A REVIEW OF

EXISTING APPROACHES TO CHILD AND YOUTH INFORMED PARTICIPATORY ADVOCACY ON CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

ecpat

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

BACKGROUND

This review aims to identify a spectrum of different options and approaches for how children and young people, including young people with lived experience (young survivors[1]) of child sexual exploitation (CSE), may engage in participatory advocacy to address CSE and related harms.

To inform the review, we identified a number of search terms and searched academic databases and grey literature. This review was not systematic in nature but serves as a starting point. It identifies relevant literature and learning related to the involvement of children and young people, particularly young survivors, in the different stages and phases of the advocacy cycle. The review has a specific focus on exploring actions to address CSE and related harms.

The paper begins with a short introduction to contextualise this piece of work within current debates in the sector. It explores the spectrum of activities that children and young people may engage in as part of 'advocacy work'. The paper outlines how children and young people's involvement and influence in decision-making has been conceptualised. Following this, the key phases involved in a participatory advocacy cycle are introduced. The review shares learning about 'how' children and young people, including young survivors, can be involved in these different stages and the observations and lessons learned.

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1   For consistency, we use the term 'young survivor' when referring to children and young people under the age of 18 who have experienced sexual exploitation. However, we recognise that not all children and young people who have experienced sexual exploitation will identify with this term or be comfortable with this language.

INTRODUCTION

In the field of international child rights and child protection, a multitude of terminology is used to describe the involvement of children and young people in activities that aim to affect social and political change.

Since the introduction of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989, the concept of 'child and youth participation' has frequently been used to describe the meaningful engagement of children and young people in processes to inform and influence decision-making across various contexts. However, in recent years, a number of alternative languages have evolved to describe children and young people's active engagement in social and political issues. Taft and O'Kane (2023) list a range of terms that have been favoured as this field of work has expanded. This includes.

» child-led advocacy

» child and youth activism[2]

» protagonism

» children as 'human rights defenders'[3]

» youth organizing

» civic engagement and citizenship

» child-led mobilisation.

Despite these variations in language, it has been argued that many activities - that may once have been described as 'child-led participation' - are now increasingly being framed as 'child activism' despite the activities and mechanisms appearing relatively similar[4].

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2   Taft and O'Kane (2023) observe that the language of 'activism' has increasingly been used over the last few years within organisations focussed on 'girl-led', as opposed to broader 'child-led' activities.
3   This term has gained traction in recent years following the 2018 day of general discussion on 'protecting and empowering children as human rights defenders' organised by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child In 2020, Laura Lundy wrote 'The rights of child human rights defenders: Implementation Guide' to articulate what is distinctive about children defending children's rights. Moreover, in 2023 Child Rights Connect and the Council of Europe published their first report exploring challenges and responses to 'Child human rights defenders'. The study explored the mechanisms and current responses by Council of Europe member states to understand how child human rights defenders were being acknowledged, protected and empowered.
4   See Taft and O'Kane, 2023

Do words matter?

Taft and O'Kane (2023) reflect that it is important to be clear about what we mean when using different terminology in this area of work. They contend that there are knock-on effects when larger organisations use specific terms to describe their work. They explain that when large, formalised organisations start labelling their work as 'activism', these organisations may be compared, and pitted against, smaller, grassroots groups who may not be registered or formalised but engage in the traditional 'activist' work of 'transformative collective action' that larger formalised organisations are often unable to do.

In addition, if children and young people are talking about their engagement in activities as 'activism', this may lead to tensions with family members and communities who may understand 'activism' as being 'radical' and potentially dangerous. The authors note that the 'tactics' and strategies that children and young people take will be dependent on the change they want to see and therefore it is important to have clarity when it comes to describing their work.

FOCUS

For the purposes of this paper - and based on our understanding of the majority of groups and organisations ECPAT International wishes to support to strengthen children and young people's involvement in influencing change - we use the term 'advocacy', as opposed to 'activism'.

We do however recognise that some of ECPAT International's member organisations are functioning in different ways, primarily acting as 'allies' to elevate the work of youth activists, particularly in Latin America, though this appears to be the exception rather than the norm across the network.

Given the considerable body of knowledge that is emerging around youth activism, and in particular girl-led activism, we attempt to bring in relevant lessons and transferable learning from this body of literature into the review. We recognise that such insights may be important to consider when seeking to ignite children and young people's engagement in advocacy.
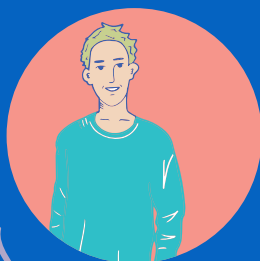
CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE, OLDER ADOLESCENTS, YOUNG ADULTS ....

The periods of 'childhood' and 'youth' encapsulate a wide spectrum of variation with regards to age, capacity, need and experience. Young children (below the age of 12) can and do participate in activities to promote change. However, given the focus of this review is on children and young people's specific role in 'advocacy', and due to the sensitive topic of CSE and related harms, we presume that facilitating organisations will be more likely to target an older age group (12-25). It is often both practically and ethically easier to navigate work with this older age group, particularly when seeking to engage young survivors (see Cody et al., 2024 for recent discussion on this and Hart et al., 2017). It is also worth noting that learning from the youth activism field suggests that young people who are 16 and over often have more agency and independence to engage in 'activism' (Salazar Rodriguez, 2018). We recognise that these justifications for engaging older young people may continue to limit opportunities for younger children to engage on sensitive topics. Whilst we argue that older children and young people may have more capacity and experience to engage in the full advocacy cycle, it is equally important to recognise the need for engaging younger children in dialogue about their own bodies and what are healthy and safe relationships and interactions given the global prevalence of child sexual abuse.

BOX 1

ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM: GOALS AND TACTICS

Although there is seemingly a lack of clear delineation to distinguish advocacy from activism, in a crude way, it could be argued that activist tactics tend to involve working 'against' the prevailing system and structures. Therefore, rather than seeking to improve existing mechanisms and structures, activism aims to dismantle and reform them, seeking radical change. In so doing, activist work may begin with a process of critical consciousness raising to draw attention to the socio-political context as a basis to catalyse social action. Activities may include demonstrations, marches, rallies and protests; strikes, speak outs, sit ins, walkouts; vigils; protest art; civil disobedience; boycotts; and the development of 'counter - institutions[5].

Advocacy tactics tend to 'work with', and through, existing structures and services to raise issues and promote positive change. For example, activities may seek to raise attention to the problems or gaps in current policy and practice - calling for changes to existing policy and practice rather than a complete transformation of the system. Tactics may include awareness raising; campaigning; street art; petition writing; letter writing; lobbying (policymakers); issuing briefings and developing policy-focussed research.

There are of course overlaps and it may be the case that individuals and groups start with 'advocacy tactics', and if these fail to achieve the desired changes, they move into 'activist actions' as a way of drawing increased attention and public support to different causes.

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5   For example, during the women's liberation movement feminists opened their own institutions including the first rape crisis centres and shelters for survivors of domestic violence.

The remainder of this paper focuses on learning surrounding 'participatory advocacy' - advocacy that is either child or youth-led or child or youth-informed or driven.

In the next section we explain different levels of participation and distinguish between what we mean when we talk about child or youth-led as opposed to child and youth-informed or driven.

Children's participation is generally defined in line with Article 12 of the UNCRC as the right of all children and young people to be involved and influential in decision-making about issues which affect their lives and those of their communities, in accordance with their evolving capacity. Others extend this definition and highlight a need to also focus on evidence of children's influence and change resulting from children's involvement in decision-making (Gallagher, 2008). Similarly Save the Children define the core purpose of children's participation as '[empowering] children as individuals and members of civil society, thus giving them the opportunity to influence their own lives" (Save the Children, 2006).
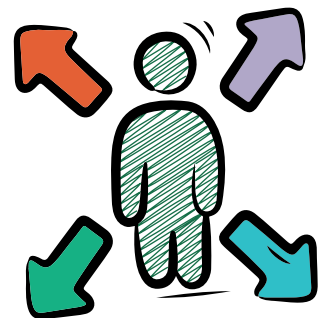
PARTICIPATORY ADVOCACY
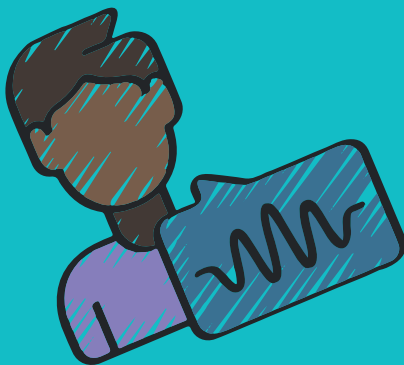
Levels of participation

Within the broader field of child participation, there are a range of models exploring the different levels of children and young people's engagement. This includes the popular categorisation of child participation by Lansdown (2018)., which is either:

» consultative

» collaborative

» child-led[6].

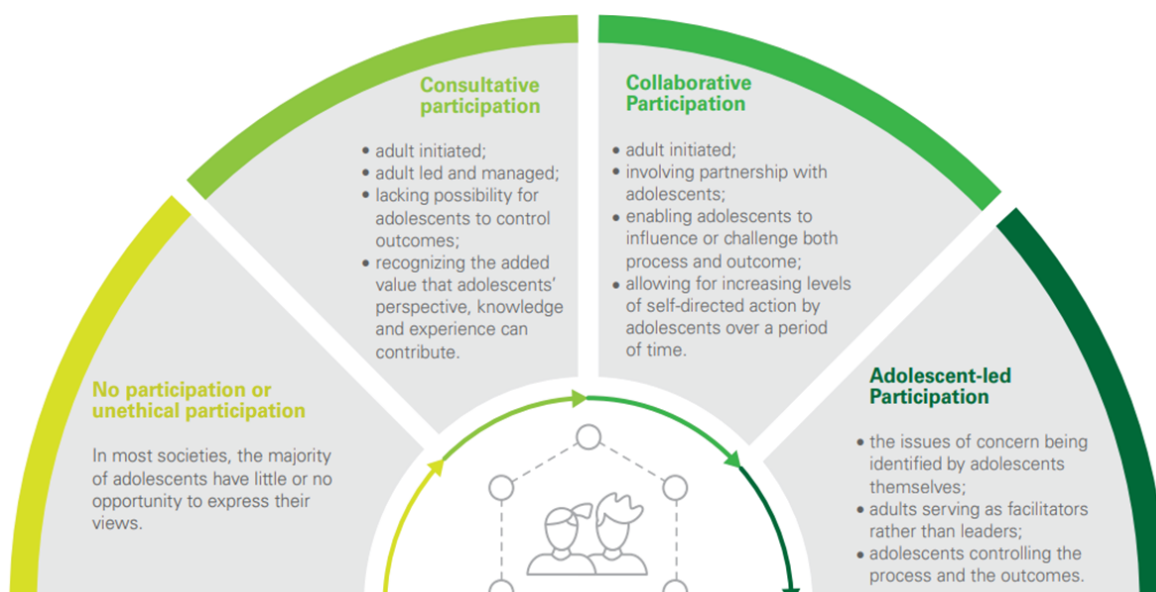Another model seeks to describe the role of children and young people in activities, as either:

» participant

» representative

» facilitator[7].

In thinking about adolescent participation specifically, the below framework distinguishes what Lansdown (2018) has further conceptualised in thinking about young people's engagement.

Consultative participation

- adult initiated;
- adult led and managed;
- lacking possibility for adolescents to control outcomes;
- recognizing the added value that adolescents' perspective, knowledge and experience can contribute.

Collaborative Participation

- adult initiated;
- involving partnership with adolescents;
- enabling adolescents to influence or challenge both process and outcome;
- allowing for increasing levels of self-directed action by adolescents over a period of time.

No participation or unethical participation

In most societies, the majority of adolescents have little or no opportunity to express their views.

Adolescent-led Participation

- the issues of concern being identified by adolescents themselves;
- adults serving as facilitators rather than leaders;
- adolescents controlling the process and the outcomes.

Source: Lansdown, 2018

The model of consultative, collaborative and led is helpful in thinking about the role of children and young people in participatory advocacy. Often children and young people, including young survivors, may engage at different levels at various points across a project lifespan. However, there are scenarios that some may see as falling outside this model, for example, where young people are involved in identifying the issue of concern and initiating the idea, but may struggle to keep up the momentum and lead all aspects.

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6   Model developed by Lansdown & O'Kane, 2014. More recently, work by WeProtect added an additional level to this model, that of 'co-production'.
7   Model developed by Pinto et al., 2020.

Edell et al., (2016) reflect on their own work igniting an intergenerational anti-racist gender justice movement in the USA. They share that although the girls they work with often identify issues and move the work forward, adults provide a significant amount of scaffolding, support and infrastructure and often in these situations do more than 'facilitate'. Therefore, they argue that it is important to delineate the difference between, what they refer to as 'girl-driven', as opposed to the often-misleading labelling of initiatives being 'girl-led'. They suggest that 'girl-led activism' is girls 'running the show' as opposed to 'girl-driven activism' which is where girls share their ideas, insights and initiate actions, but with a lot of input from adult allies who provide support, resources, guidance and who ultimately move the work forward, and sustain it.

THE ADVOCACY CYCLE

In thinking about the advocacy cycle, there are a number of phases that have been broadly identified as distinct stages.

Cox (2009) in the toolkit 'Participatory Advocacy: A toolkit for VSO staff, volunteers and partners' identifies five key stages of the participatory advocacy process:

1. Research and analysis

2. Strategic planning

3. Mobilisation

4. Action

5. Learning and review

The advocacy process is often visualised as a continuous cycle whereby advocates incorporate their learning (stage 5) into their analysis (stage 1), revise plans (stage 2), mobilise (stage 3) and take action again (stage 4).

Activist activities may not take such a planned out, systematic approach. For example, large- scale social movements, which may involve protests and 'hashtag activism', are often sparked by a tragic event or individual actions taken by one person. In these cases, 'activists', including young people, may move straight to the phases of mobilisation and action.[8] This is not to say that such actions are completely separate from planned advocacy work. Such incidents may provide an opportunity or 'moment' to mobilise on a related issue, and experienced youth advocates, may move fast taking advantage of the timing to quickly mobilise.

In participatory advocacy, children and young people, including young survivors, may engage in each phase of the advocacy cycle or in individual elements of each stage. Their level of engagement may also change across these different phases of the advocacy cycle, at some points consulting or collaborating and at other points leading. This is often due to the different risks associated with each element of advocacy work. For example, it may be deemed 'safe' for young people to lead on the strategic planning of an advocacy campaign but 'unsafe' for them to lead on certain advocacy actions and deliver the messages to advocacy targets themselves.

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8   This was evident during the Arab Spring Uprisings that started after Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor in Tunisia, set himself on fire. Cases of sexual violence, such as the case of 23-year-old Jyoti Singh who was gang raped on a Delhi bus, and later died of her injuries, also led to mass protests across India and changes in national law.

Below we outline learning from the literature that is applicable to children and young people's engagement at each stage. We include five stages in the participatory advocacy cycle, adding a 'set up' stage at the start and merging the 'mobilisation and action' stage.

SET UP

We recognise that advocacy activities may be initiated in different ways. A problem or issue may be identified by children and young people themselves. For example, children and young people may be meeting as part of a youth council, advisory committee or children's forum and identify a particular concern or issue that they feel needs to be addressed. However, it appears that within the international child rights and child protection sector, it is more common for organisations to decide a priority issue they wish to advocate on, and from this point identify and 'recruit' groups of children and young people to work with on the issue.

This means the 'set-up' of such projects is a significant phase of the cycle and may include, for example, developing criteria to help 'select' which children and young people will be involved, explaining the opportunities and inviting children and young people to engage.

It is recognised within the literature that if children and young people are going to be meaningfully engaged in advocacy, there must be sufficient resources and a budget attached at the outset (Tunyogi and Schuurman, 2021). The sustainability of future activities should also be considered at the beginning of a project to identify sustainable structures for children and young people to continue to do advocacy and share learning (Sahyoun, 2020).

LEARNING ON THE SETTING UP STAGE

Different approaches can be taken to identify and recruit young advocates

Within the examples included in the review, various approaches were taken to 'recruitment'. For example, in the 'Our Voices Too Youth Advocacy Project[9]' with young women in Eastern Europe, the young women involved in the project were all current, or past service-users of the organisations facilitating youth advocacy. In the 'Child activism in Bangladesh and Ghana against child marriage project[10]' the 'child activists' were members of existing World Vision supported groups that had been set up to explore wider issues impacting children. It was reported that it was through these forums that children identified the issue of child marriage within their communities, which then led to added focus on this issue.

The general advice from those working with children on advocacy is, where it is possible to do so, to 'build on what already exists' when seeking to work with child advocates rather than to create new structures (International Save the Children Alliance, 2007). Although this may be an 'easier' approach, and may also ensure a certain level of sustainability and support for these groups once funding finishes, it is recognised that often children and young people who face additional barriers to participation (e.g. those with disabilities or groups who are often marginalised by society) may not be represented in existing 'participation groups' and structures.

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9   See case example 6
10   See case example 7

Anecdotally, in some contexts it is easier, and generally more accepted by families and communities, to engage children and young people on less sensitive topics than CSE. For example, practitioners have shared that it may be easier to engage children and young people in health and education projects, before gradually introducing topics that may be viewed as 'taboo' or that challenge social and gender norms. Therefore, this may be an additional reason to work, where possible, with existing groups as a degree of trust may have already been built with group members and with their families and communities enabling them to start exploring topics such as CSE.

Facilitating organisations can feel unsure about how to introduce opportunities to engage in advocacy on sensitive topics, particularly when seeking to work with young people who have previous lived experience of those topics

Learning from the *Our Voices Too Youth Advocacy Project*, which involved engaging young survivors of sexual violence in advocacy, highlighted that facilitating organisations were initially anxious in approaching potential participants to engage in the project. They were unsure how to communicate the purpose, how to frame what the youth advocates involvement would entail (as this was to be determined together with the youth advocates) and they were unsure how young people would respond due to the sensitive topic and their personal connections and experience as victims of sexual violence (Bovarnick and Cody, 2020).

Recruitment choices, particularly when they involve young survivors, need to balance considerations of safety and 'readiness' with a commitment to inclusion

Thinking about 'who' to approach to take part in a project or initiative can be challenging, it requires a balance between being inclusive whilst also considering how (and how many) young people can be supported to engage. When engaging survivors in particular, it has been noted that this may require a deeper level of reflection and consideration due to the additional complexities and uncertainties inherent in this work (Cody et al., 2024; Hart; 2017).

Thinking about the composition of groups

Due to limited documentation, there is little solid learning about how best to build groups of children and young people to advocate on issues addressing CSE. For example, we don't know whether there are benefits in engaging mixed groups of young people - those with lived experience of sexual violence with those not known to have these experiences[11]. According to the literature, some believe that there is value in having mixed groups of young people when exploring these issues. For example, Hart (2017) contends that *'collaborations would no doubt be easier in hybrid organisations where child survivors of CSE and those who are not survivors of CSE are working alongside one another'.* However, others have pointed to how this may lead to difficult group dynamics (Cody, 2020). There are also different perspectives on the benefits and challenges of bringing together mixed, as opposed to single-sex, groups of young people to discuss issues related to CSE (Cody, 2020).

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11   Of course we recognise that often projects may engage with children and young people who have experienced some form of sexual violence without knowing this. However, here we are talking about purposively targeting children and young people because of their lived experiences.

Challenges around maintaining attendance and engagement of the same children and young people

A number of projects that have engaged children and young people with, and without, lived experience of sexual violence note the challenges for young people in maintaining regular attendance in projects (Cody, 2020; ECPAT, 2023). Learning from activities that have engaged survivors of CSE illustrates that in some cases these young people may be dealing with chaotic situations which impacts on their ability to attend sessions and complete a project (Suarez et al., 2023).

Different approaches to maintaining engagement and re-recruiting young people

Documented learning shares how organisations have tried different methods to support ongoing engagement, or sustain groups, when they have lost group members. Practitioners often do their upmost to try to re-engage young people if they 'drop out', but in some cases there may be scenarios where this does not work. For example, in a photovoice project involving fifteen survivors of domestic child sex trafficking, Suarez et al., (2023) report how some of their co-researchers experienced unstable home placements, substance abuse issues or experienced legal trouble during the project and were no longer able to continue. When young people did drop out, the remaining group members voted to allow new young people to join the group as co-researchers (although the authors reflect on the impact this had with regards to the changing group dynamics and levels of comfort within the group).

Communicating and gaining consent from 'gatekeepers'

There are often a number of layers of 'gatekeepers' involved when organisations are seeking to make contact with, and work with children and young people in advocacy activities. Depending on the age of children and young people, their relationship with parents and caregivers, and the issue being explored, there may be different levels of consideration to take into account when engaging parents and carers. Communication and permission to invite children and young people into projects may also involve other adults such as school staff, practitioners from services, and in some cases employers.

Learning from advocacy initiatives that involve child workers suggests that engagement with both parents and carers and employers helps address potential risks. In an evaluation of participatory advocacy with working children, meaningfully collaborating with parents and caregivers led to better support of children and their advocacy and contributed to risk management strategies (Sahyoun, 2020). In an evaluation of advocacy by (live-in) child domestic workers, a number of strategies were found to be helpful in securing support from employers for their child workers to engage in educational and skill building activities and to campaign for their rights. Such strategies included: home visits; inviting employers to events run by children and; offering employers training about child rights (Veitch, 2013).

Thinking about sustainability at the start

In an evaluation of participatory advocacy with working children, it was recommended that organisations interested in supporting children's advocacy should take time at the start of a project to consider some central questions about sustainability. This includes thinking about how the work and learning can be fed into other organisations and structures; how groups can be supported once funding for specific projects end; and how children's advocacy can connect with other campaigns on similar issues and causes (Sahyoun, 2020).

In longer term processes – transitions and 'aging out'

Learning from the youth activism field captures some of the mechanisms that groups have adopted to ensure that leadership positions are held by 'young people'. Salazar Rodriguez, (2018) in a report exploring 'girl-led organising', illustrates how young activists often have plans in place to address leadership transitions. For example, in some network's leadership positions may only be held by those who are 18-19, meaning as young people 'age out' there is an expectation that they will 'give up' these positions. FRIDA - the Young Feminist Fund requires all staff to be aged under 30, consequently exit plans are discussed and agreed in advance by staff members[12]. In addition, it is common practice for older members of children's advisory and advocacy groups to become 'alumni' and induct or mentor new members into the group. In a six-country evaluation of advocacy committees made up of child domestic workers, it was found that the inherent age restrictions of the committees created opportunities for older children to become a 'mentor' for younger members (Veitch, 2013). As former child domestic workers, many older children had moved out of domestic work into other fields of work or went into higher education; therefore, the role of mentor allowed them to 'give back' to the people, organisations and structures that had supported them in their past.

Recommendations on the key learning that can be taken forward into ECPAT's approach:

» Where possible to do so, it may be easier to 'build on' what already exists when seeking to engage children and young people in advocacy on the topic of CSE. This may have a number of benefits including that there may be an existing foundation of trust between children and young people, the facilitating organization and parents and carers. It may also be the case that children and young people have had dialogue about related issues and therefore it may be an easier transition to start to explore the more sensitive issue of CSE. In working with existing groups, this may also deal with some of the problems of project 'endings' as there are likely to be mechanisms for continued support in place to sustain such groups.

» If seeking to engage with existing groups, facilitating organisations should be mindful of who is not represented in these groups (e.g. young people with disabilities, those from groups that are traditionally marginalised) and explore ways of creating opportunities for additional young people to join.

» If forming a new group of children and young people to work on an advocacy issue, a greater length of time will be required for recruitment, but also for building trust among group members and with families and communities.

» Communication is central when introducing new opportunities to both children and young people and the adults in their lives. In participatory projects there is a balance to be made between giving enough information about the plans to enable children and young people to give their initial consent, whilst also being honest about the 'unknowns' e.g. that due to the participatory nature of the work, ideas and plans will evolve over time.

» As the 'framing' of advocacy work surrounding CSE is sensitive, it may be helpful to ask other young people - particularly if seeking to engage with survivors - to review drafts of documents or to discuss the overall framing of initiatives to help identify potentially difficult language (e.g. language that may be triggering, patronizing, victim-blaming, insensitive or unclear).

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12   Personal reflection from Helen Veitch having worked as a consultant (over the age of 30!) for FRIDA.

» If seeking to work with survivors of CSE or other individuals where there may be enhanced concerns related to their wellbeing and safety - there are additional considerations that will need to be explored when seeking to assess risk and benefit. The facilitating organisation will need to agree on their approach to risk and needs assessments, and learning suggests that these processes should be strength-based and collaborative (Cody and Soares, 2023). It should be recognised that, when done well, opportunities to 'be heard', and promote 'voice and choice' in meaningful and supportive ways are a key part of a trauma-informed approach and can be valuable for those who have experienced trauma (Cody et al., 2024).

» There are likely to be different benefits and challenges of bringing together groups of children who have different experiences, identities and characteristics. Facilitating organisations should consider the different potential options and prioritize group members' levels of comfort. It is important to recognise that topics covered may be challenging to discuss openly and therefore group members must feel 'safe' to discuss these in a group setting.

» In considering the age of children and young people, again the facilitating team must consider how they will approach parental consent, and the range of potential scenarios involved in securing consent from guardians (e.g. if a young person wishes to attend but the parent doesn't or if there is no legal guardian present etc.)

» Facilitating organisations must presume that there will be a certain level of 'drop off' when working with young people. It will be worth thinking through strategies to help maintain engagement. This may involve peers supporting each other to continue and ensuring young people can always 'rejoin' at a later stage even if they have to step out for some time. It is also worth considering what will happen if young people 'age-out' during the lifespan of a project. These initial discussions should inform further discussions with the youth advocates involved who should be part of the decisions surrounding how these issues are approached in their particular projects.

RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Children and young people, including survivors, may take part in a range of different activities to explore and identify key issues within the community to advocate on. This exploration of issues and identification of topics may be organic. For example, children and young people who may already be involved in a group may, through discussion and observation, identify an issue they wish to learn more about. They may: ask for support to locate existing research on the topic; undertake their own research or; look to collaborate with others to find out more. Whilst such an approach is possible, most examples - and the majority of documentation - suggests that advocacy that involves children and young people is usually introduced by adults. In some cases, the adults may have already undertaken or commissioned research on a particular topic and wish to involve children in the later phases of the advocacy cycle.

CASE EXAMPLE

1

A youth-led study on the vulnerability of children living in the red-light areas of Kolkata

This youth-led study aimed to develop a greater understanding of the realities faced by children living in the four largest red-light areas in Kolkata, India: Kalighat, Bowbazar, Tollygunge and Khidderpur.

13 Youth Surveyors (aged between 16-22), the majority who lived in the red-light areas themselves, developed the initial concept for the study and undertook data collection.

The aim of the study was to provide a stronger platform from which to advocate for greater action and meaningful policy change to ensure better living conditions and essential child protection mechanisms within communities located in these areas.

Small teams of youth were responsible for coordinating the implementation of the survey in each area. Each team broke into pairs to conduct the interviews. Each pair was tasked with interviewing a certain number of children and guardians.

Source: Bhattacharya, 2010.

CASE EXAMPLE

2

A youth-led study involving girls and young women with lived experience of the 'sex trade'[13] Young Women's Empowerment Project (YWEP), USA

This study was developed and conducted by girls ages 12-23 in the 'sex trade[14]' and street economy in Chicago in the USA.

The group met initially for three months in weekly research meetings to discuss what topics they wanted to include in their research. The learning questions included:

1. What kinds of institutional and individual violence are girls in the sex trade experiencing?

2. How are they resistant to this violence?

3. How are they resilient to this violence?

4. How can we unite and fight back?

The aim of the research was for the young women to understand (1) what effect harm reduction was having on the groups' 'outreach contacts' (2) who their 'allies' were (3) how girls respond to other girls in positions of leadership.

The methods included the group undertaking a literature review, facilitating several focus groups with YWEP leadership and membership, and collecting over 300 surveys from outreach contacts across Chicago and the wider state of Illinois.

The group then used the research to identify potential campaign ideas. A number of actions were developed including: developing a political education curriculum to train members and forming a 'youth activist krew' who met weekly to develop a new campaign.

Source: Young Women's Empowerment Project (2009)

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13   Language used by the young people involved who authored the report
14   As above

CASE EXAMPLE

3

Youth-driven Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Initiative in Uganda

The YPAR team included four street connected youth between the ages of 16-25 and two Ugandan university-trained researchers. The team led participant observation, life history interviews, auto-photographic exercises, and focus groups.

Street-connected children (40), sexually exploited children (19) and domestic workers (34) in Kampala were interviewed by street-connected youth researchers. All data collection, analysis and dissemination activities were led by the YPAR team.

In order to disseminate the findings, an 'exhibition booth' was set up at a National Child Welfare conference that attracted those working in relevant organisations on child development and welfare in addition to high-level government officials. In preparation the young researchers had analysed and selected what they felt were the most important messages to be communicated during this event.

Source: Ritterbusch et al., 2020

CASE EXAMPLE

4

Youth Participatory Action Research to inform advocacy to improve the criminal justice system towards young survivors in Albania

'Small Steps' was initiated based on a need identified by a group of young women who had previously engaged in advocacy work as part of the 'Our Voices Too' Youth Advocacy Project (case example 5). The young women felt that decision-makers had not taken their advocacy messages seriously due to the lack of evidence.

Six young women aged 17-26 who were supported by Different & Equal, a frontline service provider based in Tirana, were recruited into the project with the aim of developing their skills to become young researchers. The young researchers met weekly and undertook training sessions which supported them to design their own research project with the support of a professional researcher, a project coordinator and two local facilitators.

Source: Bovarnick, 2018

CASE EXAMPLE

5

Participatory Action Research into the worst forms of child labour in the adult entertainment sector in Nepal

The Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia (CLARISSA) project was a five-year action research programme. It aimed to generate evidence and develop solutions with children to prevent children being exploited in hazardous work in Bangladesh and Nepal.

In Nepal, the research focussed on children working in the adult entertainment sector. Four hundred life stories were collected from children, by children and adults, to understand children's pathways in to, and out of, different forms of labour. Twenty children who shared their stories were involved in analysing these stories and six of the storytellers later joined Action Research Groups of children. The Action Research Groups undertook a range of different advocacy activities based on the evidence collected from the life stories. This included for example: organising workshops for parents, teachers and children to explore issues that may contribute to pathways into child labour; organising life skills and self-defence classes for children; developing and performing dramas to centre children's views and perspectives; and organising events with business owners to share children's needs and experiences.

Source: See Section 4: Veitch, H. Findings from an Evaluation of Child-Led Advocacy in CLARISSA

LEARNING AROUND THE INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS PHASE

There are different options for how children and young people may engage in the 'research and analysis' phase

If a study has been initiated externally by an organisation or institute, there are a range of ways that children and young people may get involved. Although being asked to undertake research can feel daunting, existing toolkits highlight that the research phase of an advocacy project does not always have to be 'in depth and systematic' - or involve undertaking primary research (UNICEF UK, 2019).

Children and young people may be invited to engage with the research process by:

» Validating or 'sense-checking' research findings from a project that is currently underway

» Reviewing and doing their own analysis of a research report or report findings to identity what, from the report, might be the key issues and actions for children and young people

» Undertaking their own 'desk' research on the topic. For example, using different sources to understand what research already exists about the topic they are interested in. This may include talking to different 'experts' or undertaking internet searches.

» Meeting with researchers, including youth researchers, who have been involved in previous studies on the topic they are interested in to understand more about the issue

» Joining a research advisory group for a piece of research that is being implemented on the topic

» Initiating their own primary research project to gather data

» Being recruited into a 'youth participatory action project' – which may involve children and young people using different methods to gather data e.g. through surveys, peer facilitated discussions, or creative research methods.

Expecting children and young people to carry out a 'policy review and analysis' can be challenging

In ECPAT International's recent 'Sustainable Tourism' project, facilitators noted that the young people struggled with some of the planned tasks which included mapping and analysing the current legal and policy landscape with respect to sustainable tourism and CSE nationally (ECPAT, 2023). In many toolkits on participatory advocacy with children, it is recommended that policy analysis is undertaken by adults rather than youth advocates as it requires an understanding of the policy environment that children may have limited experience of.

Children and young people can be exposed to threats and risks if engaging in primary fieldwork

As is the case for any researcher, there are risks involved in engaging in fieldwork. Such risks have been reported by youth researchers, for example, young researchers involved in the youth-led study on the vulnerability of children living in the red light areas of Kolkata (case example 1), reported feeling unsafe when interviewing participants due to the presence of men drinking alcohol in houses they visited (Bhattacharya, 2010).

Children and young people can find it emotionally challenging when carrying out research with other children and young people

Young researchers have shared how leading research on sensitive issues, particularly when they have a personal connection to the issue, can be overwhelming. In the report from the Young Women's Empowerment Project (2009) (case example 2) the team noted *'that girls who were in charge of collecting and coding the data had to read lots of different stories that were both painful and uplifting'*.

Children and young people may feel ill equipped to undertake research

Reports suggest that youth researchers often lack the confidence and training to discuss the research with potential participants at the start of the process (Bhattacharya, 2010.). It has also been reported that young researchers can feel less confident and accustomed to asking probing questions, which may have an impact on the quality of data (Small Steps Collaboration, 2022).

When young researchers are connected to, or known within the community, this can improve access to participants and, in some cases, provide a 'safer space' for participants

Learning from the youth-led study in Kolkata (case example 1) indicated that, as the youth researchers lived in the red-light areas, this meant it was easier to access participants (Bhattacharya, 2010). When conducting research on violence, peer-led interviewing may help form a 'safe space' for participants. Ritterbusch et al. (2020) found that in their study in Uganda (case example 3), youth researchers, as peers, were able to develop a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and therefore the research space allowed for 'collective reflection' as opposed to a potentially extractive process.

It is important to build in mechanisms, processes and guidelines to protect young people involved in the research process

Those working to support young researchers, and young researchers themselves, have noted how young researchers require training, ongoing mentoring, and regular contact to support them to undertake primary research (Fortin et al., 2022). Young researchers themselves have shared how 'check ins' or debriefs with each other is important when not only collecting data but also when reviewing and analysing data. In the project in the USA (case example 2), the young researchers spoke about the helpfulness of taking part in 'sister circles and healing circles', taking breaks and using aromatherapy to help them deal with the emotional challenges of being involved in the research (Young Women's Empowerment Project, 2009).

It is possible to work with, or collaborate with others to undertake different elements of the research and analysis phase

In the Small Steps project (case example 4), a local consultant was hired to conduct a scoping review to outline relevant information about current practice and policies pertaining to child protection, domestic violence, trafficking and sexual violence. A summary of the scoping review was then presented to the young researchers so they could familiarise themselves with the current practice and policy landscape.

Although it may not be necessary for children and young people who wish to lead and drive advocacy activities to undertake primary research, having some connection to this phase can be useful

Learning from the CLARISSA project (case example 5) in Nepal found that, child-led advocacy activities can effectively influence decision-makers, particularly when children draw on evidence, they had collected themselves (Veitch as cited in Apgar et al. 2024).

In this project, youth researchers undertook research in their communities, interviewing peers, parents, employers and teachers, and subsequently undertook local level awareness raising and advocacy with duty bearers (e.g. parents, employers, teachers). When youth advocates (young people with lived experience of child labour who had received training on advocacy) joined forces with these youth researchers they were able to scale-up activities from a local level to a metropolitan level. They were able to develop 'evidence based' recommendations (based on the 400 life stories and research in their communities) that they presented to the Deputy Mayor of Kathmandu.

Recommendations on the key learning that can be taken forward into ECPAT's approach:

» Undertaking any form of research and analysis requires a certain level of knowledge and skill development. It may be helpful to map which research and analysis activities make best use of children and young people's experience, interests or knowledge and which make best use of adults' experience or knowledge.

» If there is an expectation that children and young people will engage in primary or secondary research and analysis, it is critical that they are supported to develop relevant skills. This will require a certain level of 'training' and time and input from those who have undertaken research in the past. Facilitating organisations should be aware that, at the point of conception, it is likely that they will not know the preferred methods that children and young people may wish to take to explore an issue. Therefore, they need to be agile when planning for this phase – e.g. not presuming that young people will want to use creative research methodologies for example and being ready to bring in different expertise and training depending on how this phase develops.

» If children and young people do engage in primary research (whether that involves interviewing two or three of their peers, or more intense 'fieldwork') it is critical that ethics and 'researcher welfare' are taken seriously. There should be risk assessments and safety plans built into this stage to support children and young people.

» Given it may be challenging for children and young people to undertake certain parts of this phase e.g. policy and legal reviews, different options should be available. This may involve contracting a local researcher to carry out a scoping review which is then presented to the youth advocates; arranging for experts to meet with youth advocates to explain the policy context or; producing a child-friendly report of an existing policy document to discuss together with youth advocates.

» Depending on the context, there may have been recent research undertaken on the topics of interest. Again, it may be worth exploring options for youth advocates to meet or interview local researchers who have undertaken studies on this topic or meet with youth researchers, if young people have been involved, to learn directly from them.

ADVOCACY PLANNING

Following research and analysis, the next phase is a 'design' phase where an advocacy plan is developed by children and young people. In this phase, the focus is on designing an advocacy campaign by identifying the key stakeholders and the goals, objectives, targets and tactics of the advocacy activities. As part of this process there may be further types of analysis involved, for example, a 'stakeholder analysis' to understand potential allies, adversaries, or influencers of advocacy targets.[15] In this phase, it will be important to continue to undertake regular risk assessments with children and young people to support their decision-making on specific aspects of the advocacy activities being planned.

There are a range of excellent, accessible and practical toolkits on involving children in advocacy, and supporting children and young people to develop their own advocacy plans (see box 4 at the end of the paper). This section therefore focuses specifically on what adaptations, or additional considerations, may be required when developing advocacy campaigns that:

» tackle CSE and/or

» involve children and young people with lived experience of CSE

CASE EXAMPLE

6

Our Voices Too Youth Advocacy Project to address sexual violence against children in Albania, Moldova and Serbia

Fifteen young women (five in each country) took part in a 12-week training programme. The programme focussed on creating a 'safe space' to start to explore the topic of sexual violence and also provided information and training on children's rights and participation, sexual violence and advocacy.

As part of the training programme, the youth advocates developed their own advocacy plans working together in their groups in each country, using a problem and solution tree to identify and map key issues for children and young people affected by sexual violence in their countries. Each group ranked the problems in order of importance and developed ideas regarding possible solutions.

Although the youth advocates discussed a range of problems, all the groups independently chose more or less the same advocacy topic. How victims/survivors of sexual violence are viewed and treated by first contact professionals.

Each group developed advocacy messages, identified target audiences and designed a range of corresponding advocacy activities.

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15 As part of this planning phase (or before) it may also be helpful to undertake an internal analysis of the facilitating organisation to assess the skills and resources within the team to identify who could support children and young people's advocacy work.

CASE EXAMPLE

6

For example, in Albania the focus was on improving responses from first contact police officers to victims-survivors of sexual violence. The youth advocates wrote and submitted an official statement to the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Interior and National Coordinator for Anti-Trafficking in Albania. In the statement, they outlined how victims-survivors are treated by first contact police officers and made recommendations to improve responses. The youth advocates designed information materials for police stations and organised information sessions with police officers on how to engage with victims-survivors of sexual violence.

In Moldova, the youth advocates wanted to sensitise a wide range of professionals who may come into contact with child victims-survivors of sexual abuse. They jointly wrote a powerful script for a short film called 'Letter to the Judge', which tells the story of a survivor's experience of coming before a judge as a child and recounts the opportunities professionals missed to listen and respond to the abuse. The film was developed as a composite case study integrating aspects of the youth advocates' own stories. It was launched at a high-level national event attended by key stakeholders from different ministries. Drawing on the youth-led advocacy activities, 50 child protection professionals were trained on how to take statements from child victims of sexual violence.

In Serbia, the youth advocates organised high-level meetings with the National Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and representatives from the Centre for Social Work to discuss the treatment of victims-survivors. They also delivered information sessions about victim-centred responses to a range of professional groups and institutions. As part of a wider awareness-raising campaign, the youth advocates produced and distributed materials, such as posters, postcards, T-shirts and bags with positive messages promoting core values such as freedom, non-discrimination, equality and children's rights. Targeting peers, the youth advocates organised various events around the country to deliver information sessions about sexual violence and trafficking.

Source: Bovarnick and Cody, 2020

LEARNING AROUND THE INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN THE ADVOCACY PLANNING PHASE

Although there are many 'how-to' toolkits on engaging children and young people in advocacy planning and design, there is little evidence or evaluation of the impact of involving children and young people in advocacy planning generally. Consequently, this section is largely based on the authors' own learning and explores how young people with lived experience of CSE can be involved in advocacy planning.

Young people's involvement can lead to better targeted messages and services

Organisations who have worked with young people with lived experience of sexual violence to create advocacy and campaigns on sexual violence have commented that they feel that the involvement of young people, specifically those with lived experience, leads to better ideas (Bovarnick and Cody, 2020).

Young people's involvement in the design of advocacy messages and activities, particularly when it involves young people with lived experience, can add clarity and legitimacy to organisations' own advocacy work

Whilst it has been noted that there can be greater challenges when supporting young survivors to engage in the later stages of the participatory advocacy cycle, it has been noted that their input in the planning stage can be beneficial in 'getting to the heart' of the problem (Bovarnick and Cody, 2020)

> *Young people go right to the heart of the problem with no concern in their mind, on the other hand for us as professionals it is difficult to have such a way of thinking and acting. This often limits our areas of action.*
>
> *(Facilitator, Albania, Bovarnick and Cody, 2020:43)*

Young people may be less cynical and more optimistic about what can be achieved in an advocacy campaign. For example in the Our Voices Too Youth Advocacy Project (case example 6), the facilitating organisation in Albania shared how, although they were aware of the need to focus efforts on changing the way police treat young survivors of trafficking, they had previously been hesitant in targeting the police as they were aware of the challenges and barriers in doing so. However, as the youth advocates were determined to address this issue, the partners supported the youth advocates to target police through their advocacy actions.

In an evaluation of the CLARISSA Project (case example 5), the development of a Theory of Change by youth advocates (with lived experience of working in the adult entertainment sector) in Nepal was a critical process in advocacy planning. The Theory of Change acted as the foundation for an advocacy strategy and enabled young people to clearly articulate recommendations for specific advocacy targets. For example, when asked what is needed to make the adult entertainment sector safe for children, one youth advocate stated: *"Proper working hours, minimum pay, CCTV, safe working environment and regular monitoring visit of the police. Strict laws must be implemented."* (Veitch as cited in Apgar et al. 2024). In this project, child-led advocacy with children acting as 'experts by experience' complemented evidence-based advocacy.

Giving young people budgetary responsibilities (through small grants schemes or specific budgets for example) can improve the level of decision-making by young people and enables young people to make more realistic and informed decisions (Veitch, 2013).

Young people, with lived experience of an issue, may choose to focus on messaging that presents a different narrative to the 'typical' messaging developed by child protection organisations

When children and young people, particularly young survivors, are involved in creating advocacy messages or awareness raising campaigns, they may wish to convey different narratives than those typically presented in the media and by NGOs. One Photovoice project in the US, that involved young survivors of trafficking, reported how the group of young people designed an advocacy initiative addressing the trafficking of children for the purposes of sexual exploitation that was hopeful and positive rather than hard hitting and sensational (Suarez et al., 2023).

An evaluation of the CLARISSA project (case example 5) noted that four of the five key recommendations developed by working children in Nepal that were presented and discussed with members of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, called for children to be able to combine work with education. This challenged the dominant narrative that 'child labour should be eliminated, and children should be in education' promoted by the International Labour Organisation, many governments and NGOs (Veitch as cited in Apgar et al. 2024).

In the same evaluation, parents reported how impressed they were by the children's capacity to facilitate, organise, present and take notes at the awareness raising workshops they participated in. This evidence suggests that, in itself, the process of children's involvement in 'organising' or 'leading' advocacy activities challenges societal norms (dominant narratives) whereby children, particularly those working in the Adult Entertainment Sector, are seen negatively as school dropouts who are not as competent or responsible as adults (Veitch as cited in Apgar et al. 2024).

The 'level' that young people wish to target is important

Learning from global campaigns involving children and young people indicate that it is important that children and young people understand, and can illustrate, how issues affect them personally at the local level (International Save the Children Alliance, 2007). Therefore, engaging in local level actions, as opposed to focussing primarily on 'international' actions, may allow for advocacy work to be more rooted and powerful.

Similarly, Hart (2017) notes that there is still a tendency for organisations to engage children and young people in efforts that aim to lead to change 'beyond the organisation' rather than considering how young people could *'establish exemplary participatory democratic practice 'within the organisation'.* It may therefore be helpful to think about where participatory advocacy needs to start, e.g. within organisations working with children.

Youth advocates as representatives of their peers

When youth advocates are elected and mandated by their peers they become 'representatives'. This means they can speak beyond their own personal experiences; they can consult with peers and raise issues with advocacy targets that represent a broader range of 'lived experience'. When appropriate consultation and feedback mechanisms are put in place, youth advocates can go back to their peers to feedback and consult with them on further issues. This representation process has been found to increase the sense of solidarity between youth advocates and with their peers more widely (Veitch, 2013).

Adapting advocacy plans to specific contexts

In a learning report for a participatory advocacy campaign on sexual violence against boys in Latin America (Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico and Paraguay) organised by Family for Every Child, a number of differences were found when advocating for the rights of boys and young men (as opposed to girls and young women) and sexual violence. Firstly, because sexual violence against boys is denied in many societies, advocating for the rights of boys who have experienced sexual violence was incorporated into a wider advocacy campaign to address sexual violence against all children. Within the broader messaging, specific messages were then added that addressed the needs of boys and young men as victims of abuse, which included the need for services for victim-survivors to be inclusive.

The overall lack of response services for child victims of sexual violence meant that in some countries, advocacy campaigns focused on the need for prevention activities on sexual violence against children. This strategy was also due to the stigma and backlash faced by some advocates who spoke publicly about the rights of boys and young men as victims of sexual violence. Advocating for prevention of all sexual violence against children was seen as a softer, more positive approach that appeared to lessen the 'moral panic' attached to this issue from conservative lobby groups. This learning is mirrored in the global advocacy campaign 'Blue Umbrella Day' run by Family for Every Child which focuses on protecting boys from sexual violence.

When exploring sexual violence of boys with youth advocates, the issue of consent (to sexual activity) raised some questions about how different the concept of 'consent' may be for young men and young women given the heteronormative culture (i.e. the assumption that sexual relations are heterosexual) in most societies. Many of the common scenarios used to discuss consent with youth advocates needed further adaptation to reflect the realities of boys rather than girls.

Recommendations on the key learning that can be taken forward into ECPAT's approach:

» Although there is little learning documented specific to this phase, based on the reflections presented above, it appears that this is a critical phase for children and young people, particularly those with lived experience, to engage in. This is the phase where children and young people can shape the focus of, and narrative surrounding, planned advocacy actions.

» Learning suggests that children and young people who are involved in advocacy planning may benefit from engagement with evidence and research so they understand the issues and can therefore problem solve specific activities and actions to address these issues.

» Learning also seems to suggest that children who are connected to the issues locally and or, are able to represent other children, may be well placed to advocate at other levels (e.g. nationally, regionally) at later stages.

» Facilitating organisations should be prepared for this phase to be potentially challenging, particularly if youth advocates wish to explore, or create messages that challenge the 'status quo' or are in opposition to the facilitating organisations' traditional approach. As with all phases, open communication is important and there should be opportunities for everyone to share worries or concerns.

» It is critical that advocacy planning is contextualised to the local environment. Children and young people may work together with adults to consider how best to frame advocacy messages so that they resonate and have a positive impact.

MOBILISATION AND ACTION

Mobilisation is the phase that involves 'bringing others with you' to support the central cause or issue. This may involve children and young people mobilising their peers and 'self-organising' and/or mobilising adults and other organisations as part of efforts to build a coalition around a particular issue. Often children and young people are already working with an organisation which is supporting them. This organisation may be well connected with others working in the area locally and nationally and therefore may be able to 'mobilise' other professionals and groups. In our review of the literature, there appears to be fewer examples of children and young people mobilising their friends, or other peers, into actions addressing CSE or related issues.

Often mobilisation is a part of the 'action', for example young people may engage in 'awareness-raising activities' with the aim of educating and developing more support for their future ideas and demands. Children and young people, including survivors, have engaged in a range of actions that have aimed to draw attention to, and demand better services and support for children and young people affected by CSE and related harms.

This has included informing and driving:

» awareness raising campaigns – including online campaigns such as #BreakTheChains[16]

» commissioning artists to develop murals (Suarez et al., 2023)

» creating street art or developing community murals (ECPAT, 2023)

» petition writing and letter writing (Bovarnick and Cody, 2020)

» meeting with senior officials to share their learning and experiences (Bovarnick and Cody, 2020)

» and developing workshops and training for different groups including young people, parents, teachers and professionals (Bovarnick and Cody, 2020; Veitch as cited in Apgar et al. 2024).

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16   See the work of One Child in Canada https://www.onechild.ca/youth/

CASE EXAMPLE

7

Child activism in Bangladesh and Ghana against child marriage

Groups of child activists in Bangladesh and Ghana were supported by World Vision to address the issue of child marriage in their local communities. The child activists were involved in long standing groups where they came together locally to learn about and act on children's human rights. These are known as Child Forums in Bangladesh, and as Children's Parliaments in Ghana. Through researching about the actions, they took to address child marriage, it was identified that their actions often involved five key stages:

» receiving or collecting information about a potential child marriag

» meeting with members of the Child Forum (Bangladesh) or Children's Parliament (Ghana) to develop a strategy for their activism

» mobilising their connections with adults who could help them stop a child marriag

» visiting the potential bride's family to influence them to not allow the marriage to go ahead

» celebrating stopping a potential child marriage or learning from failures.

Source: Tisdall and Cuevas-Parra, 2022

BOX 2

SPACES FOR ADVOCACY – THE RISE OF DIGITAL ACTIVISM

In discussing children's rights to protest, Nishiyama (2020) identifies three 'sites' for action: on the streets, online and in school. Recent work on 'girl' and 'youth' activism focuses on digital activism as a key site for today's young activists.

The rise of the internet, and widespread use of social media, has been lauded as providing a new space for action and engagement, especially for young people. This is in contrast to the preceding decades where grassroots activism was grounded in physical demonstrations and protests.

Social media has enabled grassroots actions to be amplified and to gain significant traction. Well known examples, such as 'Fridays for Future strikes' are just one of many that demonstrate how small, local actions can spark global movements, captivating millions of children and young people all over the world to strike and protest.

Hashtag movements or 'hactivism', such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter used the online space to organise and mobilise at a much faster pace. As a result, through global connectivity, activism can, in reality, be led by individuals sitting at home.

It has been contended that online activism is a more inclusive space as compared to traditional activism. For example, it has been noted that online feminist action opens up more space for non-white feminism:

'*At its most visible, hashtag feminism provides an alternative space for grassroots feminist activism and feminists of color to flourish through digital media and to reclaim the terrain of feminism from the white organizational activists who have long dominated the feminist movement: hashtag feminism makes the intersectionality of feminist projects more visible and vocal*' (Liao and Luqiu, 2022)

Restless Development's (2023) most recent 'State of the Youth Society report' which focussed on the biggest challenges facing feminist youth movements at the frontlines of democratic struggles around the world, reported that 85% of survey respondents identified social media campaigns as the most employed strategy in their work. The study highlights how the ability to be creative, to connect, collaborate and amplify their voices made this a favoured form. The report also notes how this space can provide authentic accounts and narratives that may otherwise never make it into mainstream media. Instead of waiting for journalists to pick up stories and cover them, online activism allows young activists to create and communicate their own content. However, the report also identifies that whilst social media has many benefits, digital activism should complement, not replace, real world activism. It is also important to note how 'hashtag activism' often does not remain in one sphere but translates to protests and demonstrations on the street and in other spaces.

BOX 3

THE COUNTRY CONTEXT FOR ADVOCACY MATTERS

Context matters. The activities and levels of engagement that children and young people can engage in will be dependent on a range of factors. For example, in thinking about climate advocacy and action, Vanessa Nakate, the Ugandan activist notes how she was unable to engage in 'Thunberg style' protests and the first 'strike' in Uganda was in fact framed as an event to 'raise awareness' and lasted for only one day. In writing about these differences, Locke (2023) notes that different gender norms and expectations and restrictions in Uganda, as opposed to Sweden, tempered what was achievable and safe for young activists in this context.

As Joachim et al (2021) note, activism does not stop in times of crisis. In writing about girl-led interventions these authors document examples of how girls and women continued advocacy in the midst of crisis situations. For example, they write how women's networks continued to provide safe spaces, and hotline support to address trafficking following the 2015 earthquake in Nepal. The authors also note however that girl-led activism receives little coverage and therefore there are limits to what we know about their actions and support needs. In their study they found a significant lack of information and documentation about girls' organising in situations of crisis.

In contexts where States censor independent media, the use of the internet and any form of collective action obviously impede advocacy and activism, leading to additional dangers and risks for any form of engagement both online and offline. As an example, in China during the #MeToo movement the hashtag was censored by the state which led to feminist activists creating different hashtags to circumvent the authorities.

LEARNING AROUND THE INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN MOBILISATION AND ACTION

The first stage is creating safe spaces for children to discuss 'taboo' or sensitive topics

The first stage of any mobilisation around CSE involves opening up safe spaces to talk about the general issue of sex.

The issue of childhood sexual violence is a taboo subject, this means 'awareness raising' or simply speaking about it in public, is often the first stage of any kind of mobilisation.

Evidence from the CLARISSA project (case example 5), which involved Action Research Groups of children working in the Adult Entertainment Sector in Nepal, illustrates that at the outset children experienced multiple barriers to undertaking advocacy actions. They reported feeling fear of stigma, discrimination and judgement because of their work in the Adult Entertainment Sector and this therefore was a key barrier for them in speaking publicly about their lives: *'So that others won't know what is happening with us. We can't share it with others because others will judge us. We fear what they will think of us.'* (Veitch, as cited in Apgar et al. 2024). Additional learning from this project suggested that there was a tendency for children to want to share any learning (about their rights etc.) with other children first, and then to share with duty bearers or other groups of key stakeholders.

Young people can inspire other young people to mobilise and get involved in a cause

Project learning demonstrates that youth-led awareness raising that targets peers can be a successful way of mobilising other young people (Bovarnick and Cody, 2020).

Young people's involvement in actions, particularly those with lived experience, can enhance credibility

Consultations with children and young people underscore the importance of involving individuals with 'real' experience of sexual violence in prevention campaigns, resources and activities that are targeted at other young people (Cody, 2017). Practitioners also recognise how advocacy efforts that involve survivors enhances the 'credibility' and 'authenticity' of these actions (Bovarnick and Cody, 2020).

In seeking to address issues around violence in young people's lives, researchers have highlighted how young people are often more comfortable talking to their peers as opposed to adults who they may feel don't understand their lives and situations (Barter et al., 2015; Horwath et al., 2012; Hellevik et al., 2015).

The power of peer-led and delivered approaches when seeking to support those with lived experience of CSE is also increasingly being recognised (Bintliff et al., 2018; Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2018; Kenny et al., 2020; O'Brien, 2018; Rothman et al., 2020; Williams and Frederick, 2009).

There are tensions in involving children and young people, particularly those with lived experience, in public actions

CSE is a sensitive topic, and children and young people are aware of this and have outlined the barriers of engaging in prevention work on this topic. For example, in consultations with children and young people in Europe, they shared that there is limited space for discussion about sex and relationships in general and it was therefore even harder to talk about sexual violence. They also shared that if they were going to be involved in prevention work addressing sexual violence, they would want to be involved in conversations about the language used noting they didn't like certain terms connected with the topic. They also shared that they would need to think carefully about how they were involved, and what audiences they would be addressing (Cody, 2017).

Although it is recognised that involving those with lived experience can add credibility to advocacy efforts, organisations supporting young survivors have also identified tensions and the need to protect victims' and survivors' identities (Bovarnick and Cody, 2020; Cody and Soares, 2023). Learning from the Our Voices Too Youth Advocacy project (case example 6) however indicated that involvement in earlier phases, such as 'strategic planning' can add a level of 'clarity and legitimacy' to advocacy work meaning that it may not be essential to involve survivors in all actions. Recent research with adult survivors highlights the high costs involved for some survivors who choose to share their stories to raise awareness and support the work of organisations working in this space (Taylor and Clarence, 2021).

Another recent report, *'Advocacy by persons with lived experience of sexual violence in childhood'* (Moreno, 2023) notes that:

> *Too many survivors/victims have paid (and are still paying) a high toll for their public exposure. Other people with lived experience willing to engage, struggle to do so in a meaningful way because of lack of support, advice and opportunities, of enabling environments that are trauma informed. In some regions of the world, the stigma attached to sexual violence remains an obstacle for both adults and children to publicly identify themselves as survivors/victims.*

Although recognising these challenges, those working with children and young people have observed that children tend to be 'outcome-orientated' meaning that if they are invited to share their ideas in research and consultation processes that often they wish to take part in the 'doing' (Hill, 2006; Cody, 2017).

Ethical storytelling

Many advocacy actions involve those with lived experience of the issue 'telling their story' to the public, via media channels or at events bringing advocacy targets together. Very rarely do those with lived experience have an opportunity to control how their story is told, for example, designing the way it is recorded, developing the 'script' for a story or having editorial control. There is, however, a growing interest in participatory film production and ethical storytelling in the humanitarian sector where stories are co-created with those who have lived experience of the key 'issue' in the story (Bordbar and Crombie, 2023).

Ethical story producer and advocate, Brigitte Perenyi, was seven years old when she had her own story told by a nonprofit. She recognises that in some ways it helped her but in others, it did her harm. Now she advocates for the safety of others like herself and in 2017 she re-told her childhood story, using an ethical storytelling approach she now promotes to others:

> *The producers and editors of the film were able to help me develop a clear vision of what was possible, they patiently listened to my ideas and taught me what parts might work and why others just didn't. I needed to learn from their experience so the film could have an impact, and they needed to respect my boundaries of what I was willing to share publicly with the world. I learned that you need both of those things that tells a story that gives dignity, power and safety to the person telling it.[17]*

Acts of 'resistance' are often met with 'resistance'

Learning from the broader youth activist literature notes that it is important to remember that acts of 'resistance' are often met with 'resistance' and therefore it is important to consider the potential risks for those who shine a light on bad practice or identify key problems. For example, in the YPAR project in Uganda (case example 3), it was reported that during the young researchers' dissemination event at a national conference, police officials who were in attendance took issue with quotes that were part of the young researchers' display that referred to police violence and rape of children and young people. The police ordered the group to take the content down (Ritterbusch et al., 2020).

We are witnessing a contracting space for all activism and civil society

Within the youth activism literature, there is a clear message around a general move globally whereby states are seeking to limit and control civil society. This therefore impacts on all forms of activism, including youth advocacy and activism (Salazar Rodriguez, 2018).

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17   See Brigitte Perenyi's website https://www.brigitteperenyi.com/about-me

There are a range of threats and dangers for young activists and advocates who engage in online, digital activism

The literature surrounding digital activism underscores how young activists who engage in online actions can feel alone and isolated. In these spaces, young activists are at greater risk of not finding face-to-face support and are more likely to experience online harassment, bullying and censorship, which ultimately takes a toll on their mental health and wellbeing. The most recent 'State of Youth Civil Society Report' (2023) highlights that young feminists are often at the forefront of feminist social movements that address a range of high-profile issues such as gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive rights and gender discrimination and the curtailing of women's rights. Engaging in activism on these topics can have a negative impact on some young people and there is a need for greater care and support of youth activists.

As Luwei and Luqiu (2022) write, hashtag feminism is *'handcuffed by its visibility'*. This means that users face trolling, threats and misappropriation of hashtags[18]. In certain contexts, authorities may also be monitoring online activity as part of their surveillance and control efforts.

Reports also suggest that young feminist organisations in particular are facing threats and violent attacks from extremist or fundamentalist religious groups across all regions, notably in the Asia-Pacific and MENA regions. In addition, there is evidence from Latin America in particular, of children and child protection rhetoric being used by faith-based, gender restrictive groups to *'manufacture moral panic and mobilize it against human rights, particularly those related to gender justice'* (Martinez et al., 2021).

In responding to the challenges faced by online activists, new campaigns and projects such as the 'Countering Backlash' Project have evolved to understand more about the impact of, and strategies to fight back against this 'backlash'[19].

The problems with the 'exceptional girl'

Greta Thunberg and Malala are commonly held up as examples of how young people can achieve great change. However, scholars and practitioners have problematized the attention that is often placed on particular individuals. The "Malala Effect" is a term that has been used to refer to the myriad problems of focussing on one individual 'empowered girl' or "girl hero" (Locke, 2023). Locke (2023) argues that this 'singling out' leads to more hostility towards these individual 'heroes' and underplays the important role that others, including families and communities, play 'behind the scenes'. Locke argues that intergenerational relationships are often not recognised when we focus on young activists and there is less attention given to the significance of networks of support and solidarity that form the foundation of political change.

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18   There have been a number of high profile reports where young people who have used social media to report or draw attention to sexual harassment have faced considerable backlash For example, online reports share the case of Ain Husniza Saiful Nizam, a 17 year old school girl in Malaysia who, in 2021, uploaded a TikTok video reporting a teacher who made rape jokes in the classroom with the hashtag #MakeSchoolASaferPlace, calling out the behaviour of a male teacher. This led to support and attention but Ain also received rape threats and abuse and she and her family were forced to move due to the backlash received (source).

19   See https://counteringbacklash.org/

Others have shared the pressure that can come when donors and the media wish to focus on exceptional individuals rather than recognising others' roles in creating change. For example, practitioners from one organisation in the US working with girls have reflected on how, *'the more we are affiliated with this false story of exceptional girl activism, the more we are rewarded (with media attention, funding, and more applications from more girls).'* (Edell, Brown and Montano, 2016).

Young people who are working to inspire change, but do not receive the same attention, have also indicated how de-motivating it can be for their work to be compared to individuals such as Greta and Malala noting this can be 'disheartening', rather than 'inspiring' (Cody and Soares, 2022):

> *So you know how, like, obviously, their [Greta and Malala] activism, they're on the news, they're doing something, but for the people that's like us, the people that have joined [a youth advisory panel], that have their own lives, we're still giving an input to make other people's lives better. We might not think it, we might feel like this is not enough or I'm not on TV or I'm not a massive act like, you know, doing a lot, but even like doing these sessions and having these meetings and talking about how to change, I feel like we're doing quite a lot and we should still be like as proud, if not more than those on TV because we're doing it in the background with no limelight, with no TV, with nothing, but we're still making a, how do I say it, still making progress, impact.*

(Cody and Soares, 2022).

This young person felt that it was important to recognise that anyone who is involved in trying to inform and influence decision-making processes was playing an important role.

Who is being represented?

In actions, it is important that young people, or groups of young people are clear about who they represent - are they representing themselves only or speaking on behalf of a wider group of young people? Learning indicates that there are better outcomes if children and young people who are attending meetings take the time to consult and gather views from other children and young people in order to be able to 'speak on behalf of' a wider group (International Save the Children Alliance, 2007). Learning from participatory work with children and young people highlights the importance of child or youth 'representatives' being mandated by their peers so that they can draw on a much wider experience than their own story when advocating for their rights

Recommendations on the key learning that can be taken forward into ECPAT's approach:

» Mobilising around sensitive issues that are not openly discussed can be challenging. Although there is evidence about the benefits of peer-to-peer education and awareness raising, children and young people may not feel comfortable discussing issues related to CSE and related harms with others.

» It will be important to map (as part of the strategic planning phase) which groups need to be mobilized in order to achieve the advocacy goal e.g. is it teachers, parents, community leaders, social workers or is it businesses and those in the private sector for example? Depending on the group to be mobilized, it may require working with different allies who are in the position to help mobilize on behalf of children and young people.

» If the advocacy plan includes mobilising other children and young people, this phase in itself may require longer timeframes (and resources) in order to introduce the topic sensitively.

» Based on learning from different movements, building 'critical consciousness' through dialogue and discussion can enable individuals and groups to recognize and connect personal experiences with the political which can act as a catalyst, igniting mobilisation.

» Recognising that 'influence' and 'audience' are critical pieces in participatory approaches, it is likely that this phase will be important in helping to build the support required to initiate change.[20]

» Different actions involve different risks and challenges that need to be considered and addressed on an ongoing basis.

» Online actions, such as social media campaigns, can be powerful mechanisms for building momentum and mobilizing other children and young people. However, learning from young activists suggests that there are different risks involved that need to be carefully mapped and countered to prevent the potential for harassment, bullying and surveillance.

» Before expecting children and young people to engage in actions addressing CSE, with other children and young people, it is important to create spaces for dialogue on sex and relationships in general – this needs to come first and can take time and lead to tensions in families and communities.

» The language used in advocacy actions and campaigns is important as it can lead to stigma for those involved. Children and young people should be involved in framing and labelling the work so that they feel comfortable being connected to actions or advocacy undertaken as part of the project/initiative.

» Given the reported 'contracting space' for activism, having a good understanding of the local context is essential before engaging in any kind of activism or advocacy.

» Although children and young people are often framed as experts in the use of digital and online communication, if online actions are being developed, supporting children and young people to think about how to keep safe online when campaigning is a critical element in supporting their participation.

» Pressure from the media, together with limited budgets, can often mean that individual young people are profiled or invited to attend high-level events. It is important to resist these pressures and find ways to profile, elevate and acknowledge the work of all children and young people involved in social change, not just individuals.

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20   See Lundy's model of child participation

LEARNING AND REVIEW

Across the different advocacy toolkits and guides, the final phase in the cycle is 'learning' in order to shape future actions and processes and to assess what changes have occurred due to the advocacy actions.

Learning around the involvement of children and young people in the learning and review phase

Learning is often focussed on how children and young people have benefitted from being involved rather than on how their involvement, and the participatory approach adopted, has enhanced the advocacy goal

When involving children and young people in participatory processes, there are often attempts to measure the benefits for those individual children and young people who have participated. Such measurements may seek to assess whether they have developed their skills, knowledge, confidence and self-esteem. Evaluations tend to focus on the 'quality' of the participation process with children and young people or the 'impact' of engaging in participatory advocacy on children and young people. There is however a significant gap in the literature around the significance, or added value, that a participatory approach has on the advocacy goal itself. For example, we know very little about whether the involvement of children and young people in advocacy campaigns has a greater impact on decision-makers than adults' advocacy campaigns addressing child rights issues. This is a crucial gap.

Evidencing the impact of participatory advocacy on decision-makers can be harder to document

In an evaluation of child-led advocacy on child labour in Nepal (case example 5), a realist approach was taken to explore the overarching evaluation question: *'How, for whom and under what circumstances does engaging children in advocacy activities enable children (as a group) to influence decision-makers (and build power)?'* Three sub-questions explored a) how children's skills, capacities and abilities changed as a result of their involvement in advocacy activities, b) how decision-makers responded to child-led advocacy and c) to what extent children are driving narratives that challenge dominant frames. However, due to a lack of time, access to decision-makers and documentation, the evaluation could not explore the second question, how decision-makers responded to child-led advocacy (Veitch, as cited in Apgar et al. 2024).

There is a lack of documentation on the processes of engaging children and young people in advocacy

The review highlighted that there is existing documentation surrounding the participation of children and young people in research processes exploring CSE (probably due to it being a key priority for academics to get their work published) and many 'toolkits' and 'guidelines' on how to do general 'participation' and 'advocacy' providing excellent resources, sessions plans and tools. However, there is limited detailed documentation of the process, complexities and learning from children and young people themselves or those facilitating during other phases of the advocacy cycle – notable advocacy planning, mobilisation and action.

Recommendations on the key learning that can be taken forward into ECPAT's approach:

» In seeking to support participatory advocacy on the issue of CSE, ECPAT should ensure that they promote the importance of evaluation. This will be important and help build an evidence base around the 'added value' or engagement that could be used for future influencing with donors and other stakeholders.

» There is a gap in capturing the 'learning' and tensions and complexities in engaging in participatory advocacy from the perspectives of: children and young people involved in participatory processes; their parents and carers; wider community members and; from frontline practitioners supporting these processes. Facilitating organisations should help support reflexive spaces to facilitate knowledge exchange and documentation of the 'process' not just the outcomes.

BROADER LEARNING RELEVANT TO ALL PHASES

Time demands and fitting in tasks around daily schedules

It can be challenging for children and young people to fit in tasks and activities around their daily schedules (Bhattacharya, 2010).

Lack of interest in, or resistance from, potential participants and community members

Reports outline how young advocates can find it challenging to engage community members in research and action activities. For example, young researchers may face challenges in recruiting participants due to a lack of trust by communities towards supporting NGOs (Bhattacharya, 2010). There may also be community resistance due to the sensitivities around the topics being explored, particularly if they focus on sex and sexuality (Fortin et al., 2022).

Participatory advocacy can require a lot of time and resources but often involves working with small numbers of young people

Through reflecting on the literature, it is evident that the majority of the projects cited involved small numbers of young people (often between 5-15). Despite the small numbers, adult facilitators have expressed that it takes a lot of time and resources to facilitate participatory engagement. This requires donors to understand the levels of intensity and complexity involved in supporting smaller numbers of young people and organisations may need to justify why they are taking this approach over an adult-led initiative.

Activism is, in reality, often intergenerational but these relationships can be hard to manage

In a report on the global state of young feminist organising, the authors found that young feminist activists are often well-integrated into larger movements, working with other activists across the generations (FRIDA and AWID, 2016). However, in another report surveying young feminists, interviewees noted that they felt that older feminists did not always take their work seriously and sometimes found these relationships challenging to navigate (Salazar Rodriguez, 2018).

Financial resourcing

Within the youth activism literature, a top challenge reported by young activists is the lack of financial support. In the report, 'the global state of young feminist organising', 91% of respondents noted that lack of financial resources was their primary challenge (FRIDA and AWID, 2016). However, respondents to the 'Girls to the Front' survey noted that financial resourcing was not the only challenge. Young activists responding to that survey wanted other forms of support in the form of opportunities to interact with peers, network with others, and to access technical assistance including support for project and financial management and in the mobilisation of resources (Salazar Rodriguez, 2018).

Trauma and wellbeing

Reports from the young feminist activist field recognises that many leaders of these groups, and those involved in activities, have directly experienced rights violations and may be survivors of violence and other forms of discrimination themselves (FRIDA and AWID, 2016; Restless Development, 2024). These reports underscore the importance of supporting the wellbeing of all young activists.

Safeguarding

Every phase of the advocacy cycle will present different 'uncertainties' that require consideration and reflection. There will be a range of potential risks and challenges and therefore ongoing assessments of risk and benefits will be necessary. Such assessments should involve both the young people themselves and adult facilitators and should be undertaken in ways that are strength-based, collaborative and not overly bureaucratic (see Cody and Soares, 2023)

Existing organisational safeguarding policies and procedures may not adequately 'fit', or fully address the type of activities and range of situations that fall within participatory advocacy projects and initiatives. This may mean that safeguarding policies and procedures will need to be reviewed at the start of any new initiative and additional guidance, or protocols developed to support participatory advocacy. This may be particularly pertinent when seeking to engage young survivors. In recognition of this, Veitch et. al. (forthcoming) have developed a model known as 'Survivor-informed safeguarding for campaigning' which draws attention to the importance of safeguarding processes in the campaigning space being trauma-informed, risk-informed and to involve continuous conversations around 'informed consent'.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS THAT CAN BE TAKEN FORWARD INTO ECPAT'S APPROACH

ECPAT may wish to work further with its membership, and the children and young people they work with, to explore, map out and define how children and young people, including survivors, are engaging in different ways and develop a model to differentiate and categorize work in this area. Defining for example what the organisation means/ refers to when using different terms such as 'child/youth led' and 'child/youth driven'. This could help build clarity and minimise the risk of misrepresenting work.

In developing potential approaches to encourage youth-informed, driven or led advocacy it will be important to think about the main age group that is being targeted (recognising that adaptations could be made for different ages/ groups etc.)

If targeting older children and youth, it will be worth considering how and in what ways younger children can be involved in different aspects of the advocacy cycle in ways that are age-appropriate (for example, as part of the advocacy actions could youth advocates engage in discussions with younger children around related issues?)

As it is likely that advocacy will be initiated by ECPAT's members, taking the time to 'set up' the initiative is critical due to the sensitive subject matter. Within this phase it will be important to consider a range of practical issues including: how the work will be resourced; how the initiative will be explained and communicated to others; what support will be in place for children and young people involved; how ongoing engagement will be promoted and what will happen if children and young people do not wish to continue working on the project (e.g. processes for new recruitment into initiatives and dealing with transitions).

Involving youth advocates, and others who have experience of advocating on issues surrounding CSE, at the start of the process – e.g. in the 'set up' phase might help to frame and shape the work and identify key tensions and mitigation strategies at the start of the process.

Conclusions

» Given the wide range of terminology used to describe children and young people's active engagement in informing, driving and leading different initiatives and projects, it can be challenging to navigate learning in this area.

» In thinking about the five stages of a participatory advocacy cycle, and reviewing relevant literature, it appears that there are more examples of young people, including young survivors engaging in either 'research' (which may or may not be linked directly to advocacy efforts) or 'actions' but that these phases are not always linked up. This may be due to funding being available for certain 'activities' rather than for an entire cycle of work.

» There appears to be gaps in relevant documentation and learning related to children and young people's roles in the 'advocacy planning' and 'mobilisation' phases of advocacy in particular.

» In thinking about the potential roles children and young people, including survivors, may have in these different phases, it must be recognized that young people may not be interested in, or able to participate in, every phase of an advocacy cycle.

» The issue of CSE is sensitive and children and young people will face additional challenges and hurdles in openly discussing, researching, raising awareness and advocating for change on this topic due to social norms and taboos.

» When engaging survivors, their roles in 'mobilisation' and 'action' phases require additional levels of consideration due to the potential for heightened risks to safety and wellbeing.

BOX 4

TABLE OF EXISTING TOOLS AND RESOURCES ON PARTICIPATORY OR 'CHILD-LED' ADVOCACY

▶ **Cox, J. (2012) Participatory Advocacy: A Toolkit for VSO Staff, Volunteers and Partners. VSO. Available at:** https://grassrootsjusticenetwork.org/resources/participatory-advocacy-toolkit-for-vso-staff-volunteers-partners/

▶ **Gosling, L. and Cohen, D. (2007a) Advocacy Matters: Helping children change their world, an International Save the Children Alliance guide to advocacy, Facilitators Manual. International Save the Children Alliance.** https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/advocacy-matters-helping-children-change-their-world-save-children-guide-advocacy/

▶ **Gosling, L. and Cohen, D. (2007b) Advocacy Matters: Helping children Available at:** https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/1979.pdf/

▶ **International Save the Children Alliance (2007) Advocacy Matters: Helping children change their world. An International Save the Children Alliance guide to advocacy. Available at:** https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/1979.pdf/

▶ **Lansdown, G. (2020) Advocacy with and for children in the work of NHRIS. UNICEF UNICEF, ECARO. Available at:** https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/15321/file

▶ **O'Kane, C. and Barros, O. (2019) It's Time to Talk: Children's Views on Children's Work. Toolkit II Supporting Collaborative and Child Led Advocacy. Article 15 Resource Kit**

▶ **Shier, H. (2021) T*oolkit for Children and Young People's Participation in Advocacy. SOS Children's Villages International**

▶ **Tunyogi, R. and Schuurman, M. (2021) Training tool in engaging children in advocacy work on the right to participate in decision-making processes. EuroChild and Council of Europe. Available at:** https://eurochild.org/uploads/2021/01/Training_Tool_on_engaging_children_in_advocacy_work.pdf

▶ **UNICEF UK (2019) Youth Advocacy Toolkit. UNICEF UK** https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Youth-Advocacy-Toolkit.pdf

▶ **World Vision (2017) Child led mobilisation: A participatory approach to engage children and young people in mobilising to end violence against children** https://www.tdh.de/fileadmin/user_upload/inhalte/10_Material/Manual_Participation/Useful_Readings/World_Vision_2017_-_Child-Led_Mobilisation.pdf

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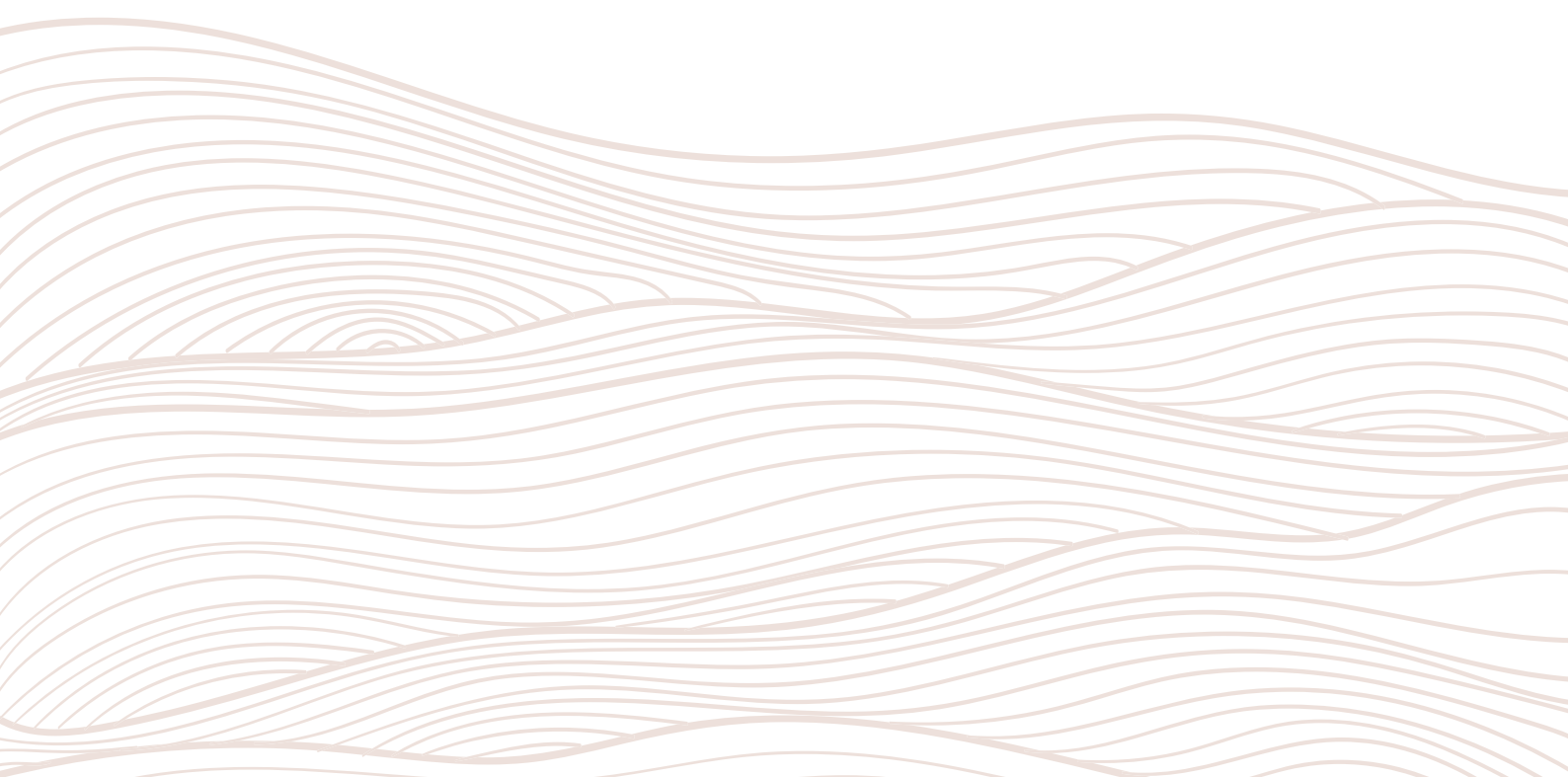
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