

How Business Affects Us

Children and young people share their perspectives on how business impacts their lives and communities

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A Report of Children's Consultations, Children's Rights and Business Principles

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Introduction

From June-August 2011, over 400 young people ages 7–17, participated in consultations to discuss the Children’s Rights and Business Principles Initiative. They explored: what is business; how does business affect our lives and rights; what role does business have to protect our rights; and more. They also reviewed the ‘draft Principles’ and gave their detailed recommendations.

Save the Children, Plan International, UNICEF and other partner organizations supported consultations in nine countries: Brazil, Argentina, Philippines, Zambia, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Senegal, Paraguay and Peru. The participants included children with disabilities, minority ethnic and language groups, indigenous children, orphaned children or children without appropriate parental care, children living below the national poverty line, children displaced by natural disaster or conflict, religious minorities and children in exploitative forms of work (e.g., street children, children on the move, former child soldiers) and representatives of working children.

This document is a summary that pulls together the input received from children across the different consultations. Individual country reports from the children’s various consultations are available on the children’s portal:
<http://www.business-humanrights.org/ChildrenPortal/CRBPIchildrensconsultations>

Overview

Many participants found the exercises/consultation very educational. Some learned more about their rights in general and many had not considered the full extent to which business affects their lives and rights. They mentioned that there is a clear linkage and they are pleased to see that the issue(s) are being explored and that they had an opportunity to participate.

Facilitators were provided a ‘consultation guide’ and encouraged to adapt the exercises to best accommodate their group and priorities. Children in the consultations found many creative ways to express their thoughts about business. Children in Bangladesh, for example, made a drawing of a community. On this drawing, they drew those places where business comes into contact with children, family, the community, and even the entire country.

Throughout the consultations, children were asked how they saw business affecting life at the personal level, the family level, the community level and the country level. They felt that sometimes business affected life in a positive or good way. And other times, business affected life in negative or bad way. What follows is a collection of the children’s most common responses:

HOW BUSINESS AFFECTS our personal life

“...They [business] should also listen to the children who work in the company and allow them to give their views on how to ensure their own safety at work...”

15 year-old girl in Senegal

Positive/Good Impact:

Education: Business can provide materials (like books) and pay for the education of poor children.

Play: Business provides play materials (like sports equipment).

Food: Business provides food.

Training: Business provides training for the future.

Jobs: Business provides employment for youth.

Negative/Bad Impact:

Pollution: Business pollutes the local environment in many ways, including releasing chemicals into the air and even sound pollution when some businesses make too much noise near schools.

Child Labour: Business produces product(s) where child labour is used.



HOW BUSINESS AFFECTS family life



“My expectations from the company is that they should create opportunity for work and that should be safe and non hazardous.”

13 year-old girl in Bangladesh

Positive/Good Impact:

Income: Business creates an income for the family.

Jobs: Business creates good jobs for parents.

Independence: Business helps family members to become self-dependent.

Materials: Business makes good products that the family needs.

Negative/Bad Impact:

Dangerous Jobs: Sometimes jobs that business creates are too dangerous for children and accidents occur too often at work place due to the lack of safety measures.

Poor Paying Jobs: Jobs do not provide a good enough wage.

Long Hours: Sometimes jobs keep parents – especially mothers – away from children too often.

Misleading Advertisements: Business advertisements promise more than it can actually give to the family and sometimes the product is not as good as the advertisement promised.

Discrimination: Some advertisements might increase “Eve teasing” (sexual harassment) and gender discrimination.

HOW BUSINESS AFFECTS the community

“One of the rules that all companies should follow before establishing themselves in an area is to “see” if they will not have a negative impact on the lives of people living around the place they have chosen.”

16 year-old in Senegal

“...it is important that businesses work... to better understand human rights and the implications their actions have over people’s lives.”

Young person in Paraguay

Positive/Good Impact:

Jobs: Business provides jobs for youth in the area.

Jobs near Home: Business provides jobs near home so people don’t have to travel as far to go to work.

Big Business Helps Small Business: Big business helps small business survive and thrive in the community.

Recreation and Play: Business helps to promote/provide recreation in the community.

Negative/Bad Impact:

Space: Business takes over a lot of space and children have fewer places to play and sometimes business takes over space where people were once living, forcing them to move or migrate.

Pollution: Business causes environmental pollution which has a great impact on health.



HOW BUSINESS AFFECTS the country



“We will respect those companies who followed proper policies for young workers... provide proper working guidelines and maintain proper respect to [children].”

12 year-old girl in Bangladesh

Positive/Good Impact:

Jobs: Business creates jobs for the country.

Raising Awareness: Business can make people aware of various things – including child rights – through advertisements.

Materials: Business produces products and service to meet the people’s needs.

Exports: The country makes money through the exporting of business products.

International Relations: Business helps the country build relations with other countries.

Taxation: Business makes income through taxation.

Disaster/Emergency Relief: Business can help during disasters or emergencies.

Negative/Bad Impact:

Pollution: Business can pollute the environment through smoke, chemicals and sound.

Keeping Children/Youth out of School: Business can lead children and youth away from education.

Corruption: Business can sometimes be corrupt.

“The realization of awareness-raising workshops for children and adolescents is a priority, especially to know their rights in general and also their roles as consumers. This way their voices can be considered and they can advocate positively on the image the business has before consumers. It is also important that these workshops are held not only once, but several times so all people may take part.”

12 year-old girl in Bangladesh

FEEDBACK AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE DRAFT CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND BUSINESS PRINCIPLES

"...it is difficult for people in the community to demand their rights to be fulfilled for fear of finding themselves jobless."

Young person in Paraguay



During the consultations, children were asked to review the draft Principles and make recommendations. Below is a list of some of the main recommendations shared by young people:

Please note: At the time of the consultations (June –August 2011), there were seven 'draft Principles'. The final version of the Principles now includes 10 and the titles/headings have changed slightly. The information provided here references the first draft version.

Children's Participation: Child-led groups should be able to freely (and safely) express their opinion about work and children's rights. Young people from the Philippines, for example, suggested that children should be asked what they think about the impact business has or might have on their lives.

Children's Groups Working with Businesses: Child-led groups should work together with businesses and partners (like school teachers, government, and other organizations) should be involved in any policy changes.

Sound Pollution: Young people in Bangladesh believe that businesses should take initiatives to minimize/reduce extreme sound made by machines as not to interfere with the education of children.

Business Security: Businesses should make sure that young children cannot get into dangerous places of business. Young people in Senegal, for example, felt that factory owners should hire security personnel to keep children away from the factory.

Cost of Goods: Businesses should consider the price of the products they make so that children can purchase it.

Land for Families: Businesses should not grab residential lands for their operations. People need somewhere to live.

Play Areas: Businesses should think about play areas in places where children work and also near the places where children live.

Big Business Helping Rural Children: A 15 year-old girl in Ethiopia said that *"Big businesses are opened in big towns. Therefore, big businesses also should be encouraged to look into how they can help children living in smaller towns or rural areas, where there are no big businesses."* Also, young people in Peru felt that businesses should invest in learning and recreational projects for children and adolescents.

Products for Everyone: When making their products, businesses should think about different kinds of children (like children with disabilities; or children who are ethnic minorities) so that every child can use it (this should be part of their policy).

RESPECT CHILDREN'S RIGHTS in the workplace

Child Labour: Businesses should strictly follow the minimum working age defined by the law in the country they are operating in. Young people in Zambia suggested that businesses should confirm the age of a child through a birth certificate before they employ them. Young people in Ethiopia felt that children from the rural areas have to travel too far to work and therefore they do not see their parents for a long time. Businesses should really be discouraged from employing children.

Decent Work and Decent Pay for Young Workers: Businesses should provide good jobs for young workers and for parents and caregivers too. Young workers should be paid fairly too. Young people in Paraguay, for example, felt that young people are sometimes paid less than that country's minimum wage.

Dangerous Work/Commercial Sexual Exploitation: Children and young persons' should not be involved with dangerous work. Children should also never be involved in commercial sexual exploitation.

Establishing a Training Institute: Business should support a training institute where children can receive the training and education that will help them get good (and safe) jobs in the future.

Discrimination: Business people should not discriminate among children at the work place based on age, race and gender, or how much money their family has.

Girl Child: Businesses should make sure that girl children should have separate toilet and other facilities at the work place.

Hygiene in the Workplace: Businesses should make sure that their workplaces are clean. Young people in Paraguay believe that businesses should create a healthy environment to work in.

Time Off for School and Play: Businesses should allow time off (weekly leave) so workers can continue their education and participate in recreational activities. Young people in Peru believe that businesses should make reasonable schedules for their young workers.

"...we have a right to play, to have fun, to study and NOT to work."

Young person in Argentina



"Due to economic reason children works at early age in many countries like Bangladesh. In this context business company should take initiative for establishing a training institute, as a result children will get skill based training/education. Besides, business should take action for young children for getting opportunity for safe job according to the local law."

Young person in Bangladesh

MAKE SURE YOUR PRODUCTS AND SERVICES ARE SAFE AND MAKE A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO CHILDREN'S LIVES:

"Everything is nice as written, but companies only aim at earnings."

Young person in Brazil

"Monitor not only the sales but also the population consuming the product and make effort to prevent stores from selling harmful products to children."

Young person in the Philippines

"Consult children about the possible effect of the product/advertisement before launching them."

Young person in the Philippines

"Do not take advantage of us, we ask you to be responsible, do not support us because you feel pity for us, instead, support us because we deserve it, we purchase your products and services, but we ask you to invest in our development. We do not want gifts, we want you to be responsible."

Young person in Peru

Good Products for Children: Products that businesses make for children should be high quality. Businesses should be monitored to make sure they are making the best possible product for children. Businesses should also make sure that their products do not make any long-time negative impact on the health of children.

Product Safety, Warnings and Child-Friendly Language: The products that businesses make should make a positive impact on children, adolescents, all humans and the environment. The information and advertisements that businesses provide for certain products and services should be clearly labelled and in easy to understand language. Products should be safe and easy to use for all children, including children with disabilities. This will also reduce accidents.

Only Child-Friendly Products for Children: Children should not be able to buy or get products that are not meant for children (like cigarettes and alcohol). Businesses who try to sell or give children products that are not meant for them should be punished.

Healthy Food Products: Businesses should provide food and/or food products for children that are healthy and free of pesticides, too many additives and preservatives. Young people from Peru believe that these products should meet the country's health standards and include an expiration date.

Food Costs: The price for children's food should be kept low.

Children's Participation: Businesses should listen to the child's view when they make child-friendly products and services.

Accurate Advertisements: The advertisements that businesses make for their products should be truthful. The product information for any product should be listed properly and honestly.

Rehabilitation: Children involved in illegal/offensive activities should not be punished legally, but should instead be rehabilitated.

USE MARKETING AND ADVERTISING TO Advance Children's Rights

Educational Advertisements: Children should be able to learn something when they see or read a business' advertisement.

Marketing Child Rights: The marketing policies of different businesses should promote child rights.

Children's Participation in Advertising: Businesses should listen to the child's view and try to include it in their advertisements. Young people in the Philippines felt that businesses should consult children about the effects of their product and advertisements before they put them up for sale to people.

Monitoring Child Rights in Advertisements: A system should be developed to monitor the advertisements of businesses and to see if the advertisements respect and promote child rights, and the best interest of the child.

Child Monitoring Team for Child Rights in Advertising: There should be a child monitoring team to monitor how businesses marketing and advertisements respect and promote child rights, and the best interest of the child.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: Businesses should be strongly punished by the law if they use a picture or a drawing that shows a child involved in or suggesting a sexual act of any kind.

Child Protection in Advertisements: The message of child protection message should be included in businesses advertisements. Young people in Peru felt that businesses should follow child protection laws and policies in their advertisements and campaigns.

Positive Depiction of Children and Adolescents: Depending on the country and the status of child labour, businesses should use young adolescent children in their marketing to promote safe jobs and/or child-friendly products.



"Most parents fail to recognise that even as children we have something meaningful to say or contribute because often they don't take our views seriously."

14 year-old girl in Zambia

TAKE CARE OF THE ENVIRONMENT WHERE Children Live and Grow

“There is a big plant that produces cement and has many risks for both the environment and people’s health. When producing cement, the smoke that comes out of the factory stacks creates air contamination. People breathe the air which can cause bronchitis, asthma and other respiratory diseases... Children do not know this danger. They often breathe this contaminated air without worrying about the risk and can get sick. For me, it is necessary to reduce the level of contamination. We should go to the big meetings such as in Copenhagen and speak out. But here in Senegal, we could also talk to the management of the cement company and ask them to reduce the contamination.”

16 year-old boy in Senegal

“Some of these pits that have been left by the mining activities contribute to environmental degradation.”

12 year-old boy in Zambia



Business and the Environment (Negative): Businesses should reduce garbage, the use of toxic products and use biodegradable materials and recycle other products to keep the environment clean and healthy. Young people in the Philippines believe that businesses should either stop cutting down trees or plant new ones to replace the old ones. Young people in Paraguay felt that pollution from various businesses (from refrigerators, oil-use, etc...) adds to respiratory problems and skin diseases among children and adolescents. Businesses need to follow the laws around the environment more closely. Young people in Peru believe that businesses should try to find better ways of processing and reducing garbage. And young people in Argentina believe that businesses should contribute with medical check-ups in the areas where they pollute.

Business and the Environment (Positive): Young people in Paraguay noted that soybean growing companies took care of the land (sustainable farming).

Where Children Learn: Young people in Bangladesh believe that there should be a policy that business operations do not get in the way of the child’s learning environment (school, college, etc...). Businesses should try to give talks about the environment in schools.

Where Children Play: Businesses can take up a lot of space in a community, including space for children to play. Businesses need to know that young people should have more space for recreation.

HELP PROTECT CHILDREN AFFECTED BY Emergencies

Emergency Plan/Fund for Children: Businesses should keep an emergency fund for children to help them during disasters and emergencies. Young people in the Philippines felt that every business should have a plan in place to protect children in the case of an emergency. Young people in Bangladesh believe that businesses should use their advertisements to raise awareness and help protect children during disasters and emergencies.

Emergency Relief/Food: Businesses should help to provide children with child related materials like food and clothing during disasters and emergencies.

Emergency Shelters: Businesses should help to protect displaced, lost or disabled children and provide them with safe shelter and other facilities (including health care facilities, toilets, etc...) during disasters and emergencies.

Emergency Health Care Facilities: Businesses should help to arrange places where children can be treated by health care professionals during disasters and emergencies.

Emergency Training and Equipment: More trained personnel are needed in emergencies. Businesses could help to train these people. Young people in Paraguay believe that businesses could help to put on and run workshops, meetings and “dry runs” (or practice drills) as well as providing people with tips and guidelines during emergencies. Young people in Peru suggested that businesses could support firefighters with better equipment.

Reduce Irresponsible Disposal of Waste: Young people in the Philippines felt that businesses should reduce the irresponsible disposal of waste which can cause flooding disasters.

“To us, an emergency is not to have water, to live in polluted environments, to have a sick child, to have a kid exposed to drugs, prostitution, crime, exploitation, and child labour. All of this is an emergency and the worst thing of all is to experience it on a daily basis.”

Young person in Argentina

“Companies should think about emergencies all the time and not only when it happens. This means that companies should have a program to reduce and mitigate damage.”

Young person in Brazil

“Prevent actions causing disasters such as irresponsible disposal of waste, which causes flooding.”

Young person in the Philippines

SUPPORT COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO

Fulfill Children's Rights

"Businesses have to celebrate children's days (like World and Day of the African Child). If they participate in these events, they will know more about children and on their own get involved in children's affairs."

Young person in Ethiopia

"Business should collaborate with the government in developing policies that will guide private and public partnerships."

Young person in the Philippines

"I am leaving with the hope that the consultation will help other children to realise that all rights are important and should all be emphasised so that we grow into to be children who can claim our rights."

12 year-old boy in Zambia

Funding Children's Rights: Businesses should use a portion of their profits to help fund programmes and events for child rights.

Business, Government and the Community: Businesses should help people in the community put together programmes and events for child rights. Businesses should monitor other businesses and report illegal activity to the government. Young people in Brazil believe that companies and politics are connected and that means sometimes there is corruption. Likewise, young people in Paraguay believe that the government has a responsibility to enforce the law and make sure businesses are not polluting the environment, or exploiting their workers, especially children and adolescents. Young people in Ethiopia felt that everyone in society will benefit from businesses that give back to the community.

Children's Rights Awareness and Children's Participation: Businesses should help raise awareness about child rights through their advertisements. Young people in Peru believe that businesses should include the view of the child in their campaign.

Helping Marginalized Children: Businesses should help marginalized children by sponsoring community programmes.

A Space to Play: Businesses should help community's make and maintain a place of recreation for children to play in.

Dangerous Work/Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: Businesses should make sure that children are not involved in dangerous work or commercial sexual exploitation. Young people in the Philippines believe that the government should work together with business to come up with a policy that deals with children and minors going into hotels who may be going to do undesirable things/work like commercial sexual exploitation.



The in-depth review and recommendations provided by over 400 young people greatly informed the development of the Principles. Key recommendations such as: security and safety in and around the workplace, washroom/hygiene facilities for girls, business responsibility to be a champion for children's rights, limiting access to illegal products for children (alcohol and cigarettes) and more, can now be seen in the final version of the Principles.

Young people also shared important insight relating to needed resources, next steps, follow up, implementation and monitoring. We are now all faced with the duty and responsibility to respect these perspectives, continue our support for the meaningful and ethical participation of children and ensure our future efforts and actions are guided and informed by young people.

