

## Child Participation in Development Programming: Lessons from Southern Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*Generally, participation, as a concept in development programming, usually refers to the idea of involving target beneficiaries and/or actively seeking their opinions and inputs into decision-making process on issues that directly or indirectly affect them. Involvement of beneficiaries in this manner is one proven means of securing their buy-in into a project or programme intervention. It is a time-tested strategy that guarantees ownership, an indispensable pillar of programme sustainability. Child participation is not any different. Involvement of children and/or seeking and obtaining their opinions and inputs into decisions that affect them is an established strategy in development programming.*

*Methodology consisted of Focused Group Discussion (FGD) with children randomly selected from four States in Southern Nigeria. A total of four (4) participating States were selected, out of ten, using compulsive non-probabilistic sampling method, purposive sampling. Most suited for exploratory research, this approach enables a researcher to focus on a specific target group for some unique purpose.*

*In this work, we analysed information obtained from children and adolescents to establish the extent to which they are consulted in decision-making process on issues that concern them. Our data analysis suggest three factors that are significant in determining effectiveness of child participation in decision-making at home, school and community levels. These are age, gender and economic status of parents.*

*Based on our findings, we strongly recommend the mainstreaming of child participation strategy into development programming by governments and their international development partners.*

**Keywords:** *Child participation rights; focused-group discussion; childhood; adolescents; young people; UNCRC.*

### **Introduction**

Generally, participation, as a concept in development programming, usually refers to the idea of involving target beneficiaries and/or actively seeking their opinions and inputs into decision-making process on issues that directly or indirectly affect them. Thus, it is imperative to involve target beneficiaries in the decision making process for siting of programme inputs like Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDC), health posts, water points or sanitation facilities. Involvement of beneficiaries in this manner is one proven means of securing their buy-in into a project or programme intervention. It is a time-tested strategy that guarantees ownership, an indispensable pillar of programme sustainability!

Child participation is not any different. Involvement of children and/or seeking and obtaining their opinions and inputs into decisions that affect them is an established strategy in development programming. It is a strategy that is widely acknowledged amongst international development agencies and also reasonably well documented in development discourses as a solid pillar of sustainability in development programming. Besides, use of child participation principles in development programming also significantly contributes to the building of life skills in children and adolescents. It helps to inculcate decision-making skills early in life, enhances critical thinking and improves self-esteem and self-worth amongst children and adolescents, thus preparing them for meaningful contribution to nation-building in their adulthood. Child participation is consequently accorded its rightful place of prominence in the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations in 1989 (UNCRC, 1989), the most widely ratified human rights instrument in human history.

The UNCRC constitutes of a total of fifty four (54) Articles, organized in three (3) parts.

- Part I (Articles 1-41) - Substantive articles which clearly stipulate all the rights of a child as well as the responsibility of State parties and other duty bearers in fulfilling them.
- Part II (Articles 42-44) - Procedure to monitor compliance of State parties
- Part III (Articles 45-54) - Process for signature, ratification, accession and reservations by State parties

The substantive articles in Part I address the four groups of child rights viz.:

- Survival (Articles 6, 24, 27)
- Development (Articles 28, 29, 17, 18, 23, 30)
- Protection (Articles 4, 19, 20, 21, 22, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 39 and 40 )
- Participation (Articles 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 & 17)

The fourth component, participation right, is the focus of this study.

## Statement of problem

Participation is one of the guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Others include universality, the best interests of the child, and survival and development. Despite its key place as a guiding principle and also as one of the *four baskets of rights*, participation is often accorded the least attention in development programming. Possible explanations for this situation include the fact that participation of children and adolescents is the most controversial of the rights of a child (UNICEF, 2001). Oppositions and contentions against child participation are usually enshrined in social norms, tradition and religious beliefs regarding the relationship between children and adults, particularly in Africa, Asia and a few other parts of the world. In these parts of the world, children are generally socialized to conduct themselves only to be seen and not heard, when they are in the midst or presence of adults. Thus, expression of views by children in the presence of adults is considered inappropriate and strongly suppressed.

But research has shown that that effective participation of children and adolescents drives “social change and improves community conditions for healthy development” (UNICEF, 2017:1). Similarly, DFID opines that “Young people are the foundation for effective development, and if engaged they will improve many of the structural development challenges that we face today, including enhancing the cohesiveness of families and communities, reducing health risks and advancing livelihood opportunities” (DFID, 2010:89). In the same vein, Child Fund acknowledges that “literature on child development theory provides strong evidence supporting the importance of including child and youth participation in development practice” (Child Fund, 2012:4).

Participation, however, has been shown to contribute meaningfully towards protection and development of children and adolescents. Ignoring participation of children in development programming could result in negative personality traits like low self-esteem, shyness, diminished sense of personal worth and unassertiveness in childhood. In the medium and long term, these traits often transit into adulthood, manifesting as lack of drive for excellence, timidity, unimaginative, uncreative tendencies with its attendant impulsive avoidance of leadership roles. These are obviously counterproductive in any progressive society.

## Background

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20<sup>th</sup> November 1989 and enforced on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1990. In 1991, Nigeria became one of the earliest countries to ratify the CRC. The CRC was successfully domesticated in Nigeria, through a legislative process in the national assembly, into the Child Rights Act (CRA, 2003). By virtue of this legislative process, the stipulations of the CRC, adopted into CRA 2003, became enshrined in Nigeria’s national laws, providing a strong legal framework for the promotion of the rights of the child. The CRC is the key instrument that guides the work of United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), in collaboration with national governments in more than 193 countries, including Nigeria, where it promotes the rights of all children, working to help them realize their fullest potentials.

## Aims and objectives of the study

This study aims at providing evidence to encourage:

- Broadening the space for involvement of children and adolescents' participation in development programming, as part of a broader strategy for enhancing direct benefits of child-friendly programme interventions.
- Mainstreaming child participation principles into development programming.

Specific objectives include:

- A. Assess the extent to which children and adolescents are consulted at family, school and/or community levels while issues concerning them are being discussed or decided.
- B. Identify the factors that either promote or impede effective exercise of child participation rights at the family, school and/or community levels
- C. Obtain and interpret perspectives and views of children and adolescents on child participation for the purpose of providing concrete evidence for promoting the mainstreaming of child participation strategy into development programming.

## Theoretical framework

Ordinarily, participation refers to numerous things, ranging from seeking information to forming and expressing views, to taking part in social activities within one's social circles. As a concept, child participation refers to an enabling environment where children are "partaking in and influencing processes, decisions and activities" (UNICEF, 2001:11).

One of the earliest theoretical foundations for the concept of child participation was laid in 1969 by Sherry R. Arnstein in her ground-breaking work entitled *A Ladder of Citizen Participation*. Arnstein proposed a typology of citizen participation depicted in a ladder of eight (8) rungs, each rung representing a higher level of citizens' power in democratic processes. This 8-rung ladder metaphor was later adapted by Roger A. Hart into a framework that attempts to assess the quality of participation in terms of the extent to which children and adolescents initiate their involvement in decision-making processes on issues that concern them. This ladder is shown in figure 1 below.

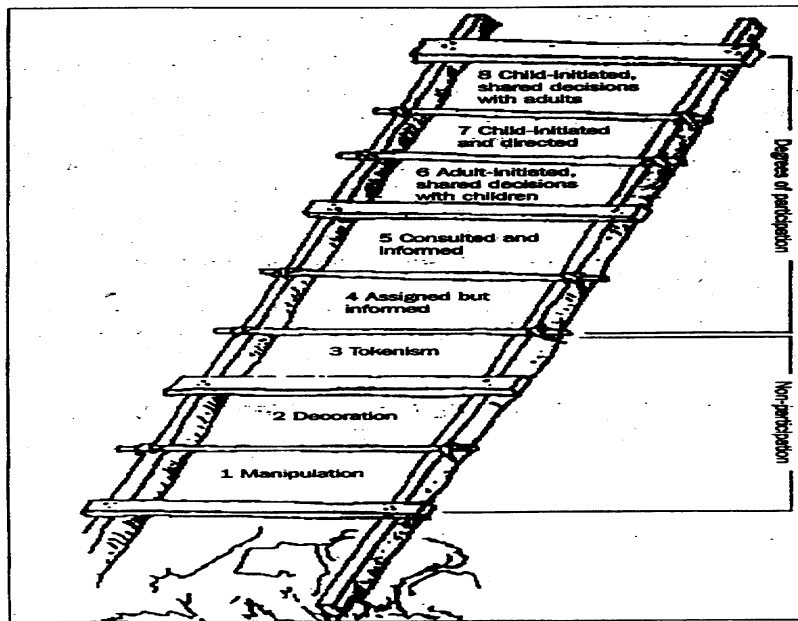


Figure 3: A tool for assessing levels of participation, from Hart, 1997:41 (Hart, 1997:40-55 for an extended description).<sup>4</sup>

Figure 1. Levels of participation (Hart, 1997:41)

Hart's work, *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*, was published by UNICEF in 1992 as Innocenti Essays Number 4. According to Hart, *participation* refers to "the process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives...the means by which a democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured" (UNICEF, 1992). The first three lowest rungs of the ladder are labelled, *Manipulation*, *Decoration*, and *Tokenism*. These three, by their definitions, constitute *Non-Participation*. Meaningful participation begins from the fourth rung of the ladder and continues to increase in effectiveness until the eighth rung where activities become fully *Child-Initiated*. At this point, children and adolescents initiate the activities and then share with adults in decision-making processes, marking the apogee of child participation.

### **The place of child participation in development programming**

Interestingly, the word *participation* occurs only two times in the UNCRC. Even these two occurrences appear in articles 23 and 40, not within the core set of articles (12-17) that typically outline action required of state parties for promoting child participation in decision-making. The principles of child participation are, nonetheless, variously rendered in articles 12-17 viz.:

- *States 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 the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.* (Article 12 (1)).
- *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, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice* (Article 13 (1)).
- *States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion* (Article 14 (1)).
- *States Parties recognize the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly* (Article 15 (1)).
- *No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation* Article 16 (1)).
- *States Parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health* (Article 17 (1)).

Beyond academic rhetoric, evidence abound in demonstration of the positive contributions to human development accruable from involvement of children and adolescents in decision-making processes. Participation can help children and adolescents know and understand their rights and also enhance acquisition of vital life-skills and knowledge amongst them. Such skills can be useful as they are enabled to take action to prevent and address abuse and exploitation. Beyond this, ensuring the adequacy and appropriateness of child survival, development and protection measures relies significantly on the extent to which promotion of participation rights of the child is operationalized in development programming. This position is corroborated by the statement credited to a former United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan:

*We know more clearly now than ever before that if development is to be sustained and poverty to be reduced, it will require the strong and active participation of children, women and men in the decisions that affect them* (Annan, 2001).

### **Methodology of the study**

Key methodology involved Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) with children and adolescents, where the concepts of child participation are elucidated. Afterwards, the children were divided into smaller manageable groups where we had closer interaction with them and administered the questionnaire.

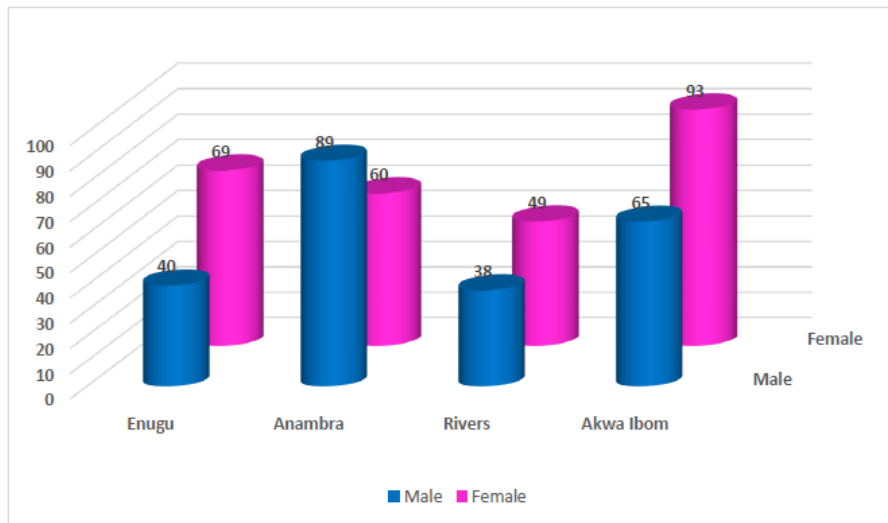
### Sampling methods for selection of participating states

Non-probabilistic sampling method, purposive sampling, was used to select the participating States. Most suited for exploratory research, this approach enables a researcher to focus on a specific target group for some unique purpose, although representativeness of the population by the selected sample may not necessarily be guaranteed. Thus, Anambra and Enugu States were selected, out of five States within Southeast region. Similarly, Awka Ibom and Rivers States were also selected out of another group of six States within the Southsouth region. From these four selected States, one local government council was selected from each of their three senatorial districts, respectively, resulting in a total of twelve (12) local government councils that made up the sample size of the study.

**Table 1.1.** Distribution of participants by state and age

state	Age Category				Total
	12-13	14-15	16-17	18-19	
Enugu	17	35	41	16	109
Anambra	41	50	41	17	149
Rivers	39	34	13	1	87
Akwa Ibom	43	51	48	16	158
Total	140	170	143	50	503

As shown in Table 1.1 above, a total of one hundred and nine (109) children and adolescents were selected from Enugu States, one hundred and forty nine (149) from Anambra State, eighty seven (87) from Rivers State and one hundred and fifty eight (158) from Akwa Ibom State. In sum, we worked with five hundred and three (503) children and adolescents within the 12-19 years age cohort.



**Figure 1.01.** Participants' distribution by sex by state

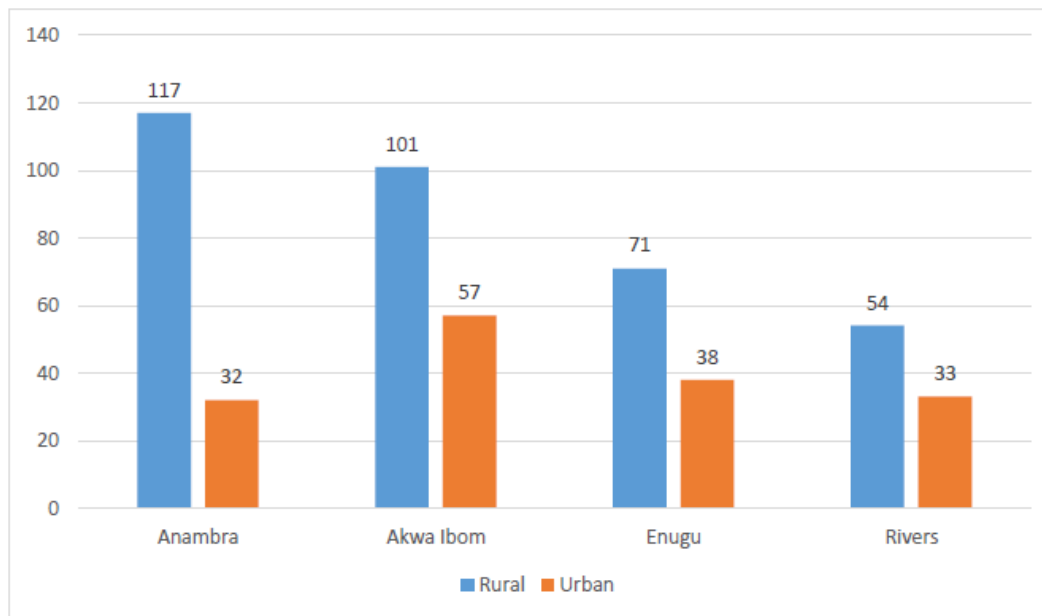
As shown in Figure 1.01 above, gender balance of participation is in favour of females – cumulatively, nine percent (9%) more girls than boys participated in the study. A total of sixty nine (69) girls (63%) and forty (40) boys (37%) participated from Enugu State; at Anambra State, we had sixty (60) girls (41%) and 88 boys (59%) in attendance, the only one of the four States where boys outnumbered girls; Rivers State presented forty nine (49) girls (56%) and thirty eight (38) boys (34%); and Akwa Ibom State had ninety three (93) girls (59%) and sixty five (65) boys (41%) who took part in the FGD. Overall, we had five hundred

and two (502) children and adolescents who were interviewed from all four participating States. Out of these, fifty four percent (54%) were females while forty six percent (46%) were males, as shown in Table 1.2 below.

**Table 1.2** Sex distribution of the sample

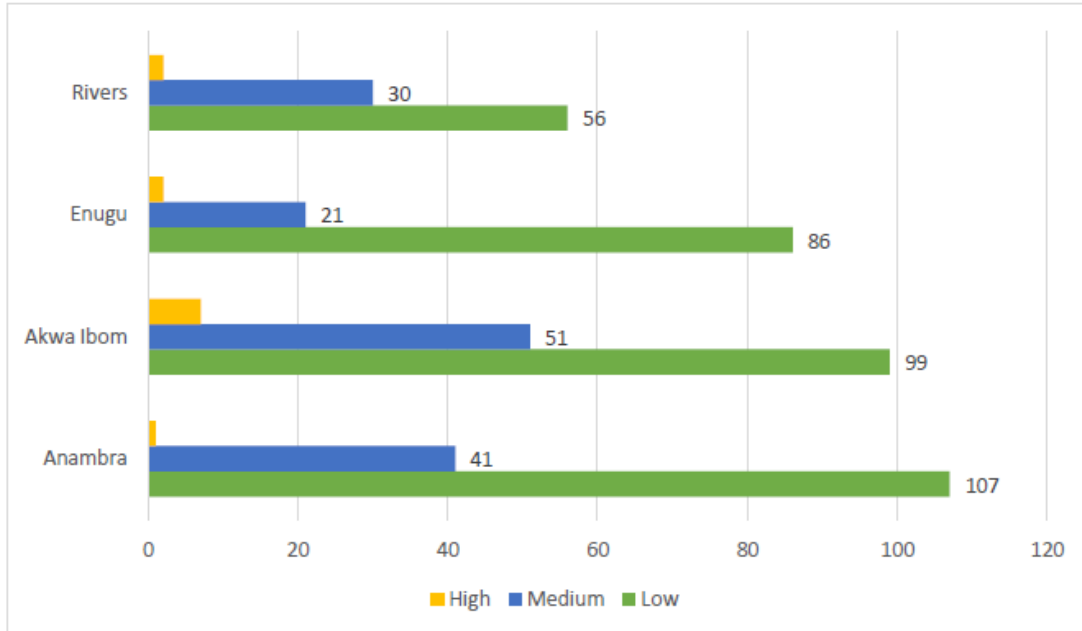
Sex of Child	Total Number	Percentage (%)
Male	232	46
Female	271	54
<b>Total</b>	<b>503</b>	<b>100</b>

Participants were also disaggregated by geographical location of their residences, rural or urban. In Nigeria, adult literacy rates are generally higher amongst urban residents relative to rural dwellers. Levels of enlightenment, social capital development, as well exposure to modernisation, also tend to chart similar course. Thus, urban-rural disaggregation as a variable, is an attempt to establish whether or not there exists any association between location of residence and effective participation of children in decision-making processes that affect them. The result is presented in figure 1.02 below.



**Figure 1.02.** Urban and rural mix of participants by state

Figure 1.02 above shows the urban-rural mix of participants. In Anambra State, rural participants nearly quadruples their urban counterparts; in Akwa Ibom State rural-urban ratio is almost double; in Enugu State, rural participants are more than twice their urban colleagues, while in Rivers State it is almost twice in the same trend. This is part of a deliberate attempt to factor in equity principles by creating more participating space for rural children and adolescents vis-à-vis their urban counterparts. The wide variance in absolute numbers across State is due to the fact that Anambra and Enugu States had four locations, three rural and one urban, while the other two States had three location, two rural and one urban.



**Figure 1.03.** Participants by socioeconomic class

Proxy means were used to classify the participants into three socioeconomic classes – low, medium and high. These proxies, which were clearly explained to the participants before they were required to provide responses to the questions, reflected their situation at home with respect to housing, nutrition, health, access to portable water and sanitation facilities, among others. Similar, to figure 1.1 above, the greatest majority of the children fall within the low socioeconomic class, understandably.

Guided by the plan to obtain perspectives from both urban and rural communities, the capital city of each of the States was selected, in addition to two rural communities from each of the other two senatorial districts. Basically, therefore, this process would produce one urban community (State capital city) and two rural communities.

A total of forty (40) children and adolescents, aged 12-19 years, were selected from each of the communities of study, with equitable representation of children across gender, geography, socioeconomic and other social divides. Thus, we had nearly equal numbers of male and female children and adolescents, in-school and out-of-school, from both rural and urban public schools, including the physically challenged.

### Data collection instrument

Due to its relative abstractness, child participation is a concept that is not readily amenable to direct scientific measurement, using standard statistical softwares, particularly, when assessing the quality of child participation. This often happens when child participation “programmes are created without clear objectives, and with no real indicators or benchmarks against which to measure progress” (SC, 2014). Qualitative methods are sometimes employed in dealing with this challenge; but quantitative methods are not out of place, either. Often, mixed methods are most ideal, providing the advantage of a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures, particularly when high precision in measurement is required. Save the Children (2014) has provided a set of very useful tools for this purpose in their publication, *A Toolkit for Monitoring and Evaluating Children’s Participation: How to measure the scope, quality and outcomes of children’s participation, Booklet 5*. We have used quantitative methods in this study, though, since it very well serves our modest purpose.

A data collection instrument was, thus, developed ahead of the field visit. The survey questions were patterned after a previous survey conducted by the Council of Europe in Finland on child and youth participation in 2011. The aim of the questions was to ascertain the extent to which adults (and other adult-

controlled bodies) create conducive environment for children living in South-East and South-South Nigeria to voice their views and influence decisions affecting them, in line with Article 12 through 17 of the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child. Thus, the questionnaire constituted of simple and direct questions designed to elicit responses that would be suitable for the assessment of the objectives as defined above.

Despite the simplicity of the questionnaire, we arranged and had the consultants administer them on the respondents because many of them, particularly from rural public schools, were hindered by language barrier and still needed additional explanation of the questions. The questions were clustered around issues like how often adults listen to and/or seriously consider the views of children and adolescents; how seriously such views are taken during decision-making by parents/guardians at home, by teachers and administrators at school, by doctors and health workers at health facilities or opinion leaders and other gatekeepers at community level, including media, social clubs, government, among others.

### **Focused group discussions (FGDs)**

We adopted Focused Group Discussion (FGD) as a means to obtain the voices and views of the selected children and adolescents. First, there was a plenary session, where we introduced UNICEF to the children. The history of the United Nations – when UN General Assembly created UNICEF, the original purpose for which UNICEF was created, and how the Agency has evolved over the years until today – was traced and clearly explained. We also took time to explain how UNICEF collaborates with national governments, the system of Country Programme cycles and how it operates, the roles of the government of Nigeria and those of UNICEF in the collaboration and how these result in development of the country. Furthermore, we explained to the children why we were consulting with them at the time and manner we were doing it and how their views and responses will be factored into the drafting of the new FGN/UNICEF Country Programme of Cooperation (2018-2022). At the end of this introduction and learning sessions, ample time was provided for questions, clarifications and other inputs. This initial interaction at the plenary session worked very well in all locations as *ice-breakers* and helped to stimulate inquisitiveness in the participants. Afterwards, the class was randomly divided into four classes.

### **Results from data analysis**

In analyzing the responses obtained from the field, we will use a simple distributional presentation of the data set as shown in the figures and tables above. This will be followed by an econometric analysis of the factors accounting for participation or non-participation. Since our outcome variable is binary, we will use logistic regression as it is most suited for modeling binary outcome variables. The logistic regression follows the method of maximum likelihood and is used to estimate the likelihood of an event turning out to be true or false, yes or no and so on. This method is superior to the linear probability model as its results often fall within the positive binary bounds. The general form of the logistic model is given as:

$$\ln \left[ \frac{p}{1-p} \right] = X\beta \quad (1)$$

$$\text{Where } P = \left[ \frac{e^{X\beta}}{1+e^{X\beta}} \right] \quad (2)$$

Where  $P$  is the probability that the outcome variable is 1 conditional upon the predictors. And  $X$  is the set of predictor variables and  $\beta$  represents the set of parameters or regression coefficients to be estimated. In practice, the regression coefficients are unknown and are estimated by maximizing the likelihood function.

### **The model**

The model we are estimating here is intended to respond to our specific objective number ‘B’ above: identify the factors that either promote or impede effective exercise of child participation rights at the family, school and/or community levels.



$$Pindex = f(ageyrs, female, inschl, ses, urban) \dots \dots \dots (3)$$

For the purpose of analysis, model (3) above could be expressed in its logistic form as

$$\text{Logit}(P(pindex = 1)) = \ln \left( \frac{P(pindex = 1)}{1 - P(pindex = 1)} \right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ageyrs + \beta_2 inschl + \beta_3 female + \beta_5 ses + \beta_6 urban. \dots \dots \dots (4)$$

ut  $P(pindex=1)$  is computed as the exponent of the right hand side of the model over one plus itself.

$$P(pindex = 1) = \frac{e^{(\beta_0 + \beta_1 ageyrs + \beta_2 inschl + \beta_3 female + \beta_5 ses + \beta_6 urban)}}{1 + e^{(\beta_0 + \beta_1 ageyrs + \beta_2 inschl + \beta_3 female + \beta_5 ses + \beta_6 urban)}} \dots \dots \dots (5a)$$

OR

$$= \frac{P(pindex = 1) \exp(\beta_0 + \beta_1 ageyrs + \beta_2 inschl + \beta_3 female + \beta_5 ses + \beta_6 urban)}{1 + \exp(\beta_0 + \beta_1 ageyrs + \beta_2 inschl + \beta_3 female + \beta_5 ses + \beta_6 urban)} \dots \dots \dots (5b)$$

Model (5a) and model (5b) are essentially the same.

Where:

*Pindex*= A dummy representing participation or non-participation.

*Index of participation*=1, *index of non-participation*=0

*ageyrs* = The age of the child/ adolescent (Continuous)

*female*= A dummy for the sex of the child/ adolescent (*Female*=1 and *male*=0)

*ses*=The socioeconomic grouping of the child/ adolescent (Low income=1, middle income=2 and high income=3)

*urban*= A dummy representing the sectoral location of the adolescent (*Urban*=1 and *rural*=0)

### Measurement of key variables

Since all other variables are either dummies or continuous variables supplied directly by respondents, we are only estimating two variables – *Participation Index (pindex)* and the *socioeconomic status of the child (ses)*. The questions on participation were structured in such a way that responses were scaled from numbers 1 to 4 and 1 to 5 as the case maybe. The average of the sum of responses was calculated. Scores beyond the average are considered as the “participation” rating and marks below the average are regarded as the “non-participation” rating. Binary or dummies were then assigned so that “participation”=1 and “non-participation” =0. The socioeconomic status of the adolescents’ household was measured to be a reflection of the possession of certain household items such as a cell phone, a car, more than one car, video set; the occupation of the household member with the highest income, the type of accommodation, toilet system, main source of energy, main source of water and other household characteristics. Each of these items is given a predetermined score such that they summed up to a hundred. The scores cards collated from the children/adolescents were then grouped to determine the socioeconomic status the child/adolescent fits into.

### Analysis of results from the logistic regression

The outcome measure in this analysis is *pindex* (a categorical variable for participation or non-participation) from which we will determine the relationship between all other characteristics such as the child’s residence (Urban), age, sex, socioeconomic status and our measure of participation.

**Table 1.3.** Logistic regression result on the determinants of participation

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Odd Ratios</i>	<i>Z-stat</i>	<i>Prob</i>
** <i>Urban</i>	0.9521453	2.591263	4.37	0.00
** <i>Ageyrs</i>	-0.1334418	.8750784	-2.59	0.010
** <i>Female</i>	-0.3732289	.6885076	-1.96	0.051
<i>Inschl</i>	0.2931024	1.34058	0.55	0.585
<i>SES</i>	0.1581872	1.171385	0.84	0.399
<i>Siblings</i>	0.0657759	1.067987	1.60	0.109
<i>_cons</i>	1.19783	3.312921	1.11	0.268

\*\* indicates significance,

Iteration 3: Log likelihood = -320.19035

Number of obs = 488

LR chi2 (6) = 33.17

Prob > chi2 = 0.0000

Odd ratios measure relative risk of an event occurring. So the odd ratio for *Urban* which returned 2.591263 implies that adolescents who reside in urban areas are about 2.6 times more likely to enjoy child participation rights compared to those in rural areas. Again, odd ratio for the adolescent's sex, represented with the variable, *Female*, returned 0.69. This figure tends more towards the Female sex assigned number 1 in the model and away from the male sex assigned number 0, meaning that females are about 0.69 times less likely to enjoy participation rights in comparison to their male counterparts. This result also sufficiently shows that education, family SES and the number of siblings born to a family comparatively increases levels of effective participation.

## Discussion

Results from our analysis show that there are three (3) variables that are statistically significant in determining the quality of child participation. These are economic status (location of residence), age and sex. We find that:

- Unsurprisingly, very low awareness level amongst adolescents, and even adults, at school, family and community levels, of the concept of child participation, remains pervasive. The respondents knew practically nothing about the concept of child participation nor its relevance in development programming towards the realization of children's rights. There was evidence, however, of a token of general knowledge on the rights of children.
- Children and adolescents who live in urban areas have a higher likelihood of being consulted by adults on issues that concern them at home, school and community levels.
- Children from families with higher socioeconomic statuses were found to be more likely to be allowed at family, school and community levels to make contributions to issues that affect their lives. This might suggest some association between economic status and level of adult literacy. In other words, more educated parents/guardians are more likely to understand the value of child's rights and to actively promote its realization.
- Age plays a significant role in the participation of children and adolescents. We observed that as children grow older, their voices and views become more likely to be taken seriously by adults at home, school and community levels. Besides, as their capacities evolve with age, children and adolescents tend to make more demands for more effective participation.
- Relative to their male counterparts, female children and adolescents are less likely to be consulted or have their views taken seriously by adults at family, school and/or community levels in both rural and urban settings.

## Conclusion

Paucity of funds had, inexorably, restricted the scope and depth of this study. Consequently, the sample size may not be representative enough for any reasonable generalization across the country or even across the Southsouth and Southeast regions of Nigeria. The study has, nonetheless, unearthed some very useful information that could support constructive dialogue and partnership for prioritization of social welfare for the most disadvantaged children. Investment of more resources (human, financial, other) into this worthy cause would certainly be the required stride that will significantly contribute to faster advancement towards the realization of children's rights as enshrined in both national and global development goals.

The above view is corroborated by UNICEF thus: *Peer educators are very effective in reaching individuals and groups at especially high risk, including males having sex with males, young people who are sexually exploited, gang members, homeless youth and those who use drugs. Many of these young people distrust adults too strongly for adult social workers to reach them. But peer educators are members of the communities they aim to reach; they meet these young people on their own territory, speak the same language and, most importantly, treat them with respect.* (UNICEF, 2002 in Child Fund, 2012:6).

In view of the above findings and discussions, we hereby conclude as follows:

- Effective mainstreaming of child participation principles in development programming in development programming has become imperative, obviously. Violence, exploitation and abuse of children and adolescents across all geopolitical zones of Nigeria continue unabated, despite existence of Child Rights Act (2003) at national level, as well as Child Rights Law (CRL) in most States. Strengthening of child participation principles will help to equip children and adolescents with necessary life skills, information and knowledge necessary to become effective advocates for promotion of child rights across the country. It will also help ensure a productive adult workforce far into the future.
- Renewed advocacy efforts should be directed at making child participation rights visible in school curricula and policy frameworks, both at national and subnational levels. This involves building and/or strengthening partnerships with the relevant government agencies, as well as with civil society entities with interest in promotion of child rights.
- Quality of child participation at family, school and community levels, is clearly engendered, as shown in our results. In designing social development programmes, there is an urgent need to identify the right strategy mix that will aid effective programme implementation towards addressing the identified development challenges. It is important that deliberate efforts are made, at this point, to vigorously weave gender equality into the core fabric of protective environment for children and adolescents, which is the core business of UNICEF across the globe.
- Participation is one of the core principles, both in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) and in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). But child participation, one of the four baskets of rights in UNCRC, is the least fulfilled of rights, the least promoted in development discourses and literature. Efforts should, therefore, be made to create more space for the promotion of child participation rights with clear accountabilities established at high levels in UNICEF and also in government institutions. This might require restoring child participation as a programme component, domiciled in the most appropriate UNICEF programme section, as the management deems fit.
- Equitable investment in children, adolescents and young people is recommended since participation can be "uneven because of disparities in ability, preparation and experience among different participants...An adolescent with low literacy skills, inadequate clothing, violent living environment, and little time to reflect and prepare will have a difficult time participating as powerfully as a young person in an opposite situation". (UNICEF, 2001).

## Acknowledgements

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