Children’s Participation:

a Utopian concept in times of crisis?

A multi-faceted exploration of the humanitarian organizational response to the UNCRC right to participation

Master Thesis

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“The Seven Blunders of the World is a list that Gandhi gave to his grandson Arun, on their final day together, shortly before his assassination. The seven blunders are:
Wealth without work, Pleasure without conscience, Knowledge without character, Commerce without morality, Science without humanity, Worship without sacrifice, Politics without principle.

This list grew from Gandhi’s search for the roots of violence. He called these acts of passive violence. Preventing these is the best way to prevent oneself or one's society from reaching a point of violence. To this list, Arun Gandhi added an eighth blunder, rights without responsibilities.”

“In the footsteps of Gandhi: Conversations with spiritual social activists” (Ingram, 2003)
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Local NGOs

INGOs

Red Cross/Red Crescent movement

UNICEF

DG ECHO
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Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

This thesis explores the field of Children’s Participation in Humanitarian Action. We examined participation rights as part of the United Nations Convention to the Rights of the Child, specifically in the non-governmental humanitarian response. Children are overrepresented as victims/survivors of humanitarian emergencies.

By means of this thesis we tried to examine whether they are equally represented in the response to these emergencies. We tried to determine whether their ‘best interest’, ‘well-being’ and their ‘empowerment’, as stated in the preamble of the UNCRC, is served. Our main research question guiding this research was: To what extent is children’s participation in the humanitarian (non-governmental) response a goal in itself, and to what extent is it a means to an end?

This thesis employed an extensive secondary literature review on the subject and complemented by interviews with informants in the field, specifically from humanitarian organizations in Yogyakarta and Banda Aceh, Indonesia and DG ECHO in Brussels, which is one of the largest humanitarian donor organizations in the world. Our research was guided by four sub research questions, moving from the international arena to field level and finally the overarching opportunities and challenges.

The ultimate aim of this research has been to make a comprehensible, multi-faceted overview of all aspects of children's participation in the non-governmental humanitarian response. It can be used by practitioners and academics alike, with either little or greater knowledge of the subject.

The research findings have indicated that humanitarian organisations do not share their power with children and even though they intent to use the ideas children have, they have failed to use the full potential children’s participation has to offer.

The legal status of non-state actors, including (I)NGOs, has changed in recent years. However, this is not apparent from the accountability structures (I)NGOs employ towards their child beneficiaries. The obligation the humanitarian community has, to conform to the UNCRC, includes confirmation to its participation rights. (I)NGOs, especially child rights oriented ones, have started to implement children’s participation at a policy level. Although committing on paper, this does not seem to have changed institutional attitude.

Children need to be recognized as competent right holders and therefore full stakeholders in the humanitarian response. This would mean a transformation of the status quo and a significant shift in the locus of power at the international, the regional or the local level.
Introduction: Into the third decade of the UNCRC

Relevance

Children in humanitarian emergencies
Half of all people affected by humanitarian emergencies are children (Save the Children UK, 2007). Over one billion children under the age of 18 live in countries or territories affected by armed conflict (UNICEF, 2010). Up to 175 million children are likely to be affected every year by natural disasters (Save the Children UK, 2008). Needless to say, these estimates overlap, since a lot of children face both the impact of natural disasters and armed conflict at the same time (UNICEF, 2010), for either shorter or protracted amounts of time.

In humanitarian emergency settings, children's daily lives change. They face a lack of service provision and inadequacy of infrastructure; they have greater involvement in economic activities, domestic duties and care-giving of siblings, peers and adults; they are exposed to more diverse and acute risks to their well-being and lastly, their family, community and societies are challenged (Hart, 2004). The international community aims to assist these children and their social circle, directly through bilateral efforts, but mostly through the combined effort of humanitarian agencies such as humanitarian (I)NGOs, UN-agencies, Red Cross/Red Crescent societies, funded by public and institutional humanitarian donors. All these stakeholders in the humanitarian response aim to effectively aid children.

In conclusion, the amount of children that face humanitarian situations is enormous and so are the challenges facing them and the responsibilities expected of them, but still "children are the most photographed and least listened to victims of disasters. (...) Images of children are used in fundraising proposals and reports to woo the hearts, and pockets, of donors in the humanitarian world. Yet children are rarely involved as competent participants in deciding how the raised funds should be used" (Plan International, 2005). The current research aims to answer, whether in the humanitarian programmes designed for children, children also get to participate meaningful themselves.

The UNCRC and the right to participation
Being ratified by all countries except Somalia and the United States of America, the United Nations Convention to the Rights of the Child is the most widely agreed international treaty ever. Not only is it ratified in 192 countries, after being adopted by the General Assembly in 1989 (Resolution 44/25), and entering into force September 1990, it is also the first United Nations human rights instrument to incorporate the full range of rights: civil, political, economic, social, cultural as well as aspects of humanitarian law (Bilson, 2007; SC UK, 2007).

One could argue that the biggest achievement of the 1989 UNCRC is the addition of Articles 12 and 13, those concerning children’s participation. Article 12 and 13 state that the views of the child of matters or procedures affecting the child have to be respected: ‘The child has the right to express his or her opinion freely and to have that opinion taken into account in any matter or procedure affecting the child (Article 12). The child has the right to express his or her views, obtain information, and make ideas or information known, regardless of frontiers (Article 13).’

These articles are key articles, as Alderson (2000) states, ‘Before 1989, children’s rights charters only mentioned provision and protection rights. These rights can as easily be
discussed under the heading of children’s needs, welfare or best interests rather than rights’. Badham (2002, emphasis added) stated that ‘Participation is the keystone of the arch that is the UNCRC. Without the active participation of children and young people in the promotion of their rights to a good childhood, none will be achieved effectively.’ Therefore participation is a right as well as a means to secure other rights: survival, protection and development.

Moreover, as Chawla and Johnson (2004) highlight, "the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which reviews the report that ratifying nations must submit to document implementation, has designated this idea (of Article 12, ed.) as one of four fundamental principles (besides non-discrimination, the right to survival and development, and consideration of the best interests of the child, ed.) that all other provisions of the Convention must consider." This means children's participation is one of the four UNCRC priorities in all actions affecting children.

**Children’s Rights versus Children’s Needs**

In recent years, humanitarian assistance has seen ‘a radical departure from a needs-based approach motivated by philanthropy or charity’ (Harris-Curtis et al, 2005), to a rights based approach. What does a rights-based approach for children in humanitarian situations entail?

According to Save the Children UK (2000), taking a child rights-based approach enforces four principles. The first of those is that rights are universal, and therefore create the need to focus on issues of diversity and on the most marginalized. The second principle is that rights are interdependent, which in turn creates the need to take a holistic approach. The third consequence or principle of taking children’s rights approach is that the holders of rights, children in the case of the UNCRC, are subjects. This has implications for the interaction or relationship NGOs have with their ‘beneficiaries’, at least in theory; ‘Rather than seeing themselves as organizations working on behalf of beneficiaries, NGOs are working with right holders.’

This creates the need for a participatory approach. Like Woll (2001) explains: ‘Children are no longer envisaged as mere recipients of services or beneficiaries of protective measures. Rather they are subjects of rights and participants in actions affecting them.’

Taking a rights-based approach to humanitarian action is not only a matter of acknowledgement of children’s rights by organizations. It is acknowledgement of entitlement of children’s rights, which in turn has consequences for the actions of humanitarian NGOs: ‘Entitlement implies benefiting from the action of others for the rights of the child to become a reality, to be experienced and practised.

It further implies the recognition of the increasing capacity of children to exercise their rights and to make valid claims for their observance and respect’ (Santos Pais, 1999). This immediately brings us to the fourth principle of a child rights approach (Save the Children, 2000) ‘rights also imply an obligation on the part of someone else to safeguard those rights, supporting and challenging those with statutory responsibility.’
Methodology

Theoretical framework
In this section we will shortly discuss by means of which theoretical framework we will pose our hypothesis to the main research question: *To what extent is children’s participation in the humanitarian (non-governmental) response a goal in itself, and to what extent is it a means to an end?*

Duty bearers of the UNCRC
“The primary duty bearer under any human rights treaty, including the UNCRC, is the State. (…) However, the state is not the only duty bearer. Parents and carers, civil society, the judiciary, the media, UN agencies, local and international NGOs and others all have duties to promote and protect the rights of the child.” (SC UK 2007)

As can be seen in figure 1, the obligations and responsibilities of the UNCRC lie with the international community, the central and local government as much as with civil society and the private sector. We will research how the instrument of international law that is the UNCRC influenced its appointed specialized agency, UNICEF and the international humanitarian (non-governmental) community and their donors. Finally we will look how the implementation of this policy works at field level, which is the interface with the community, the family and ultimately, the focal point of attention, the child.

The NGO as the non-state duty bearer in the 21st century: gaining legitimacy
“NGOs and other civil society groups and organizations do not enjoy full legal status and are often seen as anomalies in world politics. Yet, despite their alleged anomalous status, non-
state actors like NGOs (…) increasingly become almost indispensible players in global agenda setting and in promulgating and enforcing global norms” (Maragia, 2002).

Maragia (2002) states that the ontology of world politics has given rise to multiple sites of authority and multiple sources of legitimacy. He states that NGOs are acquiring legitimacy or international legal personality implicitly. “Recognition of NGOs in international legal instruments (such as the UNCRC, ed.), their participation in the creation and enforcement of international law (again, such as the UNCRC, ed.) and increasing cooptation by states as agents through which to channel development (or humanitarian, ed.) funds are all evidence of NGOs’ growing legitimacy in the system consistent with customary international law”.

Driving forces behind non-state organizational choices: ‘open-source anarchy’

Having established that NGOs, implicitly, have gained legal personality in recent years does not predict their organizational decisions, policy, and practice in absolute terms, if possible to do so at all. “Legitimacy simply means justified authority. Theories of legitimacy have attempted to specify what factors might serve as justification: tradition, rationality, legality and democracy, to name a few. The concept of legitimacy has both sociological and normative dimensions. (…) Whether an institution or regime is normatively legitimate, whether it is worthy of support is an important question in and of itself (…) since legitimacy represents a potentially important basis for effectiveness, in addition to power and self-interest.” (Bodansky, 1999).

Also Fidler (2008), argues that world politics’ ontology has changed, giving rise to the importance and legal status of non-state actors, by that questioning theories of international law and international relations. Fidler states that “the nature of ‘anarchy’ (a context in which actors in a political system recognize no common superior authority, ed.) has shifted from a condition monopolized by States to one in which anarchy has become ‘open source’ and accessible to non-state actors in unprecedented ways. (…) At the heart of this (the open source anarchy, ed.) approach rests the argument that anarchy functions like a market for power and ideas, which corresponds with a sense that international politics is not all about power, all about States, all about ideas, or all about non-State actors (…) It posits an elastic relationship between power and ideas in which non-state actors directly participate, this affecting in various ways how anarchy operates” (Fidler, 2008).

The drive behind (non-state) actors on this ‘market of power and ideas’ is a dynamic one, as the market conditions for power and ideas can change, and the most significant driving factors for such change arise in connection with transformations in the material capabilities of the various actors, as Fidler explains: “For the short term we are likely to see more unstructured plurality as all actors on the market of power and ideas try to influence the condition of anarchy.(…) Opposition to new governance architecture (which the right to participation for children is in a way, ed.) may also appear in the self-interests of some non-state actors such as NGOs which value their increasing material capabilities that allow them to try to influence anarchy independently of states. (…) This elasticity makes states and non-state actors highly sensitive to perceived changes in power relations and competition among ideas, perhaps heightening suspicions of the machinations behind proposals. (…) Serious motivation to accept bold governance innovations might be lacking.”

Are humanitarian agencies accountable to implementing the UNCRC?

Maragia (2002) argues that when we talk of global arena actors and their legitimacy: “…we are concerned with the specific actors involved and the processes through which they do their...”
work rather than on the legitimacy of the specific issues that they handle.” He also argues that it is counterintuitive to hold on the one hand that NGOs (like the humanitarian agencies that co-drafted the UNCRC) make significant contribution in norm making, while on the other hand maintain that they are not directly subject to the very norms that they have promulgated: “Participation in global norm creation comes with responsibility and accountability on the part of those who made them. (...) The central roles NGOs play in the promulgation and enforcement of international law therefore calls for urgency in holding NGOs accountable for their actions”

The locus of the change: the global arena or the field?

Nevertheless, as Maragia (2002) explains: “The rise of global problems, such as migration, poverty, disease to centre stage of global politics has resulted in a broadening of social economic issues.” Meanwhile, “the impact of these global problems are usually transnationally dispersed, in reality their origins are usually local.” Combined with Daiute’s social-political explanation (2008) that representation of the major actors (mainly the State and the family) in the UNCRC “reveals conceptual issues and power relations that limit children’s rights. (...) The emphasis on ‘nurturance rights’ (the right of the family and the state to be the main decider how children should best develop or mature, ed.) at the expense of participation rights limits the potential value of the CRC.” (Daiute, 2008).

Hypothesis main research question

We established that the UNCRC, as the most widely agreed full-range human rights charter to date, is one of the most powerful international legal instruments existent. We also established that NGOs in recent years have gained like never before in (implicit) legitimacy and access to (material) power to change ideas. They gained this power in a large part also by the 10-year advocacy process which ultimately led to the UNCRC (SC UK, 2007). Lastly, having established that all actors in the global arena are competing on the market of power and ideas on the basis of ‘open-source anarchy’, the following: We would like to advance that because of the competition on the ‘market of power and ideas’ or the ‘global arena’, this power struggle leads to all actors acting firstly out of self-interest. How ‘humanitarian’ their mission and vision may be, we would like to posit this predicts the organizational product more than it does the organizational process, which children’s participation is. The child does not have the material resources to gain access to the market of power and ideas individually, nor as a subgroup. Nor does the child have legitimacy to do so, as his ‘nurturance’ rights are at the expense of participation and broader civic rights. Therefore the child is dependent on his family and the State first of all to act on behalf of him or her.

When it comes to the humanitarian response this dependency is second of all towards humanitarian NGOs and their donors. We therefore postulate the hypothesis that these actors use participation as a means more than they do so as a goal in itself. Letting children participate actively would mean they would have to give some of their power away and let children compete with them to have the ‘copyrights’ of ideas in a way. The humanitarian community could use the unique ideas children have, using participation as a means more than a goal. The obligation the humanitarian community has to conform to the norm (the UNCRC), which they helped establish, will at the most account for changes at policy level. It will not establish a significant change to the locus of power at the international, the regional or the local level.
Sub research questions
We will explore our main research question and try to verify our hypothesis by answering the following sub research questions. Firstly, we will try to discover what the UNCRC has to offer as we answer sub research question 1: To what extent does the UNCRC provide a normative framework for children’s participation in the humanitarian response? By this we determine what norm has been established and in what way the actors as described in the UNCRC are (legally) obliged to act a certain way.

Secondly, we move from the international convention arena to the international (non-state) humanitarian community. By answering sub research question 2: To what extent does the humanitarian (non-governmental) community prioritize and implement children’s participation at policy level? We will examine what the response of the humanitarian community has been to the UNCRC, what changes have taken place at policy level, and also take a more academic outlook on what changes could or should have taken place at this level. By this we have a base line to compare the policy of the humanitarian community and individual humanitarian agencies to.

Thirdly, after having explored the international convention and the subsequent actions of the humanitarian community which mainly have been made at ‘headquarter-level’ we like to see whether these decisions are, in their implementation, influenced by the contextual realities of ‘the field’. Therefore, sub research question 3 is: To what extent does the humanitarian operational context influence children’s participation in the humanitarian response at field level?

Lastly, we have a look at all these levels combined to identify challenges and opportunities, risks and benefits at all levels, the political arena, the organizational level and for children personally, individually or as a subgroup: sub research question 4: To what extent does children’s participation in the humanitarian (non-governmental) response create opportunities or benefits, and to what extent does it entail challenges or risks, at the political, organizational and personal level?

Research process

Secondary literature review
After a first indexation of the literature on children’s participation we made mind-maps (Annexes I and II) according to the 5W1H method, identifying the ‘What’, ‘Why’, ‘Where’, ‘When’, ‘Who’ and ‘How’ of children’s participation. By this we were able to create a system to do the secondary literature review and by that identify gaps and points of overlap. Using both academic and ‘grey literature’ we have tried to breach the gap between academia and practise. These mindmaps were adjusted as the interviews as explained below and the academic literature pointed us into new yet unexplored directions.

Field research: interviews with key informants
Secondly, interviews with informants at the field and headquarter level, the humanitarian IGO/INGO/NGO and the humanitarian donor level, have been conducted in Yogyakarta and Banda Aceh in Indonesia and in Brussels in Belgium in the period of May 2010- December 2010. The list of interview respondents has been shaped top-down, according to the following structure: IGO/UN-organization (National HQ Managerial/Field), IGO/Donor (HQ, Managerial/Policy), INGO (National Headquarter, Regional, Field level), International Federation Red Cross (Field level), National Red Cross (Field level), local NGO.
List of interview respondents according to level and position

* Indicates duplication in the list of key informant, this is the case for two respondents

**IGO/UN-organization**

**UNICEF Indonesia Headquarter Jakarta**
- Child Protection Specialist Muhammad Zubedy Koteng* (conducted in Banda Aceh, Indonesia)

**UNICEF Indonesia Field level**
- former staff dr. Heribertus Jaka Triyana* (conducted in Yogyakarta, Indonesia)

**IGO/Donor**

**DG ECHO Headquarter Brussels, Management staff**
- Former Head of Unit Operational Policies & current Head of Unit Central & Eastern Europe, Mediterranean countries/Northern Africa, Newly Independent States, South/Central Asia, Middle East: mr. Johannes Luchner (conducted in Brussels, Belgium)

**DG ECHO Headquarter Brussels, Policy staff member**
- Operational policy, a.o. 'Children': ms. Lise-Marie Le Quéré (conducted in Brussels, Belgium)

**INGO**

**Headquarter level, Jakarta**
- SOS Children’s Village Indonesia
  - Advocacy staff ms. Natalina Sangapta Perangin-angin (conducted in Yogyakarta)

**Regional level**
- PLAN International
  - former area manager Muhammad Zubedy Koteng* (Banda Aceh, Indonesia)

**Field level**
- Save the Children
  - former staff dr. Heribertus Jaka Triyana* (conducted in Yogyakarta, Indonesia)
  - ms. Kartika Sari (conducted in Banda Aceh, Indonesia)
- World Vision Canada
  - former staff dr. Heribertus Jaka Triyana* (conducted in Yogyakarta, Indonesia)
- Islamic Relief
  - former staff ms. Marlina Thamrin (conducted in Banda Aceh, Indonesia)
- SOS Children’s Village
  - Coordinator ms. Martanti Endah Lestari (conducted in Yogyakarta, Indonesia)

**International Red Cross/Red Crescent movement** (INGO field level)
- IFRC ms. Indah Sari Kencono Putri (conducted in Yogyakarta, Indonesia)

**National Red Cross Society** (INGO field level)
- Canadian Red Cross ms. Farah Mardiati-Rafa (conducted in Banda Aceh, Indonesia)
Local NGO

- Institute for Community Behavioral Change (ICBC)
  - ms. Nindyah Rengganis, Psychology PhD student, presented her research 'Listening to Javanese children's voices to be included in policy making' at the First International Conference on Cultural and Indigenous Psychology (conducted in Yogyakarta, Indonesia)

- Yayasan Anak Merdeka Indonesia "Samin" (Foundation for Children's Freedom "Samin") children's rights NGO
  - mr. Odi Shalahuddin (conducted in Yogyakarta, Indonesia)

Interviews were conducted according to a combination of the following two social scientific methods:

- social psychology qualitative interview technique (Emans, 1990)
- indigenous psychology qualitative interview method (as lectured in graduate course Indigenous & Cross-cultural Psychology by Professor Uichol Kim, President Asian Association Social Psychology, 19-23 July 2010 at Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia)

Final research structure

Thirdly, we used a top-down structure to implement the theoretical framework explained above, building upon the ‘market of power and ideas’ theory. This hierarchic method is based on the institutional level from ‘most power’ to ‘least amount of power’. It follows the lines of implementation of the normative framework of the UNCRC: starting at the international convention level, descending to the international community level/humanitarian agencies’ policy level to humanitarian agencies field level, concluding with an overarching chapter on opportunities and challenges according to political, personal and organizational level. This hierarchy was also chosen because it adheres to reasons of readability and comprehensibility. However, if the ‘market of power and ideas’ changes in coming years due to its elasticity, compliant with the idea of the ‘open source anarchy’, the chapters of thesis can also be read in another order!
Chapter 1

Children’s Participation as the ‘keystone to the arch’ of the UNCRC: set in stone?

In this first chapter, we continue from the introduction part on our exploration of the United Nations Convention to the Rights of the Child, specifically the normative framework it has established for participation rights, the role of non-state actors, and the interplay between the two. Is it a legally binding universal norm we all have to adhere to, and what is the leeway stakeholders are left with to manoeuvre? We will also explore the basics concepts of participation and humanitarian action some more, as we laid the groundwork for this in the introduction. By doing so we aim to establish whether the keystone to the arch of the UNCRC is set in stone and by that answer sub research question one: To what extent does the UNCRC provide a normative framework for children’s participation in the humanitarian response?

Intended effects UNCRC children’s participation

As can be found in its pre-amble the UNCRC aims to ‘promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom’, to ‘afford the necessary protection and assistance so that the child can fully assume its responsibilities within the community’, to ‘be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, brought up in the spirit of (...) equality’. In Article 3 it is underlined that ‘in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. States Parties undertake action to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being’.

One could therefore state that the intended effects of the UNCRC have been to ensure ‘the best interest’ and ‘well-being’ of the child, which are in itself quite multi-interpretable terms of reference. Not all signatory states to the Convention will agree on what the best interest or ultimate state of well-being is for a child, let alone that the adult and child citizens of these states all will have the same opinion on this. This ambivalence is similar to the ambivalence of the terms ’developing capabilities’ and ’maturity', to which we will come back at the end of this chapter.

The UNCRC references to ‘social progress’, ‘better standards of life in larger freedom’, ‘assume responsibilities within the community’, ‘live an individual live in society’, ‘the spirit of equality’ all have elements of long-term goals of social inclusion, development and empowerment in them.

Special Role NGOs in the UNCRC

The UNCRC was the first time that NGOs, together with specialized agencies and UNICEF, were mentioned in the text of a human rights instrument, described as ‘competent bodies’ in the Convention in Article 45. This was because they were assigned the role of the ‘implementation machinery’ monitoring the ratification and implementation by the signatory states to the convention. A large number of states have entered reservations and declarations on certain articles, particular those relating to participation rights (SC UK, 2007).

Because of the required international cooperation to achieve the goals of the UNCRC, and the wide international context most (I)NGOs operate in, they also have a ‘natural place in such cooperation’ (Miljeteig-Olssen, 1990).

The impetus for the involvement of NGOs is not only found in Article 45 of the CRC, the Preamble and Article 4 as well state the expectation that ‘international actors, such as
country aid programmes, other donors and INGOs would advance children’s rights’. This statement caused the majority of international NGOs, and especially those that have children as their main beneficiary group, to move from a needs-based humanitarian approach to a rights-based approach of programming (Woll, 2001). Even child welfare organizations in the United States, which is one of the two states in the world that have not signed the CRC, undertake ‘implementation without ratification’ in their own work (Woll, 2001).

A special role was assigned to UNICEF in the UNCRC, which caused them to universally include all minors under the age of 18 in their programme strategies, as well as the adoption of a human rights framework to guide UNICEF’s work. The latter caused them to include activities in the areas of civil and political rights (such as participation in decision making) as well as recognizing specific protection needs. The 2003 version of the highly influential UNICEF report ‘The State of the World’s Children’ was even solely dedicated to child participation. The Secretary-General of the United Nations of that time Kofi Annan explains in the foreword of the same report why: ‘The report’s theme is true to the spirit of the historic General Assembly Special Session on Children, held in May 2002. For the first time, the General Assembly met to discuss exclusively children’s issues; and for the first time, large numbers of children were included as official members of delegations, representing governments and non-governmental organizations.’

Lyon (2007) emphasizes the role of NGOs in implementing the UNCRC: ‘(…) the UNCRC has provided all those who work with children and young people (…) with an aspirational gold standard (…)’

Participation as the third 'P' after Provision and Protection

Rights of the CRC can be classified in many different ways, but the most common classification is the ‘three Ps’: Provision, Protection and Participation. This three-fold classification can be seen as the common goal of the humanitarian response as a whole, and is part of most mission statements or mandates of humanitarian oriented organisations. The current research will use Alderson’s (2000) explanation for the classification, which is as follows: ‘Rights in the CRC have been classified in three types: provision of basic needs, protection against neglect and abuse and children’s participation within their families and communities’. Children's rights charters before 1989 already mentioned both provision and protection rights, whereas participation rights for children were non-existent before the UNCRC.

Participation…

Participation’ is a broad term, ranging from the more general definition ‘taking part in an activity’ to the more specific definition 'taking part in decision making' (Shier, 2001). We shall refer to the latter category as ‘active participation’, a form of participation where adults or children "have reason to believe that their involvement will make a difference" when they are "participating at the stage where decisions are actually made" (Sinclair 2004). UNICEF's State of the World 2003 Report, dedicated to children's participation, used Roger Hart's (1992) definition "The process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives". Stevens et al (1999) emphasize the element of (social) inclusion in the decision making process: "Participation can be thought of as the opposite to the process of social exclusion".

Of course not all members of a crisis or disaster-affected community can participate in the humanitarian response. The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (2003) therefore makes an important distinction in direct and indirect participation. Direct participation means that members of the affected population participate as individuals in the various phases of an aid programme. Indirect participation, or
participation by representation, can be done through community structures already existing or yet to be developed, such as Community Based Organizations (CBOs) or village committees. These structures serve as intermediate structures between the humanitarian/developmental organization and the affected community, and activities can range between discussion fora, village surveys or the selection of population members to be assisted.

In the case of both direct and indirect participation, INGOs can, and often also do, work with or via implementing partners. An implementing partner can be local NGOs that already enjoy a close relationship with the local community. Also local governmental institutions, for example health committees, can be intermediating stakeholders in the humanitarian response. ALNAP (2003) notes that all of these local structures can also turn to an international aid organization for capacity building like training in participatory tools and methods.

...in humanitarian action
ALNAP (2003) defines humanitarian action "as the response to needs arising from a man-made or natural disaster. Humanitarian situations differ in terms of type, cause, speed of onset, scale and impact. Humanitarian crises are often complex, with several disasters affecting the same population", for instance a war-affected community having to deal simultaneously with a natural disaster such as prolonged drought.

Even though "the largest humanitarian sectors remain food security, health, shelter, and water and sanitation" (Sphere, 2011), the scope of humanitarian programmes has extended in recent years. Since a lot of humanitarian crises last for years or decades, in which case a humanitarian crisis is referred to as a 'protracted crisis', humanitarian action often also includes post-crisis interventions and even prevention activities. New emerging sectors are for instance psycho-social and educational humanitarian aid. Humanitarian aid addresses "urgent survival needs of disaster-affected populations" and ranges from 'disaster preparedness' (actions that will improve capacities, relationships and knowledge to respond to a natural disaster or conflict and reduce risks for the future) to immediate 'relief' in the humanitarian response and extends into 'early recovery', also called the 'rehabilitation' phase: the process following relief and leading into 'long-term recovery' or 'development' (Sphere, 2011; ALNAP, 2003).

No means of enforcement of the right to participate
Even though the ratification of the UNCRC can almost be called universal, and many experts, like Jason Hart in his unique (2004) research on children’s participation in humanitarian action, make a compelling case that children’s participation can "further facilitate the survival, protection and development of children living in (post-)emergency situations", the right to participation in the UNCRC is no straightforward guarantee participation of children is actually achieved, as Lyon (2007) explains: ‘There is no guarantee that children’s views will be acted upon and there are few mechanisms under the law to provide children with a right to challenge, unless they can rely on rights provided by the European Convention on Human Rights or on the difficult and tortuous process of judicial review of administrative decisions’.

Therefore, an often heard critique about the UNCRC is that children’s participation is a ‘void’ right. The rationale behind such critique is that children’s participation is not an enforceable right. Some criticasters believe that children’s participation and the UNCRC as a whole are a way of ‘window dressing’ of the states that are signatory to it. Alderson (2000) describes this critique as, "the CRC is only a piece of paper which gives everyone an excuse to sit back and think they have done all they should do for children.”

As Beauclerk (2003) points out, because of the fact that NGOs are not the signatory bodies to the UNCRC, it is their choice, to adopt a rights-based approach (or not). This poses
an additional problem to the lack of enforcement: "a number of children’s NGOs have
accepted the moral obligation of duty bearers, although who holds them to account is
unclear." However, he underlines the important role of NGOs have when it comes to securing
human rights such as children’s participation: "The human rights legislation that underpins
the rights based approach has increased its profile just when the primary agent with the
responsibility for enforcing observance, the state, is much less able or willing to do so".

The INTRAC study ‘Implications for Northern NGOs of Adopting Rights-Based
approaches’(2005) points out more or less the same conclusion: "While recognizing the state
as the primary duty bearer, development NGOs often position themselves as duty bearers,
who are answerable to rights holders for their work and must ensure that they are responsible
for any violation of rights." Save the Children distinguishes between ‘the ‘rights-holders’
(children), from the care-givers (their families, for instance), and the duty-bearers (the state),
maintaining that all must be involved if child rights are to be achieved" (Theis, 2004).

Are children competent legal subjects?
The formulation of UNCRC has certain implications. On the one hand, the UNCRC preamble
statement that ‘the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration’. Meanwhile, the
UNCRC, according to White and Choudhury (2007): ‘confers rights on children as if they
were competent legal subjects, and simultaneously undermines this competence by providing
for those rights to be exercised on their behalf by others’. This two-faced recognition of
competence is exemplified in the mentioning of the impact the ‘ability’ or ‘capability’ of the
child has: ‘(…) with the clear implication that it is adults who will determine children’s
levels of capability'. Also the notion of ‘developing capabilities’ or ‘maturity’, suggests "a
more general ambivalence regarding children’s competence to determine their own fates"
(White and Choudhury, 2007).

The critique that the CRC is about liberty rights Alderson (2000) therefore counters by
stating that "The CRC does not grant to children the liberty or autonomy rights adults in
democracies take for granted. (…) Instead, the CRC enshrines some halfway-to-autonomy
rights, such as article 12.”

UNCRC levels of children’s participation
Due to the abovementioned ambiguity of ‘participation’ and lack of enforcement of
(participation) rights, it is important to establish to which extent NGOs implement
participation in practise. Therefore we will now explore what levels of participation can be
implemented according to the UNCRC.

Article 12 of the UNCRC grants to children the right to take part, not to take charge,
in making decisions. The UNCRC distinguishes three levels: (1) to express a view; (2) to be
informed about the details and options within a decision; (3) to have their view taken into
account, according to the child’s age and ability, by adults who are making the decision
(Alderson, 2000). Some signatory countries, international and non-governmental
organisations, go beyond the UNCRC to a fourth level of decision-making: (4) the right to be
the main decider in matters which affect the child. This right is only for children who are able
to make an informed decision in their own best interests (Alderson, 2000). As our key
informant Muhammad Zubedy Koteng of UNICEF explains: "The level of participation
implemented should be dependent not only on organisational choices, but should be mostly
dependent on age. An infant can not participate the same way an adolescent can, yet,
according to the UNCRC both are to be considered 'children'. This means they have the same
rights to provision, protection and participation, both this does not mean they have the same
ability to do the latter."
Sub conclusion chapter one

As discussed, the UNCRC is the most widely agreed international treaty ever and the first United Nations human rights instrument to incorporate the full range of rights: civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and parts of humanitarian law. It also is the first time NGOs are mentioned in a human rights instrument.

Before the UNCRC, children’s rights charters only mentioned provision and protection rights, which, according to Alderson (2000) might as well be called ‘needs’, ‘welfare’ or ‘best interests’ rather than rights, whereas the addition of the ‘3rd P’ that the UNCRC made, participation rights, implies a more active role for children. She mentions that active participation is a means to secure the provisional and protective rights. This is also apparent from the fact that the UNCRC has made participation a ‘fundamental principle’, which means it is a priority all other UNCRC provisions must consider.

The UNCRC has made children to be right holders, legal subjects, instead of mere recipients of humanitarian aid. The entitlement to these rights that children have means they are to benefit from the action of others, which on the part of humanitarian agencies creates at least a moral obligation to safeguard those rights, and to recognize the increasing capacity of children to exercise their rights.

The Preamble, Article 4 and Article 45 give the impetus for involvement of NGOs. These articles raise the expectation, albeit not the legal obligation, that international actors, including INGOs, ‘advance children’s rights’. According to Lyon (2007), it has raised the aspirational golden standard for NGOs who work with children and young people worldwide.

The intended aims of the UNCRC are both short to medium term, to ensure the best interest and well-being of the child, as well as establishing longer-term goals of social inclusion, development and empowerment. However, the UNCRC does not grant children the right to actively decide, or to take charge, on life-affecting matters. It merely grants the right to take part in decision making, but not to what extent. The three levels of participation that the UNCRC provides, do not include the level where the main decider in matters which affect the child is the child itself, also not for children who are able to make an informed decision in their own best interest. The UNCRC does therefore not provide children with the opportunity to ultimately decide what their best interest actually is. This is dependent on organizational choices, not on their age or ability, as the UNCRC does not distinguish between different age categories under the age of 18.

There is also no guarantee that the three levels of the UNCRC’s article 12 are adhered to, as there are few legal mechanisms to provide children with a right to challenge, which can lead to participation rights to be ‘void’ rights and ‘window-dressing’ of states, or humanitarian organizations for that matter. The increased profile of human rights for children that the UNCRC has provided, is however welcomed by Beauclerk (2003), as he states that we are now in a time ‘when the state is much less willing or able’ to enforce observance of the UNCRC. The involved stakeholders therefore are the children (the ‘right-holders’) their family or community (the ‘care-givers’) and lastly the ‘duty-bearers’. This last stakeholder is primarily the state, but could also be the NGOs which position themselves as duty-bearers.

The UNCRC provides a two-faced recognition of competence for children, as White and Choudhury (2007) describe: ‘conferring rights to children as if they were competent legal subjects and simultaneously undermining this competence by providing for those rights to be exercised on their behalf by others’. Adults determine children’s level of capability to exercise these ‘halfway-to-autonomy-rights’.

Concluding, the UNCRC has raised a normative standard that before 1989 was non-existent and which now is more ambitious and far reaching than ever before. However the ambiguous and non-committal elements of children’s participation in the UNCRC do not
provide direction how (active) participation rights are to be enforced, and leaves all leigh-way for the process with adults. Therefore, the UNCRC does provide a normative framework for children’s participation in humanitarian action, direct as individuals or indirect in community structures, via implementing partners or local government institutions. But, whether ‘true, active, meaningful participation’, where children themselves decide what their ‘best interest’ is and what would serve their best interest short or medium term, depends largely on the humanitarian community. Whether the humanitarian community has taken on its ‘moral obligation’ to prioritize and implement children’s participation in their policy we will turn to in chapter 2.

The UNCRC references to the longer-term aims of ‘social progress’, ‘better standards of life in larger freedom’, ‘assume responsibilities within the community’, ‘live an individual live in society’, and ‘the spirit of equality’, seem for now too ambitious within the normative framework that the UNCRC provides us with.
Chapter 2

Children’s Participation as ‘the 3rd P’: the response of the humanitarian community to the UNCRC

In this second chapter we conduct an in-depth exploration of the humanitarian community’s response to the UNCRC. What elements of participation and children, and what elements of the two combined, children’s participation, are implemented in humanitarian policy established after the Convention was drafted, signed and ratified? We explore (normative) models on children’s participation, how child participation ‘could’ and ‘should’ be done by humanitarian agencies, according to academics and practitioners. This includes organizational pathways, benchmarks, and ways of implementing these. We explore what policy has been established by the humanitarian community’s combined efforts and to what extent children’s participation has become as part of this policy. By this we aim to answer sub research question two: To what extent does the humanitarian (non-governmental) community prioritize and implement children’s participation at policy level?

Participation and the Code of Conduct

The humanitarian principles, as laid down by the Code of Conduct for International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief (International Federation of the Red Cross, 1992), are generally considered to be the ethical standards for organizations involved in humanitarian work: ‘481 organizations globally are signatory to the Red Cross/NGO Code of Conduct for operations in disasters, which includes a commitment to adhere to the humanitarian principles’ (OCHA, 2010). In the Red Cross/NGO Code of Conduct, beneficiary participation is mentioned as principle number 7: ‘Ways shall be found to involve programme beneficiaries in the management of relief aid’. It states that ‘Disaster response assistance should never be imposed upon the beneficiaries. Effective relief and lasting rehabilitation can best be achieved where the intended beneficiaries are involved in the design, management and implementation of the assistance programme. We will strive to achieve full community participation in our relief and rehabilitation programmes.’ (IFRC, 1992, emphasis added)

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), notes that the core four principles are endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly. ‘Humanitarian organizations may find that some of the additional principles (of the Red Cross Code of Conduct) have particular meaning in certain contexts. For example, ‘participation’ is often cited as an important humanitarian principle’ (OCHA, 2010). This would mean that, at least in theory, participation is not only a right, but also a principle of humanitarian agencies, which adds to the ‘aspirational gold standard’ (Lyon, 2007).

Thus participation has become a normative principle, and thanks to the UNCRC this norm also includes the participation of children. This research aims to find whether children's participation in the humanitarian response is not only a human right and a humanitarian principle but also standard policy of humanitarian agencies worldwide.

Humanitarian principles and organizational mandate

For the signatories of the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, participation by disaster affected people is inherent to their actions, at least in theory. Other organisations might perceive that their humanitarian principles of impartiality and independence might be under threat when engaging in
humanitarian participatory processes (ALNAP, 2003). This is because, as opposed to needs-based approaches, which often focus on the short term, rights ‘set long-term goals towards which all work is directed, as well as a set of standards to measure progress towards it’ (SC UK, 2000). Long term goals can interfere with the humanitarian principles, as they try to change the long-term situation people are facing, their political, social and cultural context, which in turn can be entangled with aspects of conflict within the country of intervention on the one hand or with the political agenda of institutional donors on the other hand. This poses a dilemma to humanitarian agencies who try to adhere to both the principle of participation as well as the more ‘core’ humanitarian principles of impartiality and independence. The humanitarian principles, therefore, seem to pose a ‘catch’ amongst themselves. But as ALNAP (2003) explains, few organisations actually exclude participation, so the leigh-way between the humanitarian principles is how to engage in participatory practises without endangering other principles. The key here is not so much that the principles will be endangered by participatory methods, but that others might perceive this as such, which could not only endanger principles, but the very people organizations try to assist. Good knowledge of the context, transparency and communication in respect of principles and strategy are pointed out by ALNAP (2003) as essential key factors in finding a balance.

**Typologies of participation**

"Typologies of participation emerged building on earlier attempts to measure empowerment" (Hinton, 2008). Some of those typologies have been dominant in research and practise of children’s participation. Participation can be distinguished in the following types, moving from least amount of participation to highest amount of participation, as can be seen in Figure 2, which is partly based on Hart’s 1992 ‘Ladder of participation’, ascending from manipulation to child-initiated action or self mobilisation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Different Types of Participation</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Typology</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Token Participation or Manipulation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Passive Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation by Consultation</td>
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<td>Participation for Material Incentives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Functional Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interactive Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self Mobilization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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1. This was initially designed to assess participation in development projects, but has been adapted and revised for different purposes. See Bopp (1989), Hart (1992), Pretty (1995), and Cornwall (1995).

Figure 2 Different types of participation, based on Hart's Ladder of Participation (1992)
The linear progression of the ladder has received academic critique, for implicitly implying a 'best' way to let children participate as well as a linear pathway towards this 'highest' level of participation. Treseder (1997) used this critique to make a non-hierarchical circle of participation, assuming that "different kinds of participatory activities and relationships are appropriate to different kinds of settings and circumstances" (Thomas, 2007). Jason Hart and colleagues (2004) also stressed that in some settings, such as in contexts of political violence, adults may be needed to ensure children's safety and well-being. Roger Hart (1997) earlier already pointed out that his model was never meant to be used as a 'straight-jacket' but merely as a 'rhetorical device' (Thomas, 2007).

Lansdown (2001) focussed on international projects, and differentiates between three types of participation: consultancy, participation and self-advocacy. For some theorists 'consultation' is a subcategory of participation, while others treat it as a separate category (Thomas, 2007). As Sinclair (2004) points out, being consulted often refers merely to 'being listened to', which contrasts active participation.

At the time of Arnstein's 1969 ladder of participation, which was the original model Roger Hart based his model on, Arnstein was concerned above all with who had the power, ranging from a segment of non-participation to degrees of 'citizen power'. Franklin's (1997) version also presented a vision in which 'the value of the exercise rests explicitly in the degree to which power is handed over from adults to children' (Thomas, 2007).

Hinton (2008) has some critique for all typologies, for one that a 'snapshot' approach can hinder reflection on the dynamic nature of power relations, 'implying a zero-sum game' that power either resides with children or with parents. Following Shier’s view (2001), full participation is not so much a matter of either/or, but instead requires "an explicit commitment on the part of adults to share their power, that is, to give some of it away." Also Cockburn (2005) notes that "a focus on issues of power in participatory processes become important, rather than narrow technocratic outcomes or findings." This is similar to what White and Choudhury (2007) conclude, that a participatory approach also means "a move from a primary preoccupation with outcomes and effectiveness to giving attention also to processes and how outcomes are achieved, and at its best the power relations involved."

Hinton (2008) adds another point of critique to typologies of participation, pointing out that they have the consequence that "diversity amongst both children and adults is submerged" and that inclusion or exclusion in these participatory levels remain unattended aspects.

Key informants opinion: Typologies of participation versus the UNCRC levels
Odi Shalahuddin from SAMIN a children's rights organisation in Yogyakarta, Indonesia: "When we try to compare this [figure 2, ed.] typology with the three levels of the UNCRC, and the fourth level some have added to that, the typology 'token participation or manipulation' down to 'participation for material incentives' do not really deserve to be coined as participation, and therefore constitute level '0' of the UNCRC. According to Shalahuddin: "Participation really starts at "functional participation" on figure 2, indicating level 1 to 2 of the UNCRC's levels": (1) to express a view; (2) to be informed about the details and options within a decision. Subsequently, he says "'Interactive participation' is similar to level (3) of the UNCRC", 'to have their view taken into account, according to the child’s age and ability, by adults who are making the decision'. Lastly, according to Shalahuddin, "True, active, meaningful participation starts at Hart's 'self mobilisation', which constitutes the (non-UNCRC, ed.) level 4) of child participation: the right to be the main decider in matters which affect the child. It is essential to consider that we can train children to make their own decision, but not whether their decision is influencing others, policy, let alone their own best interest."
Strategies to participation: ALNAP’s Handbook on Participation

The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) commissioned a ‘Global Study on Consultation with and Participation by Affected Populations in the Process of Planning, Managing, Monitoring and Evaluating Humanitarian Programmes’. This resulted in a handbook: ‘Participation by crisis-affected populations in humanitarian action’ (2003). Based on field research in Afghanistan, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Colombia and Sri Lanka the handbook claims to be "the most detailed road map to date for field workers to find practical approaches for involving affected communities in the design and implementation of humanitarian interventions." ALNAP (2003) describes participation in humanitarian action as "the engagement of affected populations in one or more phases of the project cycle: assessment; design; implementation; monitoring and evaluation. This engagement can take a variety of forms", and as a "state of mind" where "members of affected populations are at the heart of humanitarian action, as social actors, with insights into their own situation, and with competencies, energy and ideas of their own." This definition leaves a lot of leeway for organizations in defining what this means in practice. ALNAP underlines this organizational freedom in stating that "Participation is not something to be imposed but rather the product of what you want to do and what the affected population wants to do and what is possible in a given context.”

An organisation can choose from three different strategies to participation of disaster affected people: an instrumental strategy, a collaborative one, or a supportive strategy to participation (ALNAP, 2003). The choice for the instrumental strategy entails that an organization chooses to use participation as a means of achieving programme goals. The strengthening of competencies of disaster affected people can be an outcome of such a strategy nevertheless, but is not set out as a principle objective of such participatory efforts.

When using a collaborative strategy, both the organisation and participants pool their resources or capacities to achieve a common goal. For this strategy a certain amount of social structure within the participant side is required, and ultimately this could be formalised in a partnership. For children, this would mean that they have to be part of existing structures, such as children's clubs, for instance the boy and girl scouts that helped during the Haiti earthquake response in 2010, or a child-oriented local CBO, a youth committee, or a school structure.

A supportive approach is achieved when an organisation supports the affected population in carrying out its (own) initiatives. Material, financial or technical resources are provided to existing initiatives or strengthening capacities to initiate new projects. This strategy requires the capacity of organisations to seek and recognize existing capacities of the affected population, including children. This could mean that for instance, certain disaster risk reduction strategies were already implemented by children's clubs, organisations, or schools. Or that children are individually supported by means of human resources to initiate humanitarian response projects.

Participation as a means to achieve provision: the Sphere Project Handbook

The Sphere Project's Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response Handbook, has since its 2000 launch of the first version become one of the leading normative quality and accountability initiatives within the humanitarian sector, set out to improve the provision of essential basic needs or services. Originated in 1997 by a group of NGOs and the International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, and partly funded by (mostly Anglo-Saxon) Western governments, Sphere aims to uphold a "rights-based and people-centred approach to the humanitarian response" (2011).

Sphere (2011) mentions the UNCRC as one of the key documents that has informed its Humanitarian Charter: "The CRC has almost universal state accession. It restates the basic
human rights of children and identifies when they need special protection (e.g. when separated from their families)." Sphere recognises the importance of the UNCRC as a basic human rights instrument for children, but it does not specifically distinguish provision from participation rights, whereas it does underline child protection.

‘Children’ were already included as one of the cross-cutting issues with relevance to all sectors in the 2004 version. The 2011 version adds to this by mentioning in each technical provision chapter a core standard section ‘vulnerabilities and capacities of disaster-affected populations’ that highlights key areas to ensure that the rights and capacities of all vulnerable people, either young or old. The first of those key areas is to ‘optimise people's representative participation’. It especially mentions less visible groups, amongst others the group ‘stigmatised youth’. The two other 'key areas to ensure rights and capacities' are firstly to disaggregate data by sex and age (thereby also segregating data for boys and girls under 18 years old) during assessment and secondly to 'ensure that the right to information on entitlements is communicated in a way that is inclusive and accessible to all members of the community.'

Sphere’s technical chapter sections where 'child', 'young' 'youth', 'adolescent', 'boy' and 'girl' are mentioned, are mostly those sections with regards to protection aspects that have to be taken care of when providing aid to children. The two technical sections where participation of children is specifically mentioned are the chapters on shelter and food security. In the Annex Checklist on shelter, settlement and non-food items participation of youth (amongst other groups) in the building of their own shelters is mentioned. Also two of the 'guidance notes' on food security mention children, albeit only as an example.

Firstly under the heading of Access to knowledge, skills and services: 'Organisational structures should be designed and planned together with users, so that they are appropriate and adequately maintained, where possible beyond the life of the intervention. Some people have very special needs, e.g. children orphaned as a result of AIDS may miss out on the information and skills transfer that takes place within families, which can be provided by appropriate services.'

Secondly, the guidance note Coverage, access and acceptability mentions the following: 'Participation is partly determined by ease of access and the acceptability of activities to participants. Even though some food security responses are targeted at the economically active, they should not discriminate unfairly and should be accessible to vulnerable people and protection dependents, including children.'

So even though participation is mentioned in all aspects of Sphere, including the technical, more 'provisional' chapters, it is mentioned mostly in conjunction with the aim to reduce children's vulnerability and to increase protection, and in a lesser degree to implement active children's participation in the processes and actions of aid provision. Even though it is repeated chapter after chapter that children are not automatically to be seen or treated as being vulnerable, the additional example only underlines that children's vulnerability is dependent on adults accompanying them, instead of, for example, articulating the UNCRC right of children to participate in all matters affecting them.

The consecutive new versions of Sphere in 2004 and 2011 mark a clear shift in standard setting about the importance of both children and participation in the humanitarian provision. The combination of the two elements and the focus on active children's participation outside those sections with a 'longer term' focus such as shelter and food security is mentioned indirectly and could be more directly linked. The design and implementation phases of project cycle management are not particularly considered for any kind of participation. Participation seems to be mainly focussed on in the assessment and in lesser degree the monitoring and evaluation phases.

However, a direct link between (children's) participation and provision of aid is articulated by Jason Hart (2008), one of the leading academics in children’s participation in
humanitarian action. He describes that institutions such as the World Bank "see local participation as an aspect of decentralisation, itself considered the primary means of (...) more efficient delivery of services". Hart mentions access to services as one part of the 'protection' benefits of participation, completing the circle of the three P's. "Various child-led initiatives demonstrated that children can themselves play a valuable role in the enhancement of otherwise inadequate services." "Further facilitate the survival, protection and development of children living in (post-)emergency situations"

Shier (2001) adds one remark to the level of participation necessary for the different P's: "Improving service provision can be achieved with lower levels of participation. (...) all the other benefits (of participation, ed.), however, can only really come into play when children become actively involved in the decision making process".

**Participation as a means to achieve Protection**

As Boylan and Braye (2006) describe, much of the child care legislation "has tended to be protective rather than participatory". Child protection is primarily concerned with preventing and responding to violations of child rights such as acts of violence, exploitation, neglect and abuse (O'Leary and Squire, 2006).

When discussing participation as a means to achieve protection, the Sphere Humanitarian Charter can again be used as an indication of the increase in attention for the interplay between these two 'P's'. In the second Sphere version in 2004, protection was introduced as a cross-cutting objective of humanitarian aid as a whole. The 2004 version also saw the introduction of the Core Standards chapter, the process standards common to all sectors, number one being 'people-centred humanitarian response'. In the 2011 version this core standard was adapted to include, amongst others representative participation. This section mentions children's participation as follows: "The participation of youth and children should be promoted as far as it is in their own best interest and measures taken to ensure that they are not exposed to abuse or harm." We could therefore conclude that according to Sphere the ultimate goal of children's participation is, again, their 'best interest' and protection. This is elucidated in Sphere's (2011) Protection Principle 3, which mentions children extensively under 'Particular vulnerabilities to violence and coercion' (access to safe environments for children, the risk of separated children to be recruited by armed forces, and specific vulnerabilities of girls) and 'Community-based social support and self-help' (promoting the family structure and its reunification, and promoting youth groups).

According to Boylan and Braye (2000), due to the abovementioned protective nature of child care legislation, a tension between these two 'ultimate goals' of child participation, 'best interest' and protection, is created. This, according to Bilson (2007) is due to the discourse on child protection, in which the "construction of this view of risk is often in the hands of adult professionals even though these perspectives have not been able to deliver safety and protection from harm for the most vulnerable children in society."

Hart (2004) divides the benefits of children's participation in humanitarian action in two broad categories, protection and peace-building: "since these appeared, in general, to describe the two major aims of child-focused agencies". Hart conducted research on children's participation in humanitarian action, which included research amongst academics, donor agencies, governmental and non-governmental agencies and extensive field research on three projects in Eastern Sri Lanka, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Nepal. His main recommendation was to consider (active, ed.) children's participation in positive relation to protection. Although he adds a rather distinctive point that "the participation of pre-adolescents may pose particular challenges and opportunities of its own. The development of conceptual clarity and appropriate technical skills to effectively promote participation for this age group is still in its early ages, it appears". For adolescents his research showed that they
often play a vital role in the enhancement of their own protection and that good participatory projects can facilitate this further.

UNICEF (2007) states as the cause for the protective effects of participatory approaches that "in general, children's participation serves to enhance their protection by gaining a better understanding of their circumstances, by enabling environments in which they can speak out about problems and because participation promotes resilience."

**Organisational pathways to children's participation**

Whatever their motivation, or strategy, Shier's (2001) model 'Pathways to participation' provides us with a tool to indicate the extent to which organisations have made progress in achieving children's participation in their organisation's efforts. His model is based on five levels of children's participation, each containing three key questions organisations or their members should ask themselves. After answering the 9th question positively, an organisation has reached the minimum level one has to achieve if they endorse the UNCRC, according to Shier.

![Figure 3: Pathways to participation (Shier 2001)](image)

At all five levels of participation, individuals and organisations may have differing degrees of commitment to the process of empowerment. Therefore Shier identified at each level the
three stages of commitment: openings, opportunities and obligations. An opening is when a worker is ready to operate at that level, "either a personal commitment or a statement or intent to work in a certain way". An opportunity occurs when needs, (such as resources, staff time, skills and knowledge, new procedures and approaches) are met by the organisation that will enable the worker or organisation to operate at this level in practise. An obligation, lastly, is established when it becomes agreed policy of the organisation that staff should operate at this level. It is then built-in the organisation's system.

Shier does not think that his model in reality will be so 'neat', as different tasks or different organisational members might be at different stages at different levels. However, it provides an qualitative indexation on the progress an organisation has made or still has to make in order to achieve 'true' 'active' or 'meaningful' children's participation.

For example, level one evolves from stage one, the 'opening' that an aid worker or team is ready to listen to a child, to stage two, the 'opportunity' of having access to quiet time and a place to talk things over, or having an arrangement for staff to cover for one another, or to have training in listening skills. Stage three of level one, 'obligation', is achieved when the above opportunities becomes the stated policy of the organisation.

Shier makes an additional remark to his model (2001): "The enormity of the task facing international and intergovernmental agencies in tackling the processes and challenging the structures that would contain the transformational potential of children's participation should not be underestimated". By means of Shier's (2001) model, the steps that have to be taken by organisations and their members, the openings, the opportunities and obligations that have to be created and committed to, are clear. The motivation to do so, and the resources to be able to do so, and the streamlining of all organisational members to take these steps in the same direction, however, requires more organisational effort.

When we compare Shier's (2001) model to the levels of participation as can be derived from the UNCRC, we see that Shier has incorporated the 3 levels of the UNCRC in his first 3 levels of participation. He differs on his levels of active participation, as he divides this in a level where children are 'involved in decision making processes', where children do not have any real power over the decisions that are made, for instance having a seat at an adult committee where adults still have an effective veto, to a level where 'children share power and responsibility for decision making'.

Organisational resistance to child participation

Already in 2001 Lisa Woll stated the following: "First, determining what "added value" the CRC has for an organisation can take a great deal of time. The CRC was adopted by the UN more than 11 years ago, yet even the leading organisation that work with children are still struggling to make it an integrated part of their work." At the time of the current research, 10 years later this 'what's-in-it-for-us attitude' is still the case for a lot of organisations, as Bilson (2007) explains: "If the challenge of children's participation is to open up existing institutions to 'the voices of children', one question must be how far those existing institutions have to change in order for this to happen."

Organisational benchmarks to child rights programming

Using a wider scope, Lansdown (2005) researched progress in adopting and implementing child rights programming for the International Save the Children Alliance and its national members, as well as for CARE, UNICEF, Plan, Oxfam and donor institutions CIDA and DFID. In this research, fourteen benchmarks are suggested that highlight the most significant organisational changes that are required by the adoption of a rights-based approach to programming, in adopting, implementing and evaluation such an approach. These fourteen benchmarks can be grouped into four categories: organisational strategies are adopted to
introduce Child Rights Programming (CRP, benchmarks 1-5), institutional ownership of CRP is secured (benchmarks 6-8) and key steps in programme development are changed (benchmarks 9-12), accountability to children as stakeholders is introduced (benchmarks 13-14).

| Benchmark 1: | A clear mandate, vision and mission expresses commitment to child rights |
| Benchmark 2: | Policies and strategies translate the mandate and mission into practice |
| Benchmark 3: | Staffing policies, including recruitment and induction, facilitate effective CRP |
| Benchmark 4: | Tools, guidance, planning guidance have been developed to build capacity for CRP |
| Benchmark 5: | Organisational support has been introduced to strengthen an integrated approach to CRP |
| Benchmark 6: | All staff and Board members have a clear understanding of, and commitment to, CRP |
| Benchmark 7: | Staff feel competent and confident in CRP |
| Benchmark 8: | Partners are supported and enabled to work within a rights-based approach |
| Benchmark 9: | Situation analysis is directed towards mapping rights violations, and identifying causes and duty bearers, through a process that respects the views of children |
| Benchmark 10: | Priority setting and planning is informed by a rights-based perspective, and takes account of the views of children |
| Benchmark 11: | Implementation is directed towards the fulfilment of all children’s rights, without discrimination, involving both holding duty bearers accountable and supporting children to claim their rights |
| Benchmark 12: | Monitoring and evaluation is informed by CRP both in respect of its process and focus |
| Benchmark 13: | Children are acknowledged as stakeholders within Save the Children |
| Benchmark 14: | Mechanisms for accountability to children have been introduced |

Figure 4: Organisational Benchmarks of Child's Rights Programming (Lansdown, 2005)

These benchmarks are, in comparison to Shier's, to be applied to organisations as a whole, instead of its individual members. One could say that Lansdown uses a reversed and extended version of Shier's model. For example, Lansdown's first category, organisational strategies, starts off with some of Shier's obligations and ends with some of its opportunities. The second category, institutional ownership, relates to Shier's openings, requiring a personal commitment of all staff members. The third category, key steps in programme development, relates to aspects of project cycle management (assessment, advocacy, implementation and enforcement, monitoring and evaluation). We could infer from the way Lansdown numbered and formulated his benchmarks that, in order to have children's (provision and protection) rights implemented, it is important that an organisation first obliges itself officially to do so. Then secondly, opportunities have to be created by making procedures fit with this obligation. Thirdly, a personal commitment of all staff members is necessary. Fourthly, mainstreaming is of the essence, to incorporate children's provision and protection rights in all stages of the programme.

The last category of Lansdown embodies the benchmark of child participation. Benchmark 13, children are acknowledged as stakeholders within the organisation, whereas Benchmark 14 states that a mechanism for accountability to children has to be introduced. The ultimate stretch of an organisation would than to see children as stakeholders and to be accountable to them. However, according to Shier, this would mean that an organisation
would barely have passed the minimum achievement if one endorses the UNCRC. This is exemplified in the recommendations Lansdown makes that "more consideration needs to be given to the status and implications of children as stakeholders, and the need for consistency between the external expectations of duty bearers and the internal practices of the organisation."

Lansdown clearly sees child participation as an area which, even though the UNCRC was signed 16 years prior to his research, has to be explored and still has to evolve within organisations. He points out a tension arising between child rights programming with its commitment to empower children to claim their rights, and the establishment of global priorities and plans by Save the Children's member organisations around the world. He particularly points out children's participation and the challenges associated with this: "the need for culturally relevant models, the need for more effective risk assessment, the importance of participation for younger children, the need for improved tools for measurement, and the lack of adequate skills amongst many staff and partner organisations."

If we take into consideration that Lansdown's recommendation after the abovementioned one concerning children's participation is that "more debate and analysis will be needed also on the potential of child rights programming in emergency situations", we can conclude that even more debate and analysis is needed on children's participation in emergencies when it comes to organisational benchmarks.

Ackerman et al (2003), in literature research conducted on children's participation in development for Plan UK and Plan International, identify three major challenges for organisations. First of all organisations have a challenge in understanding participation. This means they should not simply copy successful participatory projects for children without considering the contextual variation. This would lead to them purely focussing on actions of participation "whilst overlooking the initial attitudinal changes required of community members and agency staff themselves."

This directly brings us to the second challenge that Ackerman et al. have identified: institutional attitude, meaning "a lack of genuine senior level commitment to democratic participatory approaches." They mark that there is a need to let go of paternalistic approaches, to make sure true empowerment of children is possible. This, they state, could be done by means of a reorientation of values and attitudes, necessary to fully move from child participation as an 'add-on' project, to become fully mainstreamed across organisational programmes as a whole.

Third of all, agencies need to consider whether they have the necessary capacity and skills in facilitating and communicating with children, in order to establish participatory projects for children. This ranges from less directive roles (observation, facilitation) to more directive input (instructing and undertaking tasks on behalf of children). A need for reflection within the organisation is necessary in order to overcome this latter challenge. The pressure asserted by funding organisations to be 'successful' is seen as a major obstacle in overcoming this challenge. This leads to many organisations not admitting openly to certain "failures", which otherwise would have the potential to be important learning experiences, also to other organisations (Ackerman et al, 2003).

This pressure to be successful, adds to the pressure exerted by funding agencies and the governments behind these agencies to be in line with their agenda-setting, as explained by Hart (2008) "Intergovernmental organisations face particular difficulties due to a modus operandi that compels them to work in partnership with national governments. How then, to ensure that children's aspirations and concerns inform processes of change when such change would directly contradict governmental agendas?"
Advocacy of participation versus 'on the ground programming'

"Agency perceptions that inappropriate attitudes, ignorance or fear constitute a major impediment to children's effective participation in development processes that could lead to the realisation of their rights, has given rise to a common emphasis upon advocacy efforts, sometimes in preference to on-the-ground programming" (White & Choudhury, 2007). As well Hart (2008) points out that advocacy is used as a stage where participation is proclaimed to be urgent, whereas agencies fail to implement these strategies themselves.

Williams' (2004) findings seem to be somewhat contradictory to this: "Research of five South Asian projects, which sought to promote children's policy influence, reports that influence was more evident in local than at national levels and at agenda-setting rather than decision-making stages." Also Kirby et al, 2003 focus on the lack of 'top-down' strategies and an organisational emphasis on 'pet-project' like strategies "Most participation is locally based and in small organisations or agencies, and is more likely to involve generic youth work or community regeneration than other areas. (...) Most participation focuses on service development or delivery with less attention given to policy or strategic development".

Pettit and Muyoki (2004) blame the strategy used for the effect obtained: "the fascination with participatory tools and methods can sometimes distract from the larger process: we think that there is some magic inherent in the methods, and that the strategy will take care of itself." They state that these participatory methods should instead be incorporated within strategies that are sensitive to the context of power, by which they implicitly prioritise advocacy efforts for greater participation, or even the use of participatory advocacy in favour of participation, over participatory tools in 'on the ground programming.' We could conclude that when it comes to participatory tools versus advocacy efforts, instead of either-or, we could focus on and-and: 'Tools and methods are not sufficient in the absence of a clear vision and strategy'.

Key informants opinion: top-down versus bottom-up implementation?

Dr Jaka Triyana, former staff member Save the Children, World Vision Canada, UNICEF: "There are differences between organisations if and how they implement children's participation. World Vision for instance is very consistent in empowering children, they do a lot of advocacy in this regard. They have a focus on health and education. Whereas Save the Children focus on environmental safety, and UNICEF on malnutrition. Also the level they aim to touch upon differs. UNICEF mainly does advocacy and policy level child participation. World Vision does this more at field level, and Save the Children focuses on provincial level."

Muhammad Zubedy Koteng, former employee of PLAN Indonesia, current UNICEF Indonesia child protection specialist: "There are many levels to be taken into regard when it comes to full children's participation. At national level we need involvement from the government, at local level we need to have discussion through community structures. Both bottom-up and top-down advocacy for children's participation. My experience with PLAN was, that if you only do it bottom-up, you get stuck halfway the process. We need indicators to measure progress on children's participation as much as we need them for their provision. For instance, as Memorandum of Understanding with government departments could be one of those. Children's participation requires a lot of support to local levels.

Zubedy also believes participation is a dynamic process: “The achieved level of participation depends on needs, demands, and possibilities. It should therefore be treated dynamic. It should first of all be meaningful to children, not to the adults who try to implement it. Children's needs should be the lead in this dynamic, not the other way round. To treat root causes, instead of being the symptom-treatment it often is. The only sustainable way to do so is to focus not only on bottom-up processes, but also on top-down implementation through the national government. Child participation should not stop once a humanitarian
organisation leaves, it should be part of a bigger scheme of things. The best way to do so is through the educational system, learning children how to raise their voice, and to do advocacy to let governments open their ears."

**Donors & Budget Allocation**

Also towards donors it could be more strongly advocated for to change positively towards a less 'adultism' point of view. "Encourage children to take responsibility at every possible opportunity, and in each stage of the programme cycle, including in the management of resources. Adopt a proactive stance with regard to donors for the support of children's participation." (USAID, 2002). As Hinton points out (2008): "The UNCRC in 1989 served as a catalyst for broad consensus that children's opinions and observations must be taken seriously. Yet, children's perspectives have failed to inform the allocation of countless resources used in their name."

Therefore, not only letting children participate, but also advocate (with them) towards donors on their behalf is essential to creating a different outlook, as made clear by an example Hart (2004) refers to: "We need to ask if the surging interest in peace-building programmes currently witnessed in Sri Lanka reflects children's own aspirations or, as seems more likely, a continuation of donor and agency-led programming."

USAID might be calling the kettle black when they state that organisations need to be encouraged to implement children's participation, when in fact: "...donors such as USAID, are very sceptical about rights-based approaches and proposals for funding to such sources need to avoid explicit rights language" (Harris-Curtis et al, 2005). Aid is often seen as a political tool, although not many institutional donors will acknowledge this: "In fact many bilateral donors still use development aid funds as 'small change' to gain access to internal markets, resources and lucrative contracts, or increasingly since 9/11 they see development aid as a tool to serve their security interests. NGOs that are very reliant on governments for grants and contracts can find it very difficult to take principle stance against the government's practises" (Harris-Curtis et al 2005).

The Directorate-General of the European commission for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection DG ECHO is, according to our **key informant** Lise-Marie Le Quéré, "clearly a needs-based organization through their mandate and in their actions', although in their policies they clearly emphasize a more rights based approach: "the European Union is firmly committed to promoting children's rights and responding to their basic needs as an integral part of both its internal and external policies", in a communication from the Commission to amongst others the Council and the European Parliament.

The European Commission does even make an explicit reference to the CRC "Children's rights are a part of universal human rights that the EU is committed to respect under international and European treaties, in particular the UN Convention on the rights of the Child. (...) The CRC established four general principles that apply to all actions affecting children: (including, ed.) respect for the views of the child (Article 12)". The European Charter of Fundamental Rights contains an explicit acknowledgement of the rights of children (Article 24), including "the right for their views to be taken into consideration." Yet, there seems to be a discrepancy between organisational policy and operational practise, also for institutional donors such as DG ECHO.

As Harris-Curtis et al (2005) describe, it is not the easiest thing, even when a donor is positive towards a rights-based approach, to actually implement a rights-based approach, as an INGO: "Even where donors, such as DFID claim to have adopted a rights-based approach and make it a condition for NGOs, it may still be difficult for recipient NGOs to reconcile with their own understanding of rights-based approaches.(...) While a donor insists on a rights-based approach, it may still require a detailed logical framework which specifies
detailed outputs and processes which NGOs are contractually obliged to follow - often within too short a time frame". But, as Harris-Curtis et al also point out, "Although it is very likely that NGOS may have more room to manoeuvre than they think as some donors are quite open to more innovative approaches".

However, even though the above might apply for human rights-, adult- based interventions, even rights-based donors like DFID do not necessarily, in practise, integrate the CRC into their work: "children's rights are currently not perceived as a priority for DFID" (…) "the CRC is only mentioned in relation to inclusion issues, not as a general framework for DFID action. The 2004 paper Breaking Cycles uses the CRC as general framework but it does not constitute DFID policy." Even though the CRC could actually benefit the donor's strategy: "Greater utilisation of the international human rights framework, in particular the CRC, would have enabled DFID to (...) use human rights standards to link children's rights and sectoral issues (...) as well as to social inclusion policies." (O'Neil et al 2007)

**Key informants opinion: are donors pushing for children's participation?**

Lise-Marie LeQuéré, DG ECHO policy staff on children and women's issues: "Children's participation is not standard policy, even child protection is relatively 'new' to our policy. ECHO's limited mandate makes a rights-based approach difficult. Our human resources are also too limited. We have working groups on these matters, but meetings due to human resource constraints are not that often, and to stir internal debate and to get feedback is very difficult. Consortia-constructions of organisations might make organisations to work more closely, and learn from each other when it comes to children's participation, but the same limitations and problems might also remain. Also NGO advocacy groups such as VOICE (Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies, ed.) also do not have a children's policy, it might help if that would change.

Muhammad Zubedy Koteng, former PLAN Indonesia and current UNICEF child protection specialist: " UNICEF's mandate is to build capacity of the government and civil society when it comes to children's participation, to provide direction. The amounts of funding the humanitarian community received following the tsunami in Aceh allowed for full child participation implementation, from the government to the community."

**Standards of Participation**

"In an environment where the language of 'best practice' is common place, few guides for organisations actually identify what is unacceptable in the implementation of child protection projects in humanitarian aid. Best practise often diminishes the complex and challenging process of establishing a child protection initiative in emergency contexts" (O'Leary 2008). O'Leary thus states that minimum standards, and optimum characteristics to aspire to, are needed to deal with the reality of emergencies. This has been achieved, at least partly, by for instance the Sphere project in the areas of provision and protection rights. We will now look whether such standards are also in place for children's participation rights.

There has been a two-fold approach to establishing minimum standards for the participation of children. The Inter-Agency Working Group on Children's Participation has developed minimum standards for consulting with children (IAWGCP, 2007). These standards are drafted to let children participate in international meetings and conferences, as they have been drafted after the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children in May 2002 and the East Asia Pacific Regional Consultation for the UN Study on Violence Against Children, June 2005. The mode of operation concerning children's participation at these meetings is aimed at consultation of children instead of their active participation.
Save the Children, found that, besides the development of a child protection policy, they needed practice standards "to ensure consistent, high quality work with children. They can be used to establish a safe and meaningful environment for the participation of children which minimizes the risk for children from their involvement in participatory processes." (Save the Children Norway, 2008). The Practice Standards (International Save the Children Alliance, 2005), which according to Save the Children can also be called 'minimum quality standards' or 'key elements' entails 7 standards, each accompanied by a set of criteria "that can be used as indicators to see whether or not the standard is being met", and five general principles derived from the UNCRC. These five general principles, in short, are that children have the right to 'voice' (express views, freedom of expression, thought, association and access to information), the right to participation in accordance with their age and maturity, the right to participation to promote the best interest and the development of the child, the right to participation based on non-discrimination and the right to protection.

The UNICEF guide for Participation of Children and Young People in Emergencies

UNICEF, the UN-organization to whom a special role was assigned to in the UNCRC, also refers to the Save the Children Practice Standards (UNICEF EAPRO, 2007). In their publication ‘The Participation of Children and Young People in Emergencies’ (2007), which is intended as a guide for relief agencies, chapter 11 is dedicated to standards to protect children who participate. In this chapter they point out that all humanitarian principles and standards (UNICEF mentions Sphere, the ICRC Code of Conduct, Do No Harm, IASC Operational Guidelines on Human Rights in Natural Disasters and the Good Enough Guide) also apply to children, but that the reason separate standards are invented for children (amongst other groups mentioned) is "because those sectors are frequently ignored and left out of consideration. They are more vulnerable because of local power structures and discrimination and need specific standards applied until those structures and cultures change."

The same UNICEF guide also mentions that specific standards have been developed for children in the area of child protection, children's participation and education. UNICEF refers with the latter to the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) quality standards for education in emergencies. They also state that "there are specific standards for children's participation that are widely used and that have been the basis for the development of more detailed standards for aspects of participation, such as children's involvement in consultations."

Apart from these standards, there are many (lengthy and detailed) guidelines and toolkits how to implement children's participation. Especially UNICEF and Save the Children have many written documents on the subject. Besides, almost each organisation that works with children affected by natural disasters or conflict has policy guidelines, checklists or written evaluation on how organisational members should 'ideally' interact with their 'child beneficiaries', although the subject of participation is less touched upon than for instance

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protection. We have put 'ideally' in brackets, because what organisations say they should do is, of course, not necessarily what they actually do.

**Percy-Smith & Thomas' Handbook of Children and Young People's Participation**

As Percy-Smith and Thomas point out in the conclusion of their very extensive 'Handbook of Children and Young People's Participation (2010)', participation is a variable construct. They quote two contributors to their book, Liebel and Saadi, who note that "one can not simply start with the English term 'participation' and look for semantic equivalents in other languages. Instead, we should look at actual practices by and with young people, and try to understand them in their social and cultural settings." As they argue, "participation of children can not be seen in isolation from the social, cultural and political contexts in which it occurs."

This could be used as an argument objecting the use of universal minimum standards, not trying to define more in depth the myriad (either culturally, linguistic or otherwise defined) ways of interpretation of Article 12 of the UNCRC, as mentioned in earlier chapters. However, as also pointed out earlier, in order to achieve true participation, with the objective of the empowerment of children, participation has to be a transformational process, which per definition entails challenging the status quo. To make sure that the negative aspects are transformed, instead of the positive ones, it is of the utmost importance that these children's participation 'standards' or whatever we may call the level deemed necessary to achieve 'true', 'meaningful' or 'active' participation, are applicable in a 'myriad of contexts'.

Percy-Smith and Thomas (2010) therefore argue to use the term 'self-determination' instead of the term 'children's participation' to distinguish those kinds of participation that involve decision making. This would mean that children "can take on higher levels of responsibility in exercising their agency as active citizens". This goes hand in hand with their other recommendation, to look beyond Article 12 to other rights in the CRC, for instance freedom of assembly, and even go beyond the CRC itself, towards a world where children have a say in matters not only affecting them, but their entire community. It seems to us that, having established that Article 12, as many other articles in the UNCRC, have not been achieved in most regards, more than 20 years later, the time might not be right just yet to set such ambitious goals for children universally. Let us, for now, focus on children's participation in the humanitarian response, looking from the minimum standards as discussed earlier, to a goal where the modus operandi of organisations is that children's participation is 'mainstream'.

**Mainstreaming participation in the Project Cycle**

In developmental organisations that focus their programmes on children, children's voice has become a more eminent factor in project cycle management "as many of them have morphed into children's rights organisations" (Theis and O'Kane in Gready and Ensor, 2005). "Although a well-established concept (participation, ed.) in the development sphere (in practise and in the literature), it has proven far from easy to operationalise in the humanitarian field" (ALNAP, 2003).

As Hart (2008) explains, mainstreaming of children's participation in humanitarian action is indeed not common practise: "By and large, children's participation in community development - as promoted by international organisations - is more likely to consist of activities and processes that run in parallel with those of adults rather than as an integrated part of local, let alone, national processes of governance.(...) Thus, as I have suggested elsewhere (Hart, 2003) participation by the young often remains in a virtual 'box'."

The same conclusion is reached by Terlonge (2010) "Although children may be consulted, it is still rare practice to prioritise children's participation in all activities that affect
them, such as assessing needs, program planning, implementation of interventions, monitoring and evaluation and finally advocacy to influence policy and practice."

Reasons for this might be found in matters of practicality as Shier (2001) explains: "The times, venues, procedures, paperwork, jargon, ethos and mode of operation of most decision-making committees are extremely un-child-friendly. It tends to be easier to involve children in decision relating to their own local play project. It is more difficult to find non-tokenistic ways to involve children in planning and policy-making at regional or national level" (Shier, 1998).

Yet, agencies such as Tearfund (2004) have developed guidelines on how to let children participate in all kinds of ways in the full project cycle, from assessment to design and planning, to implementation of humanitarian projects, to monitoring, evaluation and even advocacy. Also Stevenson (2007) suggest children to participate in ways such as visual methods such as drawing, photography and video, role play and drama, body mapping, social mapping, intervention mapping, Venn diagrams, mixture of visual and verbal techniques, raking, creativity boards and recording information. Simultaneously, he draws attention to all factors that have to be taken into account in order for participatory efforts to be successful, such as work hours and meeting times, transportation, food, equipment and support, procedures and policies, training, and strategies to ensure representation and equal decision making. These practical considerations are also mentioned by USAID (2002): "Organisations promoting child participation need to consider the time children can allocate to project activities. Distance, transport, and tutoring sessions lengthen the school day. Will the promotion of children's participation add to their work time? The impact of children's activities will require careful monitoring with appropriate indicators."

These myriad methods might seem time and (human) resource consuming, yet once institutionalised in an organization, this can become less and less the case. UNICEF (2007) puts the argument that children's participation is too complicated and too expensive to the side by pointing out that "It is only because child participation is seen as an 'optional extra' that limitations of prohibitions based on complexity and costs arise. The reality is that participation benefits children, families and communities, therefore suggesting that it is an (..) additional burden is unhelpful, unrealistic and not properly responding to children's circumstances, protection and development, especially in emergencies."

Assessment

In the ALNAP (2003) chapter on Assessment it states that "Children are seldom involved in the assessment phase. Yet experience shows that including them allows for better understanding of problems (...) and (...) cultural traditions affecting child welfare. Moreover, children often provide specific insight on situations that, otherwise, might not have been fully appreciated." Also Mosse (2001) is in line with this viewpoint: "Because project staff own the research tools, choose the topics, record the information and abstract and summarise according to project criteria of relevance, projects clearly influence the way in which people construct their 'needs'. Thus, children's participation in the assessment phase is seen as essential to correctly state their needs, whether an organization works according to a rights- or needs- based mode of operation.

Design

"Project design involves carrying out further research into the people affected by the problem and how they are affected by it (the stakeholders), identifying the risks to the project and how the project's performance will be measured" (Tearfund, 2004). According to Tearfund, children's participation can, and should be used in the stakeholder analysis, as primary
stakeholders. The way to do so is through research with children (preparation, practice design, data collection, analysis and follow-up). The findings can then be used to design projects, either directly with children, or as an advocacy or awareness raising tool. Especially older children can help developing a logical framework and can be involved in budgeting.

**Implementation**

"Several organisations have stressed the important role that children can play in implementing a relatively wide range of programmes" (ALNAP, 2003). For instance, Oxfam and UNHCR have developed a method called 'child-to-child approach', mainly focussing on peer-to-peer, child-to-family and child-to-community outreach aspects which favour organisational goals. To name another example, for their Water & Sanitation chapter, ALNAP (2003) mentions that consulting children can generate essential insights on the role that they play, such as collecting water, and can highlight specific needs and suggestions they may have.

Tearfund (2004) mentions children can take a role in the organisational aspects of the work, through weekly or monthly meetings, or that they can take on an active role in representing a project to donors and government officials in the form of a presentation, at the site of the project or at conferences. Chawla and Johnson (2004) point out that the guiding rule in such implementation participatory efforts is "to take the time to listen, to allow children to raise questions and concerns and to verify that understanding is shared". To take into account the limitations of the project essential: "to clarify potential limits to how much can be achieved and not appear to promise too much, but at the same time, opportunities for young people to experience competence should be programmed into every stage to ensure that the participatory experience as a whole will be empowering."

**Monitoring and Evaluation**

"Participatory monitoring and evaluation needs to be seen as an integral part of a rights based approach, with clear guidelines to engage children and adults regarding their different perspectives of success" (Chawla and Johson, 2004). Tearfund (2004) points out that this perspective can be gained during review meetings, "to see whether each level of objectives in the logical framework leads to the next one and whether any changes need to be made to the project plans, whereas monitoring meetings discuss progress made and ensure that activities are being carried out as planned. Children, in the end, should be part of the evaluation to assess the impact of a project. "A participatory evaluation enables the primary stakeholders to assess whether the purpose and goal of the project have been achieved, and to suggest major changes in strategy and future work. The methods used should reflect the age and experience of the children involved in the evaluation." Focus groups and interviews with children can be used as key evaluation tools.

With special regard to children's participatory monitoring and evaluation in times of emergencies, UNICEF (2007) points to the added value of such participation, for instance the identification of people who were left out of emergency plans. A complaints mechanism that is adapted also to children raising issues can identify these issues before the end of a programme. The peer-to-peer identification named earlier in this research will than have a channel to be heard. From distribution to protection issues, vulnerability and overall assessments, in terms of accountability, children have the right to make their experiences with aid organisations know, whether they have been good or bad. Identifying gaps in aid processes is one of the areas in which children can help. Not only making sure that mechanisms are in place, but that both child beneficiaries and adult agency staff know how to use these mechanisms is essential in this regard.
Sub conclusion chapter two

Besides the UNCRC, which made child participation a human right, full community participation, where intended beneficiaries are involved in the design, management and implementation of humanitarian aid programmes, is also a humanitarian principle. It is not one of the four core principles, but as OCHA (2010) underlines, an important principle nevertheless, with ‘particular meaning in certain contexts’. Children are not specifically mentioned in the Code of Conduct when it comes to participation.

We discussed the risk of a perceived clash between (child) rights-based approaches and humanitarian principles of impartiality, independence and neutrality. This has not led organizations to exclude beneficiaries from participating. Good knowledge of the context, transparency and communication in respect of principles are mentioned by ALNAP (2003) as key factors in finding a balance between the principles.

Attempts have been made to build (academic) models to measure the level of participation practised in development and humanitarian practise. Besides stating that participation has to be accustomed to context, several academics have also pointed out the necessity to focus on diversity, power dynamics and process over outcomes and effectiveness while designing and implementing participatory projects with children.

We discussed several leading quality and accountability (policy) instruments the humanitarian community has developed, and whether children’s participation is a component of these. ALNAP’s 2003 Handbook on Participation, besides referring to the UNCRC, does not specifically mention children’s participation in its full coverage of the Project Cycle, although they are part of the educational and psycho-social sections.

The Sphere Project Handbook (2004, 2011), perhaps the most influential quality and accountability initiative of the humanitarian community, mentions the UNCRC as one of the key documents that has informed its Humanitarian Charter. Subsequent versions (2004 and 2011) of the Handbook show a clear shift in standard setting when it comes to both participation and children, as both are mentioned in all sections. Nevertheless, children’s participation is mostly mentioned in conjunction with reducing vulnerability and increasing protection, not as a means to implement active participation. Specifically in the design and implementation phases of the Project Cycle in Sphere’s handbook children’s participation is not mentioned at all.

The ultimate goals Sphere points out for children’s participation are mentioned as ‘best interest’ and ‘protection’. According to (Bilson, 2007) a tension is created between these two goals. The assessment of risks affecting children has mostly been in the hands of adult professionals but has not proved to be very successful for the most vulnerable children. Therefore protection does not necessarily serve children’s best interest as risks can be misperceived by adults. Specifically adolescents could be more included in this process.

For pre-adolescent children conceptual clarity and appropriate technical skills (of the adult professionals) have to be improved yet a lot more (Hart, 2008). We should take note of Shier’s (2001) remark that improving provision services requires lower levels of children’s participation, “but for all other benefits of children’s participation to come into play, children have to become actively involved in the decision making process”. Organisational resistance to do let children participate has to be overcome, and not only for pre-adolescents.

Shier’s (2001) ‘Pathways to Participation’ and Lansdown’s ‘Organizational Benchmarks to Child Rights Programming’ (2005) have made very useful academic, yet practical models to measure the progress humanitarian agencies have made to overcome organizational resistance to child rights programming, and what steps have to be taken or created to have true children’s participation. Shier’s model is more ambitious than Lansdown’s model when it comes to children’s participation. Shier underlines this ambition,
as he states that “The enormity of the task facing international and intergovernmental agencies in tackling the processes and challenging the structures that would contain the transformational potential of children’s participation should not be underestimated”.

If we compare Shier’s and Lansdown’s models some more, Shier applies a more bottom-up, and Lansdown a more top-down approach to implementing children’s rights, including participation. According to Lansdown (2005) we have to implement provisional and protective rights before we implement participation. If we follow his rationale, an organisation needs to oblige itself to adhere to children’s rights first, than procedures need to be fit to this obligation. The next step is than personal commitment from organisational members, to be followed by mainstreaming of children’s rights. The ultimate stretch of the organisation is to see children as stakeholders and only after that to be accountable to them. Shier (2001) applies another order: personal commitment first, than establishment of procedures, than organizational obligation.

The commitment many organizations have made by endorsing the UNCRC and the Code of Conduct does not necessarily include an endorsement of all children’s rights, including children’s participation, so it seems. A lack of senior level commitment and institutional attitude (that is very likely the by-product of this lack of senior level commitment) could be explanatory factors why children’s participation is mostly seen as an ‘add-on project’ instead of being fully mainstreamed in the organization.

Inter-organizational learning on children’s participation could be aided by more openly admitting to ‘failure’. Donor pressure, and the governments behind these donor agencies, does so far not support admitting to failure, or even not allow for it. Donors and organizations might also have different understandings of a rights-based approach, and put too much constraints in terms of efficiency and outcomes on funding partners in order for children's participation to be possible. But, “INGOs might have more room to manoeuvre than they think” (Harris-Curtis et al, 2005).

Donors do not make it an easy task for INGOs to focus more on children's participation (many depending on institutional funding) seeing many governments still utilize aid in their own best interest, not that of children (Harris-Curtis et al, 2005). There seems to be a discrepancy between the policy portrayed outwards and practise, for both donors and their funding partners: “Images of children are used in fundraising proposals and reports to woo the hearts, and pockets, of donors in the humanitarian world. Yet children are rarely involved as competent participants in deciding how the raised funds should be used” (Plan International, 2005).

The lack of top-down strategies to children’s participation policy calls for more advocacy with humanitarian donors. At the same time, organizations need to practise what they preach and stop implementing ‘pet-project’ strategies (Kirby et al, 2003). Both a bottom-up and top-down policy for active children’s participation, to treat root causes and not symptoms, seem to be of the essence. Sensitivity to contexts of power, a clear vision and strategy and ultimately sound participatory methods are necessary to be implemented at the same time.

Standards for participation have been developed, amongst others, by Save the Children. The reason UNICEF endorses these standards, even though all humanitarian principles and standards (Sphere, Code of Conduct, Do No Harm, IASC Operational Guidelines and the Good Enough Guide, for instance) also apply to children, is because children as a subgroup are “frequently ignored and left out of consideration”. Power structures and discrimination, “inherent to structures and cultures” are stated by UNICEF as leading to more vulnerability for children; which stresses the need to identify ‘what is unacceptable’ instead of a focus on ‘best practise’. The status quo will have to be challenged in order for this to happen, as participation is a transformational process.
Mainstreaming children’s participation, like child participation standard setting, does not seem to be common practise. Non-tokenistic and child-friendly participation remains in a virtual ‘box’ on the shelf, for reasons of practicality. This does not mean there is a lack of method and tools, the contrary seems to be the case. UNICEF (2007) therefore counterstates the argument that children’s participation is too expensive and too complicated as follows: “It is only because child participation is seen as an ‘optional extra’ that limitations (…) arise.”
Chapter 3:

Children’s participation in a kaleidoscopic reality: the humanitarian operational context

As can be seen in the above figure 5, there are many factors affecting participation of disaster affected people in the humanitarian response. In previous chapters we explored the UNCRC and the normative framework it has set for children’s participation, and secondly to what extent children’s participation has been implemented at policy level. Whether children are able to participate is also a matter of the humanitarian operational context and how this context is acted upon at field level. Differences in culture, for instance, but also the acuteness of emergencies are factors we explore: is children’s participation as agreed upon in the UNCRC and as implemented in the policy ‘designed’ at headquarter level possible to implement in the field? Through which lens should we try to live up to the norm? Does the universal norm relate to local context and humanitarian operational reality when we try to implement children’s participation, or do the concepts of this reality change depending on who is ‘looking through the kaleidoscope’? We aim to answer research question three: To what extent does the humanitarian operational context influence children’s participation in the humanitarian response at field level?

Organisational culture

As Hart explains in his research on child participation in humanitarian action "Children's participation (...) remains an issue of concern to child-focussed agencies alone, (and not even all of these)" (Hart, 2004). One of the key recommendations that he makes to improve the
participations of children in the humanitarian response is to "encourage and promote a culture of participation within the agency itself. Organisations that maintain strongly hierarchical relations amongst staff members are unlikely to prove successful in the promotion of participatory activities with the young over the long-term." This emphasis on organisational culture is similarly expressed by the largest humanitarian donor in the world, USAID: "Encourage and promote a culture of participation within the society itself."

ALNAP (2003) clearly underlines the importance of the 'culture' aspect: "organisational culture and expertise clearly influence the types of programmes that are put in place. The use of such (standard protocol, ed.) programme techniques makes it very difficult to integrate affected populations concerns, capacities and initiatives into the programme. While top-down relief programmes might be appropriate temporarily and in certain circumstances, many relief organisations continue to function in this 'emergency' mode even when opportunities to involve the affected populations arise."

**Human Resources**

"It takes time, money and human resources to firstly assess how best to work with the children in a community, how to avoid negative repercussions of children's participation, to actually involve the children, and to ensure that the adults in the children's lives are in agreement and support the initiative" (Terlonge, 2010). This investment in human resources is not entirely in line with the current human resource trends in humanitarian action, as ALNAP (2003) explains: "rapid turnover of technical staff (...) is unlikely to promote participation. Meaningful participatory processes are always founded in a level of trust, requiring the identification of common ground and at least at some degree of continuity in regard to the interface between the organisation and the population."

While one of the human resource aspects that diminishes the opportunity for participation is that of staff skills and experience, it is of course possible to invest in training of these aspects. As ALNAP suggests, forming a partnership with either a local organisation or a more developmental oriented organisation with a lot of experience in the region, might also be helpful. Because a lot of humanitarian organisations are dependent on institutional funding, this has consequences for 'technicalities' such as contract length, which in turn can be said to be responsible for the extremely high turnover within organisations and the organisational learning that is lost time after time, besides the already mentioned level of continuity that is missing.

**Participation as a ‘buzzword’: universal UNCRC versus cultural differences**

Universal implementation of the right to participation is hindered by the fact that "participation is a buzzword that has many meanings depending on who is using the term." (Veneklasen and Miller, 2002) As they argue, the word ‘participation’ is used to describe very different processes with very different results with regard to power, empowerment, and learning.

As Pratt (2003) points out, when NGOs talk about upholding a rights-based approach it is important to know what definition and application is used. "The unquestioning acceptance of concepts such as the rights based approach does little to allow us to develop genuine participatory development, unless we are clear what we mean." He therefore promotes a loosening of focus on the legal aspects of these human rights, since “civil society organizations and NGOs are duty bearers excepting in their own self-defined terms.” He goes on to argue that ‘the rights –based approach, therefore, is no more than a metaphor; a concept that catalyses a set of values into a phrase that many people can adopt and adapt.’ Philip White (1994, quoted in ALNAP 2003) underlines the latter statement by saying that "Participation is like a kaleidoscope, it changes colour and form, depending on who is using
it." Pratt (2003) thinks a universal rights based approach can even be ‘dangerous’. “It obscures the fact that most rights and values are not universally held, leading many to attack such ideas as merely a new form of neo-colonial, ethno-centric imposition from the North.”. We will discuss now whether this critique has (also) grounds in the reality of cultural settings in ‘the South’.

**Cultural differences and the concepts of 'child' and 'participation'**

Cockburn (2005) notes that one of the main problems in children's participation is that of ‘the labels that are attached to children by adults’. Thomas (2007) argues that it is not only the verbal discourse amongst adults were children are stereo-typically discussed in terms of 'incompetence and dependence' but that bodily posture and non-verbal communication and even the very arrangement of space and furniture all contribute to creating a subordinate status of children as opposed to adults.

In 'adult behaviour' when universally relating to children they "are rarely accorded the same respect and attention as adults". In large or lesser degree, their behaviour is shaped by culture, "for instance South East Asian cultures where adopting a posture of physical inferiority to an older person is often prescribed" (Thomas, 2007). Therefore, we will need to "not only understand institutional and legal context and processes, but also the cultures and dispositions that underpin them".

Mason and Bolzan (2010) describe that children's participation has been part of 'the two related global social trends of 'democratisation' and 'individualism', but that there had been little research on the conceptualisation of children's participation across cultures. They therefore conducted research on the subject matter in Australia, China, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Similarly Twum Danso (2010) conducted research on implications of Ghana's culture for the implementation of Article 12 of the UNCRC, and likewise Caraveo, Pérez and Hernández (2010) discussed youth participation in indigenous communities in Mexico.

The research findings of Mason and Bolzan (2010) indicated that "while in each of the countries involved there was a commitment to children being 'part' of activities, what they were able to be part of was culturally specific." For instance, Australian data showed that children's participation was about children participating as individuals in adult-organised activities, whereas in Thailand and Sri Lanka the emphasis was more on children participating with others, as a group. Also in the Asian contexts 'social obligation' and 'responsibility' in particular in the family and community context was associated with children's participation. The Australian data pointed more to conceptualising children as individuals becoming adults, practising their citizen skills, so to speak, contradicting Asian cultures were participating had more of a focus on an active contribution in the present.

Research results from Sri Lanka and Thailand showed that active participation in decision making referred to communal decision making, as opposed to China, were it referred more to children challenging the parents to decide on their friendships, and Australia were these decisions involved choices regarding clothes, family consumption and extra-curricular activities.

However, they also note that these cultural differences should not be seen as a reason to institutionalise these differences, since their findings also indicate that cultural systems are dynamic instead of static. Therefore they recommend that instead of a hegemonic, top-down global political advocacy for children's participation, a bottom-up dialogue on intra-cultural and cross-cultural sensitivities is preferable. In those countries "where the value traditions were not Western liberalist, if there was an emphasis on child participation as a right, it was often a result of NGO influence".

Twum-Danso (2010) notes that as for Ghana's adults, many reject article 12 and the principles behind it 'outright', although more so in theory than in practise, due to the
importance of values such as respect and obedience. Ghana's cultural concept of 'child', extended even beyond the age of 18, to the youngest people in any group, even when someone is already married and far beyond the age of 30 or even 40. The strong parental control which was even referred to as 'ownership' was never openly challenged, however covertly often ignored. This certainly has implications in the way children's participation can be implemented in the humanitarian response.

It may be important at this point to discuss ethnocentric assumptions about the right or wrong of the conceptualisation of children and their participation. For instance, like White and Choudhury's (2007) mention the risk for 'dissociating' (as discussed in chapter 'Why'), Caraveo, Pérez and Hernández (2010) also mention that the community may have a communal manner in which the child is traditionally already incorporated. The "civil associations that see young people as a socially distinct group as they assert their identity in contrast to adults" may contradict this traditional way of children's participation by forcing a more Western form upon them, which could result in a counterproductive outcome. However, Caraveo et al are quite a bit more optimistic than White and Choudhury, as they envisage a form where both the 'old' and the 'new' ways of letting children's participate could be combined, utilizing elements of the old, using strategies of the new for instance. This strategy is to be seen in a larger perspective, since the indigenous communities discussed by Caraveo et al tried to "preserve their decision making ability and their cultural heritage", but allowing 'foreign' cultural elements selectively when they deem them necessary to survive 'domination', leading to creative dynamism within the culture.

However high the cultural differences in expression, there is also common ground in the adult resistance against children participating: "Resistance to the initiation and development of children's participation, as well as concerns around the quality, influence and purpose of participation, share a common source: adults resist and control the development of children's participation often because it disrupts adult's established working patterns and challenges existing norms" (West, 2007). Therefore, when implementing children's participation "the absence of conflict is something that should raise suspicion" (Cockburn, 2005), since "participatory initiatives tend to involve more compliant children" (Morrow, 2001), which might indicate that children do not actively participate, which would lead to a challenge of the existing norms and therefore conflict.

Different contexts can also complement one another by providing different perspectives, and by that possibly also different ways of letting children participate that could work in more than one context. Hinton (2008), for instance points out that "in many African countries promoting children's rights without a parallel emphasis on responsibilities is seen as undermining family and community values." As with higher levels of decision making, Shier in a way agrees with this traditional outlook as he points out (2001), it is important sharing power for decisions should coincide with sharing responsibilities for decisions: "There is always a risk that a decision made in this way may have adverse consequences, and then adults and children also have to learn to share responsibility for the decision."

In summary, in trying to achieve results in child participation efforts, as agreed by all signatory states to the UNCRC, it may be helpful finding out the cultural context in which one operates, in order to establish how best to challenge existing norms, if this is deemed necessary and possible. On the other hand, 'Western' conceptualisations of child participation could benefit from non-Western influences, and should therefore keep an open state of mind, to avoid ethnocentrism. To 'simply' advocate top-down to a community to implement children's participation could very well lead to counterproductive results and might even oppose already existing traditional child participation practises.

It's important to keep in mind that by cultural differences, we do not only mean cultural differences between countries, or even more strongly, indicate dichotomies between
the North and South, but that we would like to draw attention to the point of 'cultural access' (ALNAP, 2003), the difficulty that outsiders of any kind may have in relating to a local community as a result of language, behavioural and other cultural barriers. This could as much be the case for an expatriate employee of an international aid organisation as it can be a national staff member experiencing difficulties due to difference in social background, education, language and accent in a different or even the same region of his or her own country.

**Key informants opinion: universal standards UNCRC feasible to implement locally?**

Marlina Thamrin, former staff member Islamic Relief in Aceh: "The universal standards set out by the UNCRC do not take into account the cultural and religious context of the countries that the humanitarian response operates in. Cultural practises such as genital circumcision and marriage under 18 years old are ancient old cultural practises, based in religion, and should not be touched upon."

Muhammad Zubedy Koteng, former employee PLAN International, current UNICEF Indonesia child protection specialist in Aceh, when asked what he thinks about the statement above: "Local and cultural beliefs can sometimes be an obstacle to children's participation in humanitarian action. But religion and culture, like children's participation, are dynamic. We can try to influence religious and village leaders as much as we can try to influence governments to adhere to the UNCRC values. This should be an evidence-based discussion, based on grass-roots information. The key is not to push for equality between boys and girls, or adults and children, but for equal opportunities. People make standards locally, not universally, hence we need to stimulate people at a local level to adjust their standards to the universal standards as agreed upon in the UNCRC."

Indah Sari Kencono Putri, former staff member IFRC Indonesia, and Handicap International, amongst others, and current staff member Action Contre la Faim in Yogyakarta, puts forward the point that, when we try to implement certain guidelines, such as children's participation, we need to invest in staff training also on these cultural practises. She gives an example from national Red Crescent society staff: "We need to explain children's rights as much as we need to discuss what is a child, how we define the concept of a child in Indonesia, and how we can fuse the two together. Cultural boundaries are abundant when trying to implement children's participation, with local staff as much as with beneficiaries."

Kartika Sari from Save the Children Banda Aceh agrees with this viewpoint: "We need to take into account families and village leaders when we want to implement children's participation. When we tried to implement the educational programme with a focus on participatory teaching methods, teachers interpreted children's participation differently than the organisation. They missed methods how to do children's participation, they lacked child developmental knowledge. We did not need to teach them so much about children's rights, most already knew, but they did not know how to implement it. Because of a lack of knowledge, but also because of stigmas and different perceptions of what is a child. This is most obvious in rural areas."

Dr Jaka Triyana, former staff member World Vision Canada, Save the Children and UNICEF Indonesia, agrees with the latter: "We need to use local NGOs to get access to children, this works very well. But the religious background can pose a problem to children's participation. Not because Islam says children can not participate, but because of cultural and religious rooted beliefs from parents that children are not autonomous. Advocacy towards these 'third parties' is the most difficult part of children's participation. Religious leaders can be an obstacle. This is more easy in urban areas."
Children’s needs in emergency settings: participation as an assessment tool?

Originally set out as a report to the General Assembly, the ‘Machel study’, focussed on how to mainstream the subject of children and armed conflict in the work of the United Nations. At the time of this research one review later (Machel, 2007), the Machel study has become an advocacy and policy tool on children and armed conflict. One of the (main) findings of the Machel study has been that, in the case of conflict, differences between children might come more to the front: "Factors such as gender, age, class, caste, ethnicity, religion, language, birth order, residence, level of education, disability and HIV status all affect the influence of conflict on children. Moreover, conflict invariably creates new roles and responsibilities for them" (Machel, 1996). Therefore, both rights-based and needs-based organisations, should try to accommodate to the different needs of the disaster affected people, including children, they aim to assist.

In this regard, children’s participation can be a strategy to take into account the realities of girls and boys' daily lives of all different backgrounds and their consequent diverse needs in humanitarian emergencies. Like O’Kane and Karkara (2007) explain, "a range of participatory rights (Article 12-15, 17, 23, 29 and 31)" is established for all children, "irrespective of gender, disability, ethnicity or religion (Article 2)".

Ackerman et al (2003) argue in their extensive overview of contemporary research on child participation that "one of the more visible impacts that participation may have on children’s social worlds is in improved gender equity and social relations between boys and girls. It may open up new opportunities for interaction and support, reinforcing positive levels of social integration among children and strengthening the values of solidarity and democracy among each other." In other words, equal participation, according to Ackerman et al, improves gender equality. As changes in social imbalances are mostly slow, long term processes, this improvement in gender equality could, however, be outside the realm of humanitarian agencies.

What is important to take into account in this regard is the probable clash between the more Western 'development' orientation on child participation, which assumes a more or less universally homogeneous group of children which have to be prepared for adult responsibilities through child participation efforts, whereas in developing countries gender, class and status divisions amongst children and their families predetermine for some children that they have to participate economically to their families income (White and Choudhury, 2007). When the perspective on what constitutes a child and what constitutes a child's role is not widened prior to humanitarian participation efforts, and the diversity of their needs is not taken into consideration, these efforts might be in vain. On the other hand it is important to take into consideration that if children are not 'representative' of the majority of children, this also poses problems, as Hinton (2008) points out: "It is important to question whether data are representative of the majority of children, this also poses problems, as Hinton (2008) points out: "It is important to question whether data are representative of the group if the spokesperson is increasingly marginal to the group and the diversity of views."

Ray (2010) researched the participation of children "living in the poorest and most difficult situations" in Egypt, Uganda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Nepal, India, Vietnam and Guatemala. The aim of her research was to describe those children "whose rights are most violated and who are most at risk within their societies, the most commonly described 'Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances', a term coined by UNICEF in the 1980s." As Ray points out, just simply making a list of different groups that need to get special consideration will do little good for the diversity of their needs: "many documents simply list different groups of children and few clear definitions are to be found. In reality the children who are most at risk vary by location and over time and need to be identified within each country and local context." She defines these children as "those whose quality of life and ability to fulfil their potential is most affected by the violation of their rights, caused by one or
more of the following forms of marginalisation: extreme poverty, violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, discrimination and social exclusion, catastrophic events, such as conflicts and disaster"

Ray's definition may be of little help to people working in the humanitarian response, since the latter part of the definition identifies all children in humanitarian emergencies being on the exact same 'list' of marginalised children, whereas in reality, one child will be more affected by humanitarian situations as the other child: "It is important to understand that to be young or old, to be a women or a person with a disability or HIV does not, of itself, make a person vulnerable or at increased risk. Rather it is the interplay of factors that does so: (...) a 3-year old girl is much more vulnerable if she is unaccompanied than if she were living in the care of responsible parents (Sphere 2011)."

Ray (2010) advocates for a process where children identify who, in their experience, are the most affected by adversity. Likewise, Boyden & Mann (2005) question the way 'risk', 'resilience', 'well-being' and 'development' are conceptualised in discussions on "children who are exposed to adversity". They found that possibly the majority of children are actually quite capable of overcoming situations of serious adversity, and that they ''even find themselves caring for younger siblings and adults more vulnerable than themselves"

In conclusion, in order for participatory efforts to have an effect in the way that they represent the actual needs of children in their full range of diversity, a balance needs to be found in representing as much as possible the different kinds of children and their different needs on the one hand, paying attention to the most marginalized children, and on the other hand not to overemphasize the needs of minorities over the majority of children. Easier said than done, obviously, but awareness of these issues is the first step in realising them in practise. Participation of both disaster affected children and adults, can actually aid the process of being representative in the selection for the participatory process, as children can aid in the process of identifying the more vulnerable children. But for the most socially marginalized to be included in the process, special attention from outsiders will be beneficiary as well, harnessing the impartiality of aid given. Again, a balance between stereotypical lists of vulnerable children and local realities will have to be found.

Key informants opinion: children’s participation feasible in the field?

Kartika Sari, staff member Save the Children in Banda Aceh: "To my opinion, we did not implement full children's participation mainstreaming. Only for activities we would have regular consultation with children, about the difficulties encountered during these activities. The focus for children's participation was on educational and psycho-social programmes. To build on resilience, to talk about traumatic experiences of the emergency, or to talk about educational system challenges. The needs assessment would be rather participatory, than the design would be done by the organization. Than we would go back to village and religious leaders, parents and teachers to see whether our design would need changes. We would not have so much participation during the evaluation. The least amount of children's participation was undertaken with children under 8 years old. I would say that we achieved level 3 of the UNCRC, to take the view of children into account, adults being the main deciders."

Natalina Sangapta Perangin-angin, Advocacy Staff SOS Children's Villages Indonesia in Jakarta: "Children's participation is mainly used as a psycho-social tool, for instance to recover from trauma after an earthquake. Guidelines from head quarters need to be adjusted to field level. Programmes have to be adapted while in the field to the operational context."
Figure 6: ALNAP Typology of humanitarian situations

Figure 6 (ALNAP, 2003) gives an overview of the typology of humanitarian situations. In the current research we would like to distinguish whether these differences influence the extent to which children's participation can be implemented in the humanitarian response.

Participation and acute emergencies: time versus 'trust'?

As made clear from the table, the diversity of humanitarian situations is quite large. Time constraints, especially when a conflict or a natural disaster has a rapid onset, for instance an earthquake, gives little time to prepare the humanitarian response. These time constraints are often used by aid organisations as an argument that acute emergencies make it difficult or even impossible to engage in participatory activities. "There is a limited number of situations, however, where time pressure is such that it truly prevents opportunities for participatory measures. (...) In most cases, there is enough time to engage in at least some kind of participation (like consultation)" (ALNAP, 2003).

Especially since the people who are typically the ones to respond first to such an acute emergency, are local inhabitants or people from neighbouring areas: "The extent to which people participate and how they will do so will be determined by how recently the disaster occurred and by the physical, social and political circumstances (...) The local population is usually the first to react in a disaster and even early in a response some degree of participation is always feasible. Explicit efforts to listen to, consult and engage people at an early stage will increase quality and community management later in the programme." (Sphere, 2011). It would be counterproductive, besides considerations of morality, not to include these already mobilized (human) resources in the project cycle management of the humanitarian response, and at the very least to keep them informed. If the same argument holds for children, largely depends on their capacities of course. For example, if older children or adolescents have already responded to the crisis, it would be not very wise and even unethical to not include them in the process later on.

ALNAP (2003) points out the essential, yet time-consuming prerequisite for participation: trust. "Participation requires confidence and trust. The amount of time needed to establish this largely depends on attitude and skills, and the way in which you, your team and your organisation are perceived. (...) in most instances immediately trusting newcomers is not the case. Although time is often seen as a central tenet of trust building, listening capabilities and a humble and open attitude are excellent "door openers". Language or cultural barriers might be additional barriers in the humanitarian setting, finding a good intermediary (a local organisation, for instance) could be a solution to this problem."
In the humanitarian response to the massive Haiti earthquake in January 2010, boy and girls scouts groups were very helpful in the food distribution process and their participation made distribution efforts less hazardous for riots and the like (Mona Asu, CNN, February 1 2010). When we examine this example more in depth, the 'time argument' to not use participation can actually also be used in favour of participation efforts in the humanitarian response as a whole. The argument that 'participation requires trust which in turn requires time which we do not have in times of an humanitarian emergency' does not hold if we take a different perspective on humanitarian aid as a whole.

Voutira and Harrell-Bond (1995) for instance state that humanitarian aid per se requires trust, not (only) from a moral stance, but also from both an efficiency and protection viewpoint. The intermediate factor between participation and quality of aid programmes is not only 'ownership' for a group as a whole. The perception of 'ownership' can also extend to the trust one individual or a couple of individuals can have, or lack, both towards the aid agency and other aid beneficiaries. When talking about ownership, we need to determine who exactly owns what part of the aid process, this accounts as much for children as for adults.

Participation might speed up the prerequisite process of trust-building, instead of slowing it down, determining which dependencies there are. Participatory humanitarian action could make for more transparency in the processes involved and more decision making power being dispersed over different actors, at least to those beneficiaries that get to participate themselves and the people they feel they represent. Hence, children as a demographic group could be aided more (time and resource) efficient through the process of participation, which builds up trust and feelings of ownership through transparency and the dispersion of decision making power.

Key informants opinion: time for participation in times of crisis?

Johannes Luchner, DG ECHO Head of Unit: "In the situations DG ECHO and their funding partners face, for instance the mega-disaster of the floods in Pakistan, or the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, or the protracted crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, there is simply no time, not enough human resources and a lack of money to prioritise children's participation. We are glad if we can face the challenges we already have, coordination amongst INGOs, mobilizing resources so they reach the most needy. Protection is already big enough a challenge when it comes to children, and adult civilians for that matter. Sometimes we use Child Friendly Spaces components in programmes, but this mainly focuses on the protection of children while we try to deal with their parents."

Muhammad Zubedy Koteng, former employee PLAN International, UNICEF Indonesia child protection specialist: "Children's participation is feasible from the emergency phase on, at least in natural disasters, through local NGOs and government departments. We should use Participatory Rural Assessments which children more, this provides children somewhat of control over the emergency situation, this serves not only the well-being of the programme, but most importantly also the well-being of the child. However, in conflict situations, like we saw in the Northeast of Aceh, it is very difficult to do children's participation. Sustainability of children's participation is impossible due to the ongoing change of the political context, the dynamics. Political leaders change, not only in cases of conflict, and with that they sometimes also go backwards in achievements made in children's participation."
Sub conclusion chapter three

In the Chapter 2 we discussed top-down policy with regards to children’s participation. Chapter 3 focussed on the operational contextual differences and consequent influences on child rights implementation. We specifically discussed several factors that either positively or negatively influence the possibility to implement child participation at programme or project field level.

Obviously, lack of time, money and human resources are factors that negatively influence participation. Firstly, there is an extremely high staff turnover in humanitarian action. This comes from short contract length, which is inherent to the nature of humanitarian action, but also dependent on donor’s conditions for funding. This is an extremely negative factor for organisational learning, including child participation. To invest in training, forming partnerships with local or a more development orientated organisation with a lot of experience in the region are therefore essential to humanitarian organisations for them to be able to have organisational learning and continuity in the interface with the local community. Both are essential ingredients to successfully implement child participation.

Secondly, we discussed cultural differences with regards to child participation. Pratt (2003) stressed the fact that “a universal rights based approach obscures the fact that most rights and values are not universally held, leading many to attack such ideas as merely a new form of neo-colonial, ethno-centric imposition from the North”. The (cultural) labels that are attached to children by adults, exposed by language, bodily posture and non-verbal communication, and even the arrangement of space and furniture, all contribute to a ‘subordinate status’ of children to adults.

The universal aspect of the labels attached to children seems to be that children are rarely accorded the same respect and attention as adults. In what way children are able to participate in, seems to be culturally specific. Differences between Northern and Southern countries are apparent in this regard, but also between similar countries from the South or even within the same country. It is important not to try to institutionalise these differences, and to treat cultural systems for what they are: dynamic and diverse. Mason and Bolzan (2010) therefore recommend “a bottom-up dialogue on intra-cultural and cross-cultural sensitivities, “instead of a “hegemonic top-down global political advocacy for children’s participation.”

Assumptions about the right or wrong of the conceptualisation of children and their participation have the risk of being counterproductive by opposing already existing traditional child participation practises. To find out what the cultural context is, and think of ways how to overcome difficulties arising from a lack of ‘cultural access’ (language, behavioural and cultural barriers) are necessary preconditions to challenge existing norms, if deemed necessary at all.

On the other hand, 'Western' conceptualisations of child participation could benefit from non-Western influences, and should therefore keep an open state of mind. A strategy our key informant Muhammad Zubedy Koteng from UNICEF Indonesia proposed in this regard, was to have evidence-based discussions, based on grass-roots information, to stimulate people at a local level to adjust their standards to the universal standards as agreed upon in the UNCRC. Staff training on cultural practises, and how to implement children’s rights, besides advocacy towards ‘third parties’ like parents and religious leaders were all mentioned by our key informants as possible strategies to overcome cultural obstacles.

Some problems with child participation are also rooted in economic realities, which differ largely between children. A lot of children need to participate economically to their families or communities, and some might even be leading child-lead households. Participation of children from all layers of society is a strategy to take into account the realities of girls and
boys daily lives of all different backgrounds and their consequent diverse needs. This is especially important in humanitarian settings, as these differ very much from what is ‘normal’ or ‘ordinary’ from any cultural viewpoint.

For children that are increasingly marginal to the group, perspective is very likely to lack representativeness to the majority of children. Lists of stereotypically marginalized children who are most at risk will do little good in humanitarian emergencies. Instead to see which children are most at risk due to an interplay of factors will mean a better adjustment to context. Peer-to-peer outreach can help in this regard, using children’s participation as an instrument. Additional attention from outsiders can be beneficial to identify the most socially marginalized, to harness the impartiality of the aid given.

We discussed that ALNAP’s (2003) rationale contradicts time constraints as a reason not to use child participatory activities. Especially if (older) children or adolescents have already responded to the crisis, it would be unwise and unethical to not include them in the process later on. ALNAP therefore states “listening capacities, a humble and open attitude and local partnerships” as factors that could help speed up this ‘prerequisite’ process of trust building. When implemented in such a manner, participatory processes should account for higher efficiency by creating more ‘ownership’, amongst children individually as well as a subgroup of the community. Transparency and dispersion of power are intermediating factors in this regard.

Key informant Johannes Luchner of DG ECHO also mentions time, human resources and money as constraints why child participation is not treated as a priority for DG ECHO. Muhammad Zonedy Koteng of UNICEF on the other hand says that children’s participation is feasible from the emergency phase onwards, but that in situations of conflict, participation is very difficult to implement. To achieve sustainability of child participation, due to political dynamics, may be the greatest challenge of all.
Chapter 4:

Children’s participation as a golden standard: All that glitters is not gold?

In chapter one we explored the UNCRC and the universal norm it created for children’s participation, concluding it had set a golden standard for the humanitarian community. The second chapter dealt with the humanitarian community and to what extent it lived up to this golden standard by establishing a norm of active children’s participation within the community’s own policy. Thirdly we explored to what extent this policy is influenced by operational contextual factors in the field: is it possible to implement children’s participation, and to what extent is it practised? In this last chapter we conclude by exploring the reasons behind the political and organizational choices to implement children’s participation, and what opportunities and challenges have been identified at all these levels: the political, the personal and the organizational level. By doing so we aim to answer research question four: To what extent does children’s participation in the humanitarian (non-governmental) response create opportunities or benefits, and to what extent does it entail challenges or risks, at the political, organizational and personal level?

Attending to the political: representation and social inclusion

Claims of the effects of participation can be rather grand: "Participation is an essential and moral ingredient of any democratic society, enhancing quality of life, enabling empowerment, encouraging psycho-social well-being and providing a sense of inclusiveness" (Matthews, 2003). Thomas (2007) acknowledges that claims are ambitious, and he adds the point that the implications of certain claims do differ. "If the principal aim is to strengthen democratic citizenship, then the demands made on the process may be more complex altogether." Coming back to our scope of research, focussing on the humanitarian non-governmental response, it is important to distinguish that "most participation focuses on service development or delivery with less attention given to policy or strategic development."

Young (20000) emphasizes the factor of inclusion: "representation is most inclusive when it encourages marginalized groups to express their perspectives". She advocates for the use of ‘perspective’ as opposed to the often debated UNCRC preamble statement of the ‘best interest’ of the child: ‘A perspective in this context is not the same as an interest, or an opinion. Members of a group may share a perspective while at the same time having a range of views on what they need and want, and on how to achieve these things.’ She explains that a perspective ‘conditions but does not determine what one sees’. Also Percy-Smith (2005) points to the fact that "what children say is not the whole story of what they want or need. (...) having a voice doesn't necessarily lead to inclusion and even may not give rise to tangible outcomes."

According to Jason Hart (2008) there is a commonality with sexism, racism or homophobia: the achievement of children's engagement as full social actors can be seen as overcoming 'adultism', which, ideally would result in changing the asymmetry of power constructed around distinctions of age. "With the agenda-setting for children's participation, the "pursuit of a 'politics of identity" might have "taken the place of a 'politics of redistribution'"

It might be helpful to distinguish the (political) process of participation from the (political) product. West (2004) puts participatory activity on two axes, the horizontal being 'individual' to 'collective' and the vertical from 'change' to 'no change'. The participatory activity 'collective/change' refers to "social institutions change themselves to bring in and
involve children, for the benefit not only of children but new perspectives and a form of society that gives weight to the voices of children, and especially those experiencing poverty and social exclusion." One might question however, West's assumption "the benefit of not only children", which would indicate that participation is first of all implemented to serve their benefit and only additionally to serve political goals of social institutions. This order could very well be reversed, not least of all because children do not have the right to vote.

Young (2000) offers a positive outlook: "Democracy is not only a means through which citizens can promote their interest and hold the power of rulers in check. It is also a means of collective problem-solving which depends for its legitimacy and wisdom on the expression and criticism of the diverse opinions of all the members of the society."

**Who's agenda are children participating in?**

"Participation becomes a means, intended or otherwise, to produce compliant subjects of the state and producers/consumers within the global market. Thus, far from promoting active citizenship capable of challenging inequities and injustice, participation may be a means of co-option and silencing." (Jason Hart, 2008) "The political-economic forces associated with neo-liberalism as manifest, for example, in the trade policies of the US and EU, in the measures imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund on indebted governments, in the privatisation of basic services and in the unfettered movement of international capital, continue to perpetuate poverty, inequality and exploitation. There is a danger (...) that international and intergovernmental organisations, under the banner of participation, divest themselves of responsibility to tackle such issues." Could it be possible that the 'democratic wave' that has been formalized under the flagship of 'innocent children' in the shape of the UNCRC, is the result of a successful advocacy campaign of Western democratic (neo-liberal) institutions and states to change the 'less liberal' world powers? That this is a strategy to challenge those less in favour of participation and citizens rights when it comes to their adult citizens, also bottom-up, by means of children? To create more 'Western-minded' adults of the future, perhaps? White and Choudhury (2007) quote the UNICEF State of the World 2003 Report on participation, which "mentioned the need to 'deepen democracy' in the context of growing 'international terrorism', and that democracy begins with children."

Without wanting to support a 'conspiracy theory' on the true reasons behind child participation and the creation of the UNCRC as a whole, the current research aims to give a multi-faceted overview of all aspects to child participation, including negative aspects, for instance the possibility that "focussing on the personal and the local as sites of empowerment and knowledge, participatory approaches minimize the importance of the other places where power and knowledge are located, for example with 'us' in the Western development community, and with the state." (Cooke and Kothari, 2001)

**Participation to achieve empowerment**

As the UNICEF's State of the World 2003 report points out, participation is not something new for children: "Children have always participated in life: in their home, in their school, in work, in communities, in wars." Therefore, "participation can be applied to many fields and on many levels, from large platforms of empowerment (...) to concrete small-scale youth projects" (Sotsasiira et al, 2010). Sotsaiira et al argue that we should use the concept "effective" participation, which according to them means that "participation has a positive impact on the transformation of young people's living conditions."

One could indeed argue that the UNCRC right to children’s participation is not only the most widely agreed right children have, it is also the one right that aims to 'empower' children. By this we mean that it serves as a tool for affected children "to assume greater
control over their own lives and achieve structural change in the society they live leading to positive and sustainable change" (Hart, 2004).

However, VeneKlasen and Miller (2002) state that "participation is empowering only when those who participate make decisions and choices", which would entail that only active participation serves the goal of empowerment. ALNAP (2003) states that "participation that empowers individuals to represent themselves can have a positive impact on their safety (increased capacity to negotiate with authorities, for example)."

Cleaver (2001) argues that, like 'participation', 'empowerment' has become a buzzword and that 'its radical, challenging and transformatory edge has been lost'. If the abovementioned statements are indeed true, only active participation empowers, and only challenging, transformatory empowerment makes truly a difference in children's lives. This, according to Shier (2001) however is not often the case, since at the lower levels of decision-making power where children generally reside "children can be said to be empowered only in the weaker sense meaning 'strengthened' or 'supported', but not in the stronger sense meaning that those who hold power give up some of it in their favour. Decision making remains the province of adults".

If due to the element of power, empowerment is proofing difficult to establish, we could also try to express the effects of participation in relation to 'well-being'. White and Pettit (2004) state that "participatory approaches have an important contribution to make in defining well-being, and ensuring that we do so in ways that genuinely reflect people's own perspectives". Secondly, they claim that "participation has much to offer in showing what goods and relationships are most important for people to have in particular contexts and what not having such key assets means in terms of poverty and vulnerability". Cornwall and Pratt (2002) also found that the participatory method was useful in "identifying improved quality of life according to local standards".

The abovementioned could be rephrased in terms of the 'three Ps': participation can show us what children claim to be most important in terms of provision and protection, which, if indeed acted upon either directly or indirectly, leads to a state of well-being. To be able to (actively) participate can than be seen as the element of empowerment, the most when children have a say in the allocation of resources.

**Empowerment: just for the chosen ones?**

"One of the most undermining criticisms of any participation activity is that those involved are not representative" (Hill et al. 2004). According to Hill, to be arguing on either side of this argument, we should distinguish first of all representation in the statistical sense of the word, where a sample of people is generalized across an entire population, from representation in a political sense, where one person is elected to voice the views of a larger electoral group. Both definitions of representation differ from 'participation' and its statistical or political 'use'.

Statistically, surveys could provide a sample of children's views, assuming that children will be able to voice their opinion in a 'tick-a-box' kind of way. Politically, they would have to vote, to which they do not have the right. But even if organisations find a comprehensible and ethical way to let children participate, that does not necessarily mean that all children will be able to express their opinion to the adults working with them. Lack of confidence, shyness, a previous experience of not being listened to, no culture of participation or inadequate communication or lack of language skills on behalf of the staff member, the list of reasons why children might not be able to voice their concerns is long.

A supportive environment could aid in solving these issues, but according to White & Choudhury (2007) that is not enough. In a long experience-based example they point out several other negative effects participation can have for children. The main reason being that child participation "does not simply challenge existing forms of power (within development
programmes, ed.), it also becomes itself a means through which power is expressed." They suggest that certain 'luxuries', material or immaterial, are incentives for children to participate. The additional status that comes with participating, for instance, can be both "concentrating and exclusive, at once associating a very small number of chosen children to the development industry and dissociating them from the majority they are claimed to represent." Also the "bias towards attractive, articulate, middle-class participants, with a tendency to reproduce the patterns of exclusion in wider society- by age, class, gender and disability", makes some children more likely to participate in the long run than others. Well-behaved, timely children who meet organisational deadlines might be hard to find amongst drug addicted street children, for instance, and similarly, a child with a hearing impairment will, like in all other aspects of his or her life, have difficulty to participate.

**Security risks of participating**

"Although protection activities per se remain the responsibility of legally mandated institutions", such as UNHCR, ICRC and UNICEF, "humanitarian organisations still have a responsibility at two levels: ensuring that humanitarian interventions do not increase the security risks to the affected population (the 'do-no-harm approach') and instead, that integrating measures into technical programmes reinforce the protection of affected populations" (ALNAP, 2003).

Participation can be seen as an aspect that aids in achieving participation, as we discussed in 'Participation as a means to achieve protection', unfortunately, there are also risks attached to participatory activities, especially when concerning children, undermining the 'do-no-harm'-approach. Jason Hart (2004) points out some of the challenges which potentially can become risks when children participate in the humanitarian response. First of all, he points to the fact that "in an unstable political and security climate simply bringing people together for activities may entail risk." Especially when working with adolescents, "activities that require large numbers of young people to gather in a public place may (...) create anxiety amongst military authorities, leading to possible harassment or other problems." This could lead to humanitarian projects "suspending or scaling back their activities in the response".

The gathering of adolescents, but also younger children could also entail the risk that fighting forces see an opportunity for recruitment efforts. Especially in the case of remote monitoring, simply providing a space for young people to meet in some context can lead to the risk that political elements are introduced to activities. "Participatory activities may raise the profile of (child) participants. Furthermore the leadership and other skills that they develop through their involvement in child-led initiatives, may make them especially attractive (to rebel armies, ed.) on the one hand and highly suspicious to the (...) army on the other." It is therefore key that authorities are aware of the fact that activities do "not relate to the ongoing conflict" (Hart, 2004).

Apart from military forces, 'normal' power relations may pose an additional threat. The fact that "participatory activities can lead young people to take action or speak about issues that local adults find objectionable or which are perceived as a challenge to existing power relations. This is a concern at all times but in a setting where the threshold of violence may be particularly low the consequence of threatening adults in this way requires special consideration", and the same goes for adults being unhappy about the "mixing of boys and girls", especially in societies where "in societies in which a strong hierarchy based upon age (and gender) exist.", considering the possibility that 'the only area in which many adults retain a feeling of their own ability to exert authority is in respect of their children" (Hart, 2004).

In such cases, to insist on children's participation "would clearly run the risk of upsetting a certain section of the community creating a negative backlash." Also, when children participate in peace-building efforts, this could put them at risk "from those opposed
to peace efforts and intercommunal exchange. Visibility in an unstable political environment always entails risk and encouraging children to hold views and espouse values that are not endorsed by many adults, particularly those holding power, only adds to the potential danger. (...) If such risks appear likely, then it may be necessary to consider how the views of children can be represented without their direct involvement in person" (Hart, 2004) The tendency for some agencies to use pictures and names of participating children for PR-purposes, therefore, is especially warned against in some settings.

**Participation as an organisational goal**

According to the ALNAP handbook of participation of crisis-affected populations in humanitarian action (2003) "Participation is a means of achieving programme goals. If applied in a relevant manner, and in a way that respects the rhythms and capacities of the affected population, it can lead to the strengthening of these competencies. But doing so is not an objective in itself." The reasons for this are that "humanitarian action formulated with affected populations is often better adapted to the needs and the local context. As a result, it is more relevant, efficient and effective."

Also Sphere states that "Explicit efforts to listen to, consult and engage people at an early stage will increase quality and community management later in the programme" (Sphere, 2011). The goal of participation of disaster affected community members as a whole can thus be seen as a means to improve aid quality and effectiveness. Also Hart (2004) mentions the "assumption that stakeholder participation improves the accountability, effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian interventions. In other words, participation is viewed as a means to an end, which is the delivery of effective projects."

However, that this relationship is not a direct one, but that 'participation' can in fact turn from opposite into negative effects, is underlined by ALNAP: "One should be careful not to slip (...) to outright manipulation of populations, CBOs or local committees, which might result in project failure, or even weakening of local capacities and to security problems for aid workers." The key factor to successfully implement participation is claimed to be ownership: "Involving the affected population from the outset establishes a level of ownership that will help to increase the intervention's chance of success and its longer-term connectedness and/or sustainability" ALNAP (2003).

Similarly, Stevenson (2007) argues that 'the intermediate factor between young people being involved in creating and managing projects and the increased success of such projects is the increased sense of 'ownership'. This feeling of ownership in turn encourages the contribution of ideas and actions'. So, according to Stevenson, child and youth participation lead to a project designed with them, and figuratively speaking, this makes the project more 'tailored'. Stevenson states a long list of (other) intermediating factors between child participation and project effectiveness: new ideas and different ways of doing things; decision making is better adjusted to children's needs and interests; feedback on current effectiveness; peer to peer outreach efforts; increased availability of human resources; higher acceptance of messages, services and decisions and increased credibility of the organisation. Terlonge (2010) also points out the 'peer-to-peer outreach efforts'. She mentions that children can be helpful in identifying other children or adults who may be in need of special assistance, since they are "often very aware of what is going on in their community".

Stevenson (2007) links his list of intermediating factors between child participation and project effectiveness to the earlier mentioned customer oriented approach: "it is accepted that the effectiveness of services depend on listening and responding to customers. Giving children and young people an active say in how policies and services are developed, provided, evaluated and improved, should ensure that policies and services more genuinely meet their needs".
However logical these arguments above are, both Hart's 'assumption' that stakeholder participation has positive effects on project outcomes and Stevenson's 'accepted' customer-orientation, and similar research stating numerous examples, does not verify nor falsify a claim that participation has any kind of influence (be it positive, negative or none at all) on project outcomes. Most, if not all, of the literature on (children's) participation (in humanitarian action) did not use scientific methods to test assumptions on the effects associated with participation.

Although, Sphere, ALNAP and Jason Hart's have been extensive in their research, documentation of their research methods and -results on the effects of participation has not been published. For instance, ALNAP's Handbook, under the heading 'Benefits of participation' (page 23) states that "Field research carried out as a part of the Global Study (2003) highlights the reasons and motivations for engaging in participatory processes with affected populations." Also Ackermann et al (2003), in a review of contemporary literature "Understanding & Evaluating Children's Participation, Children in Development" for PLAN UK/Plan International, use the phrasing "Whether in relation to projects that focus on issues of specific concern to the young (Lansdown, 2003) or within processes of development in the wider community (Philips, 2000), children's participation is considered to lead to better decision-making. Furthermore, in the view of some, working with children may be the most effective way of bringing issues of concern within the community as a whole since the young are less inhibited in their discussion of matters otherwise considered 'sensitive'." Again, logical statements, based on literature research, but all rather permissive. If we research some of the (extensive) list of references used by Ackerman et al, we find that for instance, Lansdown (2003), in the World Youth Report chapter on Youth participation states that "Youth participation leads to better decisions and outcomes", but uses no evidence-based arguments or literature references to back this claim, yet states that "there is a growing body of evidence indicating that when adults are exposed to effective participatory practise, they invariably recognize that many of their concerns (about child participation, ed.) are based on misconceptions". Accepting the fact that people might be persuaded by positive examples (which is indeed more logical than if they were persuaded by negative examples), we would like to point to the fact that defining whether participation leads, or at least aids, successful outcomes is what is missing from these claims.

Samuel Paul, in a discussion paper on community participation in development projects for the World Bank (1987), is one of the few that publishes research results of the effects of participation on the effectiveness of projects. He states that "effectiveness of a project demands that project services are congruent with beneficiary needs and preferences. Where they do not match, project goals are unlikely to be achieved. He states that the two major contributions of planned community participation in his research were, firstly, that new services or activities were introduced or existing ones modified in line with beneficiary preferences and secondly that potential clients were motivated to use project services, thereby mobilizing demand.

Secondly, Paul mentions three projects where participation was introduced after the project ran into beneficiary dissatisfaction. He mentions that two useful insights emerged from this. Firstly, beneficiaries have needs which may not be apparent to outsiders and second of all that beneficiaries have preferences which have to be analysed and understood. Therefore, he sees community participation as a way to gain knowledge on beneficiary needs and attributes which can help project design and demand mobilization. Considering this article was written in 1987, it does underline why doing needs assessments has become common practise since than, but it does not show additional results for participation on effectiveness in the whole of project cycle management.
On efficiency, he states that participation can lead to cost savings through a reduction or elimination of delays in implementation due to misunderstandings or conflicts between project staff and beneficiaries and secondly, improved maintenance of project services and facilities. Both of these arguments might not apply when we talk about children's participation, considering implementation or maintenance of a project is not often the responsibility of children.

The added value of Paul's research is his research into successful projects without participation. In ten projects participation was not considered to be relevant or feasible for three reasons. In some projects, staff assessment pointed out that forcing community participation under the condition that they did not have a tradition of participation would be counterproductive, as conflict might surface. Paul does not mention whether the assessment of these traditional practices and the probability of conflict is done by the organisation or the beneficiaries themselves.

In those cases where communities did have 'a tradition of participation', the incentive for participation was nevertheless low when the project was not considered a primary need by beneficiaries, for instance when the project was aimed at a natural resource that was not scarce, and had always been sufficiently delivered by the government. A third reason to be reluctant in carrying out community participation was when it was believed a certain amount of expertise was necessary for project success, such as the case with medical or engineering projects.

In summary, why these projects were considered to be successful, even though participation of the community was not implemented, was that people were informed, therefore participating passively, but that participants did not feel the need to actively participate in decision making, or did not have the tradition to do so.

We have to take into consideration that some contextual circumstances, might not make it possible to generalize the effects of child participation across settings, for instance from one community to another, or from development to humanitarian projects. Edwards & Davis (2004) underline the need to study the effects of poverty and lack of material resources on the ability of children and young people to participate effectively.

Concluding, we would like to state that the often strong assumptions on the effects of child participation on project outcomes made by some of the academics or field experienced researchers should be read with some scrutiny by the reader. Lansdown (in Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010) advocates for: clarity of the definition of "participation in the context of children's rights"; to hold governments to account; the need to redefine children's capacities and the nature of childhood and the need for indicators to measure participation. We would like to point out that there is also a need to do more scientific and less exemplary research to the effects of child participation on humanitarian projects.

One suggestion to measure the 'success' of a project is truly in the spirit of children's participation: "Participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) needs to be seen as an integral part of a rights based approach, with clear guidelines to engage children and adults regarding their different perspectives of success." (Chawla & Johnson in IIED 2004).

**Participation as an organisational goal: to be trusted or being trustworthy?**

"Child participation, like community participation generally, can be manipulated to serve predetermined goals. Given the dictates of result-oriented funding, project goals are usually established in advance of participant involvement, especially under conditions that emphasize efficiency and timely action. Doing so reduces the space for authentic involvement in project design and implementation" (Hart, 2008). Hart paints a negative picture in this regard: "consultations often lead to publications in which children are represented as speaking in one
voice, commonly expressing sentiments that mirror the values, mandate or agenda of the organisations involved.

Terlonge (2007) seems to share this pessimism somewhat: "Children are the most photographed and least listened to victims of disaster". Even USAID (2002), the largest humanitarian donor in the world itself, points to the aspect of 'utilizing children' for PR purposes: "Further, children are attractive for public relations efforts. War-affected children can easily be commodified. Images of children in dialogue with adults may be used for symbolic capital to impress project funders, even though children's participation may have little real influence in the dynamics of decision-making. Participation may even result in further disillusionment and frustration." Considering that "the language of rights is now virtually mandatory for (...) agencies that wish to attract outside funding for their work with children" (USAID, 2002).

Organizational pitfalls to children's participation

Besides the associated security risks, direct negative impacts of participatory activities could also add an extra burden to the already expanded roles and responsibilities of some or even most children in complex humanitarian settings, for instance in the case of child labour or child headed households. Whatever their responsibilities, children should never feel an "undue responsibility for the moral and physical reconstruction of their communities., nor should it "become a substitute for the continued efforts of adult members in their communities, of human rights organisations and the international community at large" (Hart, 2004). Also here monitoring is central to make sure this does not happen. Unrealistic expectations can lead to feelings of failure and despondency, especially when children "lack a sufficiently detailed understanding of the wider political context." The same goes for not letting children participate in a meaningful way. "We might call this approach 'participation-in-a-box', containing the energy ideas and activities generated without implementing them, only leading to frustration and disappointment" (Hart, 2008).

Thorburn (2008) mentions negative consequences of humanitarian aid on cultural practices in his description of village government three years after the tsunami. The cultural practise of gotong-royong, community voluntary self-help, a cultural concept and tradition throughout Indonesia, was supposedly negatively impacted through cash-for-work programmes, as one interview respondent to Thorburn's research explains: "The youth here, most have been 'damaged' by cash-for-work. They're spoiled, don't want to work, just wait for the aid money." But as another interview respondent mentioned, he thought this was mainly the case for certain NGOs that were not well managed, NGOs that "just handed out projects, used up their budget, not concerned about effectiveness." This example does not constitute active participation, where decisions are made with youth, pointing out their rights as well as their responsibilities, just the active participation of them in manual labour. However these negative consequences have to be taken into account when planning participatory projects.

"Many projects fail to achieve tangible outcomes because they are inappropriately selective in the types of children they recruit, do not enable children to take decision-making positions, and fail to create long term dialogue between children and decision-makers" (Tisdall and Davis, 2004). Besides these 'adult-centred' and passive approaches to participation, there are more aspects that are counterproductive to children's participation.

Putting too much emphasis on aspects of vulnerability of children, and not enough on their resilience, can be another barrier to their participation. This can be a matter of organisational policy on how to deal with 'cross-cutting issues' such as children. Whether this cross-cutting issue is formulated as 'vulnerabilities' or 'special needs' could already make a world of difference: "Experience has shown that treating (...) people as a long list of 'vulnerable groups' can lead to fragmented and ineffective interventions, which ignore
overlapping vulnerabilities and the changing nature of vulnerabilities over time, even during one specific crisis" (Sphere, 2011).

Certain organisations, mainly Save the Children and UNICEF, have, at least at policy level, identified the importance of language and the organizations' 'accessibility'. With practice guidelines to improve organisational outings and communications "to make participatory processes accessible for everyone" they try to overcome the barrier of organisational 'adult' or 'formal' language towards beneficiaries, and specifically children (Save the Children, 2000). But is it just a matter of language and communication outwards that needs to be changed, or are more 'inward' processes also in need of change?

Shier (2001), as discussed before, emphasized the organisational 'openings' that represent policy elements that need to be changed. Chambers and Pettit (2004) examined aid organisations and argue that there are four barriers to systematic organisational change to include participatory approaches: "the invisibility of the governing dynamics of power; dominant language; fixed rules and procedures that reinforce existing power relations; and a lack of critical internal reflection. Organisational understanding of how hierarchy and power relations can restrict learning and reinforce upward accountability is still a rarity."

**Does the humanitarian community practise what it preaches?**

"Of course, the CRC, and its introduction of the concept of participation for children, didn't appear out of a vacuum. There was a range of groups (NGOs, campaigning groups focussing on education, child labour, abuse issues etc.) who were pushing for participation as a feature of children's rights" (Skelton, 2007). But even though NGOs have collectively pushed for the right to participation to be implemented, most organisations do not seem as keen to practise what they preach. For instance: "Although most, if not all, Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies target children with interventions and activities in disaster response or preparedness programs, it is not yet common practice within the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement to prioritise children's participation" (Terlonge, 2010).

"While child-focused organizations have increased their focus and efforts to engage children as participants in community programs and activities in the past 20 years, this practise has yet to spread significantly to other organizations" (Terlonge, 2010). This lack of child participation implementation seems to be the case for the more needs-based organisations, but even the most child oriented rights-based organisations seem to be more child rights committed in their policies than in practise: “Staff at UNICEF and Save the Children UK have said that the transition to human rights programming has been made at a policy level, but it has certainly not yet “trickled down” into the majority of their programming.” (Woll, 2001)

Even though most organisations experience a ‘gap’ between policy and practise, between child-oriented organisations there are also some differences in children's participation, as Woll (2001) discovered in her research: “Save the Children Sweden was amongst the first large, international institutions to change its working methods in response to the CRC. UNICEF and Save the Children United Kingdom followed soon thereafter. In contrast, Save the Children United States has not reacted very strongly to the CRC, and the CRC has had an uneven effect on PLAN and World Vision. Similarly, the institutions vary in their responses to calls for increased child participation and to the demands that concerns for human rights place on their organizations in regard to advocacy and policy” (Woll, 2001).

“For agency workers and the wider citizenry to ensure that developmental efforts lead to meaningful change, it seems essential that the aid relationship is reformulated” (Hart, 2008). This could very well be the case for child participation. The more rights-based and child-oriented organisations are, the more common the term 'child participation' is, at least in
But to move from child participation policy to child participation mainstreaming is a long way to go still, so it seems.

**Sub conclusion chapter 4:**

**Sub research question 4:** *To what extent does children’s participation in the humanitarian (non-governmental) response create opportunities or benefits, and to what extent does it entail challenges or risks, at the political, organizational and personal level?*

Hart (2008) describes that the greatest potential for children’s participation is that it could overcome ‘adultism’ in humanitarian agencies, “ideally changing the asymmetry of power constructed around distinctions of age”. However, as Hart explains “The agenda-setting for children’s participation, the pursuit of a politics of identity, might have taken the place of a politics of redistribution.” This, in summary could be described as the ‘Achilles heel’ of children’s participation, as both provision, protection and participation rights are necessary to create well-being, according to the UNCRC. In West’s (2004) terms, we should not loose focus on the political product over the political process of children’s participation. According to West, participatory activity can be both collective and individual, leading to change on both dimensions. This could ultimately result in the change of social institutions as well as providing a means of inclusive collective problem solving.

The risk herein lays that (child) participation could be used as means of co-option and silencing politically. It has the risk to divert responsibility of international and intergovernmental organizations to tackle global and local problems of poverty, inequality and exploitation. To create more ‘Western-minded’ adults of the future should never be the leading force in participatory efforts. UNICEF’s (2003) statement that child participation leads to a deepening of democracy “in the context of growing international terrorism”, and that “democracy starts with children” is a quite disturbing one in this regard.

However, children’s participation is not something new, as they have always participated in life: in their home, in school, in work (domestic chores, but unfortunately also in child labour), in their communities and most unfortunately also in wars. Effective participation, which has a positive impact on the transformation of young people’s living conditions is more of an instrument to change the status quo of ongoing participation in children’s daily lives.

Child participation can define well-being, what children wish *to have* and what *not having* means to them in terms of well-being. It can “identify improved quality of life, according to local standards” (Cornwall and Pratt, 2002). Participation can show us what children claim to be most important in terms of provision and protection, which, if acted upon directly or indirectly leads to a heightened level of well-being. When children have a say in the allocation of resources by means of active participation would account for truly empowering them.

If organisations find a comprehensible and ethical way to let children participate, a supportive environment is necessary for children to be able to express their ‘voice’. On the other hand, a risk that comes with an ‘enabling’ environment is that it can become so enabling to specific children that children’s participation can itself become “a means through which power is expressed” (White and Choudhury, 2007). Certain luxuries and the status that children gain by participating in INGOs activities could ‘dissociate’ children from the very social structures that they are claimed to represent. The bias towards “attractive, articulate, middle-class” children has the “tendency to reproduce the patterns of exclusion in wider society, by age, class, gender and disability” (White and Choudhury 2007).
Children’s participation has to be implemented in ways that do not increase the security risks and instead reinforce the protection of children (ALNAP, 2003). Hart (2004) mentions that ‘in an unstable political and security climate simply bringing people together for activities may entail risk, especially when working with adolescents’. It entails risks for recruitment in armed forces by raising children’s profiles and improving their (leadership) skills. These two factors simultaneously make them attractive to rebel armies on the one hand and highly suspicious to the government on the other hand. Clear communication to authorities that activities are not of a political nature is key in this regard.

Also challenging existing ‘normal’ power relations at lower levels may entail risks, especially in situations where the threshold for violence is low. Mixing boys and girls, or encouraging children to have views that oppose their parents’ views can pose a risk. To implement indirect children’s participation and not using names and pictures for PR purposes could be a solution in these instances.

Organisational gains to children’s participation lie within the fields of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, quality and community management. The increased stakeholder participation which arises from children’s participation is said to improve accountability as well (ALNAP, 2003). Increased availability of human resources, higher acceptance of messages and services as well as increased credibility of the organisation are intermediating factors between child participation and project effectiveness.

However, literature on children’s participation in humanitarian action seems to lack in the use of scientific methods to test assumptions on the effects associated with participation, or at least a lack of documentation. Instead, overuse of exemplary evidence is the case in most research.

For elements of the project cycle which require a certain level of expertise, children’s direct and active participation may be out of reach. However, informing children is also part of article 12, so at least passive participation is still an option in most cases. The same goes for participatory assessments, monitoring and evaluation, as children might have a different perspective on what constitutes ‘success’. The dictates of result-oriented funding, projects often being designed in advance of participant involvement, make this latter point a quite problematic factor.

Utilizing children for PR purposes, using children to impress project funders, and meanwhile not implementing active children’s participation goes against the UNCRC, Code of Conduct and many other prescriptions how to act as a humanitarian agency. Organizations must realise this might lead to short-term result in terms of funding, but that they lose long-term organizational credibility and effectiveness long term. Unrealistic expectations should be avoided, to not further create disillusionment and frustration.

UNICEF and Save the Children, amongst others, underline the importance of the organizations’ accessibility by means of language and proper external communication, adjusted to children’s level. Meanwhile it is as important to counter the more inward institutional process of treating children’s input as ‘participation-in-a-box’. Chambers and Petit (2004) identify a couple of factors as barriers to systematic organisational change to include child participatory processes: dominant language; the invisibility of governing dynamics of power; fixed rules and procedures that reinforce existing power relations and a lack of critical internal reflection.

Child participation is not yet common practise in humanitarian agencies at field level. This goes for needs-based organizations, but as well for child-oriented rights based organizations. Children’s rights programming has, as we could see in the preceding chapter not yet fully been implemented at policy level, but when it has, this does not mean it has trickled down into the majority of programmes. “Institutions vary largely in their response to calls for increased child participation” (Woll, 2001). It seems essential that the aid
relationship is going to be reformulated (Hart, 2008) to move to humanitarian action where child participation is mainstream policy as well as practised as such at the field level.
Discussion

In this thesis we examined the participation rights as part of the United Nations Convention to the Rights of the Child, specifically in the non-governmental humanitarian response. Children are overrepresented as victims, or positively stated, survivors, of humanitarian emergencies. The subsequent challenges facing them and the responsibilities expected of them are similarly to the responsibilities of adults.

By means of this thesis we tried to examine whether they are equally represented in the response to these emergencies. We tried to determine whether their ‘best interest’, ‘well-being’ and in the longer term their ‘empowerment’ is served. Our main research question guiding this research was: To what extent is children’s participation in the humanitarian (non-governmental) response a goal in itself, and to what extent is it a means to an end?

Our research was guided by four sub research questions, moving from the international arena to field level and finally the overarching opportunities and challenges. Sub research question 1 focused on the international convention itself: To what extent does the UNCRC provide a normative framework for children’s participation in the humanitarian response? The UNCRC has provided children, and the humanitarian community that aims to serve them, with a human rights instrument covering the full range of rights, adding the ‘participation’ component to the already existing two other ‘Ps’, provision and protection. By making participation a fundamental principle to the UNCRC, it has made children rights holders, instead of mere recipients of humanitarian aid.

The entitlement to these rights means they are to benefit from the action of others. This on the part of the humanitarian community has created an obligation, and at the minimum raised the expectation and the golden standard for humanitarian agencies to ‘advance children’s rights’. The goals that should guide their action are stipulated in the UNCRC in short- to medium-term as having to ensure the best interest and well-being of the child, and long term to establish social inclusion, development and empowerment.

The limits to the normative standard that is the UNCRC, is that it merely grants the right to take part in decision making, but the UNCRC does not prescribe to what extent. The main decider on informed decisions what is ultimately in the child’s best interest remains the ‘province’ of adults, prioritizing ‘nurturance rights’ over participation rights. The UNCRC has set the norm constituting a child to be a human being under 18 years old, and lets adults decide what the level of maturity of each individual child is. This provides children with a ‘two-faced competence’ as legal subjects, with adults determining a child’s capability to exercise these ‘halfway-to-autonomy rights’.

The UNCRC does provide children with a very limited ‘right to challenge’. Because the possibility to enforce rights is limited, this increases the risk of all rights to be ‘void’ and the possibility of ‘window-dressing’ of states and humanitarian organizations. However, it has increased the profile of human rights for children in a time when the state is much less willing or able to do so, making the humanitarian community more and more a duty bearer of these rights.

Concluding, the UNCRC has ‘raised’ the standard to a more ambitious and far-reaching level of children’s participation than ever before, but it does not provide a lot of direction, leaving all leeway for the process of children’s participation with adults. Thereby, the UNCRC has not changed the status quo to the extent that it aimed for, as it is still a humanitarian organizational choice whether the short- to medium- goals of well-being and best interest are served by these organizations. All accountability structures remain to be a matter between the organization and its child beneficiaries, not its right holders. The longer-

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term goal of personal empowerment of children, which could ultimately make them autonomous, within the normative framework that the UNCRC provides us with, seems for now too ambitious.

Our second chapter aimed to deal with the former, whether the humanitarian community had responded in an affirmative way to the UNCRC’s participatory components. Our sub research question 2 being: To what extent does the humanitarian (non-governmental) community prioritize and implement children’s participation at policy level? The Code of Conduct, established a couple of years after the UNCRC, has made full community participation to be a humanitarian principle, making it an ethical standard, a commitment, that intended beneficiaries are involved in the design, management and implementation of humanitarian programming. Children are not specifically mentioned in this regard. There is a risk of a perceived clash between the principle of participation and the core principles of the Code, however. This has not led organizations to exclude participation, but it does entail that to some signatories of the Code it is not a priority.

We examined leading accountability initiatives of the humanitarian community, and to what extent they covered accountability to child beneficiaries, in other words to what extent they made recommendations on how humanitarian organizations should deal with ‘child participation right holders’. The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) ‘Handbook for Practitioners on Participation by Crisis-affected Populations in Humanitarian Action’ (2003) as well as the Sphere Project’s Handbook ‘Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response’ (2004, 2011) both refer to the UNCRC as a key document. Although a shift in standard setting is apparent when it comes to children and participation in subsequent versions of Sphere, participation is mostly described to serve protection rights. Especially Sphere describes children in terms of ‘needs of the most vulnerable’, thereby not building upon their competence as right holders, especially considering the assessment of risk and vulnerability is often in the hands of adults, not children.

Several researchers have aimed to identify ways in which organizations should let children participate, and to establish to what extent they have done so far. We compared, amongst others, Shier’ (2001) model of Pathways to Participation and Lansdown’s (2005) Organizational Benchmarks to Child-Rights Programming, and identified Shier as the most ambitious one in terms of children’s participation. Lansdown’s model implies a more top-down approach to implementation, whereas Shier builds more upon the personal commitment of organizational members, but at the same time warns us for the enormity of the task to tackle “processes and challenging the structures that would contain the transformational potential of children’s participation”. Ackerman et al (2003) identified three of those major challenges: in understanding participation, a lack of genuine senior level commitment to democratic participatory approaches and lack of capacity and skills in facilitating and communicating with children.

Inter-organizational learning in this regard, is identified by Harris-Curtis et al (2005) as being somewhat opposed by donor pressure to perform efficiently and to focus on outcomes over processes. Combined with a different understanding of rights-based approach between donors and their funding partners, this makes it difficult to implement child participation (Harris-Curtis et al, 2005). The instrumental value aid still has to many government institutions behind humanitarian donor agencies (Hart, 2004; Harris-Curtis et al, 2005), also raises the suspicion that it is not so much the ‘best interest of the child’ which is leading the allocation of resources but their own, by that bypassing their signature to the UNCRC.
Even though all humanitarian principles and standards also apply to children, according to UNICEF (2007): “as a subgroup children are frequently ignored and left out of consideration”, which has led UNICEF to endorse Save the Children’s Child Participation Standards (2008). This to challenge power structures and discrimination inherent to structures and cultures, which according to UNICEF has lead to increased vulnerability of children.

Mainstreaming child participation, including all aspects of the project cycle, does not seem to be common practise yet. Notwithstanding the abundance in methods and tools provided by the more child-oriented humanitarian organizations, ‘meaningful’, ‘active’, ‘true’, ‘effective’, ‘non-tokenistic’ and ‘child-friendly’ participation remains in a ‘virtual box on the shelf’, and is described by most researchers in terms of ‘add-on’, ‘pet-like’ projects.

Concluding, the humanitarian (non-governmental) community does not prioritize children’s participation at policy level, and therefore most organizations treat it as an ‘optional extra’. This is in a lesser degree the case for the more children’s rights-based agencies. Especially Save the Children and UNICEF are in a leading position of discovering the territory of child participation in humanitarian situations. However, the focus seems to be more on providing methods and tools than on strategies how to change the status quo top-down, establishing senior level commitment as well as advocating with donor organizations.

In chapter 3 we shifted our focus from policy level to the field to discover whether humanitarian agencies on the ground find opportunities and challenges in trying to implement child participation as prescribed by the UNCRC. Do operational and contextual factors contribute the process of child participation or are they detrimental to it? Sub research question 3 states: To what extent does the humanitarian operational context influence children’s participation in the humanitarian response at field level? In this chapter we found that organisational learning and continuity in the interface with the community are essential ingredients for child participation. A lack of financial resources, high staff turn-over (inherent to the nature of humanitarian action, but also to donor funding conditions) and a lack of time are contributing negatively to child participation.

However, these factors do not need to be barriers to implementation of child participation in the field. We argued that trust building is a prerequisite process for humanitarian relief, and that by doing so organizations might actually save time in the end. Children, especially adolescents, could contribute valuably to the humanitarian response, and often already do so without cooperating with agencies. It would not only be unethical not to include them in the humanitarian agencies’ processes, it could also counter time and human resource constraints, although this should never be the leading motive to let children participate. Trust building is not simply aided by just any means of participation. By letting children participate actively transparency and dispersion of power are the intermediating factors in trust building.

Secondly we discussed the cultural differences and universal similarities in ‘labels’ that are attached to children by adults that are exposed by language, bodily posture, non-verbal behaviour and the arrangement of space and furniture. The universal similarity seems to be that children are rarely accorded the same respect and attention as adults.

Cultural differences lie in the fact that the definition of a child extends in most cultures beyond age limits, for instance in Ghana a child is the youngest person in any group. Also the concept of participation has different meanings in different languages and cultures, as well as different goals. These differences might even be regionally, therefore it is important not to institutionalise them, but to treat cultural systems as dynamic and diverse.

Assumptions about the right or wrong of the conceptualisation of children’s participation have the risk of being counterproductive, opposing already existing traditional
child participation practises. This would also mean agencies would miss out on the benefits or potential (non-Western) influences have to offer to other (‘Western’) conceptualisations.

Child participation is also a strategy, to take into account the realities of girls’ and boys’ daily lives, of all different backgrounds and the differences in needs they have, all the more so in humanitarian settings. Lists of stereotypically marginalized children will do little good to see which children are most at risk in humanitarian situations, as risk is an interplay of factors. Peer-to-peer outreach can be used as an organizational instrument in this regard. To harness the impartiality of aid given, additional assessment by outsiders will be beneficial to the most socially marginalized.

Lastly, we would like to conclude that children’s participation is feasible from the emergency phase onwards, and as can be seen from the abovementioned, there seems to be more to gain from child participation than there is to lose. However, many academics and practitioners state that children’s participation entails significantly more risk in conflict situations. On the other hand, as Jason Hart’s extensive research (2004) on this issue underlines, the potential for children’s participation in situations of conflict is also one of the most undiscovered territories in humanitarian action. On the one hand we should consider the negative influence (protracted) crises have on the development of children, and on the other hand we should consider the positive and the negative influence participation has on protection. We would like to conclude this is an area that deserves more attention, especially when it comes to pre-adolescents. We will discuss these aspects more in-depth in the next section, where we discuss the risks and opportunities of participation.

We did so by grouping opportunities and risks stated by academics and practitioners under three headings: the political level, the personal level and the organizational level. **Sub research question 4**: therefore states *To what extent does children’s participation in the humanitarian (non-governmental) response create opportunities or benefits, and to what extent does it entail challenges or risks, at the political, organizational and personal level?*

For the political level we found that the main opportunity was to overcome ‘adultism’ in the humanitarian response, “ideally changing the asymmetry of power constructed around distinctions of age” (Hart, 2008). The ultimate benefit of participation lies in changing the social/political institutions as well as a means of inclusive collective problem solving for society as a whole.

The risks on this level are that participation could be used as a means of co-option, silencing children. It has the risk of diverting responsibility of international and intergovernmental organizations to tackle global and local problems of poverty, inequality and exploitation. A focus on establishing values of democracy and equality in the ‘hearts and minds’ to counteract terrorism should never be the leading force in child participatory efforts.

On the personal level, the ultimate opportunity could be stated as ‘effective’ participation: to create positive impact on the transformation of young people’s living conditions. Secondly, participation can “identify improved quality of life, according to local standards” (Cornwall and Pratt, 2002), defining ‘well-being’ and ‘best interest’ in children’s terms and conditions. Participation can show us what children need in terms of provision and participation. For children to have a say in the allocation of resources would account for truly empowering them.

A risk of children’s participation lies in the exclusive nature of it socially. “Participation can become a means through which power is expressed” (White and Choudhury, 2007), the luxuries and status that *some* children gain by participating in an INGO’s activities could mean they “dissociate children from the very social structures that they are claimed to represent”. The bias agencies have towards “attractive, articulate, middle-class children” has the tendency to “reproduce the patterns of exclusion”.

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Also security risks are worth considerate attention, especially in situations of armed conflict. Simply bringing people together for activities may entail risk. Raising the profile of individual children and improving their skills makes them more attractive for recruitment for armed forces and raises suspicion with government forces, for instance. Also, to challenge existing ‘normal’ power relations, for instance mixing boys and girls or encouraging children to oppose their parents’ views, can pose a risk, especially in situations with a low threshold of violence.

On the organisational level benefits are stated as increases in: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and quality. Also increased availability of human resources, higher acceptance of messages and services as well as increased credibility of the organisation, which result in better community management and accountability, are claimed to be the benefits of children’s participation in humanitarian action. These claims on the effects of children’s participation do suffer from a lack of (documentation of) scientific methods to test assumptions, and an overuse of exemplary evidence.

The challenges to children’s participation for the organizational level are those activities which require expertise, which would exclude active participation, but still leaves the option for informed decisions, ‘passive’ participation. Secondly, the dictates of result-oriented funding, and projects often being designed in advance of (child) participant involvement excludes the possibility for participatory assessments, monitoring and evaluation.

The risk for organizations lies in using children merely for PR-purposes to impress project funders, without implementing active participation. Another external communication pitfall is a lack of ‘accessibility’, using too formal and ‘adult’ language. Besides dominant language other barriers to systematic organizational change have been identified by Chambers and Petit (2004) as the invisibility of governing dynamics of power, fixed rules and procedures that reinforce existing power relations and a lack of critical internal reflection.

We concluded by stating that child participation in humanitarian action is not yet common practise, this is the case for humanitarian agencies at policy level, but as much if not more at field level. When children’s rights programming has been implemented at policy level, it does not mean it has ‘trickled down’ into the majority of programmes. “Institutions vary largely in their response to calls for increased child participation.” (Woll, 2001).

Conclusion

Our main research question guiding this research was: To what extent is children’s participation in the humanitarian (non-governmental) response a goal in itself, and to what extent is it a means to an end?

Like we postulated the non-governmental humanitarian community does use participation as a means more than they use it as a goal in itself. As of yet humanitarian organisations do not share their power with children and even though they intent to use the ideas children have, they have failed to use the full potential children’s participation has to offer. Below we discuss our recommendations to academics and practitioners.

The legal status of non-state actors, including (I)NGOs, has changed in recent years, as explained in our theoretical framework. However, this is not apparent from the accountability structures (I)NGOs employ towards their child beneficiaries. The obligation the humanitarian community has to conform to the UNCRC, includes confirmation to its participation rights. (I)NGOs, especially child rights oriented ones, have started to implement children’s participation at a policy level. Although committing on paper, this does not seem to have changed institutional attitude. Donor-dependence is partly to blame for this, but not in full. As
we have pointed out change needs to be top-down as well as bottom-up, obligation for adhering to the UNCRC lies with all individuals operating in the humanitarian response. By that we mean that there is a horizontal moral obligation, not only an imposed one.

Children need to be recognized as competent right holders and therefore full stakeholders in the humanitarian response. This would mean a transformation of the status quo and a significant shift in the locus of power at the international, the regional or the local level.

**Recommendations for academia**

This being one of the first multi-faceted explorations of children’s participation in a humanitarian context, the humanitarian community could profit a lot from more extensive research on the subject matter. It would especially profit from more evidence-based research, based on grass-roots data. Instead of using PR-language, we should use scientifically backed up claims, not exemplary evidence to be able to advocate for more adherence to the norm of the UNCRC. This too would help to stop treat child participation like a ‘pet-project’, but instead a topic for serious research and practise.

There are two sub areas of child participation in humanitarian action that deserve closer attention. First of all the area of child participation in situations of armed conflict, as Jason Hart seems to be the only academic giving this serious consideration. Secondly the humanitarian community could gain from more academic input on the effects of child participation on pre-adolescent children, beyond the psycho-social and educational realm.

**Recommendations for practise**

In the second chapter, we found that participation is best served by adapting to context. Several academics have pointed out the necessity to focus on issues of diversity, power dynamics and processes over outcomes. For instance, in the process of assessing risk and vulnerability, children and specifically adolescents could be more included. For pre-adolescents “conceptual clarity and appropriate technical skills have to be improved yet a lot more” (Hart, 2008).

When we discussed the differences between Shier’s (2001) and Lansdown’s (2005) models, we established that Shier’s prescribed a bottom-up, and Lansdown a more top-down approach to participation. According to Lansdown we have to implement rights-based approaches to provisional and protective rights before we can implement participation rights. We would like to recommend that organizations try to implement participation top-down and simultaneously bottom-up. Humanitarian agencies should advocate for change at senior level for a commitment to children’s participation rights and with donor agencies for a change in policy.

Organizations can advocate more strongly by using the room to ‘manoeuvre’ and offer innovative proposals or examples of ‘successful’ participatory projects from the field. To move from ‘pet-projects’ to full child participation mainstreaming calls for a sensitivity to contexts of power, a clear vision and strategy (why and how children participation has added value) and sound participatory methods at the same time. The need to identify ‘what is unacceptable’ instead of a focus on ‘best practise’ will help challenge the status quo (O’Leary & Squire, 2008). Standards of Child Participation as those established by Save the Children can contribute to this.

As discussed, the high turn-over and donor pressure in humanitarian action is detrimental to organizational learning and continuity in the interface with the community, which has negative consequences for child participation efforts. It is essential for humanitarian agencies to not only invest in training on child rights and culture, but to form
partnerships with local (child rights) organizations or international development aid organizations with a lot of experience in the region.

Also, a bottom-up dialogue on intra-cultural and cross-cultural sensitivities with local staff and the local community is proposed. Our key informant Muhammad Zubedy Koteng from UNICEF Indonesia recommended “an ‘evidence-based discussion, using grass-roots information to stimulate people at the local level to adjust their standards to the universal standards as agreed upon in the UNCRC’. He suggests advocacy towards third parties like parents and religious leaders, but we would like to suggest to similarly doing so with ‘Western’ staff at managerial positions, as Western conceptualisations can also learn from (non-Western) child participation traditions. By doing so, organizations gain in cultural access, relating to a local community as a result of language, behaviour and culture. To keep an ‘open state of mind’ instead of a hegemonic one seems to be key.

The agenda-setting for the pursuit of a politics of identity might have taken the place of the politics of redistribution. This could be the Achilles’ heel of (child) participation on the political level. When the humanitarian community merely decentralizes global problems of inequality and poverty to a local level, by means of implementing participatory efforts, instead of searching for solutions on multiple levels, participation will be counterproductive for the provisional and protective rights of children. In other words, we should not loose focus on the (political) product over the (political) process. Participation should lead to change on the collective, global dimension as well as on individual, local level.

Clear communication to authorities, especially in situations of armed conflict, that activities are not of a political nature, is key to implement children’s participation in ways that do not increase security risks and instead reinforce protection. Not to use names and pictures for PR purposes, or to use indirect participation of children are also options in these situations.

It seems the humanitarian community needs most of all to change its ‘attitude’ towards children’s participation, on all levels and dimensions. Listening capacities and a humble and open attitude are recommended by ALNAP (2003)’s Participation Handbook.

There is a need to stop seeing child participation as an optional extra, or as ‘going the extra mile’ in child rights programming. Not just for children’s participation, but for beneficiary participation as a whole, we need to see ‘trust’ as an equally important outcome as ‘efficiency’ when it comes to humanitarian action.

Children’s Participation has been universally agreed upon to be the norm more than 20 years ago, it is not only time we start acting upon it, it is time to move to the next level: the level of active and effective participation, being accountable to children at policy and field level and simultaneously keep the leaders of this world accountable to their commitment to the UNCRC’s provisional, protective and participation rights.
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Save the Children UK. *In the Face of Disaster, Children and Climate Change*. 2008. Print.
Annex I: Mindmap 1
Annex II: Mindmap 2
Annex III: List of interview respondents

Local NGOs
- Institute for Community Behavioral Change (ICBC)
  - ms. Nindyah Rengganis, Psychology PhD student, presented her research 'Listening to Javanese children's voices to be included in policy making' at the First International Conference on Cultural and Indigenous Psychology (Yogyakarta, Indonesia)
- Yayasan Anak Merdeka Indonesia "Samin" (Foundation for Children's Freedom "Samin") children's rights NGO
  - mr. Odi Shalahuddin (Yogyakarta, Indonesia)

INGOs
- Save the Children
  - former staff dr. Heribertus Jaka Triyana (Yogyakarta)
  - ms. Kartika Sari (Aceh)
- World Vision Canada
  - former staff dr. Heribertus Jaka Triyana (Yogyakarta)
- Islamic Relief
  - former staff ms. Marlina Thamrin (Banda Aceh)
- SOS Children’s Village (Yogyakarta)
  - Coordinator ms. Martanti Endah Lestari
- SOS Children’s Village Indonesia (Jakarta)
  - Advocacy staff ms. Natalina Sangapta Perangin-angin
- PLAN International
  - former area manager Muhammad Zubedy Koteng (Banda Aceh)

Red Cross/Red Crescent movement
- IFRC ms. Indah Sari Kencono Putri (Yogyakarta)
- Canadian Red Cross ms. Farah Mardiati-Rafà (Banda Aceh)

UNICEF
- former staff dr Heribertus Jaka Triyana
- Child Protection Specialist Muhammad Zubedy Koteng (Banda Aceh)

DG ECHO
- Former Head of Unit Operational Policies, current Head of Unit Central & Eastern Europe, Mediterranean countries/Northern Africa, Newly Independent States, South/Central Asia, Middle East: mr. Johannes Luchner
- Operational policies, a.o. 'Children': ms. Lise-Marie Le Quéré