outcomes against which participation can be measured from the perspective of an adolescent. This paper, which is the result of a process involving global consultations with adult experts in the field of participation, seeks to develop a framework to facilitate that goal.

## Section One: Participation as a Fundamental Right

Adolescents have always participated in many ways within societies – for example, at the community level, through play, the arts and sport, in their social and economic contribution to their families and more recently through digital media. However, participation has a very specific meaning in the context of adolescents’ human rights.

Adolescent participation can be defined as:

**Adolescent girls and boys (individually and/or collectively) form and express their views and influence matters that concern them directly and indirectly.**

### 1.1 Participation in the Context of the CRC

Participation needs to be understood not only through the lens of Article 12, but also within the framework of the wider civil rights embodied in the CRC – the rights to freedom of expression, of association, thought, conscience and religion, the right to privacy and to information. The opportunity for adolescents to exercise these rights can be seen as pre-conditions for the right to express views, have them taken seriously, and influence matters of concern to them.

Article 13, freedom of expression, asserts the right to hold and express opinions and to seek and receive information through any media. As such, the obligation it imposes on governments is to refrain from interference in the expression of those views, or in access to information, while protecting the right of access to means of communication and public dialogue. The right to speak out without fear of retribution is integral to active participation. Similarly, Articles 14 and 15 respectively protect the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and to freedom of assembly from interference or control by the State. Freedoms of expression and association require the creation of conditions in which adolescents can form and express views and meet friends and form their own associations. Similarly, if adolescents are to participate, they need access to information about their rights, and knowledge and skills in how to exercise them, in order to be able to understand issues affecting them. In some contexts, although not all, they may need to be assured of privacy and confidentiality, for example, if they wish to express views relating to discrimination.

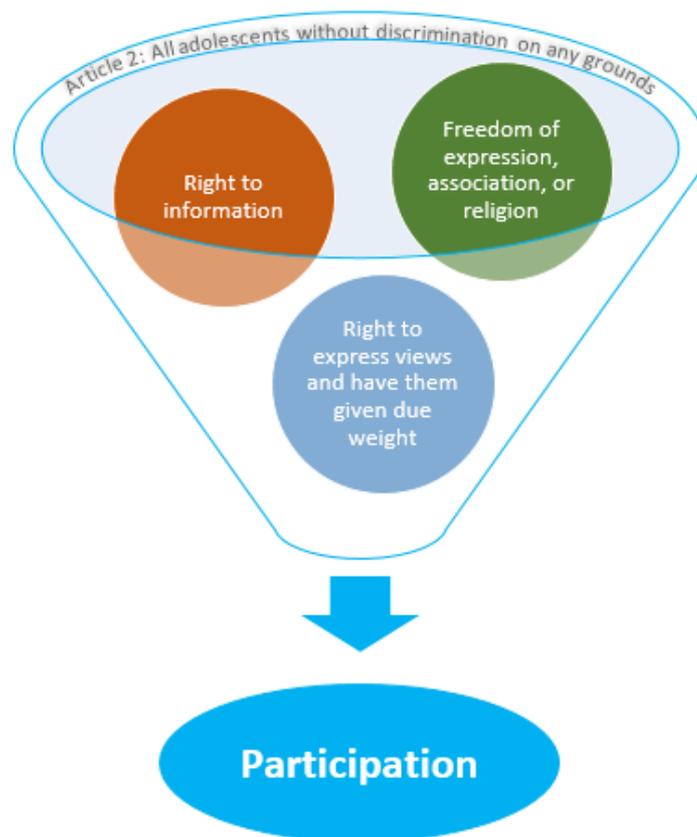
Article 12 relies on the realisation of these other rights but places additional obligations on States. It represents a new provision in international law, included in the CRC to address the fact that most children below the age of 18, unlike adults, do not have autonomy or independent rights of decision-making. It is both more restrictive and more extensive than the civil rights described above. On the one hand, unlike the right to freedom of expression, its scope is restricted to matters affecting the child, albeit this has been interpreted very widely by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the international monitoring body.<sup>2</sup> However, it goes further in imposing an obligation on States to introduce the legal framework and mechanisms necessary to facilitate opportunities to express views and thereby support the active involvement of the child in all actions affecting them, and to give due weight to those views once expressed. It is this additional obligation that differentiates Article 12, and constitutes the full meaning of participation.

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<sup>2</sup> CRC GC No.12 the right of the child to be heard, CRC/C/GC/12

In summary, the term ‘participation’, endorsed by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, needs to be understood as a shorthand to describe adolescents’ right to involvement in decisions and actions that affect them and to have their views considered. It is strengthened by the other civil rights in the CRC, for example, the right of adolescents to form their own associations, but places additional obligations on the State to create the conditions necessary to enable adolescents to express views and have them taken seriously. Finally, the right to participate must extend to every adolescent without discrimination. Additional investment is needed to reach out to marginalised groups to ensure prevailing norms that may inhibit the participation of socially excluded adolescent girls and boys are addressed and to ensure that participation does not become a privilege of already advantaged adolescents in any given society. This relationship is characterised in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Participation in the context of the CRC**



## 1.2 Participation in Relation to Evolving Capacities

An additional and critical aspect of participation relates to the concept of evolving capacities of adolescents. As children grow up, their skills and knowledge base expands and they gain the capacities to listen to others, gather information, express views and negotiate increasingly complex decisions. This concept of ‘evolving capacities’ is elaborated in Article 5 of the CRC<sup>3</sup> which requires that the duty and right of parents or caregivers to provide guidance and direction must be provided: *‘in a manner consistent with the **evolving capacities of the child...in the exercise by the child of the rights** recognized in the present Convention’*. In other

<sup>3</sup> Lansdown G (2005) The Evolving Capacities of the Child, UNICEF, Florence

words, it recognises that a transfer of responsibility for decision-making from responsible adults to children themselves must take place as children acquire increasing levels of competence, and are less dependent on adults for protection and guidance. In some circumstances the determination of children's evolving capacities is defined in law as, for example, with ages of criminal responsibility, consent to medical treatment or sexual consent, although there is wide variation between states as to where those ages are fixed. In many other areas, the judgement rests within the family, for example, on issues of adolescents' choice of friends, freedom to go out or whether to go to work or continue their education. Article 5 is relevant to the concept of participation as the weight afforded to children's views should necessarily increase in line with their evolving capacities. However, it goes further in recognising the right to increasing levels of autonomous decision-making. For example, in respect of health, Article 12 would mandate that any child capable of forming a view is entitled to express their views in respect of a given treatment, and to have them given due weight. However, Article 5 indicates that once a child is competent to understand the nature and implications of that treatment, she or he should be entitled to exercise an autonomous choice as to whether to give consent to it taking place.

### 1.3 Participation in Relation to Protection

While the right to participation applies to every child capable of forming a view, its nature and scope inevitably changes as children reach the second decade. Adolescence is characterised by the emergence of a sense of identity, acquisition of new responsibilities and exposure to emerging opportunities and risks, and in many cases an engagement in more risk-taking behaviours. Central to that process is the gradual relinquishing of many of the protective structures that are provided in early childhood, and active participation in a wider range of issues and in the more public domain. As children acquire greater maturity, so their level of agency to take greater responsibility and to exercise their rights increases.<sup>4</sup> Although this does not obviate their entitlement to continued protection under the CRC until they reach 18 years, nor the obligation to promote their best interests, they can and should be enabled to play a growing role in their own protection throughout the second decade. It is important to recognise that some risk-taking has inherent value in both achieving change and helping explore and understand the assessment and control of risk. Engaging adolescents in identification of potential risks and the measures needed to mitigate them will lead to more effective protection.

In seeking to provide an appropriate balance between the protection and active agency of adolescents, it is important to have regard to a range of factors that affect decision-making, including the level of risk involved, the potential for exploitation, understanding of adolescent development, recognition that competence and understanding do not necessarily develop equally across all fields at the same pace and recognition of individual experience and capacity.<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that both the vulnerability to violence and abuse, as well as the potential to challenge it, are influenced by marginalisation, with, for example, girls, adolescents in conflict with the law, adolescents with disabilities and LGBTI adolescents often at greater risk and with fewer opportunities for participation. Greater sensitivity to their exclusion, as well as support and capacity development, are needed to ensure equality of opportunity for participation.

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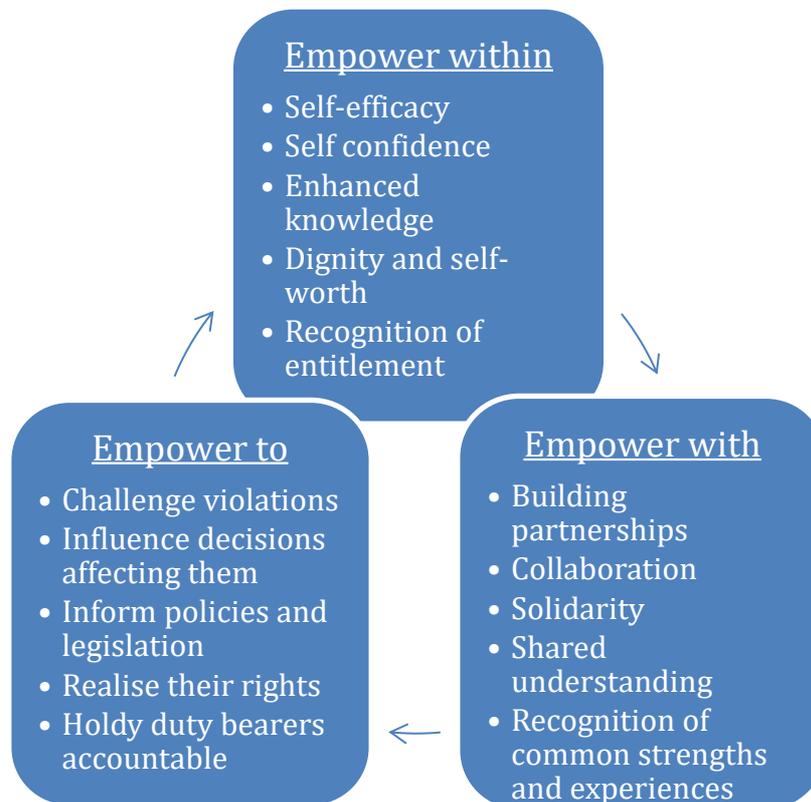
<sup>4</sup> CRC GC No.12, The Right of the Child to be Heard, CRC/C/GC/12

<sup>5</sup> CRC GC No.20 on the Implementation of the Rights of the Child During Adolescence, CRC/C/GC/20

## 1.4 Participation in Relation to Empowerment

The right to participate derives from recognition that every human being is entitled to equality, dignity and the capacity for self-determination. Involvement of individuals in decisions that affect them, and the holding of those in power accountable for their actions is central to that experience of human dignity. Participation contributes to the empowerment of adolescents – to believe in themselves, to build strength through collaboration, and to actively engage in the realisation of their rights. In other words, recognition of the right to be listened to and taken seriously promotes a sense of self-esteem and capacity to make a difference. This emerging self-confidence is further strengthened by understanding the reciprocal and collaborative nature of participation – that it applies to all adolescents and that a shared voice can be more powerful and effective. Finally, through that collaboration, it becomes possible to have more influence, to advocate together for the realisation of rights and to hold those in power to account. And in turn, the experience of influencing and holding duty bearers accountable reinforces a sense of efficacy, capacity and self-confidence.

**Figure 2: Participation leads to different forms of empowerment**



## 1.5 Unpacking Participation

The implications of participation and its interpretation have gradually evolved and become better understood over the last three decades. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has

elaborated its interpretation of Article 12, emphasising that the following dimensions are essential to understanding its meaning and scope.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 1: Unpacking participation**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
<b>Universal nature of participation</b>	
<b>It applies to all adolescents without discrimination of any kind</b>	Participation is a right for all adolescents. Efforts must be made to reach out to beyond the engagement of those who are easy to access. Opportunities need to be created for more marginalised adolescents including, for example, girls, adolescents with disabilities and from indigenous or minority ethnic groups, internally displaced or refugees, working adolescents, LGBTI
<b>It is both a means and an end</b>	Human dignity and respect requires that all individuals are entitled to be involved when decisions affecting them are being made. However, participation is also a means through which other rights can be realised. For example, it is not possible to guarantee access to justice if adolescents are denied a hearing in the process.
<b>It applies to adolescents as individuals and as a group</b>	Adolescents are entitled to express their views as individuals, for example, in matters affecting them in the family, schools or judicial proceedings, as well as on matters affecting them collectively, such as the development of local or national policies or allocation of resources.
<b>It applies to all matters affecting adolescents</b>	It applies not only to issues of immediate relevance to adolescents' lives, such as education or health, but also wider issues relating to the environment, transport, macro-economics or immigration.
<b>Multiple dimensions of participation</b>	
<b>It requires different forms for different contexts</b>	The way in which adolescents participate will necessarily differ according to their age and abilities. The entitlement to participate applies equally to those, for example aged 10-14 years and 15 up to age 18 but will require different environments, levels of support, and forms of information. A 16-year-old with severe learning disabilities will require different levels of support from an adolescent of similar age but different abilities.
<b>It encompasses different approaches and platforms</b>	Participation can take place on or offline, directly and indirectly, and can span processes in which adolescents are consulted on their views through to adolescent-led organisations and movements, and all levels in between.
<b>Power and responsibility aspects of participation</b>	
<b>It does not obviate the right to protection</b>	Adolescents are entitled to all the protections embodied in the CRC and the right to participation must be realised in accordance with those protections. However, adults must not use their duty to protect as an excuse to put obstacles in the way of adolescents' participation.
<b>It differs from adult participation</b>	Unlike adults, most adolescents lack full legal independence. Participation is not synonymous with autonomy. Participation often benefits from the support and facilitation of adults although with differing levels of involvement depending on the ages, competencies and context in which it takes place. In so doing, adults must promote the best interests of adolescents.
<b>It promotes empowerment, influence and civic engagement</b>	Participation affords adolescents personal opportunities to acquire additional knowledge, skills, self-confidence and new experiences. It also plays a significant societal role in contributing towards the realisation of their rights, and wider civic engagement. The empowerment of adolescents to have a more active role in decisions that affect them necessitates a change in the way adults exercise their power in relation to adolescents. This power shift contributes to more democratic relationships between adults and adolescents and facilitates their gradual acquisition of responsibility at both the individual and collective levels.
<b>It is a right, not an obligation</b>	Adolescents are entitled to choose whether or not to express their views or participate actively in decision-making on issues that affect them or their communities. Some adolescents, like many adults, will not choose to participate. They should never be compelled or pressured to do so against their will.

<sup>6</sup> CRC General Comment No.12, The right of the child to be heard, CRC/C/GC/12

## Section Two: Participation in Practice

Significant levels of investment in the creation of different models of participation have been committed over the past 30 years. This has given rise to a considerable body of experience in the elements that contribute to effective and meaningful participation and the forms that it can take. While it is neither possible nor desirable to seek to restrict a definition to any single model, the following elements can be understood as a useful guide to understanding the conditions necessary to ensure the realisation of adolescents' participation rights:

- The necessary enabling environment
- Features necessary for meaningful participation
- Different modes of participation
- Social ecology of participation

### 2.1 Establishing the Enabling Environments for Participation

Few societies have traditionally created the opportunities for adolescents to make a meaningful contribution in matters affecting their lives. A range of barriers can impede those opportunities. Action is needed both to recognise and acknowledge the existence of these barriers, and to act to remove them, in order to build enabling environments that respect, protect and fulfil adolescents' right to participation. In so doing, sensitivity needs to be afforded to the significant differences in how those barriers impact girls and boys, adolescents of different ages, as well as those who are more marginalised.

#### **a) Addressing social norms and barriers**

In all countries, adolescents encounter social norms and prevailing cultural values that impede participation rights. Deep-seated hierarchies of power, at multiple levels within communities, serve to exclude adolescents from decision-making in most societies. These hierarchies are justified in terms of, for example, adolescent incapacity, need for protection, traditional gender role expectations, fear of disruption and need for discipline. Intersectional and structural discriminations can further compound exclusion from participation, for example, for girls or adolescents with disabilities. Younger adolescents may experience greater limitations on their right to be heard. Investment in measures to engage with, challenge and potentially change these norms, and demonstrate the individual, familial and societal benefits of greater democratic engagement with adolescents, will contribute to enhanced participation outcomes.

#### **b) Establishing the legal and policy environment**

If the right of all adolescents to be heard in all spheres of their lives is to be realised, it needs to be underpinned by a legislative and policy environment to strengthen and guarantee that right. Establishing legal rights, incorporating them into policies and providing the necessary budgetary support will contribute to the creation of an environment in which participation becomes institutionalised and culturally embedded for all adolescents, rather than simply a series of short-term, one-off activities.

#### **c) Promoting awareness of the right to participate**

It is not possible for adolescents to exercise their participation rights if they are unaware either that they have those rights or how they can be used. Equally, unless and until professionals working with and for adolescents understand the implications of those rights for their day-to-day practice and the institutions within which they work, and begin to transform the cultures within those institutions, adolescents will continue to be denied the right to be heard. This calls for the strengthening of human rights education in schools, and education on human rights for adult professionals.

#### d) Building skills and capacities

In societies where adolescents are not encouraged to question, speak out, express views, and make decisions, investment is needed to build their skills, confidence and capacities to exercise their participation rights, and to overcome the fear of so doing. This can only happen if adults are simultaneously provided with the knowledge, skills and capacities to enable them to work with adolescents in a participatory and inclusive manner, consistent with their human rights.

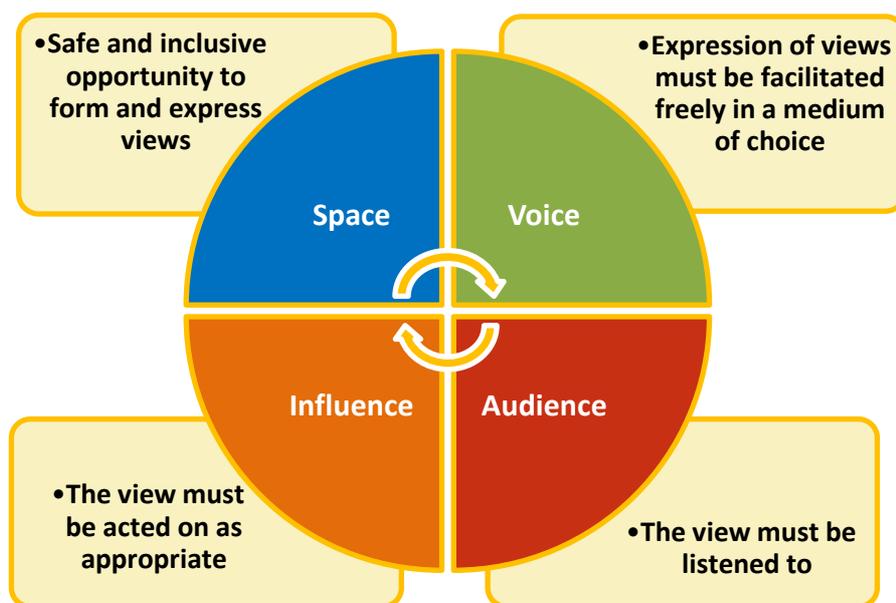
#### e) Creating opportunities for participation

Adolescents must be provided with time and opportunities for their opinions to be heard and to be able to influence decisions affecting them. It requires more than one-off consultations. It necessitates the 'institutionalising' of opportunities for individual adolescents to be heard in, for example, their home, schools, local communities, health care, child protection, work places, and judicial systems and national processes. It also requires support for the adolescents to organise, identify issues of concern to them and gain access to relevant policy makers. This might involve opportunities to undertake research, develop strategies for action, provide mutual support and campaign and advocate for change both online and through more traditional routes.

## 2.2 Essential Features of Meaningful Participation

Promoting the enabling environment involves the measures needed to build and sustain a culture of respect for adolescents' participation rights. However, at the level of any specific participatory activity, attention must be afforded to the four specific obligations placed on adult duty-bearers under Article 12 in order for it to be meaningful and effective. All four features are essential to the fulfilment of the right to meaningful participation.

Figure 3: Features of meaningful participation<sup>7</sup>



<sup>7</sup> Lundy L. Voice is not enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *British Educational Research Journal*. 2007 Dec;33(6):927-942

- **Space:** In order to become increasingly active in influencing matters affecting them, adolescents need to be able to form and express views and they must be afforded the space and time to do so. Adolescents must be given the opportunity to gain the confidence, the time and space to contribute their views. This applies both at the individual level, for example, decisions relating to health care, as well as issues at the broader level such as access to services, legislation or policies.
- **Voice:** Adolescents can express themselves through multiple different media. For example, the digital environment affords significant opportunities through which adolescents can speak out. It offers the potential for them to network, reach out, and communicate widely to their peers as well as wider society. Appropriate and accessible information is an important pre-requisite for the ability to speak out and express views and negotiate decisions. This needs to be provided in different forms according to the adolescents concerned, for example in relevant languages, in sign language, braille or other forms of augmented communication. Not all adolescents will be able to express themselves easily. The onus is on supporting adults to find ways in which to enable adolescents to communicate their views, concerns or ideas. They may need to be able to raise issues confidentially, or through different forms of expression, for example, in writing, through artistic media including music, poetry or writing. It is worth remembering that, according to Article 12, participation rights are based on the capacity to form a view, and not on the ability to express a view in any particular way.
- **Audience:** Central to the right to participate is that adults listen respectfully to what adolescents have to say. They must have access to the relevant audience for the views being expressed, whether that is their parents, peers, a teacher, a doctor or judge, a local politician, key civil servants, or relevant media. For example, a school council must have access to the head teacher or school board if its role is to have any meaning. The right to express views and have them given due weight can only be realised if adolescents' views are heard by those people with the power and authority to act on those views.
- **Influence:** The right to participate does not imply that adolescents' views must always be acted on. However, it does require that their views are given proper consideration and that any decision that is subsequently made is reported back to them with an explanation of how and why it was made in the way that it was. Ideally this should apply in all settings.

In addition, for adolescent participation to be effective, ethical, systematic and sustainable, there are a number of basic quality requirements that have been elaborated by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and need to be reflected clearly in all activity, initiatives, programmes and projects working directly with adolescents need to be met.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.3 Different Modes of Participation

Adolescents can participate in activities, processes and decision-making in broadly three different ways: consultative, collaborative or adolescent-led.<sup>9</sup> It is important not to perceive them in terms of a hierarchy of preference. Each mode of participation offers differing degrees of empowerment and influence, but they are all legitimate and appropriate in different

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<sup>8</sup> The nine requirements are that participation must always be: transparent and informative; voluntary; respectful; relevant; child-friendly; inclusive; supported by training for adults; safe and sensitive to risk; and accountable. CRC General Comment No. 12, The right of the child to be heard, CRC/C/GC/12, 2009

<sup>9</sup> Lansdown G & O'Kane C (2014) A Toolkit for Monitoring and Evaluating Children's Participation, Save the Children et al, London

contexts, and can be **rights-respecting provided they comply with the features of space, voice, audience and influence, and the nine basic requirements for quality**. Without compliance, participation runs the risk of being tokenistic, manipulative or even coercive.

**Figure 4: Modes of participation**

<p><b>No participation or unethical participation</b></p> <p><i>In most societies, the majority of adolescents have little or no opportunity to express their views</i></p>	<p><b>Consultative participation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ adult initiated;</li> <li>✓ adult led and managed;</li> <li>✓ lacking possibility for adolescents to control outcomes;</li> <li>✓ recognizing the added value that adolescents' perspective, knowledge and experience can contribute.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Collaborative Participation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ adult initiated;</li> <li>✓ involving partnership with adolescents;</li> <li>✓ enabling adolescents to influence or challenge both process and outcome;</li> <li>✓ allowing for increasing levels of self-directed action by adolescents over a period of time.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Adolescent-led Participation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ the issues of concern being identified by adolescents themselves;</li> <li>✓ adults serving as facilitators rather than leaders;</li> <li>✓ adolescents controlling the process and the outcomes.</li> </ul>
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- **Consultative participation** takes place when adults seek adolescents' views in order to build knowledge and understanding of their lives and experience. It can be used to reach out to a wide range of adolescents, and tends to be the most commonly used approach to participation. Consultative participation does not allow for sharing or transferring decision-making responsibility to adolescents themselves. However, it does recognise that they have knowledge, experience and perspectives that need to inform adult decision-making.

Consultation is an appropriate means of enabling adolescents to express views, for example, in family decision making, when undertaking research, or in planning, monitoring or evaluation processes, or when developing legislation, policy or services. For example, a new programme initiative might consult with adolescents before deciding a course of action. An NGO might conduct a survey to gather adolescents' views on how to design a campaign, or to provide the basis of evidence of that campaign. Online surveys and outreach programmes such as U-Report represent a consultative form of participation. Adolescents can also be consulted on decisions affecting them in health care or in education, or as witnesses in judicial or administrative proceedings. Consultation may be the most appropriate way of enabling adolescents to contribute their perspectives within democratic systems where elected politicians are accountable to the whole population, but wish to gather views from different constituencies. They tend to be one off activities with no on-going commitment, but they do offer a viable means to gather the views of very large numbers of adolescents, and the results can be more representative of the views of the entire adolescent population than other types of participatory activity. However, it only constitutes meaningful participation if serious consideration is given to the views contributed by adolescents, and appropriate feedback is provided on how those views have been taken into account.

- **Collaborative participation** affords a greater degree of partnership between adults and

adolescents, with the opportunity for active engagement at any stage of a decision, initiative, project or service. Collaborative participation might include involvement of adolescents in designing and undertaking research, policy development, peer education and counselling, participation in conferences, or in representation on boards or committees. Collaborative participation provides opportunity for shared decision making with adults, and for adolescents to influence both the process and the outcomes in any given programme.

Consultative processes can be made collaborative by, for example, a research project:

- enabling adolescents to identify what the relevant questions are;
- giving adolescents the opportunity to help develop the methodology for the research;
- supporting adolescents to take on the role of researchers;
- involving adolescents in discussions about the findings, their interpretation and their implications for future developments.
- involving adolescents in the dissemination of research, and supporting them in advocacy or campaigns for the implementation of recommendations.

Individual decisions can also be collaborative, for example, adolescents sharing responsibility with their parents for a decision relating to medical treatment, where the adolescent does not want to take a decision alone but is more comfortable with the support of parents.

- **Adolescent-led participation** takes place where adolescents are able to create the space and opportunity to initiate their own agendas. This kind of participation tends to involve smaller numbers since, as with adults, in any population, only a minority are likely to be motivated to become actively engaged. However, with growing numbers of adolescents engaged in the digital environment, adolescent-led participation online is rapidly increasing the scope and access for self-directed engagement.

Adolescent-led participation affords greater empowerment and allows for a greater degree of influence, for example, through the establishment and management of their own organisations, or identification of problems within their communities that they wish to address. It can be activated through social media, where the opportunity for more immediate or short-term activism can take place. It might involve: policy analysis, advocacy, awareness raising; community action; peer representation and education; and use of and access to the media as well as online campaigns and networking. In general, the role of adults in adolescent-led participation is to act as facilitators to enable adolescents to pursue their own objectives, through provision of facilities, information, guidance, contacts, resources, and support. However, in the digital environment, it is increasingly possible for adolescents to organise and engage, both individually and collectively, without the same degree of adult support.

The appropriate mode of participation will be informed by the context. All three types can apply to both individual and collective participation. However, while all three can be appropriate, it is important that consultation is not always used as the default mode simply because it is easier, without full consideration of the potential for a higher level of engagement of adolescents.

## 2.4 Social Ecology of Participation

Adolescents' lives are impacted, both directly and indirectly, by factors throughout the social ecology – from the family, and peers, to school and the local community to local and national government through to the international sphere and the global environment. Accordingly, they are entitled to participate at all of these spheres in order to try and influence and transform laws, policies, budgeting, service provision and design, cultures and norms, political priorities and socio-economic conditions that affect them, not only now but in the future. The

opportunities for wider engagement are enhanced by the digital environment and use of social media that allow for the building of far greater networks, more responsively, more cheaply and with diminished need for adult support.

Depending on the level and the sphere, adolescents can be involved in multiple forms of participation, for example:

- individual participation within the family, school, health services, workplace, or judicial proceedings
- collective participation involving peer education, advocacy and campaigns, research, community development, peace-building, strengthening governance and accountability, running their own organisations, environmental protection, participatory budgeting, promotion of positive behaviours and norms.

**Figure 5: A social ecology of adolescent participation**



Adolescents have been active participants in all of these spheres. In all areas of policy – child protection, education, health, media, water and sanitation, HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, social protection, climate change, as well as budgeting– initiatives have been developed to engage adolescent perspectives and experiences. Innovative and wide-ranging approaches to participation have been adopted, including peer education, research, advocacy, community development, campaigning, and UNCRC reporting. Adolescents have been invited to speak at conferences at local, national and international levels. A few, such as Malala Yousafzai, have been recognised as world leaders. Children’s parliaments, unions, clubs, and adolescent-led organisations have developed across many regions of the world, representing an expression of democracy and an opportunity to learn about and claim rights. Rights-respecting schools in which children have a meaningful role to play have been introduced in a number of countries.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> see, for example, <http://www.unicef.org.uk/Education/Rights-Respecting-Schools-Award/>

## Section Three: Measuring Outcomes of Participation

Adolescents' right to participate requires adults and institutions to provide opportunities for space, voice, audience and influence. In order to examine whether the necessary conditions have been met to allow meaningful participation, it is necessary to identify the desired outcomes of that participation, and then to measure the extent to which those outcomes have been achieved. The analysis elaborated in this paper provides the lens through which to understand both the nature of participation and the conditions necessary for its realisation, which in turn facilitate the development of a focus on what the outcomes should be.

Meaningful participation can result in empowerment and influence. These outcomes can be experienced at both the personal level and community or societal level. For example, adolescents may feel inwardly empowered by participation through a sense of their efficacy, knowledge or skills, the very fact of having been listened to and taken seriously, or recognition of their capacities to take responsibilities for relevant decision-making. Participation can lead to strengthened social solidarity, peer support or reduced social isolation. Empowerment can also be the outcome of having successfully influenced decisions that affect them individually such as court rulings or health treatments and in the public or political domain, for example, through contributing towards raised awareness, improved policies, more accessible services, or legal reforms.

### 3.1 Defining Outcomes of Participation

It is possible to identify the potential outcomes for adolescent participation in four clusters, all of which are characterised by empowerment and influence. Each can be elaborated on in relation to behaviour, personal attributes, opinions or knowledge that might be associated with those outcomes, together with the sphere in which they take place (see Annex 2 for illustrative examples). These clusters will provide the basis for the subsequent development of indicators against which to measure outcomes of adolescent participation. The four outcomes were selected on the basis that each one can indicate a wider set of positive changes or implications for adolescents.

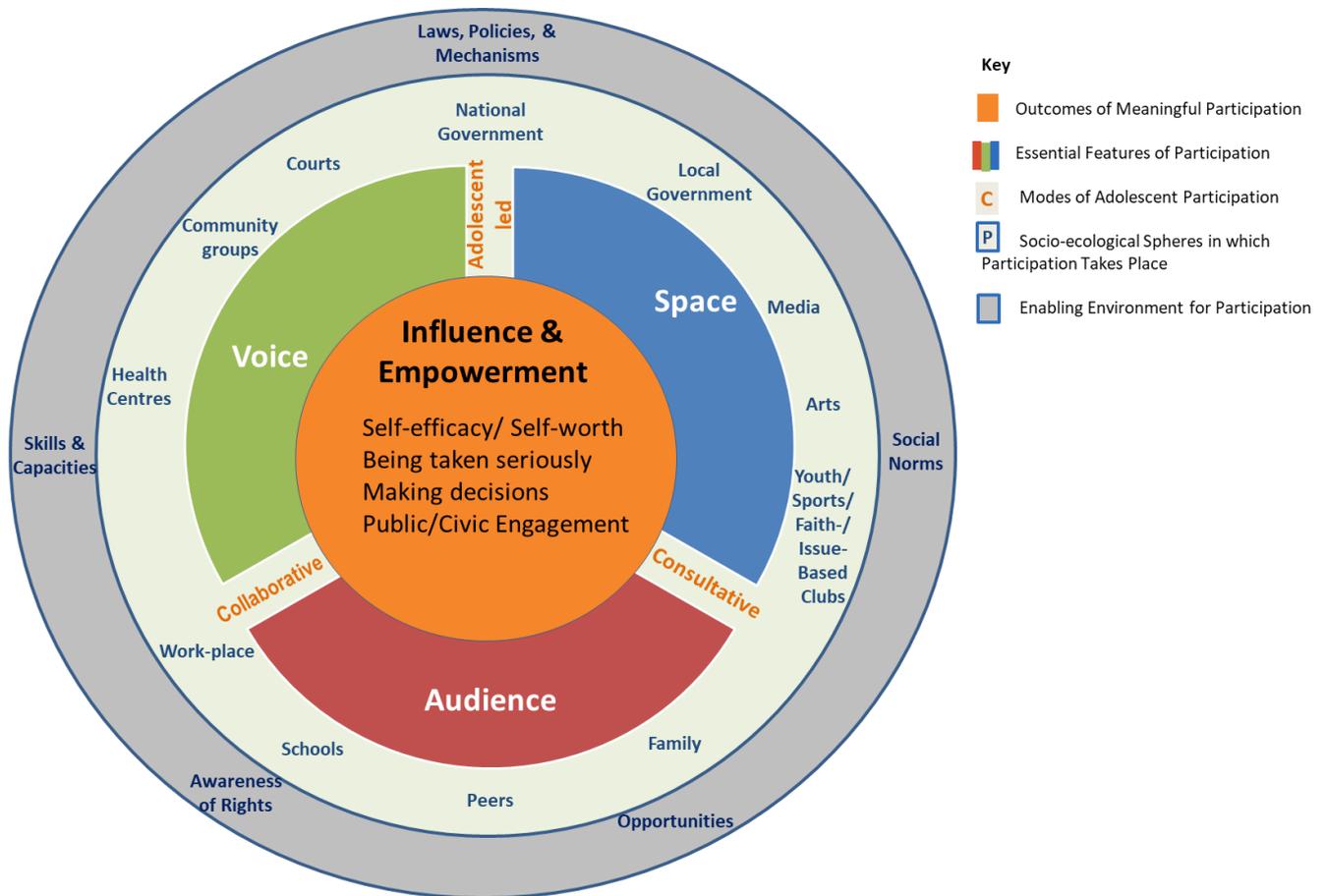
- 1 Sense of self-worth/self-esteem/efficacy:** self-confidence, opportunities to aspire to goals, ability to challenge injustices, positive environments towards adolescents, safety in speaking out, a sense of personal well-being (*supported by changes in social norms, awareness raising and capacity building*)
- 2 Being taken seriously:** self-respect, sense of influence, growing motivation to speak out, potential to make a difference, respect by adults towards adolescents, opportunities to change one's life, potential for demanding justice and accountability (*supported by legal and policy frameworks, changes in social norms, awareness raising and capacity building*)
- 3 Making decisions:** self-confidence, sense of growing autonomy, improved knowledge, sense of responsibility, adult confidence in adolescents' abilities (*supported by changes in social norms, awareness raising and legal and policy frameworks*)
- 4 Public/civic engagement:** learning and knowledge, potential to influence laws, policies or programmes, awareness of rights, collaboration, sense of group efficacy, potential to bring about concrete changes to practices, provisions and services implemented by public authorities which in turn lead to improvements

in wellbeing, reduce inequality and contribute to the quality of life (*supported by creation of spaces, capacity building and legal and policy frameworks*)

### 3.2 Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation

While participation can be consultative, collaborative, or adolescent-led, in order to be rights-based, it must always comply both with opportunities for space, voice, audience and influence, and with the nine basic requirements for quality participation. In addition, adolescents are entitled to participate, both as individuals and collectively, at all levels of the social ecology, starting within the family and moving out to the wider social and political domain. Meaningful participation contributes to the empowerment of adolescents and allows them to influence matters that concern them directly or indirectly. However, as this paper has also highlighted, the realisation of this right will only be achieved when the necessary investments are made in terms of addressing social norms, implementing laws and policies, raising awareness, building capacity and creating sustainable spaces or opportunities for participation. Drawing on this analysis of the meaning of participation, and the environment and conditions necessary to ensure its effective realisation, the conceptual framework for adolescent participation can be characterised as follows:

**Figure 6. Conceptual framework for measuring outcomes of adolescent participation**



## Conclusion

In establishing the right to be heard and taken seriously, the drafters of the CRC unleashed the potential for radical transformation in the lives of all children, but with particular impact on adolescents. Article 12, together with the other civil rights in the CRC, poses a profound challenge to adolescents' traditional status, whereby they lack autonomy, rights to independent decision-making, and or opportunities to participate in major decisions affecting their lives. Since the adoption of the CRC by the UN General Assembly in 1989, there has been appreciable progress in law, policy and practice in many countries towards greater recognition of the right of adolescents to express views and have them taken seriously. There now exists a far deeper understanding of what is meant by participation, models of effective and ethical engagement, and recognition of adolescents' capacities to accept greater responsibility for decisions in their own lives than they have traditionally been granted.

However, the process is far from complete. Many millions of adolescents throughout the world are still silenced and impotent to influence either major or minor dimensions of their own lives: forced to abandon their education in order to work; or if they remain in education attending authoritarian schools which deny them the right to question, challenge or discover; lacking access to justice or mechanisms for complaint or redress; forced into marriages without consent; denied opportunities to choose their own religion or friendships; subject to laws, policies and programmes which fail to reflect their realities, their best interests or their hopes and aspirations; lacking access to civic or political decision-making. Where investment in participation is made, it tends to be short-term, piecemeal and reaches only a tiny minority of adolescents.

Commitment is needed to build sustainable environments in which every adolescent is able to realise their right to express their views and have them given due weight. This requires comprehensive investment, drawing on a clear conceptual framework for understanding the meaning of participation, recognition of the measures necessary to make it a reality for all adolescents, and, importantly, the elaboration of outcome domains against which to monitor the extent to which it is being implemented. And without these three dimensions, it is not possible to develop indicators with which to monitor progress, nor to hold adults, institutions and governments to account on their commitments. Participation will remain an ad hoc activity, available for the few, rather than an entitlement for all. Accountability to all adolescents requires systematic monitoring based on an agreed interpretation of participation and measured against consistent indicators.

This paper seeks to contribute to that goal. It provides the foundation from which to develop the indicators which are needed to build the evidence base required to monitor these outcomes and contribute towards the change in social norms necessary for participatory inclusion of adolescents at all levels of society.

## Annex 1: Glossary

A number of concepts are used and developed in this paper. They can sometimes be applied with differing interpretations, but in order to clarify their meaning and the way that they are used in this particular context in respect of adolescents, the following definitions are provided:

**Accountability:** A system whereby effective measures are in place so that governments or other duty bearers are answerable for the protection of adolescents' rights and can be held accountable if those rights are not met.

**Adolescence:** Adolescence is a transitional period encompassing rapid physical growth and sexual maturation combined with emotional, social, and cognitive development. While UNICEF recognizes that individual diversity makes it difficult to define a universal age for the start or end of this critical period, defining a specific age span is essential for monitoring progress across contexts and across time. Therefore, UNICEF follows the WHO definition of 'adolescents' which is persons from 10 through 19 years of age.

**Agency:** The personal capacity, or self-belief by an adolescent, in their capacity to act and to make free choices or to have control over their actions.

**Autonomy:** The freedom or the right for adolescents to make their own decisions about what to do rather than being influenced by someone else, told what to do or have decisions made on their behalf by others.

**Civic engagement:** Individual and collective actions designed to make a change or difference in the community locally or nationally.

**Efficacy:** The power of an adolescent to influence or achieve a desired result.

**Empowerment:** The process of adolescents becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling their life and claiming their rights. It also refers to the measures designed to increase the degree of autonomy.

**Enabling environment:** Those factors within adolescents' environments that serve to support, strengthen, and sustain meaningful participation.

**Evolving capacities:** The process of maturation and learning through which adolescents (and younger children) progressively acquire competencies.

**Outcomes:** Lasting or significant change, positive or negative, in an adolescent's life brought about by an action or a series of actions.

**Participation:** Adolescents (individually and/or collectively) forming and expressing their views and influencing matters that concern them directly and indirectly.

**Social norms:** Pattern of behaviour in a particular group, community, or culture, recognised as appropriate and acceptable, to which an adolescent is expected to conform, and breach of which has social consequences. The strength of these norms can vary from loose expectations to unwritten rules.

**Social ecology:** A model that recognises that adolescents' behaviours are influenced by multiple factors ranging from their immediate family and peer group to the local, national and international levels.

## Annex 2: Outcomes of adolescent participation with illustrative examples of behaviours, personal attributes, opinion, or knowledge<sup>11</sup>

Outcome Domain	Illustrative examples of behaviours, personal attributes, opinion or knowledge associated with outcome, by sphere as applicable						
	Parents Caregivers	School	Health	Workplace	Courts/child protection	Community	Local/national government
<b>1) Sense of self-worth/self-esteem/efficacy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I feel that my views are worth listening to</li> <li>• I feel that I can make a difference in the world</li> <li>• I feel accepted and valued by family, friends and community</li> <li>• I feel I can get the information I need to make decisions/choices</li> <li>• I am confident expressing my views</li> <li>• I am satisfied with myself and my life in general</li> <li>• I have much to be proud of</li> <li>• I am given an important role in family, school or community</li> <li>• I know my rights</li> </ul>						
<b>2) Experience of being listened to and taken seriously</b>	<p>My parents encourage me to express my views</p> <p>My parents listen to me and take my views into account</p> <p>My views are given the same weight as my brother (for girls) or sister (for boys)</p> <p>I know what to do or where to report if I am hurt/abused/discriminated against in the family</p> <p>I am confident that I will be treated with respect if I make a complaint/seek help</p>	<p>My teachers encourage me to express my views</p> <p>My teachers listen to me and take my views into account</p> <p>I am confident that proposals/suggestions from students on the school council are valued and taken seriously by the head teacher</p> <p>I feel the school has improved due to voices of students</p> <p>I know what to do or where to</p>	<p>Nurses and doctors encourage me to express my views</p> <p>Nurses and doctors listen to me and take my views into account</p> <p>I know what to do or where to report if I am hurt/abused/discriminated against in a clinic or hospital</p> <p>I am confident that I will be treated with respect if I make a complaint/seek help with abuse in the family, at school or in the community</p> <p>I have made a complaint/reported abuse</p>	<p>I am able to raise concerns with my employer</p> <p>My employer takes my views into account and acts on them</p> <p>I am able to join a trade union and my employer takes the views of the trade union into account</p> <p>I know what to do or where to report if I am hurt/abused/discriminated against at work</p> <p>I have made a complaint/r</p>	<p>Judges and social workers encourage me to express my views</p> <p>Judges and social workers listen to me and take my views into account</p> <p>I know what to do or where to report if I am hurt/abused/discriminated against in the justice system</p> <p>I am confident that I will be treated with respect if I make a complaint/seek help with abuse in the justice system</p> <p>I have made a complaint/reported abuse and it was taken seriously and action was taken</p>	<p>Community/religious leaders encourage me to express my views</p> <p>Community/religious leaders listen to me and take my views into account</p>	<p>I am listened to and taken seriously by the municipality as a member of the local youth council</p> <p>I am listened to and taken seriously within my community as a member of my local youth club/group</p> <p>I am listened to and taken seriously by the government as a member of the youth parliament</p>

<sup>11</sup> Data collection would need to be disaggregated by, for example, age group (younger and older adolescents), gender, race, religion, disability, LGBTI.

Outcome Domain	Illustrative examples of behaviours, personal attributes, opinion or knowledge associated with outcome, by sphere as applicable						
	Parents Caregivers	School	Health	Workplace	Courts/child protection	Community	Local/national government
	<p>with abuse in the family</p> <p>I have made a complaint/reported abuse and it was taken seriously and action was taken</p>	<p>report if I am hurt/abused/discriminated against at school</p> <p>I am confident that I will be treated with respect if I make a complaint/seek help with abuse in the family, at school or in the community</p> <p>I have made a complaint/reported abuse and it was taken seriously and action was taken</p>	<p>and it was taken seriously and action was taken</p>	<p>reported abuse and it was taken seriously and action was taken</p>			
<p><b>3 Making decisions</b></p>	<p>I decide on my education and which school I attend</p> <p>I decide if I want to pursue further education after finishing school</p> <p>I decide if, when and who I marry</p> <p>I choose my own friends</p>	<p>I choose what subjects I take</p> <p>I choose what after-school activities I take</p>	<p>I decide if, when and where I seek health care</p> <p>I decide if, when and where I access SRH services</p> <p>I decide if my parents should be informed that I have sought health care services</p>	<p>I make my own decisions on when to enter the workforce and how to balance work and education.</p>	<p>I decide who represents me in any legal proceedings (lawyer, social worker, advocate, friend)</p> <p>I decide where I live and who I live with (family courts)</p>	<p>I decide if I take part in community / NGO activities</p> <p>I decide on whether to take part in sports or clubs or faith-based practices and which ones</p> <p>I decide when and where to meet my friends</p>	<p>I can decide if I want to join a youth parliament/council/youth forum/youth led activity</p> <p>I am able to take on responsible roles within the youth parliament/council/youth forum/youth-led activity</p> <p>I decide who to vote for in school, community,</p>

Outcome Domain	Illustrative examples of behaviours, personal attributes, opinion or knowledge associated with outcome, by sphere as applicable						
	Parents Caregivers	School	Health	Workplace	Courts/child protection	Community	Local/national government
	I decide what I wear  I decide when I go out  I decide if or what kind job I want  I decide if I want to visit my friends and/or relatives  I decide how to use the money I have earned  I decide if and when I move from my parents' home						local or national elections
<b>4 Civic/public engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am able to take action on issues that matter to me, either myself or together with groups of my peers, offline and/or online</li> <li>• I am a member of a school council/health or social committee that can make changes</li> <li>• I am a member of a local youth group/forum that promotes the rights of adolescents within the community</li> <li>• I am a member of an (online or offline) youth network that promotes the rights of adolescents</li> <li>• I am a member of local youth council that promotes children's rights within local government/municipality</li> <li>• I am a member of a national youth forum/parliament that promotes children's rights at the national level</li> <li>• I feel that the forum I belong to has an impact on the relevant policy makers</li> </ul>						