

## Child Rights and Children's Participation

---

*"You may give them your love but not your thoughts  
For they have their own thoughts  
You may house their bodies but not their souls,  
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,  
Which you cannot visit even in your dreams"*

***Khalil Gibran***

### **The Context:**

The traditional concept of the child has been one of beneficiary or victim, dependent on exogenous processes determined by arguably well-intentioned adults and adult led institutions. As part of a gradual shift in focus towards participatory approaches undergone by development discourse and practice over the last decade, organizations and researchers concerned with the position of children within developing countries are increasingly declaring a commitment to children's participation in the development process. While a highly contested and problematic concept, participatory development can be broadly defined as people's involvement in developmental processes that concern their lives and their community. Within this discourse, children are seen as competent social actors, capable and deserving of expressing opinions and acting autonomously. They are also regarded as human beings who form the centre of development, not merely the passive recipients. Participatory rights for children are for many adults a strange concept and are particularly difficult to obtain for marginalized children.

Child participation may be seen as an ongoing process of children's expression and active involvement in decision-making at different levels in matters that concern them. This requires information sharing and dialogue between children and adults, based on mutual respect and power sharing, giving children the power to shape both the process and outcome. It is essential to respect children's own evolving capacity, experience and interests in determining the nature of their participation. Participation may be in the form of a consultative, participatory or self-initiated / managed process.

Listening to children's perspectives can be seen to provide a sound starting-point for intervening in ways that are realistic, context-appropriate and in the best interests of children. Children believe that many projects started on their behalf failed because their opinions were never taken into consideration during project conceptualization and implementation. Also that their input was never respected and wishes never listened to.

There are, however, problems with this discourse and it would be foolish to uncritically accept the idea of child participation as a panacea. There is a real danger that the concept is merely becoming the latest 'development buzzword'. It could be the case, for instance, that organisations 'bolt' participation into existing approaches in a tokenistic response to donor pressure. Indeed, while the right to participation is widely touted at national and international level, action to put that right into place in the formulation of laws and

standards is still incipient at best. Crucially, working towards participation by children in decision-making will require considerable change in attitudes, a change in mindset, at times even culture and a change in many aspects of practice and procedures.

### **Empowering Children for Participation In Development Processes:**

*“Children are undoubtedly the most photographed and least listened to members of society”*

*Roger Hart*

This paper draws upon experiences of Butterflies a grassroots NGO working for the empowerment of street and working children in Delhi, India. It is thus concerned with girls and boys who are surviving life in a particular geographic, socio-economic, political, cultural context. In recognition that children are social actors in their own right, whose views and perceptions need to be understood, this paper gives space for sharing child worker's own experiences, perceptions, reflections and concerns.

Furthermore, listening to children's views and perspectives is particularly important if we wish to gain a greater understanding of the similarities and differences between different children's lives. In planning programmes and policies for children it is important to recognise the diversity amongst children's life experiences, and to be enabled to respond to children within their local community contexts. Whilst children's 'childhoods' may be characterised by similarities such as their interest in play and their lack of power, children's childhoods are also characterised by diversity, cultural, economic and political context.

Thus, whilst this paper shares illustrations of children's dialogue and experiences in a particular local context, wider learning's for child-focused development practice and the theoretical discourse on childhood and adult-child relations shall be deliberated. Moreover, attempts will be made to place the discussions within a historical framework, highlighting certain trends and politics surrounding the emergence of children's participatory rights. A brief introduction to the context and the work of Butterflies will be given.

### **Brief Introduction to the Context:**

The gap between the rich and poor within, as well as between societies and nations is advancing. In South Asia there is an advancing middle class whose income levels have increased tremendously in the past decade, which has given India an image of booming economy. However, there is the other India which struggles for survival in the midst of all this wealth. This India is the rural and urban poor who have their traditional livelihoods disappearing and with no recourse to alternate forms of livelihood are forced to join the ranks of informal workers and as Jan Bermer puts it they are “footloose

workers". The footloose workers phenomenon has resulted in families getting disintegrated with fathers or parents migrating for work and leaving behind a single parent headed household or children living with grandparents while parents go in search of work.

This paper is particularly concerned with the lives of street and working children living in urban centres. These are children who have run away or rather escaped from acute poverty, dysfunctional families and in some instances from strict disciplinarian parents. These children live and work on the streets.

The effects of ongoing structural adjustment programmes and increasing rural to urban migration have led to an increasing number of families living in poverty in cities. Rapid urbanization has brought with it rapid growth in urban slums. In 1996 an estimated 100 million people were said to be living in urban slums in India (UNICEF, 1998). Of the 37 million children who are living in urban poverty a substantial proportion of them are living in informal (illegal) settlements or other temporary situations which include living along railway lines, drainage canals and on the streets themselves. Products of family instability, violence or economic circumstances of the family, one guesstimate are that 18 million children live or work on the streets of India (Human Rights Watch, 1996). There are no reliable census data on this population.

Working primarily in the informal sector as rag pickers, shoe-shiners, porters, assistants in tea stalls, restaurants, and hotels, the lives of street and working children are commonly characterized by exploitation, marginalization, and abuse. Largely unprotected by adults, children have to learn to survive in difficult circumstances, requiring the acquisition of new skills, and a high degree of resilience.

In the 1980s increasing publicity was given to the phenomenon of street children<sup>1</sup>. In responding to the challenge of reaching out to street children, who clearly did not fit western notions of childhood, nor experience 'golden age childhoods', some local NGOs developed new ways of working with such children on the streets in ways which built upon their capacities. Street children became active partners in programming; new movements grew from which street children were able to raise questions regarding their participation in society, in economic, social and political life.

The historical emergence of Brazilian street and working children and adolescents' movement was first of its kind in the world, a country that also was first in recognizing the status and plight of street children. In many ways Brazil showed the way to rest of the world. Cussianovich (1995) encourages us to recognise the historical significance of children and adolescents movement, not only due to their increasing numbers, but because they:

[child workers and adolescents] lead us to fundamental questions about the explosion of poverty in the international economic order and the scandalous inequalities between and within the

---

<sup>1</sup> As more visible child workers, street children became the focus on fundraising campaigns, media stories and thus programme responses.

countries; because they raise questions about the model of development and about social and political value assigned to different social actors; because they invite us to rethink the culture of work and its role for building identity and dignity; because they force us to reconsider the concept of age as element besides gender, ethnicity and class' (Cussianovich, 1995, p.32).

### **Butterflies:**

With an emphasis on empowering street and working children with the skills and knowledge to protect their rights as children and to help them develop as respected and productive citizens; a range of responses by NGOs to the 'street children phenomenon' in India began to emerge in the late-seventies and eighties. However within a socio-cultural context in which children are generally not listened to, most projects were designed by adults (as 'adults know best') and were characterized by welfare or institutionalization responses. However, Butterflies fueled by our fundamental beliefs in democracy and children's capacity to participate, and inspired by alternative strategies in Latin America and West Africa, the founder Ms. Panicker clearly envisioned that the core value in the organization should be to listen to children, consult them and make them part of the decision making processes.

Butterflies strategy towards empowerment of street and working children involves a broader approach which takes into consideration the larger socio-economic and political factors. As opposed to a welfare (or charity) perspective which views street children primarily as victims or delinquents in need of basic services and rehabilitation, an empowerment approach views children as citizens of our society, with rights to survival, protection, and development, in addition to information, respect, and opportunities for participation in decisions that affect them. Through varied strategies children are given information and knowledge about their rights. Moreover, Butterflies uses the Constitution of India and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as a major tool for ensuring Government and public accountability to the well-being of all vulnerable children.

*"In our meetings we have a chance to ask questions and get information"*  
(Street boys - Jama Masjid and New Delhi Railway Station contact points).

*"Through meeting with Butterflies educators I have come to know about my rights: my rights to education, to protection, to health and play. Before time I didn't even know I had rights. Now I have this information I can do something"* (Afroze, rag picker, age 13)

Children are further encouraged to critically reflect on their current realities (e.g. the reasons why they were compelled to run away from home, to live and work on the streets for their survival), to understand the structural, political factors that are at force, to organise themselves (e.g. through unionization) and to identify the decision-making bodies which need to be made aware of their realities.

*"The right to information is very important, as we need information to know About things so that we can change things."*  
(Rajesh, rag picker, age 12).

*"We on behalf of the BAL Mazdoor Union, have taken out rallies, we went to National*

*Human Rights Commission [on Human Rights Day] and at that time they listened very  
Carefully to us and expressed their sympathy and help.  
(Bal Mazdoor Ki Awaz reporters)*

The 'Bal Sabha' (Children's Council) is the supreme body, and the guiding force and mechanism of Butterflies programme. Once a month, representatives from each contact point come together for the Bal Sabha. The children elect a chair person and the meeting is presided over by him/her. Each member is encouraged to share any agenda issues, and each of the outlined points is discussed. One of the literate children records the minutes and decisions. Most often, issues discussed are about police harassment, non-payment of wages, need for better jobs, wages, education, saving schemes, problem of gambling, drugs, as well as planning outings etc.

Responding to children's identifications of their needs, Butterflies varied programmes have been developed and implemented including the: education programme, life skills education, Children's Development Bank(also known as Bal Vikas Bank in India), distribution of identity cards, health cooperative, picnics, vocational training, counselling (especially in supporting children to return to their families), in addition to supporting children's own self-help groups, organised action groups (e.g. Bal Mazdoor Union, alternative media group) and cooperatives (e.g. Health Cooperative, Children's Development Bank, Media group). The majority of these programme activities are conducted directly on the streets with street and working children's genuine participation. Moreover, the Bal Sabha enables a forum where the children can speak, share their ideas as well as monitor and critique the programmes and orientation of the organisation.

*"Whenever we have any crisis we come together to have a meeting to look for a solution"  
(Street boys, at Connaught Place - Butterflies contact point)*

Discussions at the contact points and at the Bal Sabha meetings enable children to discuss and share information that concerns their lives, to analyze various social and political events and decisions, and to work together towards collective action. Through the Bal Sabha children learn the principles of democracy (i.e. every person has a right to an opinion and freedom of expression, a consensus must be reached to take a final decision and that sometimes a compromise is needed).

*"Through the process of Bal Sabha we learn three important things. Firstly, we get motivated to unite for our rights. Secondly, we have come to understand the importance of our unity which is our biggest asset, our strength in front of which no-one can stand. And finally, it is our unity that will help us in defeating our exploiters."  
(Beeru, rag picker, boy, age 14)*

The idea of a Children's Council provides a very concrete mechanism for allowing children's collective voice to be heard. Furthermore, one of the main strengths of the Bal Sabha is the way that children's own initiatives (/organisations) have grown out from it. They have all been outcomes of children's collective response to discussions arising during Bal Sabha meetings.

## Perceptions of Children:

Children's participation involves complexities which require us to "deepen our perceptions" of what the construct of childhood means to the many different people in children's lives (Fuglesang and Chandler, 1997). Perceptions of children inevitably affect the roles, responsibilities and behaviors that children are expected to take on in any one particular context, as well as the nature of adult-child relations, and how children are treated. Moreover, children's own perception of themselves and their peer group plays an interacting role in determining how children think and behave.

Street children live much of their lives in peer groups, largely without adult supervision. However, despite the freedom that such life offers, their lives continue to be influenced by a wide range of adults.

Whilst trying to struggle for their own survival these children are frequently scapegoated as thieves and delinquents and treated unfairly as a result. Such images of street children have been perpetuated by the media, and strengthened by Governments and NGOs when their response to street children has been characterized by 'criminalisation' or 'rehabilitation'. The children have reported numerous cases of the police beating them, bribing them, locking them up in cells and harassing them. Moreover, the public generally remain passive on-lookers or supporters to such violations.

The impact of prevailing negative perceptions of street children and their desire to be treated with the dignity and respect that they deserve have been frequently vocalised by children during their Bal Sabha meetings, and varied collective and participatory action initiatives:

*"We want the people to leave us alone so that we can live our lives peacefully. We want Them to stop labeling us as thieves, pickpockets and beggars.... We should be Treated with respect. Even we are human beings, we are not animals."*

(Sonu, rag picker, boy, age 12 years).<sup>2</sup>

*'One day I went to the Government hospital as I had a high fever of over 100 degrees. However, because I was dirty and poor the doctors didn't want to look at me properly. Our educator had to convince these doctors to let me be admitted to the hospital.'*

(Rakesh, rag picker, boy, age 13 years).

To change the population's perceptions of street children, it is necessary to transform these children's personal troubles into public issues (Mills, 1958). Through strategies of empowerment and mobilization of street and working children, children themselves can play an active role in sharing their narratives about their lived experiences, thus, challenging dominant narratives about who street children are. Dialogue and encouragement of 'critical enquiry' by children helps them become *conscious beings* struggling for humanization (Freire, 1970).

By listening to children's interpretations of their roles, relationships, as well as to how members of society view them and treat them, we can learn a lot about the nature of children's childhoods in any particular context. Moreover, in considering the range and complexity of children's relationships with different groups of adults it becomes clear that children take on a myriad of relationships and roles, and behave differently in relation to different adults in different local settings who impinge upon their lives.

If we consider the differing perspectives of childhood that various stakeholders hold, we will be enabled to understand the complexities and conflicts that may arise in children's lives as they negotiate with varied stakeholders (parents, police, employers, community members, NGO workers, judiciary, Government agencies, and international agencies) who frequently have differing (and often conflicting) expectations of them.

The implications of such differing expectations need to be addressed in practice, policy developments and in re-constructing theories of childhood. Mayall (1994) suggests that the level of 'children's powerlessness varies according to how the adults in specific social settings conceptualize children and childhood. Thus, the need to address dynamics of power, to carry out preparatory work at varied levels enabling access and space for children as citizens for social change, whilst also valuing diversity becomes evident. Moreover, in recognising power and valuing diversity the necessity to work constructively with conflict is inevitable.

#### **Power:**

By empowering street and working children to reflect upon their experiences, articulate their views, plan effective programmes and advocate for their own rights, these children are challenging the status quo regarding *children's place and power* in society. Conflicts will arise when children advocate for their own rights, due to differing socio-cultural perceptions of childhood amongst varied stakeholders, in addition to disparities of power.

Relations between adults and children are regulated by power and interests (Qvortrup, 1994). Whilst many of the 'supposed differences' between children and adults may be socially constructed, adults power over children '*means that merely in relation to adult's praxis... children have no claim on equal treatment because they are not old enough*' (Qvortrup, 1994, p.4). Furthermore, considering that civic institutions and the adult world with its power relations are, by and large inimical to children's participation (Fuglesang and Chandler, 1997), in working towards children's empowerment, it is imperative that we work simultaneously at varied levels.

For example, in the early 1990s Butterflies NGO was 'scapegoated' by many NGOs, institutions and International NGOs for their strategy of supporting the development of working children's unions. However, alliances with existing working children's movements in Latin America and West Africa provided solidarity. Moreover, growing acceptance of children's rights to participation and association, in accordance with the

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child have increased acceptance and support of Butterflies position. Over time, there has been a change in discourse regarding children's right to association and to form collectives. Though, the word 'union' remains a loaded term with negative connotations for many.

In dealing with power dynamics we can learn lessons from strategies which promote women's empowerment. Recent studies have found that many strategies are ineffective in causing a positive impact, unless parallel sensitization programmes for men are conducted. As unless men are willing to share power and change their practices, then what can women do? (See Guijit and Kaul, Shah (eds), 1998). Those with less power generally have a lack of control and choice. Indeed the powerless may be placing themselves at more risk by speaking up and challenging the power status:

*I don't know anything except that the powerful people and the officials join hands. If we talk about the Juvenile Justice Act or our rights then the police beat us all the more.*  
(Gyan, rag picker, age 17)

Whilst working directly with children to give them space and encouragement to speak up for themselves, to organise themselves and to work together to find collective solutions to overcome their difficulties - the quotes below show that such a focus is not enough:

*"We have tackled issues like police violence - we have had protests for many years, But what has changed? We have little power"*  
(Street boy at Jama Masjid contact point)

*"The politicians are not giving us our rights"*  
(Street boys, New Delhi Railway Station)

Children must be seen as integral members of the community. There is a crucial need to sensitise adults to be willing to share power, otherwise children's voices can have little influence and children may become disillusioned. In working towards children's empowerment it is crucial that we carry out preparatory work with adults who are part of children's lives (e.g. parents, teachers, employers, community members, law enforcement officials), whilst also working for change in the institutional and social environments to open up access and opportunities for children to participate (in local, national and international decision-making forums). Sensitization work with adults who are part of children's lives is a critical part of the process.

Furthermore, in working towards systemic change conflict is inevitable. Thus, as facilitators of change processes we need to be alert, able to exercise good judgment, resolve differences and nurture relationships, in order that we may work sensitively and creatively with conflict (see Guijit and Kaul Shah (Eds), 1998).

*'Butterflies strives the most to make adults talk to children more gently and treat them in a better manner. Another important thing Butterflies does is in the field of advocacy. They do this by meeting and discussing with various political parties, the Government and other influential people, about our problems... Meetings between them and us children are also arranged.*



(Child workers, editors of Bal Mazdoor ki Awaz)

Furthermore, it is also imperative that we address the disparities of power amongst children (e.g. due to age, gender, caste, disability, or language). Considering additional discrimination faced by certain groups, such as girls, children with disabilities, or younger children, we must continuously Endeavour to make our participative processes and opportunities inclusive and accessible for smaller voices to be heard. It has been suggested that *'exploring cultural models of difference and the ways in which these are used to create inequalities can make space for sensitization about prejudice and discrimination as an integral part of the participatory process'* (Cornwell, 1998, p.56). Children should be encouraged to celebrate differences amongst them, to challenge discrimination and to work together cooperatively and democratically in a manner that transforms and challenges much of their existing experiences of exploitative relations.

### **Rights and Responsibility:**

In the last 17 years and more the discourse on '**Child Rights**' has centered on rights as against needs. The language of child development was no more on welfare, development, and needs assessment but on rights based programming, along with this change in language came also of viewing children as persons who have human rights. They were no more to be seen as passive beneficiaries but active actors to be consulted and to decide on their life situations and options available. This also meant children's participation became an important concept to be understood and to be put into practice.

Over the year's children's participation as pre-requisite to planning/programming for children became a standard requirement from funding agencies. Today practically most NGOs working with children will speak the rights language and would vouch that their approach is participatory and children are active participants in the decision making processes. There are enough of literature on children's participation and as many training workshops held for social workers to understand the concept. However, the understanding of participation varies from activists demanding that children should be "in charge" to tokenistic involvement of children. There have been times when programmers and activists have dismissed children owned or led activities/projects/forum as truly not fitting into the standards/norms set by international agencies on children's participation as the idea of the project/activity/forum came from an adult!! . There are times when children may come up with ideas to initiate an activity but there can also be times when adults can share an idea with children and build on it with their active participation. We have to recognize that as adults we have a responsibility to share knowledge, information and ideas to children, which they can then use it to create something of their own.

Somewhere along the way we have forgotten children also need help and guidance, by doing that it does not in any way take away children's role nor does it dilute the concept of children's participation. In recent past there has been an over emphasis on children being pushed on to taking roles of leadership in areas where they do not have competence, capability nor the knowledge and skills to take on such responsibilities in the name of children's participation. We also need to recognize that they are children first and foremost and not thrust upon them responsibilities which they are not ready for. In

this frenzy to get children to participate at all levels of decision making and fora, adult's inadvertently push their agenda through children. It is sad that in the move to make children's voices heard we manipulate them for our own need.

The other area of concern is when older children bulldoze their way through decisions at meetings where there are children of younger age who would have different viewpoints to that of older children. There is this real danger of older children manipulating younger children, just as there is danger of adults manipulating children. One has also experienced that once children have experienced the power of negotiating, as they grow older find it difficult to give up positions of leadership. There have been cases of older children who may be 18 and above pretending they are 15 and 16 years so as not to lose out their positions of power. Organisations also find it convenient to push them forward in public arenas as they are able to articulate well and say the "right things". Of course, today child rights activists have realized that we need age specific fora. There is also the danger of children especially well articulate older children to be manipulated by adults for their own agenda and to settle scores with others. The older children/late teenagers are in a phase of their lives which has its stress and pressures; if they are not handled carefully they can go astray and sometimes join the lumping

One of the areas which are completely left out in child rights debate is the concept of responsibilities. The stress has always been on "rights" and not on "responsibilities". It is equally important to educate children about their responsibilities, so that they learn that along with rights they have responsibilities too. This one sided way of looking at rights has inadvertently resulted in children only demanding what is fairly theirs but not what they should be doing to fulfill their responsibilities. As an organization we have had occasions when children only demanded for things but were not happy to be responsible for the same. Similarly there were occasions when decisions were taken but they were not ready to be responsible for the decisions. It is important to educate children about their responsibilities, this is necessary if we want children to inculcate values of fairness, justice, honesty and acceptance of ones responsibilities and of others. Most available literature on children's rights and participation do not address the concept of responsibilities.

### **Moving forwards:**

While dealing with the situation of children in our society, the relationship between children and their families, communities, societies, nations and the international system need to be understood. We need to have socio-cultural, economic and political understandings of various development issues, and critical questions regarding the status of children and children's rights in South Asia need to be asked. We need a dynamic policy framework which relies on the shared responsibility of governments, communities, individuals, and non-governmental organisations to mobilise and pool resources and to evolve and implement culturally relevant and sensitive programmes for children, families and communities in difficult circumstances.

Furthermore, generation analysis, alongside gender and ethnicity analysis need to be carried out, in order that the differences and relationships between different groups are understood. If differences are not identified, there is a tendency to discriminate against those who are less visible, less powerful and less assertive. Generation analysis will enable us to identify the social structures, practices and ideologies that perpetuate and reinforce the unequal positions of people of different age-groups (children, young people, adults, and older people).

In moving forwards with our work within a children's empowerment framework, we can learn a lot from the women's movement. For example, if I am to exchange the word 'women' for 'children', and 'gender' for 'generation', the following passage (written by the Society for Participatory Research in Asia<sup>2</sup>) concerning steps towards women's empowerment becomes highly useful for exploring steps forward for children's empowerment:

"To effectively work within children's empowerment framework, development actors need to work at different levels and undertake diverse strategies. These may include: transforming social institutions; influencing development policies; initiating institutional reforms within implementing agencies; incorporating issues of the empowerment framework in project cycle management; strengthening children's collectives; initiating process of conscientisation and enhancing self confidence. While, no individual project can work at all the levels, an understanding of the broader context is essential.... Some important tenet for initiating empowering processes within a project context includes a holistic and a context specific approach, focus on practical and strategic generation needs and incorporation of children's participation."

Whilst working with children in South Asia, particularly those children whose lives are characterised by difficult circumstances, we need to address both children's practical generation needs (e.g. education, health care, shelter), in addition to their strategic generation needs. When talking of children's strategic generation needs we are addressing the fundamental causes of powerlessness that arise due to children's lesser age, and we are striving for goals like equality.

Whilst working at local levels with children on issues that are relevant to their lives, all activities which seek to enable children to fulfill their basic needs (e.g. education, protection, health, shelter, savings, and recreation) can be based in a broader framework, which builds upon opportunities for awareness-raising, training, bolstering identity and self-esteem, participation and organising. Furthermore, parallel work at more strategic levels to increase children's access to adult decision-making forums at local, district, regional, national and international levels needs to be conducted. However, one would like to add that it is important to recognize that adults need to have their own spaces, it is not necessary to have children represented in all adult forum(s).

---

<sup>2</sup> 'Development Projects: A Step towards Women's Empowerment' Editorial for *Participation and Governance*, Vol.6, No.15, March 1999.f

Children and young people's participation is a democrating process, which also enables the status of children and children's voices to increase. When supported and given real access to decision-making power children can become a powerful force for social change as we have seen in China where children were instrumental in bringing about a change in peoples' concept of hygiene and in Mexico where children brought about a system to clear garbage and thereby brought in a change in people's attitude towards garbage disposal and littering. In India, in the eastern state of Orissa, girls clubs called Meena Clubs are advocating for girl child rights..... The inclusion of children's voices has not only challenged existing pre-conceived notions of childhood, but has forced adult communities to recognise the macro-economic trends that impact negatively on the lives of children and their families and perpetuate local and global inequalities. Interestingly world over it is the poor children who are in the forefront of the battle for their rights and have also got themselves organized to advocate for the same.

### References:

Anandalakshmy, S the weavers community in Varanasi'. In D. Sinha (Ed) *Socialisation of the Indian Child*. New Delhi: Concept.

Cornwall, A. (1998) Gender, Participation and the Politics of Difference'. In Guijt, I. and Kaul Shah, M. (1998) *The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development* (Eds). IT publications.

Cussianovich, A. (1995) 'Working Children and Adolescents: Culture, Image and Theory'. NATs Working Children and Adolescents International Review, February 1995, 27-32.

Diversi, M. (1998) *Street Kids In Search Of Humanization: Expanding Dominant Narratives Through Critical Ethnography And Stories Of Lived Experience*. PhD Dissertation. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Ennew, J. (1995) 'NATs (Working Children and Adolescents): Historical Emergence of a Category.' NATs Working Children and Adolescents International Review, February 1995, 19-26.

Espinola, B., Glauser, B., Ortiz, R.M., and Ortiz, S. (1988) *Working in the Streets: Working Children in Asuncion*. Bogota: UNICEF.

Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Fuglesang, A. and Chandler, D. (1997) *Children's Participation: A Case for a Strategy of Empowerment in Early Childhood*. Redd Barna: Save the Children Norway.

Guijt, I. and Kaul Shah, M. (1998) *The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development* (Eds). IT publications.

Henk Van Beers (1996) 'A Plea for a Child-Centred Approach in Research with Street Children'. *Childhood*, Vol.3, No.2, p.195-202.

Glauser, B. (1990) 'Street Children: Deconstructing a Construct' in A. James and A. Prout. (eds) *Constructing and Re-constructing Childhood*. Basingstoke: Falmer Press.

Human Rights Watch (1996) *Police Abuse and Killings of Street Children in India*.

*In Search of Fair Play: Street and Working Children Speak about Their Rights*. Butterflies.

ISSBD South Asian Workshop: *Intervention Strategies for the Psycho-Social Development of Children and Youth in Poverty*. Workshop Report. November 1995. Chandigarh, India.

Mills, C.W. (1958) *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Murphy, L.B. (1953) 'Roots of Tolerance and Tensions in Indian Child Development'. In G. Murphy, *In the Minds of Men*. New York: Basic Books.

Qvortrup, J. (1994) 'Childhood Matters: An Introduction'. In J. Qvortrup et al. (eds) *Childhood Matters*. Aldershot: Avebury

Rita Panicker, Claire O'Kane, "Street and Working Children's Participation I Programming for their Rights: Conflicts Arising From Diverse Perspectives and Directions for Convergence." Paper Read at European Modern South Asian Studies Group 16<sup>th</sup> Conference, Sept. 2000, Edinburgh University, UK  
Street Children Report: Butterflies

UNICEF's (1998) 'Rights and Opportunities: The Situation of Children and Women in India'

Wright, J.D., Kaminsky, D. and Wittig, M. (1993) 'Health and Social Conditions of Street Children in Honduras' *American Journal of the Diseases of Children*, 147, 279-83.

Children's Participation is an informed and willing involvement of all children including those who are differently able and those at risk, in any matter concerning them directly or indirectly, in a spirit of partnership.

In the early years of community development in various societies, there was always a stated principle of participation of the community in development processes; however it did not include women and children. The women's movement paved the way for women to be involved in decision making processes. 1990s saw the advent of UNCRC and child rights came into the forefront of human rights debate.

This paper draws upon experiences of Butterflies a grassroots NGO working for the empowerment of street and working children in Delhi and the tsunami affected children of Andaman Nicobar Islands. It is thus concerned with girls and boys who are surviving life in a particular geographic, socio-economic, political, cultural context. In recognition that children are social actors in their own right, whose views and perceptions need to be understood, this paper gives space for sharing children's own experiences, perceptions, reflections and concerns.

Furthermore, listening to children's views and perspectives is particularly important if we wish to gain a greater understanding of the similarities and differences between different children's lives and of different age groups of children. Children are not a homogeneous group. In planning programmes and policies for children it is important to recognise diversity amongst children's life experiences and to be enabled to respond to children within their local community contexts. Whilst children's 'childhoods' may be characterized by similarities for interest in playing and their lack of power, childhoods are also characterized by cultural diversity and economic and political situations.

Thus, whilst this paper shares illustrations of children's dialogue and experiences in a particular local context, wider learning's for child-focused development practice and the theoretical discourse on childhood and adult-child relations shall be deliberated