



South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children [SAIEVAC]

SAARC Apex Body

"In Solidarity with the Children of SAARC"

General Children's Participation Principles, Practice Standards and Institutional Framework for Meetings/Consultations Organized or Supported by SAIEVAC

I. Introduction

The South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children (SAIEVAC) has since its inception included 'Children's Participation' as an integral part of its structure and programmes. Children's participation is part of children's citizenship rights as described in articles 12, 13, 14, 15 and 17 of the Convention on the Rights (CRC). The engagement and ethical and meaningful participation of children in SAIEVAC mechanisms and processes is an essential precondition to ensure that children's perspectives on violence are taken into consideration in systems and institutions, and decision-making processes affecting them. Institutionalising Children's Participation is equally crucial to ensure the quality and credibility of SAIEVAC's work in ending violence against children, along with its accountability towards the children of SAARC. SAIEVAC reiterates its commitment to empower children as citizens, participants, and agents of change in their own well-being, and to minimize any risk of harm or consequences resulting from their participation in activities promoted by SAIEVAC & its mechanisms.

II. Goal and scope

This document outlines SAIEVAC's child participation principles, practice standards, and institutional framework to ensure child safety, meaningful & ethical participation, quality and consistency throughout SAIEVAC processes, mechanisms and activities involving children. This document applies to SAIEVAC Secretariat and its national mechanisms, the South Asia Coordinating Group on Action against Violence against Children (SACG) and the National Coordinating Groups on Action against Violence against Children (NACG) in the South Asian countries. Whilst contexts may vary across South Asian countries, this document is meant to provide a common platform, a set of minimum standards and a shared understanding of child participation in SAIEVAC. For the purpose of this document, the word "child" refers to every person under the age of 18.

III. Overarching Principles

In all child participation processes under SAIEVAC mechanisms, SACG and NACG, child participation must comply with the following overarching principles:

1. **Ethical:** the "do no harm" principles and the best interests of children must be protected at all times in the plan, design, implementation, and follow up of any child participation process.

2. **Voluntary:** children must not be pressured to join activities or processes, and they should have the option of refusing to participate or withdrawing from a child participation process.
3. **Informed:** children and their guardians/caregivers should be timely & well informed about the background, purpose, roles of their child, level of engagement, possible risks and expected outcomes of the participation process, activity or initiative.
4. **Meaningful:** participation should have realistic and constructive purposes that benefit children across the region, keeping in mind the heterogeneity among children across the region.
5. **Accessible, inclusive and non-discriminatory:** participation processes should be accessible to, and intentionally include, children from different genders, religions, ethnicities, castes, classes, nationalities, economic status, abilities, and other backgrounds. Children's contributions are valued, prioritised and their comments are listened to without discrimination on any grounds, including those mentioned above.
6. **Respectful:** child participation activities and processes respect children's age, evolving capacity, preferred form of expression, language, cultural, and religious background.
7. **Child friendly:** the activities and methodologies used shall be easily understandable to children, enabling children to contribute to the best of their abilities through age-specific information and inclusive approaches.
8. **Safe** participation activities and their venue should not put children or adults in danger of physical, psychological or emotional harm.
9. **Consistent and accountable:** all processes and activities with children are designed and implemented to ensure appropriate follow up. This includes providing children with information about the outcome of their participation and progress on how their contributions and inputs have been put to use. Mechanisms are established for children to evaluate their participation experience and make recommendations for improving child participation practices.
10. **Child Led:** children are supported and empowered to take a leading role in determining the agenda, the nature and the modalities of the participation process.

IV. Practice Standards

Practice Standards are operational guidelines that describe the expected level of performance and quality to be upheld in all the aspects of SAIEVAC, SACG, and NACGs Child Participation processes, in line with the guiding principles above.

In order to ensure meaningful children's participation within SAIEVAC processes and mechanisms, the following practices should be followed:

- Any potential risks of physical, social, emotional, or other harm to children that may arise from the child participation process should be carefully assessed, considered, prepared for, and minimized, prior, during, and following child participation activities.
- Children representatives (including to the Governing Board) are selected from national consultations through democratic processes and comply with the regional selection criteria ensuring proper representation of each country. Children are supported in influencing the nature of such selection process. They are provided with child friendly and appropriate information, background documents, and support to

understand and carry out their responsibilities as child representatives prior to, during and after the events or meetings.

- Plans are established and implemented to obtain informed consent from child participants and their caregivers. Children participating (and their parents or guardians) in the national/regional consultation/SAIEVAC meetings receive adequate and clear information on the participation process in advance. Children and adults are informed, in ways that they can understand, about each of the following:
 - 1) The purpose and expected benefits or outcomes of the child participation process;
 - 2) The potential risks and consequences of being involved in the process;
 - 3) The time commitment and other expectations of participants;
 - 4) The possibility of refusing to participate or to withdraw from the activity at any time;
 - 5) The logistics (including communication, transportation, and supervision arrangements);
 - 6) Their responsibility in representing the views of children from their respective constituencies.

- Intentional plans are established to ensure the inclusion of the most vulnerable children, and children from different genders, religions, ethnicities, castes, classes, nationalities, economic status, abilities, and other backgrounds in participation processes. Children participating at the regional and national levels represent larger constituencies of children's groups associated with the national child rights coalitions, for example NACGs. Appropriate child friendly preparations and consultations are held to ensure that children representatives have the opportunity to gather and meaningfully represent the views of the children from their respective constituencies. Children participating are supported in understanding and performing their responsibility to represent others, ensuring that diverse views are taken into consideration, including those from the most vulnerable or marginalized children. Preparation for children participating in the national and regional consultations is consistent across countries.

- Children's national/regional consultation reports and documents are disseminated to a larger audience and archived within the SAIEVAC Secretariats at national and regional levels.

- Supporting adults such as staff, chaperones, facilitators and coordinators are informed on how to effectively carry out their responsibilities and how to keep SAIEVAC Secretariat and national counterparts, such as NACG, informed. Supporting adults receive appropriate orientation on child safe participation principles to ensure the protection of participating children. The risk of facilitators and chaperons being a threat to children is minimized through appropriate local background checks prior to their involvement in child participation processes. Due consideration is given to the ratio of number and gender of children per chaperon in child participation activities.

- A child friendly complaints and response mechanism exists to report and respond to child protection issues that may arise in the child participation process. Such mechanism is known and accessible to children and adults.

- Cultural traditions, knowledge, and customs should be respected at all times in participation processes. Adults involved in the child participation processes should be aware and sensitive to differences among participants. Facilitators should always strive to speak and act in ways that are child-friendly and that minimize as much as possible power inequalities with and amongst participants. Facilitators and children are encouraged to agree on behaviour protocols addressing appropriate and inappropriate behaviour during the participation process. Adults involved in child participation processes should: avoid raising unrealistic expectations, avoid making promises to children that they cannot keep, and follow up on all commitments made to participants.
- Resources are allocated for regional meetings and also for follow-up. Child friendly debriefing activities are planned, budgeted for, and implemented to ensure that children have the opportunity to provide feedback on their participation experience and recommend how to improve participation processes.

V. Institutional framework

This chapter describes the institutional framework, mechanisms, roles, and responsibilities of SAIEVAC mechanisms, including NACGs, in relation to child participation at national and regional level.

V. (a) In all matters related to National Level Child Participation:

1. Child participation at the national level will be organised through children's forums in collaboration with the respective SAIEVAC national government mechanisms and NACGs.
2. The respective SAIEVAC national government mechanisms and NACG collaborate in supporting and preparing children for meaningful participation in national and regional meetings.
3. The SAIEVAC national government mechanisms and NACG map children's groups and activities and send regular updates about SAIEVAC and its processes to these groups and vice versa.
4. The SAIEVAC national government mechanisms and NACG ensure that a meeting is organized at least once a year with representatives of children's groups to discuss and plan initiatives to address VAC, discuss national priorities of SAIEVAC, and select children to participate at the regional level.
5. Selected child representatives to SAIEVAC's regional consultations will be supported by their chaperones to take part in meetings and represent all children in South Asia.
6. Communication and coordination mechanisms are to be ensured by the SAIEVAC national government mechanisms and NACG to promote and sustain children's participation.

7. Allocation of resources for children's participation, especially funds to design and implement activities on violence against children, is to be ensured by the SAIEVAC national government mechanisms and NACG.
8. SAIEVAC national government mechanisms and NACGs are accountable for and exchange regular updates on the actual implementation of the child participation principles and standards outlined in this document.

V. (b) In all matters related to Regional Level Participation through the SAIEVAC Secretariat:

1. SAIEVAC national government mechanisms and NACGs ensure preparatory meetings for children prior to the regional consultation to facilitate their meaningful participation at the technical consultations.
2. SAIEVAC and national mechanisms commit to give equal status, recognition and visibility to child representatives in all SAIEVAC events and forums (e.g. speaking roles, representation at the dais, etc.).
3. SAIEVAC Regional Secretariat allocates a focal person within the Secretariat to ensure appropriate focus, communication and coordination to support and strengthen children's participation and:
 - Develop a work-plan on children's participation as per SAIEVAC's 5 year work-plan, Governing Board Decisions, Technical Consultations and Priorities identified by children themselves;
 - Support necessary capacity building of children and support adults to effectively promote and implement/support children's participation;
 - Allocate adequate resource to ensure effective communication and coordination mechanisms among children on SAIEVAC issues in the region to share information, good practices and lessons learnt;
 - Support Child Governing Board members in fully understanding and executing their duties and responsibilities;
 - Sensitize the SAIEVAC Governing Board members to accommodate and support meaningful and ethical participation of children during their meetings and ensure that their voices are heard and opinions taken into due consideration in decision-making processes;
 - Officially assign the SAIEVAC National Coordinator to support and guide the Child Governing Board Representative;
 - Provide an opportunity for the Child Governing Board members to represent SAIEVAC in VAC related forums and platforms in the region and internationally.

- Mobilize resources to establish and sustain a permanent child and youth forum on violence against children, to ensure continuous involvement and effective follow-up actions by children and young people under the auspices and with full support of SAIEVAC regional and national mechanisms.

VI. Resources

Additional resources on child participation can be found below.

GENERAL COMMENT No. 12 (2009): The right of the child to be heard, UNCRC Committee: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC-C-GC-12.pdf>

Save the Children's Practice Standards on Children's Participation (2005): <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/resources/online-library/practice-standards-children%E2%80%99s-participation>

World Vision's Guidelines for Child Participation (2012): <http://www.wvi.org/child-rights-and-equity/publication/guidelines-child-participation>

UNICEF Child and youth participation resource guide (2006): [http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/files/Child_and_Youth_Participation_Guide\(1\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/files/Child_and_Youth_Participation_Guide(1).pdf)

“Participation is a virtue that must be cultivated: An analysis of Children's Participation working methods and materials within Save the Children Sweden”, Save the Children Sweden: <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/2684.pdf>