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TITRE / TITLE:
CHILD PARTICIPATION : WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN'S VOICES IN RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION

This paper presentation is divided into different sections and these include; the meaning of child participation and the basis for children’s right to participation. It examines the extent to which the right to participation of children has been promoted in social science research and reasons that account for the limited participation of children in this area, the benefits of involving children in social science research and the constraints and challenges in increasing child participation in research. The paper also discusses child friendly research approaches and methodologies, highlights some recommendations for increasing child participation in social science research and makes conclusions on the issues under discussion.

Child participation is a pathway and a road towards ensuring integration of the voices of all members of society into the development process and creates an environment for children’s views to be heard. The purpose of the paper is to examine the extent to which social science research has fostered child participation. The main argument of the paper is that the majority of social science researchers do not target children as respondents unless the research issue is considered to be directly affecting their lives. Lack of skills among social science researchers to elicit information from children largely accounts for the absence of children’s voices in research. Social science research is another area where children’s right to participation can be realized. Therefore, there is urgent need to integrate child friendly research approaches into the curriculum of research methodology courses in Social Science Faculties in African Universities. This paper was developed using documentary review of existing literature on the subject under discussion and a rapid appraisal involving discussions with 12 respondents; 7 women and 5 men.

MEANING OF CHILD PARTICIPATION AND THE BASIS FOR CHILDREN’S RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION

Broadly, participation is about influencing decision-making and achieving change. Child participation is a process through which children involve themselves in taking decisions in matters that affect them and the community they live in\(^1\). This definition of child
participation was developed by the UNICEF Country Programme of Uganda. It summarizes the definition of child participation as stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989 in Articles 12 and 13.

The UNCRC and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) are the key instruments that explicitly grant to children in Africa the right to participation. Articles 12 and 13 of the UNCRC (1989) that emphasize participation of children state:

Article 12: Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of a child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Article 13: The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, or written or in print in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice.

Specifically, Article 12 of the UNCRC calls for the ‘visibility’ of children by highlighting the right of the child to express views freely, and further to have those views taken into consideration in all matters which may be of relevance to the child. This applies to the family setting, the school context or the community level and it includes the right to be heard in administrative and judicial proceedings affecting the child. Further reference to a child’s entitlement to participate is found in other articles of the UNCRC; 13, 14 and 15 which establish the child’s right to freedom of expression, freedom of thought, conscience and religion; and freedom of association. Freedom of expression includes the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice.
Articles 7, 4 (2), and 9 of the African Charter also make provision for children’s views or those of their representatives to be “given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Article 4 (2), states that: *In all judicial or administrative proceedings affecting a child who is capable of communicating his or her own views, an opportunity shall be provided for the views of the child to be heard directly or indirectly through an impartial representative as a party to the proceedings, and those views shall be taken into consideration by the relevant authority in accordance with the provisions of appropriate.*

Article 7 states that: *Every child who is capable of communicating his or her views shall be assured the rights to express his opinions freely in all matters and to disseminate his opinions subject to such restrictions as prescribed by law.*

Article 8 grants the right to association and 9; the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

An analysis of these articles indicates that child participation takes many forms and these may including: seeking information, sharing views, playing different roles, taking part in activities and processes and being informed and consulted in decision-making. Therefore, child participation is a right and not a privilege or a favor and it is a child right interwoven with other rights. It is an entitlement that enables children to involve in matters affecting them, their communities and at international level. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the rights and Welfare of the child qualify this participation stating that the extent of children’s participation is determined by their age and understanding.

The right of children to participation as enshrined in international and regional human rights instruments has been translated into domestic law in various countries in Africa. In Uganda, the right to participation by all persons is reflected in the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda 1995. The Constitution has clauses that prescribe the right to
freedom of speech, thought, conscience, assembly and association with others. Other enabling laws that have provisions relevant for participation include the Local Government Act, Cap. 243 and the Children Act, Cap 59. The Children Act provides for a Secretary for Children who presumably represents children’s views in each local council.

There have been efforts by different stakeholders in Uganda to promote children’s right to participation in different ways. Of late, this right has been protected and promoted through contributing to decision making at household level that relate to what meals to be eaten, which schools to go to and what clothes to wear. In the public sphere, child participation has been realized through media activities like painting, question and answer pull out, quiz on the radio and TV, children’s puzzles, radio children talk shows, school leadership, various clubs at school like, essay writing and poem competitions and Day of the African child activities. Children have held pre-conferences as part of international events. This happened for the CHOGM meeting and the HIV conference. In 2008, the national theme for the commemoration of the Day of the African Child was “Child Participation: Children to be Heard and Seen”, which is an indication that the government is committed to creating an enabling environment for the realization of this right for children in Uganda.

TO WHAT EXTENT HAS CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION BEEN PROMOTED IN SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH?

This section will highlight the level of participation of children in social science research and examine the reasons that account for that.

For purposes of the discussion in this paper, children have been categorized into different age groups; 0-2, 2-6 6-12 and 13-17. In the last two decades, children aged 13 – 17 years have been much involved in social science research. This specific group constitutes children who are adolescents and therefore part of the youth. For this specific group of children, being part of the youth has created space for them to participate in many initiatives, research inclusive. The youth as a specific population group have become very
popular among politicians, policy makers and implementers, and are a target population group for many programs responding to the AIDS scourge and armed conflict. This trend explains the increasing involvement of children aged 13-17 in social science research as primary respondents.

There is very limited social science research that has involved children between 2-6 years. Most researchers carrying out studies that cover this group target their parents particularly the mothers. In most cases, social science researchers who are doing medical or educational research treat children as subjects of study but not active participants in the research.

The voice of children that is largely missing in social science research yet they have potential for meaningful participation in research, is that of children aged 6 – 12 years. Most researchers do not target them as primary respondents in household surveys unless the adults are absent, in which case, they use children as adhoc respondents or to triangulate information generated by adults. This specific age group is the main focus of this paper.

**Reasons that Account for Limited Participation of Children in Social Science Research**

There are many reasons that account for the low participation of children between 6-12 years in social sciences research but the major one is negative perceptions about children’s potential and the social positioning of children.

There has been limited involvement of children in social science research, which is deeply embedded in the socialization process of children. In Africa children are socialized to be at the lowest point of the power hierarchy in the family and community, and childhood is associated with powerlessness. The discourse on child participation in research is made complex by the fact that all forms of relationships in the domestic and public domains are stratified and role expectations are clearly defined according to age.
and gender among others. Because of this hierarchical order, in some communities, children are not allowed to speak among adults without permission. Doing so can bring disgrace on the parents of the child and is therefore punishable. Thus, in many cases children have no say in decision-making, even when the decision being made will directly affect them.

In research, children are comparable to women. Earlier research left out women because of the socio-cultural perceptions about women’s status in the family. Based on the power structures within the family, most researchers did not target women as respondents. Instead, it was assumed that the head of the household who is the man would give representative views of the family. This is attributed to culture. To date, in some communities, there are women who do not feel comfortable to talk to researchers on certain issues. In Uganda, in 2005 during the HIV sero study, it was not easy to get information from women. They referred the researchers to their husbands. In a similar way, there is an assumption that adults’ views represent children’s views. Therefore, cultural perceptions about the powerlessness of children as a population group is still deeply embedded in the communities and determines the level of child participation in development programming including social science research.

It is inbuilt in the conscience of social science researchers that children should not be targeted for research. Researchers have a tendency of thinking that children do not have the cognitive levels to answer some of the questions in the research tools. For instance, if the research is on education, the researcher interviews parents and teachers on behalf of the children. He/she feels that the parents and teachers are knowledgeable about children’s needs and interests and are better placed to present their views without involving children themselves, forgetting that children have their own experiences and perspectives of the issue under investigation. A PhD student at Makerere University said that children may be sub-summed in the process but not directly targeted. Meaning that children do not participate in their own right but can be “added on” in some situations as the individual researcher deems necessary.
Limited participation of children in research is partly because of the rigidities in some research designs. The conventional scientific methods of research excluded children just as women were also left out. These methods were masculine-based and influenced by paternalistic tendencies. In some studies on the educational sector, if a school community is the sampling unit, children may be left out because they do not wield power. Some researchers still look at children as population group which is powerless because they are not independent in decision making, yet some children take on adult roles early in life and may be the ones paying their own school fees or do petty work to buy scholastic materials.

Child involvement also depends on what kind of research and the issues being investigated. It is an ethical issue in health related research and the researchers must seek the consent of the parents of the children to be involved. Another question would be the ways in which children are involved in the research. This was raised by researchers at Makerere University as a strong reason that explains the absence of children’s voices in research. It is unethical to involve children in some researches, and this is more so in health related research. Children being minors, if the researcher is involving children below 12 years, he/she must first get consent from the parents. Such aspects in the protocol for research involving children can be rigorous and discourage researchers from targeting children as respondents. They opt for targeting parents, teachers and other care takers instead of children. For some research topics, children may not have an opinion. The children affected may be too young to understand the issues and make meaningful contributions. In such circumstances, researchers rely on the information given by adults and do not seek children’s views. In health research, children are used as subjects of study but not participants and this is based on the assumption that children are irrational; they do not understand what is going on in their lives.

A discussion with some researchers at Makerere University revealed that children’s participation in social science research is minimal because in some instances, the research design of the study may be already pre-determined. Therefore, at times, it is the study
design which influences the categories of respondents to be targeted. If a researcher is contracted to carry out a study, it is not in his/her power to determine the categories of the respondents. One researcher commented as given below:

*If the research is on governance issues and the funders specify to you that the target group is MPs, then you cannot involve children because they are not MPs.* Researcher, Makerere University, 14/07/2009

However, an analysis of this statement reveals that even when the research is on such issues as mentioned above, children if targeted, could have some meaningful views to give. They are left out because of the negative attitude about their potential. Another example given was that the study may be on UPE and the targets are the education officers, staff, parents and children are left out yet they are the primary stakeholders. They also have views on how the programme is impacting on their lives and can give them once there is a conducive environment for doing so.

Although children constitute more than half of the population in many African countries, their role as social actors who contribute to their own development and that of society has been ignored. This also explains their limited involvement in social science research. This arises out of limited understanding of the meaning of children’s participation and lack of skills and knowledge on how to involve children in decision making processes and research among others. There are mis-conceptions about the meaning of participation among the general public. Whereas for adults, participation is explicitly viewed as active involvement in their lives like expression of views, for children, the community including local government leaders and those in the education sector, it is understood as children’s engagement in domestic chores like washing plates, cooking and digging (UCRNN, 2008). One can understand why it has been difficult to internalize this concept in Africa. Until recently, children have been at the lowest edge of the social strata, meaning that they are powerless and do not have any space for airing out their views. They are regarded as a group of individuals who are not capable of making any meaningful contribution. In traditional African communities, children were not allowed to talk while
adults were talking, for fear of being challenged by children. They instilled fear among children to maintain discipline and respect for adults.

There is a general lack of interest in issues related to children among the public including academicians and researchers in African Universities. One professor at Makerere University admitted that she was not interested in children and she did not focus on children, though she was doing research on maternal health not child health. When asked whether she had involved children in the research she had undertaken she said:

I am not interested in children. I am doing research on maternal health not children. Researcher, Makerere University, 28/07/2009

This lack of interest in children is deeply embedded in attitudes of adults towards them. Children are regarded as a group of people who are powerless, weak, disturbing, dependent, uninformed and immature and therefore, unable to make logical decisions. This negative attitude about children has been reinforced by the many governments in Africa. Limited efforts have been done to present children as category of people who are curious, active and full of hope, once given an opportunity to realize their full potential. Lack of awareness about children’s potential has largely contributed to non-involvement of children in many activities in the community including research. Recently, in Uganda, people give out wedding cards with a clear warning that the invitation does not include children. Does this foster child participation?

Another important reason that explains the limited participation of children in social science research is lack of skills among researchers to elicit information in research. This is attributed to the absence of modules on child friendly research approaches from many research methodology curriculum of the key social science disciplines like Sociology, Social Work and Social Administration, Political Science and Gender Studies. Using Makerere University as a case study, the major curriculum in research methodology covering child research is in the Faculty of Education and Institute of Psychology but not
in the Faculty of Social Sciences. In a discussion, one of the Lecturers at the Department of Women and Gender Studies on Research paper said:

In the curriculum, we do not have a special focus on children, our focus is on feminist research. Researcher, Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University, 15/07/2009

He further asserted that he had not come across any feminist methodology for eliciting information from children. Another lecturer on research methodology in the same department also affirmed that there is no curriculum with a module on how to involve children in research. These responses confirm my assertion that social science researchers do not involve children in research because they lack skills in child friendly research approaches and this is largely attributed to their training.

A documentary analysis of the research methodology courses for the Faculty of Social Sciences covering Sociology, Social Work and Social Administration, the course in Feminist Research for Gender and Development undergraduate course, MA Gender Studies and MA Human Rights indicated that none of these courses had a module on child research approaches. Therefore, I firmly assert that the Faculty of Social Sciences at Makerere University is passing researchers who lack skills to do research involving children.

WHAT BENEFITS ACCRUE FROM INVOLVING CHILDREN IN SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH?

This section explores what would be the benefits of increasing the involvement of children in research.

Research that makes the most of children’s abilities, and treats them with respect, can provide children with opportunities that bring significant improvements in their own wellbeing. These include greater opportunities to acquire knowledge, to develop new
skills, to build new friendships and wider support networks, to be heard and to have their concerns taken seriously.

The principal argument for children being more actively involved in research concerning them is that it is their right. Boys and girls have the right to decide if they wish to get involved, to what degree and how. They will be able to identify the most important concerns related to the issues under investigation from their viewpoint.

Involvement of children in research helps their views to come out early enough to avoid consulting them when a problem has risen for example when they fail to go to school or they become sexually promiscuous. Research that has not involved children leaves out their perspectives on how they are impacted upon by some phenomena. Therefore, increased participation of children in research will help to challenge the silence surrounding how children are affected by policies, laws and programs. Researchers, policy makers and implementers at various levels will gain important information that they can use to improve program relevance and efficiency as this makes it easier to focus on and address the real needs of children.

More active participation of children in social science research can work as a protective measure for children’s rights (Save the children, 2004). Children are most vulnerable to abuse in situations where they have little opportunity to voice their views. In this respect a participative approach to child research helps overcome fear and builds skills among children to resist exploitation. Children who are encouraged to work with others and share their ideas gain self-esteem and self-confidence and they are more likely to talk about problems with the hope of finding solutions.

Involvement in research will facilitate children to develop their critical thinking abilities. They will gain communication and problem solving skills. Child participation through research enables children to gain ability to evaluate options and make more informed personal decisions at home, the school and community levels. Consequently, involvement in research will help children to be able to discern and discriminate what information is
important to their lives. Participation in research teaches children how to access information and this can be of crucial importance to their cognitive development and overall survival. Increased self-confidence is also protective. Children learn skills of cooperation and team building, including how to negotiate with peers, give and take, collective problem-solving, avoiding biasness and respecting other people’s points of views.

Children’s participation in social science research can help to heal the past. In relation to traumatic events like armed conflict, the process of involvement, if undertaken in a supportive and understanding environment, can help children to explore past experiences and regain confidence for the future. At its best, participation can be an important tool that children can use to get out of victimization, passivity and silence.

Children have a unique contribution to make in the research process. They may have ideas about where to locate some people’s homes and relevant documentary sources otherwise unknown to adult researcher, because children roam the whole community. They can have also a good perspective of the community sometimes better than the adults. Children may approach old problems in new, and sometimes more effective and appropriate ways. They may not be biased because they do not have experiences of events that happened three decades ago.

It is difficult to elicit information on complex things like household expenditure income from children but can give valuable information that can be used to triangulation. They may not give the researcher an exact figure of how much the household spends on basic necessities but can estimate and give guiding information because they are ones they send to the shops to buy these items.

Children can tell you what their parents and teachers can not disclose because they are innocent. In case parents are not willing to disclose correct information, if children have this information, they can give it to you without distortions and biases. For instance, if the
research is on the nutritional status of the family, children can tell the researcher what meals they ate yesterday without hiding. For some issues they can tell every thing without hiding or biases without being conscious. If a researcher asks adults whether they boil water for drinking, he/she may say yes when they do not boil the water but the child will say that they pour the water from the well straight into the pot for drinking water. In this regard children can act as good respondents for triangulation of findings from adults.

There are benefits that accrue to society from involving children in research. Choosing to involve children in research is a political act. It challenges ideas about who has expertise and who does not. It teaches children to question power relationships. In many ways children’s participation in research makes children more active citizens.

Involvement of children in research gives them space to challenges the status quo in terms of what children can realistically contribute and accomplish including existing notions of children’s capacities and vulnerabilities. When children’s participation in research takes place in an environment of mutual respect, it can lead to a change in attitudes about the roles and capabilities of children and the amount and level of responsibility that they are able to manage. Their participation can contribute to bridging the generational gap and creates a positive intergenerational communication process which increases the opportunities for listened to their views and their opinions taken into account.

**CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES OF INCREASING CHILD PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH**

This section will attempt to answer the following question. *What are some of the constraints and challenges social scientist researchers will encounter when they involve children in research?*

There is a general view that children are not confident enough to air out their views or what they want.
The general lack of interest in and respect for children’s views and the perception that children are not confident enough to air out their views as alluded to in the previous section will affect the level of engagement of children in research. It is likely that both the communities and researchers may not be willing to give opportunities to children to be involved in research as respondents or members of the research team. It is the patriarchal culture and paternalistic tendencies that still prevail in some societies and the socialization process of children that erode their confidence and make them fail to give their views even when given space to do so (UCRNN, 2008). Therefore, efforts to increase child participation in research need to be supported by community sensitization about the importance of child participation in research, otherwise adults will not give them space.

In some communities there are cultural restriction that limit the extent to which children interact with adults and the degree to which the females interacts with males. These restrictions have implications for the participation of children in research. Parents may not feel secure to have a male researcher to interact with children aged 6-12 years.

Girl children are likely to be less at liberty compared to boys to participate in research because the community tends to believe that time spent in such activities by girl children is wasted time instead, they should be helping out with domestic chores. More so, parents are very protective of girl children and are restrictive of who they interact with. It is likely that girls may not be restricted from being involved in research unless they are targeted through the school.

Consent to involvement of children in research is in most cases given by parents. Some researchers view that as derailing to the research process. Children are likely to be left out if their involvement is time consuming to the researcher.

There is fear that children will be exploited when child research is popularized. There could also be research fatigue among children just as it has been experienced by adults. This is partly attributed to limited sharing of research reports by researches and their
clients like government institutions, Development partners and CSOs basically because some regard one another as competitors.

Lack of skills in basic child handling skills among social science researchers is a big challenge in increasing participation of children in research. Due to lack of adequate skills, some researchers may administer conventional research techniques to children and consequently they lose interest in being involved in research.

There are some groups of children that researchers might find hard to reach unless special skills are used, these groups are likely to be left out. Such groups include out of school children, children with disabilities and those on the streets. Targeting out of school children is difficult compared to those in school. Mobilizing them for an activity and sustaining their interest is not easy, as there is no institutional framework through which they can be targeted for participation. Due to lack of literacy skills, they may not be able to read the questions in the questionnaire and write the answers. Children with hearing and sight impairments are in most cases left out because of lack of skills and facilities.

Lack of resources to support the involvement of children in research also limits their participation. Such resources include infrastructure, manpower, facilities, funds, and time. Children need a lot of time and supporting adults to be organized to participate meaningfully in activities like research.

CHILD FRIENDLY RESEARCH APPROACHES AND METHODOLOGIES

There is no one right way to involve children in research, just as there is no ideal technique to use in research with children. Child friendly research approaches should be participatory in nature. Approaches to participatory research with children are not
techniques, like interviews or drawing, but are broad approaches that are used in research involving children to make the process interesting to children and sustain their participation.

The choice of the research approach will depend on whether the researcher wants to involve children in every stage of the research, or to consult them about specific areas. It is important to consult children themselves about what they think would be an appropriate way for them to be involved. There is great value in a participatory approach but there are research topics and contexts where a more conventional approach is the most suitable.

There are broad participatory approaches that are applicable to child research such as Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), Peer research, Action research and Child to Child. Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) is a broad term for a group of similar approaches including Participatory Action Research. PLA uses a wide range of visual methods such as mapping, model building, role-playing, ranking and scoring exercises. Such methods are used to empower people to express and analyses the realities of their lives. Researchers working with children have drawn on the from the various PLA methods; Peer research, Action research which involves combining pedagogy with research and Child to Child. In peer research children, usually girls and boys who themselves have some experience of the issue under investigation, are engaged as researchers to work alongside adults. Action research methodology combines information-gathering activities with the training process. Child to Child is an approach to health promotion and community development that is led by children. Child to Child projects involve children in activities that interest, challenge and empower them.

Child Friendly Research Techniques

Use of a child focused approach involves child friendly methodologies which enable children to share and articulate their experiences. Child friendly research techniques should be participatory in nature and include; Use of a child focused approach involves
child friendly methodologies and techniques which enable children to share and articulate their experiences. Child friendly techniques should be participatory in nature and include; one-to-one interviews or with more than one child, focus groups, using stimulus material which enables the child to focus on something other than the researcher (things to be used include short scenarios/stories on a relevant theme, objects, photos, drawings cartoons, a puppet, a newspaper report, story-telling, drawings, singing and drama. Mapping, modeling (build a model of your village using local materials), ranking and scoring type activities may be usefully adapted to children’s ranking and scoring type. Children can draw a village map and those in nursery can tell a story about what happens in their homes\(^2\). One researcher did a wealth ranking for the village with children. They carried out the ranking using their own perceptions of what constitutes wealth. These methods can be administered through a workshop. A workshop can be organized for children between 8-12 years and any of the different methods highlighted are used to collect information from them. Another technique is using creative work like producing a piece of theatre or a video film or drama and artwork.

Children’s writings are another participatory technique used in child research. Children can be asked to write an essay on a particular subject. This gives them a great deal of control over the research activity. The case study technique can also be used to engaging younger children aged between 2-4 years. They can make a sensory walk and are encouraged to talk about what they saw, smelt, touched, tasted and heard as they walked along. Some of the children can take photographs or draw pictures which show how things look from their perspective.

What are the Key Considerations When Involving Children in Research?

It is important to develop good and open communication with children and the researcher must take time and care to achieve this. Roles of children in the research should be clearly stated. There are a number of distinct roles children can take in research. Different groups of girls and boys could be involved at different stages of the process. Children can participate in the research as advisors; they can be members of advisory groups or being
consulted on specific issues. Secondly, they can participate as respondents. Under this role they can fill in quantitative questionnaires, be interviewed, take part in focus group discussion, take part in active group work including play, drawing, singing, ranking and scoring exercises, validate findings by hearing summary and confirming key points and assist in developing recommendations. Another way in which they can participate is working as co-researchers on the research team. This role can be done through planning the research alongside adults, acting as peer researchers, carrying out fieldwork and act as a research assistants to adult researchers.

Assess the risks of harm to children that are involved in the research and plan to minimize these in the course of the research process.

Ensure that all children that participate in the research or their parents give informed consent to their involvement. Assure children that they can withdraw their consent at any point in the research process.

The researcher needs to give children tasks that are interesting and that do not take so long. Tools that are used should make them active participants in the research as opposed to carrying out repetitive tasks like photocopying documents and carrying materials when going to adult respondent.

It is necessary to separate children from adult respondents when administering research instruments to create a free environment for children to open up and give their views without fear of being reprimanded by adults or feelings of self-blamed for reporting adults for instance their parents or teachers

The researcher should be prepared to deal with any distress children may express during the research process. Make arrangements for further ongoing support to individual children who may need it. Children out of school often do small jobs to earn a living, so their time is limited and timing their activities is very difficult.
Consider child protection issues that may crop up in the course of the research process. It may be important to recruit both male and female adult volunteers who will give support to child researchers or mobilize children to be involved in the research as respondents. Make practical arrangements to protect the confidentiality of the child respondents where needed.

Seek the support of local leaders, community organizations, school administration and people who are important in the lives of children locally so that the researcher can work with these stakeholders to mitigate any unintended negative outcomes of children’s involvement in the research.

Ensure that the research approach and the methods used maximize the chances of girls and boys and other disadvantaged groups of children to participate fully.

Assess the risks and costs to children of their participation in terms of time, inconvenience, embarrassment, sense of failure or coercion, fear of admitting anxiety, pressure to achieve unachievable tasks and always act in their best interests.

Build in benefits for children who choose to be involved in the research. These may include building skills in self-confidence, being a good listener and increased awareness of child support services.

Be honest about what work realistically needs to be done by adult researchers, and tasks that can be shared or led by children.

Be able to talk about the research without using any jargon or academic terminology that is above the cognitive levels of the children involved in the research.

Decide whether children should be paid or given another form of incentive for their contribution in the research process.
The researcher should be reflective and critically examine his/her assumptions and prejudices about children’s capacities and vulnerabilities and the quality of their ideas and insights.

Remember that consistency, constancy and continuity are important aspects in adults’ and children’s relationships with one another. Endeavour to hold up your promises and part of the bargain up to the end and if need for changes arise, seek their views on the proposed adjustments.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Use existing skills and resources within the communities i.e. Probation Officers and coming Development Officers.

When targeting out of school children for involvement in research, train some community volunteers to assist in mobilizing them. Integrate some information on skills development as this will sustain their interest in the research activities because most out of school are much more interested in information that will enhance their skills for income generation.

Research should be viewed as yet another area where children’s rights to participation should be fostered. Therefore, child participation in research should be institutionalized. Timing of research activities is important. Children should be targeted at the right time, when they can achieve maximum participation.

Duration of administering research instruments; the period of administering the research tools should not take so long to be able to sustain interest as children may not have the patient to be kept in one place doing the same activity for a long period of time.

If the research is involving children as primary respondents, hard to reach children and other disadvantaged children should also be involved. This requires special skills and facilities. Researchers should budget for such expenses and in no circumstances should that be an excuse for leaving out the views of children with disabilities.
There is need to develop monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess progress towards realizing child participation in research. Harts ladder of participation could be used as a starting point. It is critical that actors think through and develop measurable indicators for child participation.

Child participation must be promoted within the overall framework of children’s rights since the dividing line between child participation and other categories of rights is not clear cut. CODESRIA should develop a guide on child participation in research. This will go a long way in ensuring harmony and uniformity in the child research approaches used by social science researchers involving children in research.

Deliberate efforts should be taken to design curricula to teach child rights (as subjects or courses) in educational institutions in different disciplines at different levels.

**CONCLUSION**

The level of knowledge and practice of the children’s right to participation among the general public is very low in Africa. Key stakeholders in the protection and promotion of children’s rights lack adequate skills needed to promote child participation. Consequently, the level of child participation in social science research is also limited. There are opportunities for increasing child involvement in social science research. One important strategy is to integrate a module on child research into the curriculum of the Research Methodology courses in Social Sciences Faculties in African Universities. This will strengthen the knowledge and skills base of African social science researchers on child friendly research approaches. Efforts to popularizing child research should be implemented in a gradual manner to avoid children being exploited by unscrupulous researchers.
END NOTES

1 UNICEF Country Programme Definition
2 Discussion with researcher at Department of Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University, 22/07/2009

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