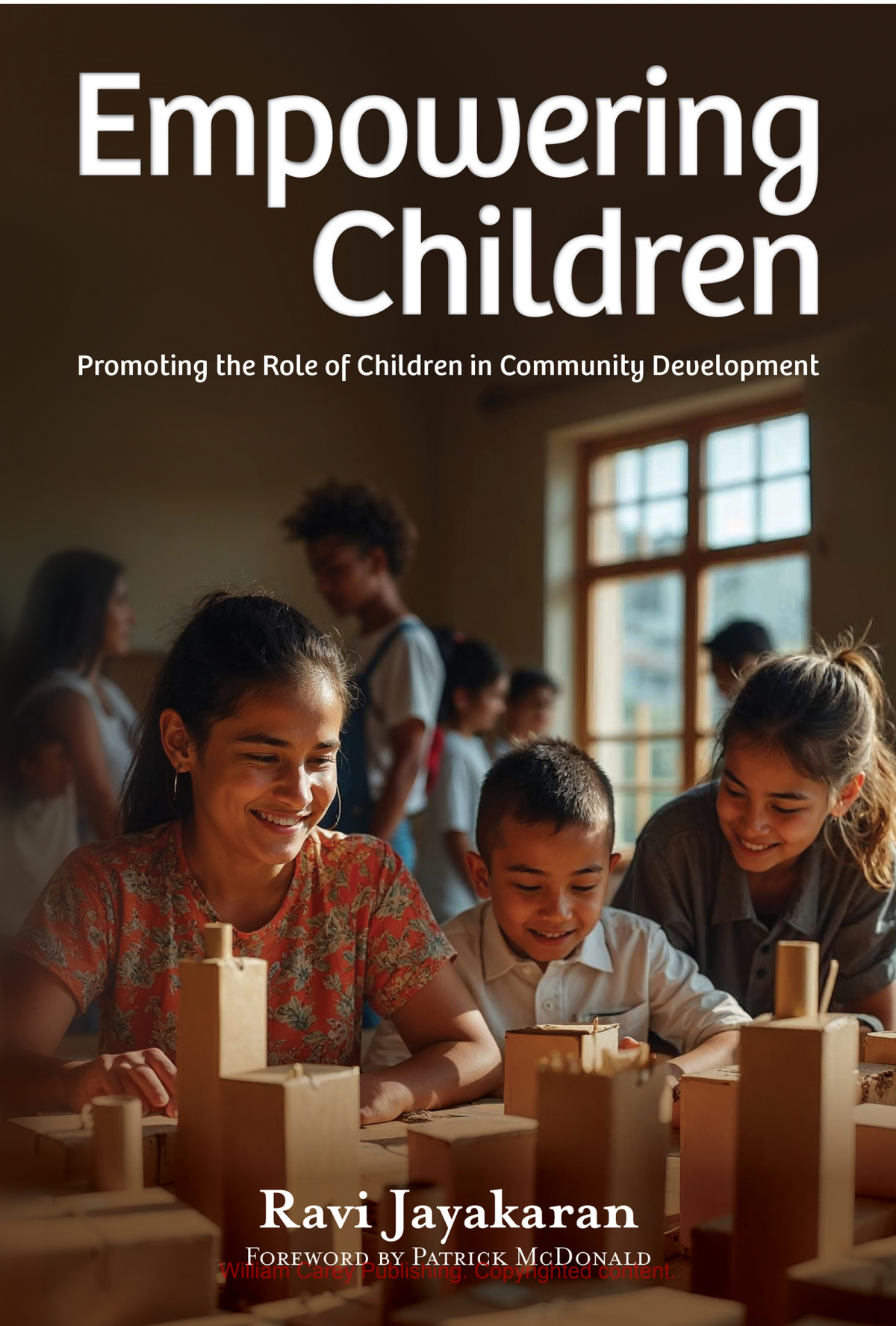
Empowering Children

Promoting the Role of Children in Community Development



Ravi Jayakaran

Foreword by Patrick McDonald

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Empowering Children: Principles, Strategies, and Techniques for Mobilizing Child Participation in the Development Process

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Lesson 1:
Key Principles

READING UP TO this point must have given you a clear idea that involving children in the development process is not mere "child's play!" Using participatory tools with children for involving them closely in the development process requires a well-planned strategy. Again, these are not intended to be "one-size-fits-all" models. At best, these concepts can serve as guiding principles and strategies for use. Please feel free to modify and adapt them to your own context.

Key Principles of Child Participation

Two resources demonstrate the key principles that should be used as you work to mobilize and empower children to participate in various activities. Tearfund's Wheel of Participation encourages you first to give children respect, and then to give support, responsibility, and opportunity.[9]

Roger Hart's "Ladder of Young People's Participation" gives further descriptions of what types of actions and attitudes truly empower children's participation and what types are just manipulations, tokenism, or decoration instead of true participation.[10]

As you read the following lessons on preparation and try out the exercises in this book, keep these principles in mind. You may want to refer back to this section as you and your team plan activities and design exercises to learn with children. Think about how you can respectfully support children and give them opportunities to share their thoughts, initiate action, and make joint decisions with adults.

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9 Paul Stephenson with Steve Gourley and Glenn Miles, *Child Participation* (Teddington, UK: Tearfund, 2004), 14, http://tilz.tearfund.org/Publications/ROOTS/Child+participation.htm.

10 Roger Hart, *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship* (Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 1992). See also http://www.freechild.org/ladder.htm.

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Key Principles for Developing a Pilot Program

Let us now turn our attention to several of the important principles involved. The following are five key principles for success in developing a pilot program.

1.
First, convince yourself that children's participation is a good idea.

First of all, it is important that *you* are convinced that involving children in the development process is important and a good idea. Do as much reading as possible on the subject of child participation.[11] Also, talk to experienced educators who are open to new concepts. If there are organizations that have already started work like this in your area, visit them, observe their work, and learn from their experiences, especially about their struggles while getting started. After you are convinced and have studied enough about the techniques, identify a project location where you can launch your pilot program.

2.
Mobilize support within the community for the venture.

At the pilot program site, arrange for a meeting with the community elders and leaders, and talk with them briefly about the concept. You can use some of the examples from this book to talk to them about some of the perspectives of children and how they have impacted and modified the intervention. Prepare well for carrying out one or two simple exercises to demonstrate the effectiveness of the techniques. List the advantages of the program and mobilize their support for it, including a commitment from them that they will follow through on the findings and support the actions that might be needed. During this exercise, stories and case studies from other projects will come in very handy. There are plenty of examples quoted in this book that can be used for

11 An internet search on "child participation" will help access a great number of articles on the subject. Also, please see www.celebratingchildrentraining.info; www.knowingchildren.org; and http://tilz.tearfund.org/Publications/ROOTS/Child+participation.htm.

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this purpose. Once this has been done, set dates and begin your program! Soon, you will have your own pictures, stories, and successes to quote.

3.
Get enough experience to demonstrate and share in new areas.

After completing the exercises in one community, your confidence will be built up. Succeeding communities will then be much easier to work in. You will have several examples to draw from, and very soon you will have the confidence to meet members of a new community, demonstrate the techniques with the children, and analyze the information for the community.

Key Principles

1. Get yourself convinced that children's participation is a good idea.
2. Mobilize support within the community for the venture.
3. Get enough experience to demonstrate and share in new areas.
4. Generate examples of success to share.
5. Be prepared to become a hub of sharing and learning.

4.
Generate examples of success to share.

When several locations have started using the techniques, these pilot projects can become centers of learning and demonstration of the concept. The experiences from these places can be documented and recorded for sharing with others. When coupled with testimonials about experiences from people who were involved in the process, photographs showing the process are very good ways of convincing the audience. Never hesitate to be candid about some of your own doubts and struggles when starting. Case studies and specific learning that came about through understanding the perspective of children can also be a strong support while introducing the approach in new places.

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When you get started, take plenty of pictures. With today's modern technology of digital photography, this should be very easy. Sequential photographs taken as an exercise is in progress are an excellent tool to show people how the exercise is conducted and how attitudes can change. Finally, nothing breeds success like success itself! Arrange field visits to places where the program is operating, and facilitate interaction with the community so that they can talk with the "outsiders" and share their experiences.

Child Protection While Taking Pictures

* * *

It is very important to be aware of child protection issues when taking pictures. Here are a few tips:

1. Always ask the children for permission to take and use photos.
2. If possible, ask parents or guardians for permission as well.
3. Do not use photos of children if this could lead to harm for them (e.g., if you are working with children who are survivors of sexual exploitation).
4. Do not use photos of sad or dirty faces just to ask people for money.

5.
Prepare to become a hub of sharing and learning.

The concept is still very new, so you have every chance of becoming a pioneer in your area. Some people may ask if they can come to visit your project so that they can learn from you. I have noticed of late that several organizations are reluctant to have people come and visit their projects and consider such visits an intrusion on their time. Always remember that sharing your experiences can also result in growth for you! When you give to others, you also receive back from them, and this in turn becomes a means for your growth. This has always been a hallmark of participatory techniques. When PLA techniques began in the mid-1980s, many people were quick to share their learning with others. It is this that helped make it a global movement. Today, almost every

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donor[12] insists that the technique should be actively used in their programs. In future years, I believe that trends in development will be such as to have a lot to do with creating infrastructure in the rural areas, transitioning from microenterprise to small business development, and the incorporation of innovative approaches and interventions into current educational programs. These interventions will take current educational programs far beyond the mere creation of educational facilities to innovative interventions for curriculum development and more!

Minimum Standards for Child Participation



In addition, you will need to keep in mind a set of minimum standards for child participation. The following list has been developed by Save the Children for people who work directly with children. These standards seek to ensure that children are adequately protected, that the staff is well prepared, that all children are treated with equality, and that activities are followed up and evaluated properly.[13]

> ***Standard 1: An ethical approach: transparency and honesty***
> *Adult organizations and workers are committed to ethical participatory practice and to the primacy of children's best interests.*

This means that, as mentioned previously, the best interests of the children need to be a primary concern. Also, adults need to be *ethical* (morally upright) in their behavior.

12 Donors include the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), and various United Nations agencies.

13 These minimum standards are taken from Save the Children, *Practice Standards in Child Participation* (London: Save the Children, n.d.), 4–11, http://www.savethechildren.net/alliance/about_us/accountability/practicestandardscp.doc.

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