Children as Beneficiaries and Participants in Development Programs: A Case Study in Burma

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Children as Beneficiaries and Participants in Development Programs: A Case Study in Burma (Myanmar)

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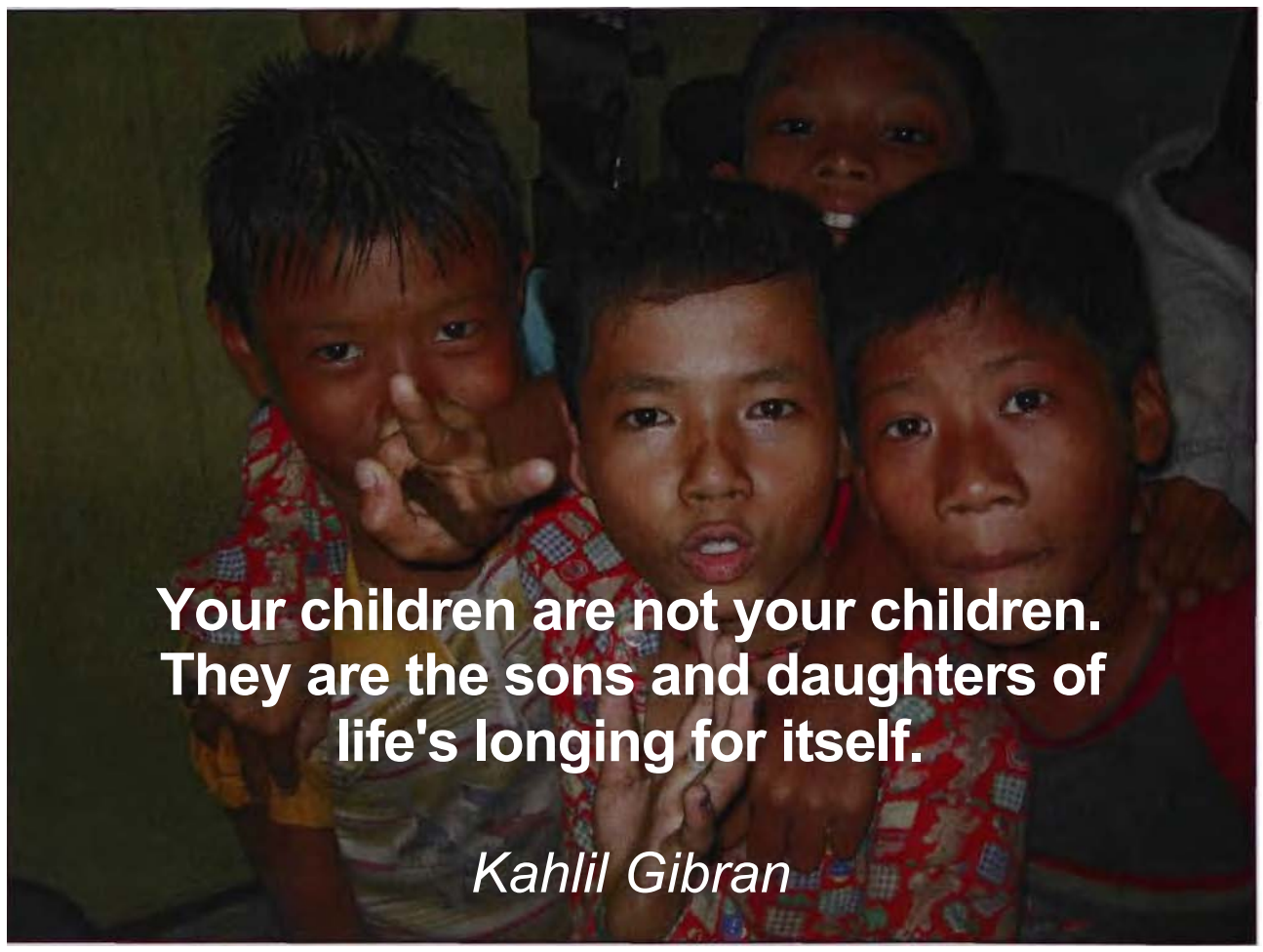
Abstract

This study seeks to understand the dynamics and processes of community development programs for children in Burma (Myanmar). It examines the ethical dimensions of children's participation, critiques the extent of participation of young people in community development activity, explores the barriers and avenues for increased participation and presents recommendations based on lived experience which can be used to formulate policies that will enable/encourage greater participation.

The development industry reaches to almost all areas of the globe and is not confined by national boundaries, ethnicity, age, gender or other social stratification. One of the most topical issues in contemporary development regards the rights of the child. It is an area of increasing interest to United Nations agencies and to human rights groups such as Amnesty International and the International Labour Organisation. In addition, a number of international programs have been created to focus upon improving the global situation of children, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Mandela and Machel's "Global Movement for Children." Such interest in the situation of children, however, rarely includes discussion of the ethical issues involved in the construction of children as appropriate subjects of development. Even rarer is examination or discussion of the culturally and historically contingent nature of assumptions about children and childhood that are built into many programs that focus upon children. The implications of applying programs and techniques that incorporate "Western" or

"generic" understandings of children and childhood upon children from non-Western nations should be part of such discussions.

Development programs increasingly employ national workers, not only as stakeholders and participants, but also as initiators of programs and as directors of resource allocation. However, with this growing trend of the participation of 'beneficiaries' of development programs in identifying needs and planning and implementing solutions, the voices of children have, until recently, been quiet.



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The data in this thesis reflects the lived experience of many adults and children in Burma, where I have spent much of the past fourteen years. There are many Burmese friends to whom I owe a great deal, both for their contribution to the data that I collected, as well as their friendship and inspiration. They are too numerous to mention; however, I would particularly like to acknowledge the support of Nilar Myaing, Khin Win, Myint Su, U Nayaka and Khin May Aye who have been there from the beginning, always willing to lend a helping hand or word of advice. The stories of the people of Burma (both children and adults) that I have tried to capture here reflect lives that have touched me in some way. They are stories that have been shared from the heart. They have showed me a side of Burma to which I would otherwise not have been privy. They are humbling stories of courage and resilience and it is to those children most of all that this thesis is dedicated. I do hope that in more favourable political conditions I can release this piece of work and that it might serve to bring about positive change in the lives of Burmese children.

My special thanks to Sue, Sam and Gabriel, who have never been demanding of my attention and have given me time to work and space to think and reflect. Their love and encouragement has made the difference so many times, when I wondered whether or not this was all worthwhile. Finally, my mother, now 85 years old and my father who, at the age of 93 has hung on to see me through; we are all children of someone and I have been so fortunate to be one of theirs!

Acronyms

ADP	Area Development Program
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CAP	Children as Partners Network
CEDC	Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances
CFN	Child Focussed Network
CNSP	Children in Need of Special Protection
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DFID	Department for International Development (British Government)
GONGO	Government Organised Non Government Organisation
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
INGO	International Non Government Organisation
LPK	*Lan Paw Kale* - Street Children
NGO	Non Government Organisation
NRC	National Registration Card
PDO	Phaung Daw Oo Monastic Education High School
PLA	Participatory Learning and Action
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SK	Sangguniang Kabataan (Youth Councils in the Philippines)
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
SWOC	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Constraints
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNGASS	United Nations General Assembly Special Session
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US DA	Union Solidarity Development Association
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

Doctor of Philosophy Declaration

I, Karl Goodwin-Dorning, declare that the PhD thesis entitled Children as Beneficiaries and Participants in Development Programs: A Case Study in Burma (Myanmar) is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signature Date

Preface

The focus of this work is children, and more particularly children in Burma[1], where I lived and worked for more than eight years. Children are an emotive subject. We have all been children and many of us will have children of our own at some stage. We watch them grow and, whether they are our own or someone else's, we have opinions as to how we think they should be brought up. It is perhaps stating the obvious but sometimes we (as adults) forget that, ultimately, we would not be here had we not once been children ourselves. From that time in our lives, no matter what age we reach, the events and memories of our childhood both consciously and subconsciously have an impact on who we are today and what we will become.

I must here admit to a personal bias. Some years ago, when my Burmese language was quite limited, a Burmese colleague and I conducted some informal research into an area in Bangkok where he had informed me that there were a number of Burmese children who had been trafficked from the border, in order to beg on the streets. As our organisation at that time had a number of programs for (illegal) migrant populations in Thailand, we decided to discover what we could about the situation of these children. We uncovered stories, often of heartbreak, but of enduring fascination.

Throughout this document the term 'Burma' is used, not 'Myanmar' as the country has become known today. This is out of respect to the people of the country who voted unanimously for a democratic government in 1990. Their democratic and constitutional choice was violently over-ruled by the present military regime (previously the State Law and Order Restoration Council - SLORC) now know as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) who seized and maintain their grip on power at the time of writing. In a bid to create a new nation in their own image, the country was, with questionable legitimacy, renamed Myanmar by the SLORC in direct contravention to practices of democratic principles and good governance. The one exception is when Myanmar is used to refer to the name of a specific organisation that uses Myanmar, such as World Vision Myanmar or UNICEF Myanmar.

I summarised this experience in September 1999 in a report to my supervisor. I have reproduced it here as I believe, as Gittens (1998) espouses, that any research into children must be predicated on an understanding of what we, as researchers, bring to the analysis. We see children and childhood through the lens of our own experience of being children, as well as through the filtering disciplines of social science, psychology and history that we have learned or absorbed or have inculcated in later stages of life.

So here then is my story of Burmese street children in Bangkok:

> *Of late I have decided for numerous reasons not to stay in the usual hotel in Bangkok. Rather I have taken myself to the backpacker's area of Banglampoo - far more interesting than Sukhumvit as those of you who know the city I am sure will agree.*
> *One can sit in a sidewalk café or bar and watch life in all its complexity and variety pass by. You come to recognise the faces, watch the comings and goings, enter a different, quite unusual world. Part of this world that you discover is a group of street kids.*
> *You know this because of the fact that they have no shoes and wear ragged clothes; because you are a development worker and you have seen these things before. They traverse Khaosan Road and the numerous lanes and alleys surrounding it. They sell tissues. 10 Baht. You see them most nights, there are not that many so you can, if you wish, come to recognise them. You realise with your limited grasp of Thai that these children are not Thai at all. They are Burmese. So one night, if you speak a few phrases of Burmese which is about all I can, you speak to them and they smile, they are astonished, they gather around and chatter at a velocity that renders you completely devoid of comprehension. But you realise that this is not important, that*

what matters is that someone has made an effort to communicate with them in a way that they have not experienced for God knows how long.

If you spend the time you can learn their names and their ages and how much they earn in a night. And then you realise that your grasp of Burmese is all too limited. So, if you are like me and have Burmese colleagues, you ask one to come and talk with these children of the street and you learn so much more. That they have come from Mawlamyaing and that they are Muslim. That they are frequently arrested, sent to the reception centre for illegal migrants, released and return. That their parents are either dead or at the border or begging in some other part of Bangkok. That they are proud because they can earn to support their families. You learn that they are streetwise. That they have potential to develop great intelligence. You learn all this and much more. You are gradually invited into a different reality to your own and you begin to understand because of your own reality, because you have a grasp of time and politics, that the world in which these children live is profoundly complex. Much more so than they realise.

Then on one trip you notice Charlie. He is one of 'them'. But this time he is different than before. He no longer carries his bag of tissues. Now he sells something else. You know this because he tells you. Not in words, because these are words that one has yet to learn in Burmese. But children do not always need words to communicate things of the heart. You have read about many children like this before. If you are like me you will have worked with similar children in another life. But this time, reality has taken a different face and you realise, suddenly, that you are the one person who understands that Charlie is sinking, letting go, spiralling down into despair, onto the borderline. You realise that because you live where you do and understand the profound and complex nature of things. At the same time you are left with your

own growing sense of despair because of this understanding. You look into his eyes and know that you will never be able to look into the eyes of your own children in quite the same way again. You begin to question all of those values and the high purpose that you have prided yourself on. You think of all the projects that you have designed and all the money that you have managed to procure and all the reports you have written and the words that you have spoken. You think of all of this and you realise now, at this moment, in this child's life, that they make not the slightest difference at all. That they never will.

You try to rationalise these understandings because otherwise what is an intellect for? You tell yourself that there are many Charlies in the world; that there always will be. You realise that anger and despair, even love are, perhaps, wasted emotions.
Because they will not help. You know these things because you understand the profound and complex nature of life. Because time and circumstance have allowed you to grow up in another world.

With all of these realisations, you walk past the UNICEF office very close to Khaosan Road. You cannot help but think of the great irony that this presents. You catch the bus to the airport, from one reality you move to the next. You wonder if, when next you return,
Charlie will still be there and if he is what you will say, what you can do. You realise that you do not know. You struggle with your thoughts, your emotions. You dig deep. Into your mind, into your soul. To find some reason to hope.

As a postscript to this story, I have no idea what happened to Charlie. Not long after writing this Charlie and a number of his friends were arrested and sent to a refugee camp on the Thai border. While some of his friends returned to Bangkok, Charlie, as far as I could ascertain, never did. Charlie's story raised numerous

issues that I found difficult to reconcile. I spent much time pondering why his childhood was so different to my own and to that of my children. This, in turn, raised questions about the way in which I had been conditioned to believe that the experience of growing up was a predictable, clearly staged, and universal process. Charlie's life experiences clashed directly with these strongly embedded assumptions that I had about childhood, and made me question, in the first instance, why his life could not be different but then, upon further reflection, whether or not my own assumptions about what childhood should and should not entail might be flawed. Most significantly, I came to see that no matter what I thought, that Charlie was essentially a powerless, insignificant being, caught up in a series of political and social events over which he had no control and that everything he did and said was prefaced by his own need to survive.

Following this experience I decided that I might try to do something that would hopefully have an impact on the 'Charlies' of Burma. After ail, I had the position and the ability to do so. As a result, I have been responsible for establishing programs for children working and living on the streets of Rangoon and Mandalay, for developing initiatives to address the needs of children both infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, and for setting up programs of non-formal education for children who are unable to attend school, and more. When I look back on all of this I suppose that I have achieved something although there always seems so much more to do - that is the nature of this kind of work. Burma has left an indelible mark on me. My wife and I brought up our own two children there. I have come to terms with many of the complexities of life there and sometimes I even think I have an understanding (limited as it is) of why things in Burma are the way

they are. I have worked with a rich diversity of people in Burma - both old and young - who have shown me what commitment is, through tireless hours of work for disadvantaged and marginalized children (with little or no recompense) who have an undying belief in their potential and capacity. I am humbled by their lives and the example they have set.

Finally, I have come into contact with the lives of hundreds of children through programs that I have worked on in Burma and I am in constant awe of the ability of human nature, in such young lives, to triumph over all forms of adversity. Try as I might I am not, therefore, an objective bystander and, as Gittens argues, and I believe, it is important to recognise that:

> *If we try to understand 'the child' without acknowledging the centrality of our own experiences we stand in danger of making one-sided judgements and taking one-dimensional actions that deny a vital aspect of the meaning of 'the child'and 'childhood' in human culture (Gittens, 1998).*

This thesis is, therefore, simultaneously the reflection of a personal journey, based on my experience as an adult looking into the world of particular groups of children, as well as a scholarly attempt to understand how children might best be afforded the opportunity to productively and respectfully take part in the world around them.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Focus of the Study

Children's participation has gained much attention in the 'development discourse' in recent years. Now, more than ten years after the almost unanimous acceptance and ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child[2] (of which the notion of participation is a crucial component), an examination of what participation really means for children is timely.

This study examines the dynamics and processes of community development programs for children in Burma. It provides an analysis of the ethical dimensions of children's participation and it critiques the extent of participation of young people in community development activity. The thesis also explores the barriers and avenues for increased participation and presents recommendations based on lived experience which can be used to formulate policies that will enable or encourage greater participation. An interdisciplinary approach, including ethnography, development theory, and policy analysis, is used in this work to address a complex problem, and a new paradigm for the analysis of children's participation in development is presented.

The thesis contends that rights-based approaches, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child, while providing a useful legal framework and commonly

Only two countries, The United States of America and Somalia have not ratified the Convention.

acknowledged basis for defining what should and should not be expected of children, have limitations. It argues that the newly defined sociology of children, that in many ways complements rights-based understandings of childhood, also has its limitations, but makes major advances in allowing children the social, emotional and political space and recognition to be seen as fully human. A contribution to knowledge will be made through analysis of childhood, of children's participation and of participatory practices of non-government development organisations in the Burmese context, using Burmese case studies and empirical data. This will also add to the limited body of knowledge about childhood in Burma, about which there are few contemporary comprehensive studies.

Children's participation - a complex issue

Children's participation has received a great amount of attention in recent times. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) global report for the year 2003 has participation of children as its primary theme. In the Foreword to this report, the then Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, extols the virtues of children's participation. He commends the role that children and young people played in the May 2002 UN General Assembly Special Session on Children, the first of such assemblies in which children had played a part:

> *The children's presence transformed the atmosphere of the United Nations. Into our usually measured and diplomatic discussions, they introduced their passions, questions, fears, challenges, enthusiasm and optimism. They brought us their ideas, hopes and dreams. They gave life to the values of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. (UNICEF, 2003b)*

Yet it is easy to be swept up in the euphoria of an event such as the Special Session (which I attended and I was affected in exactly that way), and not really reflect on the inherent complexities of this apparently straightforward concept.

An understanding of participation requires firstly that the term is contextualised within the community development discourse. This enables an appreciation of its theoretical roots and provides a framework for the more complex task of understanding participation as it relates to children. Participation is associated with other equally nuanced terms such as ‘empowerment’, 'people centred’, and ‘democratic’ and each of these terms need to be deconstructed. However, as will become clear, it is not sufficient to look at this notion strictly within the discipline of community development or even more broadly within the social sciences.

What makes the participation of children such a challenging concept is the idea (or perhaps ideal would be a better word) of childhood that we, as adults in the West particularly, have grown accustomed to, arguably conditioned, into accepting. For when children are seen as participants, the following questions are posed: Should children vote? Should children be allowed to choose where, or even if, they go to school? Should children be able to work? Should they be able to take part in sexual activity, and if so, at what age? While commonly (adult) accepted boundaries of what is and is not appropriate for different aged people in different societies are either defined in law or through culture, these standards and values are being increasingly challenged in many different contexts around the globe. On the negative side there has been the discovery of the widespread sexual abuse of children in some of the most respected of societal institutions (the church for

example) and on the positive side there is the increasing influence of human rights treaties, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

And so it is not sufficient to look at participation only from the perspective of community development, for it is obvious that we cannot treat children in the same way in which adults are treated. When delineating boundaries around childhood experience, philosophical questioning and ethical dilemmas are inevitable. For example, why should participation in the form of having a personal voice for a child be more important than deep-rooted cultural norms of respect and reverence and obedience to the voice of an elder as might be argued from an 'Asian Values' perspective? (Fukuyama, 1998, Vo Van Ai, 2000).

In the past child psychologists such as Piaget (1950) have shown that children go through a number of clearly distinct stages of development and that these are universal and unconditional prerequisites for our modern understanding of 'normal children'. Such claims of universality are, however, being questioned (James and Prout, 1997), and, increasingly, childhood is coming to be seen as a construct of time and culture. Some scholars, notably Philippe Aries (1960), have claimed that prior to the industrial revolution there was no concept of childhood at all. It is argued in this thesis that children's lives and the expectations placed on them by society are different in every culture and vary again within cultures and that imposed notions of a 'universal' childhood risk undervaluing and even, in some circumstances, endangering children. The growing realisation that psychology, culture, nature and nurture are all key elements in the development of the child encourages us to reconsider the way in which society places expectations and

boundaries around, not only what is and is not acceptable for a child to do or to be, but also around the way in which we understand the concept of childhood itself.

Regardless of the close relationship that may exist between a child and his or her parents and siblings, a child does not exist only within a family or a community. Expectations and understandings of children and childhood are also shaped by, and help to shape, broader societal factors, such as politics and economics. Such factors must be brought into any analysis of children and childhood in the modern day. Indeed, they are of particular interest in this age of rapid globalisation where children have been thrust onto the international arena as instigators of change, as was the case during the UN Special Session. They have also been the subjects of other people's actions as in, for example, the tragic case of the use of hundreds of children as hostages in a school in Beslan in North Ossetia, Russia in September 2004, where children were used to further political gain.

Despite the increasing role (both self initiated and through factors beyond their control) that children are playing within their own families and communities, even internationally, there is a lack of recognition of children as social actors in their own right. Recent years have seen an increasing number of writers (Bissell, 2003, Boyden et al., 1998, Gittens, 1998, Chawla, 2001, Lansdown, 2004, James and Prout, 1997) advocating for children to be given greater status according to their role in society, and to allow for children's voices to be heard not simply as an expression of their parents or within societal institutions set up specifically for them (schools for example). Rather, they argue that children should be recognised as deserving of attention as individuals with their own social standing and influence,

independent bearers of rights and responsibilities; they warrant being listened to and not being treated simply as 'adults in the making', or minds and bodies that will be but are not yet worthy of attention.

Since the evolution of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as the major international human rights treaty regarding children, the participation of children has, therefore, become a key theme of many international development agencies. However, the different dimensions of children's participation and what constitutes an effective and culturally relevant framework to engender, support and analyse children's participation within the discourse of community development theory and practice remains unclear. This thesis will address these issues, through critical analysis of the nature of children as beneficiaries and participants in development programs in Burma.

Methodology

This research topic very quickly lends itself to philosophical discussion about the nature of childhood. It is necessary to understand the numerous ethical dilemmas that relate to how we, as individuals, as members of a family, a community, a country, an international global society, decide what is and what is not appropriate for children to do, to have, to see, to experience, to believe, to be. Quantitative data collection and analysis, therefore, is not necessarily the most appropriate tool. More relevant are the tools of qualitative social research, itself deeply embedded in philosophical probing, which can provide an important means of empirical data collection. Hughes (1990) points out this relationship and suggests that philosophical issues cannot be solved by citing evidence, as it is too hard to prove

established fact; that what is needed is a clear argument that shows systematically how a conclusion has been reached. The case in point, children's participation, may at the outset seem to be a simple question, but it is not. Children might participate according to their parents' wishes. Children might participate according to the cultural norms of any given society. From an individual perspective, children might participate according to their intellectual capacity. From a legal perspective, children might participate according to the statutes laid down in the law. Alternatively, children might participate according to their physiological and psychological development.

For each perspective however, the question is raised, 'Who decides what kind of participation is appropriate; and why, and how in fact will we know that *this* is participation and *that* is not?' At a more fundamental level, 'What is a child and how does society come to define childhood and why does one society construct and view children in one way and another society in another?' These are all vital questions that cannot be addressed through a strictly quantitative research framework. Indeed, as Hughes (1990) suggests, there are two fundamental questions in looking at philosophical issues. The first is an epistemological one, which relates to understanding: 'What is the character of our knowledge of the world?' The second is an ontological one that asks, 'What kinds of things are there in the world?'

In seeking to discover more about the nature of participation and children, this study has, therefore, drawn on social research methods that allow for people of different ages in Burma to tell their stories; to narrate their lived experience of the

world at different stages of their lives. Narrative research within the social sciences defies singularity of approach but as a means of data collection, the mere act of telling stories values the life and experience of the story teller and can be seen as a form of involvement or participation:

> *Stories do things: they produce realities. Narrative research is therefore about the constitutive power of stories in producing realities and indeed the subject (Tamboukou, 2006).*

While some of the data that was collected can be 'quantified', to a degree, much of it was narrative and reflective of the rich tapestry of life and experience in Burma today. These data, these narratives, will be used to illuminate understandings of the broader philosophical debates around children, childhood and participation, not to reach any definitive answer to the question, 'What is a child and how should children participate'. Rather they will be used to ensure that as many different discourses are being brought to bear, particularly at a global level; that sufficient time is given to understanding the debates; and that certain discourses are not, without clearly established reasons, allowed precedence over others.

Empirical data collection, therefore, had the primary function of broadening the view of participation and illuminating considerations for the development of a new model for the analysis of participation, not of proving a hypothesis. A secondary function of the research was to contribute to contemporary understandings about Burmese children and their lived experience. For those reasons the research methodology primarily involved qualitative data collection techniques, including semi-structured and unstructured interviews, focus group discussions, direct observations and review of secondary data sources.

Three kinds of informant were interviewed in the course of the study: (1) key informants about Burmese cultural understandings of children, childhood, and child socialization, (2) staff of community development programs operating in Burma that target children as beneficiaries, and (3) children who are beneficiaries of these community development programs. Secondary data was used to provide background to both research subjects and community development programs. Data collection (including fieldwork preparation) took place between October 2001 and December 2002.

Location and Composition of Informants

The study was conducted in Burma's capital city, Rangoon (Yangon) and involved approximately eight months of data collection. Rangoon has a population of five million people and most of these people come from the Bamar ethnic majority. Burma has over 135 ethnic groups. In order to define what is 'Burmese culture' and what are the Burmese understandings of 'childhood' and other related terms, key informants were selected from the majority ethnic group, the Bamars. This group was selected as it is the majority group and is the only major group to which the researcher had (relatively) easy access.

Key Informants

Key informants about contemporary Burmese cultures and beliefs were selected according to competency testing (Bernard, 1988). Generally they were older Burmese people. The study attempted to have stratified sampling[3] and to include an equal proportion of men and women, boys and girls. One of the criteria

Defined by the Penguin Dictionary of Psychology (Reber, 1996) as sampling in which the population as a whole is separated into distinct parts (or 'strata') and each is drawn from separately.

ascertained by competency testing requirements was that informants were either parents, or cultural guardians of knowledge about children, such as Buddhist monks and nuns. Until the annexation of Upper Burma by the British in 1885, Theravada Buddhist monks ran the education system and they continue to hold great moral authority today as guardians of Burmese children and authorities on appropriate forms of childhood behaviour and discipline (Khine, 1945). Data was collected in the form of both semi-structured interviews (to gain personalistic and individual experiences and beliefs) as well as small focus group discussions, designed to elaborate more instrumental beliefs about children, childhood and child socialization in Burma. Unstructured interviews with key informants served to indicate the type of questions that should be asked in more structured interviews (as discussed in Werner and Schoepfle, 1987).

Three groups of key informants were selected: Mothers/Fathers (aged 60 yrs and older from the ethnic Burma Buddhist minority); Teachers (government primary schools); and Monks (who run monastic schools). These groups were chosen as in Burmese society authority has traditionally emanated from elders, kings, teachers and monks. Traditionally, they have been responsible for the socialization of children. Ten of each of these informants were interviewed using a semi-structured format. A maximum of thirty interviews represented a feasible number within the fieldwork period, while providing a diversity of views. As the study is qualitative and deals with issues of meaning, the sample size is not designed to be statistically representative. This qualitative approach is common within the social sciences when collecting subjective data concerning issues of meaning (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Community Development Workers

To gather data about children's participation within the community development arena, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with project officers of development projects in Burma. They included staff from five child focussed agencies: three international (World Vision Myanmar, UNICEF Myanmar, Save the Children); and two local (The Child Focussed Network and Phaung Daw Oo Monastic Education School). All are presently working with children in their programming. Interviews sought to elicit information from different levels of project implementation: policy, management and community at a 1:1:3 ratio (i.e. a total of five people from each organisation - twenty-five in all). This represents the diversity of organisations that work with children and the different levels at which they work. The ratio allowed for a diversity of views and maximized the data that could be gathered in the implementation of the programs, as well as policy and management. The sample size was constrained by the small number of development projects focusing on children in Burma.

Burmese Children

While using focus groups discussion and semi-structured interviews, as with the data collection with adult respondents, a focus upon Burmese children also involved observation of children participating in community development programs, in order to ascertain any discrepancies between the theory and practical implementation of programs targeting and involving children. Observation consisted of at least five visits to each project (for a period of a day per visit) to observe children in their day-to-day activities. These observations were recorded

through the keeping of detailed field notes. Children taking part in focus groups were identified from amongst the development projects being implemented by the organisations mentioned above.

Data collection with children was constrained by the limited number of child focussed organisations, both international and national, working in the Rangoon area and, therefore, focussed on one international and two national organisations. Stratified sampling was used for the selection of children. Input was gathered from children in two age groups: children eight to ten years old and young adolescents aged thirteen to sixteen. These two age groups represent periods of significant transition for children and therefore provide an opportunity to observe the differential interplay between family and community, for children at different developmental levels. From a practical standpoint, children under eight would find it difficult to articulate meaningful responses to the questions being posed and children older than sixteen may have already transitioned into adult responsibilities. However, in addition one focus group was conducted with a group of older seventeen year old children who were university students and who came from privileged families. They were involved as volunteers in one of the programs. While not representing the full developmental continuum, the strategy generated samples of two different age cohorts, providing the ability to draw more reliable profiles of the daily reality and major issues of concern to children across developmental levels. Children's care-givers were invited to attend the focus groups with their children and a female interpreter was also present at all focus groups and during semi-structured interviews.

Participatory Activities

In keeping with the subject of the thesis, a number of participatory data collection activities were conducted with children. These were based on Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) activities, commonly used in the development industry. They consisted of the following:

1. The clock

In this activity, children were asked to fill In two 24-hour clocks - one for weekdays and one for a Sunday. This was to ascertain what activities children undertook on a typical day. Following up from this activity was a discussion with children on what they like/dislike about their day and why. Through the clock diagrams and the subsequent discussion it was possible to focus on some of the issues which are of particular interest, such as the type and amount of work a child does on any given day.

2. Lifelines

Lifelines were drawn on a large sheet of paper, recording the child's life from birth to the present. On it the children were asked to mark the highs and lows of their lives and then to tell the group why they had chosen those particular moments in their lives.

3. Family Diagrams

In this activity children were asked to draw pictures of their families and to mark on them the relationships between family members. Different things were then marked on the diagram, to allow some understanding of the relationships. For example, the children were asked to mark who they felt they were particularly close to and then to explain their relationship with that person. Follow up prompts such

as: how do they think people react when no one loves them; what sorts of things do they talk about with each member of the family; what sort of decisions do they make within that relationship; what happens if they disagree with a parent, sibling or member of the extended family and how are difficulties resolved, were used to elicit further information relating to the diagrams.

4. Neighbourhood Mapping

Participants were asked to think about where they live, work and play and to draw their neighbourhood. They are then asked to mark in major landmarks, places that are friendly and unfriendly, places where they spend a lot of time, places that are important for them, places that they are scared of. Discussion follows on why particular places were chosen and others were not.

5. Venn diagram of people and relationships

Children were asked to cut circles, representing people that they come into contact with; the larger the circle, the more important that person. Circles were arranged to show relationships between these individuals.

6. Causal diagram

Causal diagrams or impact diagrams are useful to find out the inter-links between events and they can also be used for working backwards, to find out the cause of a problem or situation. In this case, causal diagrams were constructed to find out why children are on the street in the first place.

7. Profile of a child's work/school day

This exercise was carried out to identify the child's role in the family and community and to give some idea of the child's input into the economic situation of the family. In Burma, going to school is generally seen as a child's duty (and work).

All of these techniques were used in the course of data collection however, while some are presented in the text of the thesis, others are used to assist in the construction of narrative around the lives of key informants.

Focus group discussions and key informant interviews held with both adult and child informants were semi structured in nature. For children, they focussed on discussion around the particular activity, such as the life lines, in order to fill out the sometimes limited data recorded by the child in pictorial form. For adult informants interview and focus group guidelines were developed and focussed on the following broad themes:

1. How childhood defined irr Myanmar
2. Memories of childhood
3. Well-known proverbs, expressions and sayings related to children and childhood
4. What Myanmar cultures tell us about children relating to the following:
   - Discipline practices
   - Initiation into adult life
   - Kind and appropriateness of work (paid and non paid)
     - o Tea shop boys, domestic workers etc
     - o Work done in the family
     - o Looking after younger siblings
   - Gender differences
   - Religion
   - Education
   - "r Social relationships amongst each other, parents, siblings, extended family,, wider community (teachers, monks, community leaders etc)
   - Involvement of children in the decision making processes of:
     - o Tha family
     - o The-community
     - o School
5. Kinds of responsibilities/obligations children have in the family for: .".V
   - Themselves
   - Siblings
   - Parents
   - Other family members
   - Religious authorities
   - Civil authorities
   - Teachers
6. Sorts of decisions children make and when (what age / maturity

Miòùt ffìemsjéfóes feìàlng" io:
- o Education
- o Work
- o Involvement in family 7. activity
- o Social obligations •„
- o Day to day activities
- o Treatment of younger 8. siblings
- o Peer and social relationships
- o Religious practices and responsibilities
- o Living circumstances
- o Marriage

About their younger siblings relating to:
- o Discipline
- o Education
- 19 Work
- Day to day activities
- About their parents

■ About others?

Understandings and examples of participation and the cultural "potential" for increased participation

For development workers

■ Kinds of projects they are involved in

■ Children's involvement in these projects if any - why/why not?

■ Reaction from other members of the community to this involvement

» Reaction ôf children to their own involvement

• Results and impact)f this participation

A summary of data collection processes used for the thesis appears in the table below:

Participants		Data Collection Method				
Type	No.	Key informant interviews/ narrative collection	Focus Group Discussions	Participatory Activities	Document Review	Observations
Children	50	*Y*	*Y*	*Y*	*Y*	*Y*
Adult community members (Parents)	30	*s*	*Y*	*Y*		
Development organisations staff	16		*Y*			
Community leaders	10	■/				

Table 1 - Summary of data collection processes

Data Analysis

Data from focus group and interviews were transcribed and coded using Atlas Ti and Microsoft Excel computer software. This enabled the generation of specific themes which are articulated in the discussion sections of Chapters 4 and 5. Participative activities elicited numerous pictorial information however it was often

in the discussions held with respondents around the activity that more data rich information was gathered. Discussions were recorded, transcribed and analysed is a similar fashion using Atlas Ti and Excel.

Ethics

All data collection activities were conducted in accordance with the approval given by the Ethics Committee of Victoria University. Participation was strictly on a volunteer, confidential and anonymous basis and participants were able to stop interview proceedings at any time. Children were always interviewed in the presence of other adults, where possible a parent or legal guardian. Fictitious names have been used unless express consent was given for real names to be used and photographs have only been used with permission. Photos have been included for the purpose of examination of the thesis only, to provide examiners with a visual snapshot of the associated written narrative. They will be removed prior to final binding of the thesis. Even though much of the information in this thesis is of a general nature, certain parts of it are sensitive and may compromise the work of the organisations discussed, should this information be available in the public arena. Simply providing fictitious names for the organisations would have little bearing, as there are so few organisations working with children in the way described, that it would be a simple task to identify their real names. Therefore, I have used the correct names of organisations but, as with photographs, these names will be changed prior to final binding. In addition, should some of this materia! enter the public arena, I would no longer be able to enter Burma and this, in turn, would affect my own livelihood and the ability to continue the work that I have started in the country which I believe adds to the quality of life of a broad range of people (including myself). Most importantly, much of the data was

collected from people with whom I had, and in some cases still have, relationships of trust that I do not wish to compromise. I have, therefore, requested that, if accepted, the thesis remains embargoed in the restricted area of the university library, and will be only available for viewing after the permission of the author and supervisor is given in writing.

Overview of thesis structure

Chapter Two of this thesis reviews the literature that represents the multi-disciplinary nature of participation. It begins with a discussion of the meaning of participation and related concepts from the community development perspective. It will be shown that participation is a complex concept, made even more so by the variable of age; acknowledging that 'children' cannot be treated in the same way as 'adults'. Links will be made with feminist theories, as it will be argued that there are many similarities around issues of discrimination against women and generational discrimination. Drawing on community development theory and examples from development projects in the third world[4], as well as literature more representative of Western democracies, participation and the debates about the 'right to participate' will be shown to be a fundamental notion of democracy and civil society.

[4] It is acknowledged that there is much debate as to the use of the term "Third World" and similar terms. These are used recognising their limitations: that they imply a linear track that all countries are on, when some are deteriorating, others are stagnating; that they lump very different settings, for example China and Sierra Leone, into one basket; and that they have an embedded 'western' concept of what is 'developed' which can be seen as derogatory. However, alternatives are little better, for example, "Two-thirds world" or "majority world" often need explanation and do not describe the real problem; "resource poor settings" does this better, and is used more often - however it's mainly poverty of economic resources being referred to, because many "resource-poor settings" are rich in human, cultural, environmental or natural resources; "economic resource-constrained settings" is clumsy; "Low income countries" and "Least developed countries" are terms used by the World Bank, but have very specific criteria; other suggestions such as "the South" (a northern hemisphere suggestion) has problems when considering countries like Australia . I have, therefore, used these terms interchangeably acknowledging their inherent limitations but, at the same time, recognising the need for some distinction to be made between countries that are quantifiably more advantaged than others.

The second strand of literature to be reviewed in Chapter Two focuses on the human rights 'movement', particularly children's rights. This literature will be examined in order to provide insight into notions of participation in its legal sense, as well as to help further the understanding of commonly accepted rights and responsibilities of children. While it is obvious that not all countries (perhaps not any) fully adhere to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the fact that it has been signed and ratified by 193 countries could be said to be illustrative of commonly accepted norms and understandings of childhood, at least from a legalistic perspective.

Of greater relevance is the use that has been made of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by advocates both for and with children, as well as by child advocates themselves, in calling for the rights of children, including their right to participation, to be respected and translated into law. The human rights movement has been vital in the creation of opportunity for participation for marginalized communities, and in the reduction of discrimination against women. Human rights approaches can be controversial, and from some perspectives may not necessarily be seen as the most appropriate vehicle through which children and their contribution to society can be given the status that some would argue they deserve. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has four primary tenets: survival, development, protection and participation. It is the conflict that arises with the latter two (protection and participation), which is most contentious. To what extent should children be able to take control of their own lives before their safety and the need to protect them becomes more important? Who will fight this battle

for children's right to participate: adults advocating on children's behalf or will it be children themselves?

After reaching some consensus about understandings of participation or at least an understanding of the breadth and complexity of the term, a third strand of literature will be introduced: the growing body of knowledge that looks at children and childhood as a social construct. The implication of such thought is far-reaching; if all cultures do not see childhood in the same light, can there be any standardised regulation of childhood, in terms of age or ability or social acceptability of different activities? Can international treaties such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child be applied to all cultures or is this simply an imposition of a Western ideal of childhood that would have all children in school, seen but not heard, busy preparing themselves for adulthood, not truly individuals until the arbitrary age of 18 is reached? These are but some of the challenges that the social constructionist agenda brings to understanding children's participation.

Together these three elements: community development; child rights; and the social construction of childhood, will help bring together a composite understanding of what it means to be a child within society today, and will help to reveal a more robust understanding of what it means for a child, any child, to participate. While the focus of the thesis will be, primarily, on developing countries, literature concerning both developed and developing countries will be used where relevant. This may serve to broaden the relevance and potential application of this research.

The third chapter of the study will look at Burma as a specific example or context in which children's participation can be examined more fully and in which the questions raised above can be reflected upon. For many years considered a pariah state by the rest of the world, Burma's history since the end of the Second World War has been marred by violence and oppression. A short-lived democratic period between 1948 and 1962 preceded the extended rule of General Ne Win and his 'road to socialism', which led to the country spiralling into economic decline, where it had once been known as 'the rice bowl of Asia'. When General Ne Win stepped down from public office in the late 1980's, a brief glimmer of hope for democratic advancement was seen with the appearance of Aung San Su Kyi (daughter of the father of modern Burma, General Aung San - assassinated in 1948 just prior to independence) and a rising student movement calling for reform. Resultant democratic elections saw Suu Kyi's party winning 82% of the seats (Falco, 2003) but it was denied government by the military still controlled by the retired Ne Win. At the time Suu Kyi was herself under house arrest and, to this day, she has only seen brief periods of freedom. Her party has been constantly harassed and has never able to take political leadership of the country.

A country with the history of Burma, one of the few remaining overtly military regimes in the world, may initially seem a strange choice in which to identify and study children's participation. An environment such as this does, in many respects, seem to preclude any notion of participation. Yet it is paradoxically in the face of the overt denial of participation that the true nature of the term can be fully illuminated. Firstly, by the analysis of the total lack of formal mechanisms of participation and the impact that has on a community (i.e. through looking at what

participation is by understanding what it is not). Secondly, it can be illuminated by examining the informal mechanisms of participation that spring up, almost as a form of 'social capital' (Putnam, 1993) upon which people have come to rely. That people in Burma have been able to survive, despite economic mismanagement, lack of political freedom, and poor government infrastructure, could well be due to the widespread social networks and social capital that have taken the place of more institutionalised systems of support.

Chapters Four and Five seek to understand the dynamics and process of community development programs in Burma, and the ways in which participation has and might continue to contribute to improved quality of life for children. The chapters have been divided for ease of analysis, although in many respects they should be seen as closely related. Chapter Four looks at participation from the individual's perspective. That is, how some children and relevant adult key informants on Burmese culture understand children, childhood and the ways in which children participate at a societal level. This will help clarify the contextual factors that influence the ability of children to participate within community development programs, the topic of Chapter Five. Data in Chapter Four suggests that these factors can broadly be divided into three areas: the personal; the socio-political; and the narrative, which refers to the way in which society embodies childhood and the implicit narratives that create this such as culture, religion, history. Analysis from the perspective of these different 'realms' enable us to uncover and in some cases 'deconstruct' the factors that influence childhood in Burma today, illuminating how the lived experience of Burmese children relates to understandings and nuances of participation in its broadest sense.

Chapter Five looks in detail at child-focussed development programs in Burma, operated by both international and local organisations. It will examine the manner in which children are able to participate (or not), and the way in which the realms of influence' (from Chapter Four) are taken into consideration in the planning, implementation and monitoring of child-focussed programs. Both chapters will have the secondary outcome of adding to the presently sparse body of knowledge of childhood in Burma.

Based on the theoretical discussion in Chapters Two and Three, and reflection on the empirical data of Chapters Four and Five, the possibility for a new framework for the analysis of children's participation emerges. This is part of the new contribution that this thesis makes in relation to children and development. The framework delineates the three interrelated realms that help describe the way in which society embodies childhood; the personal, socio-political and narrative, as described above. It also identifies a more nuanced way to look at participation programs for children being implemented through development organisations in Burma and more broadly within a community development context.

Chapter Seven summarises findings, examines some of the implications of the research for the organisations involved, as well as for policy and program in general, advances conclusions, updates relevant information about the situation in Burma and make recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

Locating Participation

Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of the key discourses related to the thesis: community development; the human rights movement and within that, child rights; and examines the growing body of knowledge around the sociology of childhood. Despite representing quite different disciplines of study, each discourse offers a vital perspective for this thesis. It is through these analyses and understanding of the areas of convergence and divergence that more definitive conclusions about children's participation become possible.

The first section of this chapter relates to community development and particularly to notions of participation and empowerment. What is clear from this analysis is that participation, while theoretically viable and arguably necessary, is influenced by power and hegemony, and that those who generally benefit from participating are often those who already have or control access to decision-making structures and systems within the community. Most often, this means men. Women are often unable to formally influence such processes, and children are seldom even considered. Indeed, it is clear from the analysis of mainstream community development literature that children are scarcely mentioned, other than in a welfare sense as beneficiaries of programs that aim to meet specific needs, such as health or education.

However, with the growth of the human rights movement, previously marginalised groups are finding a voice and are destabilising existing power imbalances. There has been a convergence of development thinking and rights-based approaches: good development has become synonymous with the notion that people must have a voice in their own development. This is now seen not simply as a good idea but as an inherent human right.

The child rights movement and its manifesto, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), have the potential to raise the status of children and to give them greater control over issues facing them. However the convention leaves many questions unanswered, particularly as it attempts to qualify children's participation by making it dependent on the age and maturity of the child (similar limitations are not placed on adults, many of whom have questionable maturity). A primary foundation of the convention is the 'best interests of the child' (article 3 of the CRC, UNICEF, 2003a); but who might determine these interests is often left open to debate and interpretation.

This chapter will discuss what might constitute 'authentic' participation of children within the child rights framework and will suggest that the convention can be seen to have roots in a particular understanding of the concept of childhood: a primarily Western vision of the ideal of innocence and purity. This idealisation of childhood is, by many accounts (Prout, 1996) a recent phenomenon, having evolved from the Age of Enlightenment and is not always wholly transferable across cultures.

This understanding of childhood, however, is being increasingly challenged as a result of new studies in the sociology of children (e.g. Wyness, 2001, Prout, 1996, Mulderij, 1996, Bissell, 2003, Woodhead, 1999, James and Prout, 1997). Literature in this field argues that children can no longer be seen as a silent minority but as entities endowed with their own ontological status and capable of acting on their own behalf. Such a perspective challenges the common acceptance of the current understanding of childhood development (such as Piaget, 1950, Vygotsky, 1962), and raises pertinent questions about the universal nature of childhood.

In drawing together these three complementary yet separate strands of literature: community development, human rights (including child rights) and the sociology of childhood, it is possible to draw more informed conclusions about the nature of participation for children.

Locating participation within the community development discourse

> *More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate, they are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas. For the first time in history humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these people....I believe that we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realise their aspirations for a better life...what we envisage Is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair dealing...Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge (President H Truman 1949 cited in Escobar, 1995).*

Despite the good will espoused in President Truman's speech in 1949, after decades of post World War II development the great disparity between rich and poor remains. Indeed it may even be growing. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Report of 1997 noted that despite clear gains in many areas of human development, 'a quarter of the world's people remain in severe poverty' (UNDP, 1997 p2). More recently, a report summarising urgent priorities for the new millennium, published by World Vision, noted that half of the world's population of six billion people lived on less than $2 per day and that malnutrition was affecting the growth of four out of every ten children. The report remarked that more than 130 million children have no access to education and, of those who do, 150 million drop out of schooling before the fourth standard. It also cited evidence that contaminated water accounts for 80 percent of all disease that claims the lives of around 5 million children a year, and that more than 250 million

children around the world work so that their families can survive (World Vision International, 1999 p4).

Furthermore, on a global scale the emergence and re-emergence of infectious disease epidemics, such as HIV and tuberculosis, are having a devastating impact on many of the hard earned development gains of the past decades (Scalway, 2003). The increasing poverty of many countries, despite the huge investment in development, has caused some to question the value of the current development paradigm, as Escobar notes:

> *For instead of the kingdom of abundance promised by theorists and politicians in the 1950s, the discourse and strategy of development produced its opposite: massive underdevelopment and impoverishment, untold exploitation and oppression (Escobar, 1995 p3).*

Prominent authors (Korten and Klauss, 1984) have suggested that the 'failure' of the present development paradigm has been a direct result of sophisticated systems of control in the West that have imposed Western values and doctrine:

> *The progress of the industrial era was guided by a powerful paradigm, a product largely of Western thought and experience, that shaped the dominant direction of societal development, dictated the goals to which policy attention was directed, and spawned sophisticated methodologies for guiding human choices...(Korten and Klauss, 1984 p5)*

Although some authors trace the causes for Western hegemony to events that took place well before the beginning of the twentieth century (Landes, 1999), it could be argued that this 'product of Western thought' referred to by Korten and Klauss

above, began in 1944. At this time the Bretton Woods Agreement triggered the development of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (The World Bank) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade - GATT (now transformed into the World Trade Organisation). The dominance of these organisations and the development policies (largely based on the beliefs encapsulated in Truman's speech above) has maintained the economic hegemony of the north over the south. Escobar (1995) argues that the development discourse, entrenched in violence and oppression, has been the central and most ubiquitous operator of the politics of representation and identity in much of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Where did things go wrong? Participation has become a rallying cry for development agencies over the past few decades. Many theorists, advocates and activists have suggested that the world as described by Escobar can only be changed through the participation of the oppressed in their own liberation. Paulo Freire (1970) is perhaps the best known of these:

> *This then, is the great humanistic task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves.*
> *Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both (Freire, 1970 p 21).*

People's participatory movements have played a vital part in affecting all kinds of local, national and global policy change (Toh and Floresca-Cawagas, 1997). There have been movements against globalisation and World Bank structural adjustment policies by poor communities and their supporters. Women's

movements have identified and fought against the exploitation of women and children in sweatshops. Grass roots environmental and political movements have at different times created momentum for substantial change. As some have described this:

> *Globalization from Below...has the potential to change the power equation. Rarely in human history have ordinary people had such an opportunity to transform the world for the better (Brecher et al., 2004).*

Over the years participation has been treated as a principle, an approach, an ideal, a philosophy. Participation has become an underlying premise on which democratic institutions have been built and is now recognised as a fundamental human right within many international human rights treaties.

As participation has grown in response to the failure of the post World War II development paradigm, so too have the number of definitions of this concept. The World Bank, for example, defines participation as:

> *The process through which stakeholders influence and share control over priority setting, policy-making, resource allocations and access to public goods and services (World Bank, 2003)*

Others include a particular focus on rural development

> *With regard to rural development...participation includes people's involvement in decision-making processes, in implementing programmes, their sharing in the benefits of development programmes and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programs (Cohen and Uphoff, 1977).*

Or the equitable distribution of resources to marginalised communities:

> *Participation is concerned with... the organised efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social*

situations on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control. (Pearse and Stifle 1979)

Some see participation as a means through which those who might benefit from a programmatic intervention begin to claim influence over planning and implementation:

Community participation is an active process by which beneficiary or client groups influence the direction and execution of a development project with a view to enhancing their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values they cherish. (Paul 1987)

Some use descriptive terms that are themselves quite esoteric, such as 'empowerment':

Participation can be seen as a process of empowerment of the deprived and excluded. This view is based on the recognition of differences in political and economic power among different social groups and classes. Participation in this sense necessitates the creation of organisations of the poor which are democratic, independent and self-reliant! (Ghai quoted in UNDP, 2003 p 18)

Some relate participation to the creation of new bonds of understanding and shared purpose:

Participatory development stands for the partnership which is built upon the basis of dialogue among the various actors, during which the agenda is jointly set, and local views and indigenous knowledge are deliberately sought and respected. This implies negotiation rather than the dominance of an externally set project agenda. Thus people become actors instead of being beneficiaries. (OECD 1994)

There is, therefore, no single definition of participation, although within the development discourse it has become a rallying cry and held great hope for change. Campfens (1997), for example, locates participation within the

fundamental principles of community development, arguing that co-operative responsibility, participation, local capacity strengthening and the mobilisation of community resources are key tools in the reconstruction of society and are capable of addressing the inadequacies of the past development decades. In particular he notes that:

> *Those who are marginalized, excluded or oppressed should be given the essential tools that will enable them to critically analyse and become conscious of their situation in structural terms, so they can envisage possibilities for change (Campfens, 1997 p24)*

Participation, therefore, has grown to prominence within the development discourse. Despite the diversity of definitions, most imply that participation is a process whereby participants take control over outcomes through a process of consensual decision-making that benefits the whole (as opposed to individuals within the group). Participation is, therefore, both a means to an end, as well as an end in itself. It can be seen as leading to the development of skills that facilitate consensus making and necessarily requires the opinions of all involved to be taken into account, resulting in an equitable sharing of resources and outcomes of any particular initiative.

Empowerment

Integral to the participation process is something that has become known in development circles as 'empowerment'. This is a term which is used often but like 'participation', is packed with nuance and is often misunderstood. It can appear paternalistic and presumptive: as in, 7 *empower you'.* However, its underlying notion is one of redistribution of power, rather than of one person acting to increase the 'power' of another. As early as the 1930s, some development projects

stressed empowerment and collective local action and by 1969, participation was being discussed in terms of its relationship with power. Sherry Arnstein (1969) identified this link, asserting that participation must lead to a redistribution of power, from those who have it, to those who do not. She developed a ladder of participation (see Figure 1), an idea used later by proponents of child participation, such as Hart (1997) and Franklin (Franklin, 1998). Arnstein argued that citizen participation in local governance was predominantly tokenistic and needed to change, enabling power imbalances to be addressed and disenfranchised citizens to be included in political and economic structures and processes.

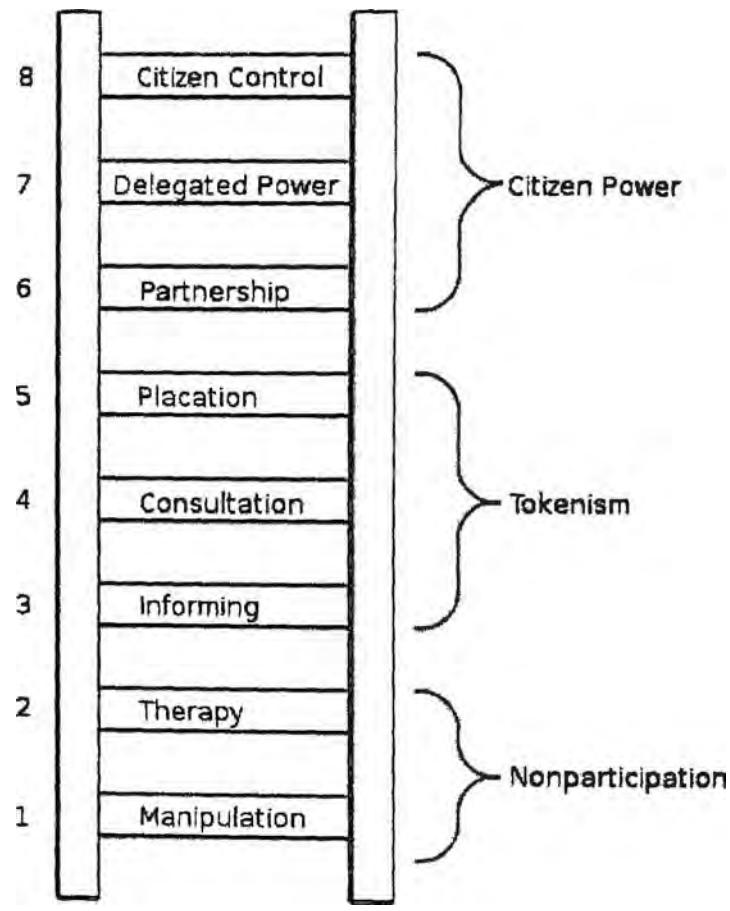


Figure 1 - Arnstein's ladder of participation

The recent global interest in participation and empowerment has been traced to the 1970s, when the failure of many projects led to a need to understand the perspective of local communities and brought into question the hegemony of the ‘external expert' (Gujit and Shah, 1998). This realisation, combined with some earlier methodologies of social transformation (Freire, 1972), helped to provide basic principles to guide people’s empowerment over their own development process. Empowerment, therefore, can be:

> *...seen to varying degrees as a process which strengthens people's and organisations' political awareness, power analysis, critical consciousness, personal sense of worth and rights, analytical capacities and skills, and ability to participate in decision-making at all levels from family, to NGOs, to government (VeneKlasen et ai, 2004 p 15)*

However, assuming that communities need and want to be 'empowered' or indeed presupposing that they are not 'empowered' already, might fail to take into account the way in which more traditional societies operate. As Tonnies (1957 first published 887) postulates, there are essentially two types of society, Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. Gemeinschaft societies are those in which people interact with a small number of others who they know well and who take part in a variety of roles within society. In such a community, neighbours provide support to each other in times of need and everyone knows each other's business. Public and private are not separate, resulting in a far richer sense of community. Traditional societies fit more broadly within this category. Gesellschaft, on the other hand, entails people interacting with a range of other individuals in different situations that are largely instrumental in nature (i.e. purpose, not relationship driven). There is a clear understanding of what constitutes legitimate dealings with others and the private and public are clearly defined. Taxes paid to the state pay for others (usually professionals) to fulfil the responsibility that the community might once have had. Ife (1995) argues that modern 'Western' societies fit within this category. It should be acknowledged, however, that all Western societies are not the same and rural communities within them may well be more Gemeinschaft in nature. Motivation for participation in each of these types of society will, however, be quite different.

Logically, the richness of community outlined in the Gemeinschaft model could possess far more potential for 'authentic' participation. Still, one must not look at traditional societies naively, assuming that everything within is perfect or homogeneous. Many traditional societies are ruled by laws that are often discriminatory (particularly towards women), sometimes extremely harsh, and are composed of complex systems of power that may not encourage participative decision-making of any sort. Some writers (for example Guijt and Shah, 1998) have cautioned that the failure to understand the complex nature of community, indeed the desire of proponents of participative development to hold on to some mythical ideal of community, could, ironically, be considered one of the major impediments to the participatory development movement.

Within the community development discourse Gujit and Shah (1998) note that a 'participation boom' took place in the 1980s. This saw an explosion of grassroots activists and local non-government organisations (NGOs), whose focus was on understanding and respecting insider knowledge. The early 90s saw, 'frenzied levels of global interest in participation' (Maguire, 1987 p4), with participation becoming a prerequisite for funding. We now find participation in today's development discourse being characterised by two growing paradoxes. The first is the trend to standardisation of approaches, which, in a sense, completely contradicts the notion of participation, whereby direction is moulded by the participants and is, therefore, difficult to standardise. The second paradox relates to the growth of a technical body of knowledge that takes the empowerment aspect of the participatory process out of the hands of communities and places it in the hands of the 'experts' once again (Maguire, 1987).

In the present day, as with many development terms and practices, the notion of participation has now grown to be complex and ambiguous. It can mean anything from consultation to full empowerment and has even been likened to a Trojan horse that can hide coercion and manipulation as its basic motivation (Slocum and Thomas-Slayter, 1995). Perhaps the greatest irony in the participation discourse is that traditional societies are often much more participatory in nature than Western societies but it has been western governments and development agencies, in a bid to find more sustainable solutions to development problems, that have encouraged the participation of beneficiaries of aid in their own development. Rather than understanding indigenous forms of participation, however, the development process that they often espouse is underpinned by Western forms of democracy. This assumes that the 'empowerment' of local communities to analyse their situation and problems, reach consensus over solutions and take collective action, is the best way for the development process to take place. The inherent risk of such assumptions suggests that a more thorough knowledge of the mechanisms within communities that result in cohesion and positive social outcomes is necessary.

Social Capital

Since the 1980s 'social capital' has become increasingly influential in the context of development (Collier, 1998, Grootaert, 1998). Recent debate about social capital has resulted from a need to better understand the complexities of societies and the failure of economic models of development in transitional and developing

economies (Collier, 1998). Understanding social capital, therefore, also helps to further illuminate participation.

During the 1990s the introduction and failure of policies such as structural adjustment, led to a re-thinking of development theory and practice. Fukuyama (2002) suggests that development policies of the 1990s (known as the 'Washington consensus') that sought to reduce the control of the state in economic development failed due to a lack of understanding of culture and social capital.

Like many social science concepts, 'social capital' has a multitude of definitions and is interdisciplinary in nature. It is also a concept that is very difficult to measure in a quantitative sense. The term gained recognition primarily through the work of James Coleman (1988) and was given further impetus in the 1990s through the study of democratic institutions in Italy (Putnam, 1993). Bourdieu defines social capital as:

> *The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to...membership in a group - which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital .(Bourdieu, 1986 p 243)*

Both Coleman and Bourdieu emphasise the 'capital' nature of the concept whereby individuals within social networks that are formed reap rewards that include economic benefit.

Others such as Putnam have defined social capital as 'trust, norms and networks that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit' (Putnam, 1993 p 167), and stress its 'social nature. Both the social and the economic bias in the definition of social capital requires that people co-operate and participate, not simply for their own

benefit but for the 'greater good' of those around them (Arnold, 2002). However, while claiming that the family is the cornerstone of social capital, neither Coleman, Bourdieu or Putnam detail the nature of family life that supports social capital (Winter, 2000). By inference, the role of children In social capital has been largely ignored.

Social capital theory brings relevant insights to understanding autocratic governments such as Burma, as well as the nature of participation. Fukuyama (2002) points out that good democracy equates to good economies, growth and technological change and that social capital is vital for good democracy. Although his observations fail to adequately account for the success of the real economic giant of the current era, China, on the whole, they appear to be true. Democratic liberalisation has been crucial to the successes of economies such as South Korea and Poland, whereas countries that have maintained autocratic or corrupt democracies, such as Indonesia and Russia, continue to struggle for real improvement in quality of life:

> *Social capital is what permits individuals to back together to defend their interests and organise to support collective needs; authoritarian governance, on the other hand, thrives on social atomization (Fukuyama, 2002 p 26)*

According to Fukuyama, the result of authoritarian governance is to push social capital into familial and kinship networks. This has possibly been the case in Burma, where restrictions on formal networks or associations, apart from those under the auspices of the regime, are largely based on relationships of trust and based also upon family or immediate communities such as religious groups. Such action, however, can have negative long term ramifications, as it precludes trusting

those outside the network, thereby inhibiting economic growth. As Fukuyama points out:

> *The single most difficult situation to deal with, from a policy standpoint, is a society thoroughly lacking in social trust (Fukuyama, 2002 p 32)*

The way in which children participate in society will obviously be influenced by the social capital and networks of the society in which they live. Study into the social capital of children is scant but growing. Harpham (2002) suggests that social capital from the point of view of a child has generally been seen from two different perspectives; within and outside the family. She notes that most attempts to measure children's social capital have been 'top-down', looking at the ability of parents to invest in the child's future, rather than the perspective of the sociology of childhood (to be discussed later in this chapter), that would see children as social actors in their own right. Morrow (1999) takes this position, arguing that the social context of children extends beyond the family to peers, out of school activities, work and to many other areas that do not include their parents. By inference, then, children participate, to varying degrees in a range of social interactions. As will be discussed later in this chapter, and contrary to Morrow's claims, in Western countries in particular, the space children have outside the family appears to be decreasing. On the other hand, in many developing countries children appear more visible, often in terms of their sheer numbers but also in the way in which they take part in what has become to be seen in the West as the 'adult world', particularly the world of work.

Participatory Methods

Despite the conceptual challenges in defining participation, it is generally recognised that participation must in some way form a part of development processes. As a result there has been a growth in participatory tools, for example those devised by Robert Chambers (1983), and typologies to try to encourage participation and to capture the types and degrees of participation (for example, Biggs, 1989; Cornwall, 1995; Gujit, 1991, Hart 1992). Participatory ladders such as Arnstein's (see Figure 1 above) provide a particular conceptual framework for organisations wishing to become more participative.

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), developed by Robert Chambers (1983) are perhaps the best known of a growing number and variety of participatory tools and techniques. Some critics of these tools (e.g. Cooke and Kothari, 2001) suggest that participation could be seen as the new 'development tyranny', devaluing traditional means of decision-making, reinforcing existing power dynamics and inhibiting other methods of development that might be more effective. From their perspective, such tools often reflect a simplistic understanding of power dynamics and risk becoming instruments of social control (Cooke, 2001), rather than freeing people to participate on their own terms. Henkel and Stirrat (2001) suggest that the push for participation could be equated with an evangelical movement, with its promise of salvation and preaching a specific vision of community that may unwittingly undermine existing community structures, resulting in what Foucault calls 'subjection' (Foucault, 1980).

Conclusion

The discussion above suggests that locating participation within the community development discourse is challenging. However, numerous development organisations extol the virtues and benefits of participatory approaches, including one of the most influential and largest development organisations, the World Bank, as illustrated by the words of the then president James D. Wolfensohn, in 1996:

> *I personally believe in the relevance of participatory approaches and partnerships in development and am committed to making them a way of doing business in the Bank (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 1996).*

Indeed the ability and the right to participate have become the cornerstones for many of the human rights treaties that have evolved during the last century, as will be discussed in the following section. Participatory processes, however, entail certain risks. The tendency, often, is to paint empowerment and participation as some kind of 'development nirvana in which everyone gaily commits themselves to what can be quite conflictual and tedious processes of local analysis and planning' (Gujit and Shah, 1998p 10). Furthermore, it could be argued that debate over what constitutes 'good' and 'bad' participation has tended to result in overlooking gender issues, assuming that they will be taken care of through the participation process (Mayo and Craig, 1995). The way in which gender differentiated knowledge and perception exists within participatory process has been illustrated by Kindon (1998) and Goebel (1998) and neglecting to take into account gendered power dynamics only serves to reinforce traditional male hegemony. Such neglect could apply even more so to children within the development process.

Locating participation within the child rights discourse

> *Although children have rights they don't always get them. As soon as a child is born it has needs (clothing etc). A child should be educated, have time to play, and should be with the parents. Children not with their families - on the streets, have rights too (like me). Children should have the right to an education, when a child is educated they can think and decide on their own.*[5]

A historical progression towards children's right to participate

Tun Naing's comment above exemplifies one of the current dilemmas relating to children's rights and participation; while rights might often make immutable sense, they are seldom fully realised. From a human rights perspective, participation is foundational to a number of international conventions that have become major instruments, not only for dealing with disputes within and between countries but also providing benchmarks for individual and collective freedoms and responsibilities.

The contemporary concept of individual human rights has its origins in the Age of Enlightenment, although perhaps the first human rights document might be considered to be the Magna Carta, signed in 1215 (Verhellen, 2000). Well before this, most if not all, religious scriptures made reference to some form of documentation of rights and responsibilities. The Ten Commandments in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Precepts of the Buddha and the Koran all contain teachings of respect and responsibility which reflect some of the underlying values of current human rights instruments. It was, however, in 1689 when the 'Bill of Rights' was signed, again in England, taking away the absolute power of the king

[5] **Tun Naing, a street child in World Vision M/anmar's Street Children's program in Rangoon.**

and putting it into the hands of an elected Parliament (Houses of Lords and Commons) that the modern human rights movement has its origins. Almost a century later, across the Atlantic in 1776, the American Revolution led to the 'Declaration of Independence' which stated that 'All men are created Equal'. In 1789 the French Revolution resulted in the 'Declaration of Human Rights and Civil Rights'. A number of other conventions including The Geneva Convention' (1864), The Hague Convention' (1899), The International Convention on the Abolition of Slavery' (1926) came into force before the need for a globally accepted standard on rights led to the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' in 1948.

The period of time after 1948 saw a rapid growth in the number and extent of human rights treaties. At the present time more than 80 treaties are in existence. Verhellen (2000) divides the development of human rights documents into three distinct areas: 'First generation rights', which refer to the civil and political rights, such as the right to freedom of opinion or assembly that, while providing protection from certain forms of abuse, assign negligible responsibility to the state; 'second generation rights' which begin to assert the responsibility of the state in areas such as income (a minimum wage) and education (compulsory primary schooling); and, more recently, 'third generation rights', which relate to more global issues such as the right to peace and to a clean environment. While not all treaties have been signed by all countries, a number have received widespread ratification and none more so than the Convention on The Rights of The Child. This has been signed and ratified by all but two sovereign nations, Somalia and the United States of America.

Most human rights treaties, particularly those of the second and third generations, enshrine the right to freedom of expression and participation of individuals within the State in all matters affecting them. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (See Appendix 1), for example, in its very first article, states that all human beings are bom free and equal in dignity and rights. Article 19 in the same treaty safeguards the right of freedom of opinion and expression, the underlying belief upon which much participatory theory and practice is based. This treaty, however, does not include many specific references to children. Those that do, such as Article 25, see children primarily as the responsibility of their parents and focus on their protection and afford children and their mothers' special care. Others affirm the right of children to free and compulsory primary education (Article 26, section 1) and accentuate the need for education to be directed at the full development of the human personality (Article 26, section 2).

These articles reinforce the ideal of the child as someone requiring care and protection and needing to be educated in order to attain the necessary skills and 'human personality' required for productive adult life. Parents, not children, are given the responsibility of identifying the most appropriate form of education for their child (Article 26 section 3).

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which came into force on 23 March 1976, made similar reference to children. Article 14 made special reference to the right of children involved in criminal or matrimonial dispute proceedings to privacy; the right of parents to ensure the religious and moral education of their children (Article 18) and for the protection of children (Article 23).

The Covenant also made reference to children's right to non-discrimination and to acquire a nationality (Article 24).

While such human rights instruments claimed universality regardless of race, colour, religion, gender or age, many of the articles (such as those quoted above) left little doubt as to the dependency of children primarily on their parents and on the state. It is due to concerns that children were not being seen as holders of rights, apart from those derived through their relationships with their parents and family, that the second half of the last century saw a growing movement towards the recognition of children as bearers of rights themselves and the need for a specific human rights treaty for children (Verhellen, 2000). This resulted in the Convention on the Rights of the Child which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989 after nearly ten years and a drafting process that included over forty sovereign nations. The CRC was preceded by a number of other international treaties including the 1924 Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child. It contains 54 articles in total and can broadly be divided into four distinct parts, Survival / Prevention; Protection; Development / Provision; and Participation. Some of the Articles specifically those that infer children's right to participation (Articles 12, 13, 14 and 15; see Appendix 1) take a dramatic departure from the earlier, more dependent view of childhood adopted in other human rights treaties; affording the child rights of expression, thought, conscience and religion, previously granted only to adults or parents on behalf of the child. The CRC incorporates civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights and is the first legally binding international instrument to do so (UNICEF, 2003a). According to Van Bueren

(1996), the CRC accomplishes a number of goals. Firstly, it affords children a number of previously un-recognised rights such as the right to the preservation of identity. Secondly, it enshrines these rights in a global treaty. Thirdly, it creates binding standards where previously there were only non-binding recommendations, for example relating to safeguards around adoption procedures. Fourthly, it obliges states to address the protection of children, including harmful cultural practices. Finally, it stresses the duty of state parties not to discriminate against children in realising their rights.

Becoming signatory to human rights conventions and translating the same into policy, law and action are quite different undertakings. This is particularly so with participation. In the introduction to a recent book, *Stepping Forward, Children and Young People's Participation in the Development Process* (Johnson et al, 1998), Judith Ennew laments the absence of an integrated discourse on child participation. She notes that, despite increasing incidence of the participation of children in development projects over recent years, success is generally claimed on anecdotal reports with little hard evidence, and that:

> *Instances in which children are truly involved in programming, planning and evaluation are rare (Johnson et al, 1998: p.xix).*

Key dilemmas with participation in the child rights discourse

The best interests of the child

Although the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been responsible for fundamental advances in the social, educational and physical status of children around the world, it is not without ambiguities. For example, Article Three states that:

> *In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration (UNICEF, 2003a).*

The 'best interest' clause first appeared in International Law, in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959, which stated that the 'the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration' in the 'enhancement of laws' in relation to children. It is included in six other CRC articles: separation from parents, 9(3); parental responsibilities, 18(1); deprivation of family environment, 20(1); adoption, 21(a); restriction of liberty, 37(c); and court hearings involving juveniles, 40(2)(b)(iii). The best interests principle is also reflected in a number of other international agreements and instruments: two articles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the 1986 UN Declaration relating to foster placement and adoption; the work of the Human Rights Committee in interpreting the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the 1990 Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child; and the work of the European Commission of Human Rights (Pearson and Collins, 2002).

The concept of best interest has been criticised as a fundamentally Western concept (Breen, 2002) and analysis does raise certain questions. The most contentious of these is the fine line that is sometimes drawn between allowing the child the right to participate and protecting the child from harm. Whether or not children should work is a case in point. The concept of children working to support either themselves or their family may be difficult to come to terms with for many in modern industrialised countries, yet the reality for a large proportion of the world's children is that *not* to work is a luxury (Boyden et al., 1998). Susan Bissell, who

researched the impact of globalisation on child Bangladeshi garment factory workers, noted that the Harkin Bill of 1996 (a bill known as the Child Labour Deterrence Act), which passed through the United State Senate in 1993, enforced sanctions on goods made with child labour. The result, rather than to encourage children to enter school, was that thousands of Bengali children lost their jobs and many were forced into far more risky forms of work (Bissell, 2003). Although both children and parents who were interviewed as a part of this study subscribed to the ideal of education and a 'happy' childhood, the reality that they articulated was very different. Illustrating how the 'best interest' principle could be manipulated for political gain, Bissell went on to suggest that the Harkin Bill was an imposition of Western values of childhood (i.e. that children should not work but go to school) used to maintain market dominance in the global textile trade by undermining Bangladesh's source of cheap labour (its children).

What is a child?

The difficulty of translating human rights instruments for children into action, particularly aspects relating to participation, is partly due to apparent ambiguity within some of the key concepts and terminology of the convention. Not least of these is defining childhood and the term child. The convention defines a child as anyone under the age of eighteen. However, in many countries 'children' of a much younger age are already raising their own families and have become responsible for the income and survival of their parents and siblings. Children as young as seven years old have been enlisted into militias and have died on the battlefield. In Nepal 7% of girls are married by the age of ten (Thomas and Hocking, 2003). Such ambiguity raises questions about the relevance of the CRC

across cultures and, more fundamentally, from where the perception of childhood, as promoted in the convention, has come.

Even though the CRC asserts 18 as the age of majority, it attempts to further qualify what is and is not appropriate for children through a number of different articles that attempt to nuance the stricture of age. However, this can be argued to foster even greater ambiguity. Article Twelve (one of the key 'participation' articles), for example, states that:

> *1. The child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.*
>
> *2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.*

This view would, on the one hand, have children enabled or empowered to have direct influence over all matters that have an impact on them, depending on their age and maturity. On the other hand, the article could be seen to have the effect of further confusing definitions as to what issues, if any, do not affect children to some extent, and who is to decide the level of maturity of a particular child? Notwithstanding the provision of an appropriate representative as outlined in the second part of Article 12, it can be argued that in a court of law the burden of proof will be on the child (or his/her representative) to prove that he or she is capable of expressing his or her own views.

Furthermore, why is the arbitrary age of 18 years old the decisive point at which one suddenly becomes able to make decisions with competence and full responsibility when it is commonly accepted that the human brain continues to physically develop well into the 20's (Begley, 2000).

Expectations of what children can and cannot do are by no means universal, even from a legal perspective, and legal regulations have, themselves, changed through history. For example, in the United Kingdom, in 1860, the age of consent was set at 12 years old. This was adjusted to 13 in 1875 and rose to 16 in 1885. Between 1967 and 1994, the age of consent for homosexuals was set at 21, then from 1994 to 2001 at 18. From 2001 to the present time, this reverted to 16, to conform to standards set for heterosexuals. The age of consent in Chile and Panama at the present time is 11 years old and 12 in Japan and Spain (Thomas and Hocking, 2003). Although in Japan, prefecture legislature generally abides by the CRC.

Indeed, there are obvious areas where children could be seen to be far more competent than adults. As Karel Mulderij (1996) points out, when comparing children's physical movement and ability to that of an adult, it is not difficult to observe who is more competent in terms of grace and form. One only needs to look at the ever decreasing age of many athletes, particularly gymnasts, to confirm such an observation. In 1996, for example, the average age for female Olympic gymnasts was around fifteen (Barry, 2001). Such a perspective brings into question the idea that children are growing into something more fully developed (Mulderij, 1996). Physical ability is by no means the only area in which children's competence seems to outstrip that of adults. As many parents will attest, their

children are often far more computer literate and able to manoeuvre around the often overwhelming array of technical necessities of the modern household, such as remote controls and modern electrical appliances.

Article 12 also states that extent to which the views of the child are taken into account should be based on the maturity of the child. However, there is a cultural divergence in the understanding of competence and maturity and this has differed within cultures over time, depending on prevailing societal norms. Vygotsky (1962), a Russian psychologist, suggested that child development is dictated by culture. By inference, notions of when and how it is appropriate for a child to participate will also be partly dependent upon cultural norms:

> *What a cultural approach emphasises is the respects in which the environment for child development is shaped by human action, profoundly social in character and at all times mediated by cultural processes (Woodhead, 1999 p 11).*

The importance of cultural context is echoed by other scholars, for example, Rogoff who notes:

> *The developmental endpoint that has traditionally anchored cognitive developmental theories — skill in academic activities such as formal operational reasoning and scientific, mathematical, and literate practices - is one valuable goal of development, but one that is tied to its contexts and culture, as is any other goal or endpoint of development valued by a community...Each community's valued skills constitute the local goals of development.. .In the final analysis, it is not possible to determine whether the practices of one society are more adaptive than those of another, as judgements of adaptation cannot be separated from values (Barbara Rogoff cited in Woodhead, 1999 p12)*

The Evolving Capacities of the Child

At the heart of these 'dilemmas' is the fine and difficult balance between the degree to which children require the protection of adults and the freedom to be able to make their own decisions and take responsibility for their own actions. No-one could argue that a young baby is almost totally dependent upon those around it to provide food, warmth, love and affection. As a child grows, however, this apparent dependence decreases. Children, often from a young age, look to assert their own desires, wants and needs. Clearly, as Vygotsky suggests, this is dependent upon a variety of factors, not the least of which is the culture in which the child is brought up. Societal norms, education (both of children and adults), experience and legal stipulations might also influence the degree to which the protection of the child takes precedence over the child's growing autonomy. Article 5 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the concept of evolving capacities, mediates between these apparently conflicting themes:

> *Article 5*
>
> *States Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention.*

Simply stated, this article affords children the right to claim their growing autonomy with the assurance that family, community and state will be there to provide the necessary protection as they develop independence. The degree to which parent or guardian can impose their own restrictions over the child is tempered by the use

of the phrase, 'appropriate direction and guidance'. This acknowledges the responsibility of both for negotiating the child's pathway to adulthood. The interdependence and the notion of community responsibility articulated in this article also suggests that rights should not be seen as highly individualistic but, "Understood in this way, it becomes clear that human rights affirm rather than challenge principles of inter-dependence and reciprocity" (Lansdown, 2005b p5).

This is the first instance of the notion of evolving capacities being incorporated into a human rights treaty and despite its apparent common sense, the translation of such a concept into law is challenging. For example, the extent to which laws should set age limits for different activities may become overly bureaucratic and fail to recognise that children develop competencies at different ages. Article 6 which asserts the survival and cognitive, social, emotional, physical and moral development of children is further strengthened by a number of other articles that refer to children's development (such as 23, 27, 28, 29, 31) and together elaborate on how evolving capacities might be taken into account in a variety of environments including the school and the home (Lansdown, 2005b). Together, these articles attempt to provide children, regardless of gender or culture, the right to gradually explore their growing autonomy as they are ready and for parents, the community and the state, the responsibility to adequately provide protection and guidance without asserting ownership of the child. A vital element of this dynamic is what Lansdown refers to the 'participatory' or 'emancipatory' concept of the notion of evolving capacities:

Articles 5 and 12, and, indeed, the overall philosophy of the Convention, establishes children's role as active participants in

decision-making processes that affect their lives (Lansdown, 2005b p22)

Models of child participation

Notwithstanding the dilemmas that accompany child rights law, there have been significant advances in thinking around children's participation over the past decade. Participation might be seen in a number of ways but primarily could be divided into two distinct subsets; participating in an activity or participating in decision-making. The two are not mutually exclusive although the latter is likely to imply a greater degree of democratic process and autonomy. As Thomas (2007) identifies, different commentators have identified varying reasons for the importance of participation. They relate to a broad range of areas affecting children including protection, decision-making, the upholding of children's rights, the development of skills and self-esteem to name a few. Matthews (2003) suggests three reasons for children's participation: firstly, that it assists in the development of active citizens; secondly, that it assists in young people finding their place in society; and thirdly, that it strengthens young people's status in relation to adults.

Much of the conceptualisation of children's participation, therefore, has taken place around the idea of children's evolution into decision-makers. Perhaps most notable to date has been a model developed by Roger Hart (1997) (based on the work of Arnstein, discussed previously) for encapsulating various stages of child participation, in a ladder with eight different rungs (see Figure 2). Hart, in looking at how children can become active participants in environmental programs, envisaged a series of steps (rungs on a ladder) through which children can rise to

reach progressively more sophisticated levels of participation. As the diagram indicates, the lower three rungs refer to manipulation and tokenism, much in the same way as Arnstein's lower rungs and they do not constitute participation at all. In such instances children are not given a choice and appear primarily to meet the needs of adults. Genuine participation begins to occur from the fourth rung of the ladder where children, even though they may have little choice in participating, do so in an informed manner. For example, a school might involve children in an environmental cleanup activity. The next rung indicates a greater level of consultation, with children in planning and so on, culminating in a process that leads to shared responsibility for decision-making between adults and children.

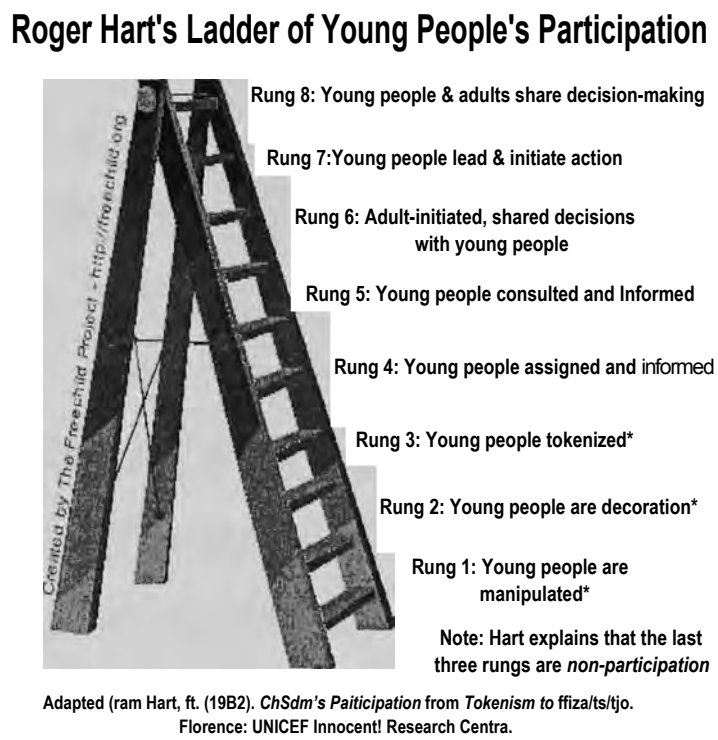


Figure 3 Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation

Harts model has been widely used and has been a valuable tool to assist development projects to think through how children are treated within community development practice. It has led to the development of other linear models such as that of Barbara Franklin (1995) in Figure 3 below. She defined 10 levels of participation, culminating in children taking charge of an initiative, calling on adults only when they need assistance.

Barbara Franklin Model of Participation

Non-Participation

0 No consideration. Children are not given any help or consideration at all. They are Ignored.

1 Adults rule. Adults make all the decisions. Children are told nothing except what they must do.

2 Adults rule kindly. Adults make all the decisions. Children are told what to do and are given reasons and explanations.

Participation':'"

3 Manipulation. Adults decide what to do and ask children if they agree. Children must agree.

4 Decoration. Adults decide what to do. Children take part by singing, dancing and performing ceremonial functions.

5 Tokenism. Adults decide what to do. Afterwards, children are allowed to decide on some of the minor aspects.

6 Invitation. Adults invite children's ideas but make decisions themselves, in their terms.

7 Consultation. Adults consult children and consider their opinion carefully, and then adults decide, taking all opinions into account.

8 Joint decision. Adults and children decide together on the basis of equality.

9 Children lead, adults help. Children lead in deciding with help from adults.

10 Children in charge. Children decide what to do. Adults get involved only if children ask for their help

Table 2 - Barbara Franklin's model of participation

These two ladders bear much similarity, despite the very different end goal of a participatory endeavour; Hart's shared responsibility as opposed to Franklin's children in charge. However, although such tools help to further clarify notions of participation and empowerment of children, they still fail to capture the complex nature of these concepts. The 'ladders' may be seen as simplistic, in that they portray power as a linear relationship of exploitation, very clearly defined according to those who possess power and those who do not. This denies a more nuanced understanding of power that is multi-dimensional and acknowledges that individuals, no matter what their social status, gender and age are, by virtue of their own humanity, caught up in power relationships.

A slightly more nuanced model of participation (below) is provided by Shier (2001)

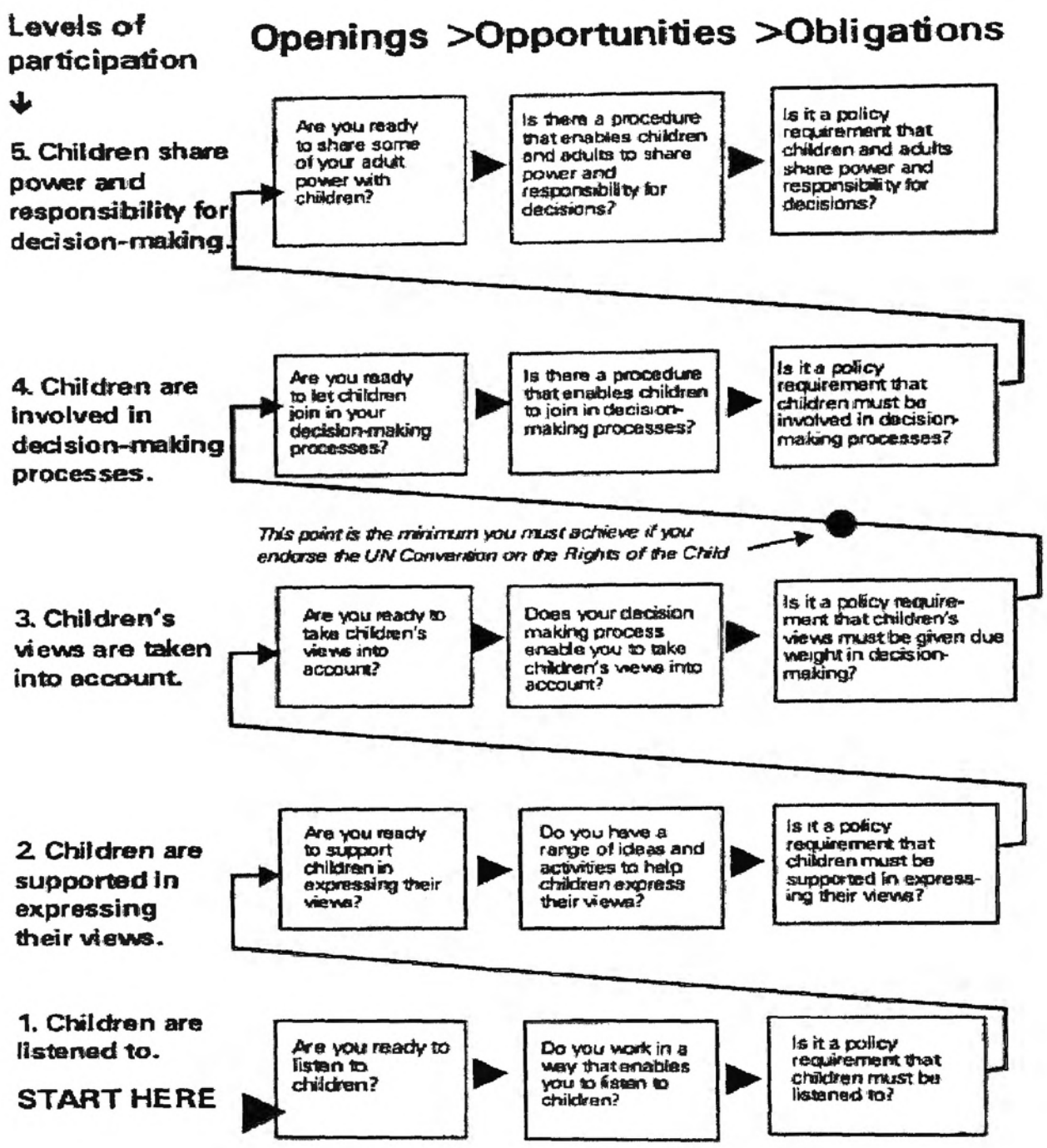


Figure 4 Pathways to Participation by Harry Shier

This model is based on five levels of participation that appear in the left hand side of the diagram beginning from 'children being listened to' and ending in 'children sharing power and responsibility for decision-making'. Across the top of the model there are three stages that refer to the organisational interest and commitment to be inclusive of children s perspectives; openings, opportunities and obligations. The model is more nuanced than Hart's or Franklins and takes into account the varying degree of commitment to involving children that an organisation may

exhibit as well as the factors within the child or group of children that may affect or inhibit their participation. In the same manner as Hart, however, the model is linear and does not adequately illustrate the notion of children's participation beyond a specific project or activity.

Emmanuelle Abrioux (1998) illustrates the importance of power within the participatory discourse through her work with girls attending a street children's program in Kabul, Afghanistan. In a country such as this, where girls are denied access to formal education and participation in any public forum after the age of 12, participatory processes can risk personal safety, and Abrioux claims that even the decision made by a girl to attend the program is a significant form of participation:

> *The decision of the girls to come down to the centre and attend an activity would, therefore be a considerable way along a spherical process, taking into account the starting point (although not necessarily high if rated on a ladder scale) (Abrioux, 1998 p 26).*

In contrast to the hierarchical structure of the ladder models already discussed, she suggests that a spherical model (Figure 5 below) of participation is more useful, particularly in situations where the rights of certain groups are constrained.

Participation theory, therefore must take into account notions of power more comprehensively.

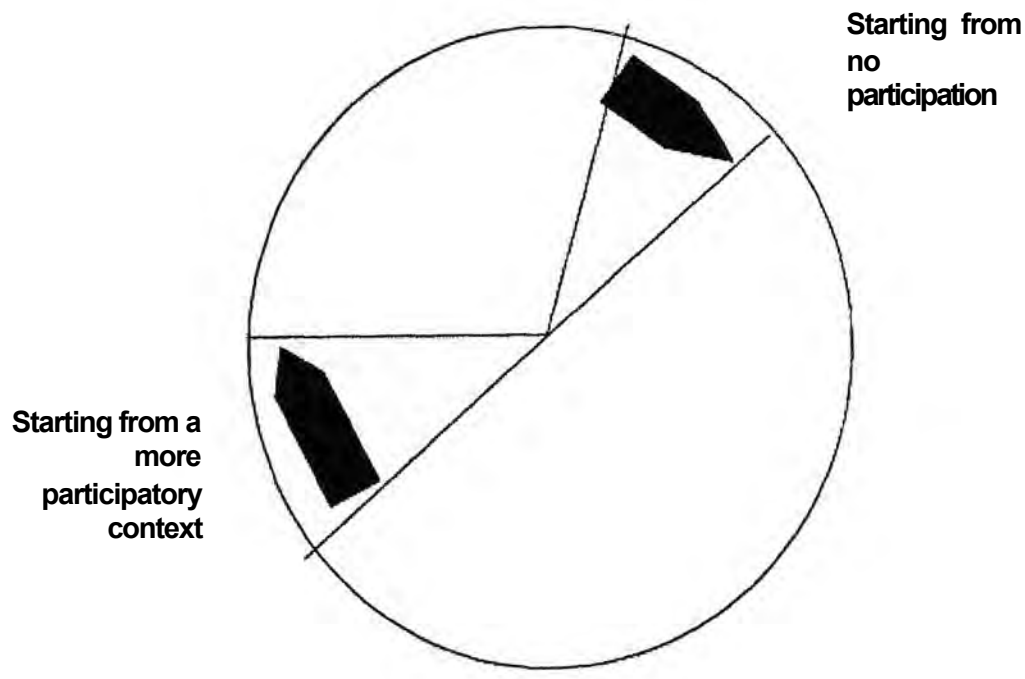


Figure 4 - Abrioux's spherical model of participation

Thomas (2007) identifies a dual nature of participation observing that:

> *There is a discourse of children's participation that is predominantly social - that speaks of networks, of inclusion, of adult-child relations, and of the opportunities for social connection that participatory practice can create. Alongside this there is an alternative discourse that is more or less overtly political - that speaks of power, and challenge, and change (Thomas, 2007 p 206)*

A further analysis of power, therefore, becomes necessary if participation is to be better understood.

Participation and power

Participation is subject to an expansive breadth of definition but is often seen narrowly as a methodology to improve project performance through the inclusion of stakeholder knowledge and rarely as mutual decision-making process with shared agendas. VeneKlasen et al (2004) suggest that systems and structures of 'power[1] can prevent participation and can work against the fulfilment of rights. Power takes

many forms and may be overt and visible, or subtle and hidden. In the case of the latter, it becomes more insidious, distorting meaning and notions of acceptability, affecting the way in which people shape their world, their values and notions of what is right and wrong.

At a fundamental level, human rights question structures of power. This is their primary function. By inference then, participation, a crucial element of rights and participatory development, must seek to do the same. 'Empowered' individuals and communities are those that find the strength and ability to challenge systems of power, despite the associated risk. Of course some choose to challenge power openly and others do not. As the following chapter on Burma will suggest, silence in opposition is not unusual, nor is it a sign of a lack of power.

However, even this analysis of power has been questioned. Perhaps the best known analysis of power in recent times has been that of Michele Foucault (1980). He compares power to an idea of Jeremy Bentheim for prison reform in the 19th Century. Bentheim claimed to have designed the perfect prison, known as the Panopticon, in which all cells opened up to a central tower where prisoners were under constant scrutiny, never escaping the gaze of the tower and unable to see or communicate with each other. Foucault suggests that power:

> *...must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization... [Individuals] are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. ...Individuals are the vehicles of power, notits points of application (Foucault, 1980, p98).*

If we are to acknowledge the complexity of power to this extent, then present participatory approaches, particularly the simplified participatory tools often used by development practitioners, may be considered naive and they run the risk of creating more problems than they might aim to resolve.

Foucault argues that power is not necessarily negative, that:

> *...power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society (Foucault, 1979 p93)*

In relation to children, this distinction is crucial and begins to shed light on some of the deeper complexities relating to children's participation and the problem associated with having 'children in charge', which is the logical conclusion for the linear power based models encapsulated in Franklin's ladder. Whereas linear models suggest that increasing participation implies a transferral of power from adults to children, a Foucauldian analysis might claim that children already assert power in their relationships with those around them and the structures that bind and create society. A child's cry, for example, is sufficient to galvanise a parental reaction and is therefore an expression of the existence of power dynamics between parent and child. This suggests that children have the potential capacity to assert power, even as infants. The extent of their actual power is constrained by adults, society and what society sees as their rights and responsibilities. In other words, the construction of power relationships is dependent upon the way in which societies define the nature of childhood. Adding even greater complexity to this observation, as Frones argues, there is not simply one childhood but many 'childhoods':

> *...formed at the intersection of different cultural, social and economic systems, natural and man-made physical environments. Different positions in society produce different experiences (Frones, 1993 in James and Prout, 1997, p.xiii)*

So then, if we are to fully understand the nature of participation and the crucial role that power exerts on intergenerational relationships, it is necessary to consider a further discourse, one that will help to deconstruct the notions of childhoods; that of the sociology of childhood.

Locating participation within the socioiogy of childhood discourse

Just as development theory and rights based approaches can be construed within the Western European and North American tradition of historical experience, so can current notions of childhood. However, as development and rights based paradigms have been challenged (for example Escobar, 1995, Said, 1979) so too have theoretical paradigms of child development (James and Prout, 1997).

Constructions of Childhood

Childhood is a relatively recent construction in the West. Some authors trace the emergence of the current Western notions of childhood back to the 18th Century Period of European Enlightenment. According to Gottleib (1993) young people in medieval society shared most tasks with their elders but from the period of the Enlightenment on, children became increasingly marginalized from participation in societal production and decision-making roles. With industrialisation and the need for a skilled and well-educated labour force, children became 'economically worthless but emotionally priceless' (Zelizer 1994). Increasingly then, with the emergence of full time education, children became less able to make any economic contribution to society and, therefore, were less able to influence any decision-

making processes (Stein 1995). A ‘good childhood’ became one in which the child lived a protected life in a nuclear family in which he/she would eventually make their passage to adulthood and productivity. Some authors argue that during the Middle Ages children were routinely abandoned, that infanticide was common, and that it has only been since the Classical Era that children were treated with any sense of ‘humanity’ (deMause, 1974). Postman (1982) supports this argument observing that during the middle ages, due to the absence of literacy, education and the concept of shame, that there was very little difference between what adults and children knew and were exposed to.

Other authors, for example the French historian, Philippe Ariès (1914-1984), in his book, *L’enfant et la vi familiale sous ¡’Ancien Régime* (published in 1960), claim that childhood did not exist as a separate anthropological category at all, during the Middle Ages. Although Ariès writings have been brought into question (due to his iconographie research methods), there is no doubt that childhood was seen quite differently before the Age of Enlightenment and that the idealised notions of childhood, as described by Holt, as the ‘mythic walled garden of happy, safe protected innocent childhood which all children ideally inhabited’ (Holt, 1975 p 22-23) evolved as children were increasingly removed from the world of work and responsibility and placed in institutions (schools) to be given time to learn how to become productive and socially responsible adults.

Needless to say, this process varied depending on the social class of the child. Some authors (such as Depaepe, 1996) have added to this understanding by pointing out that along with the era of enlightenment and the growth of the nuclear

family grew the ideal of romantic love, the reduction of marriage as an economic transaction and the gradual separation of childhood from the adult world. Children in the middle classes, once exposed to the everyday activities of adults, were progressively sheltered from exposure to activities such as sex, death and even bad language. Of course, children of poor families had no such luxury. However, with the introduction of universal and compulsory education and the simultaneous growth of both a religious and social concern for the underprivileged, the expectation grew that even poor and marginalized children should have the opportunity for education and a 'childhood'. This saw the growth of a discourse around childhood and youth, based on an increasing pedagogical interest in children.

Key societal institutions, particularly the church, also began to take a very strong role in many countries in Europe, leading to standards in such areas as sexuality and discipline. As a part of this development, in the late 1800's and into the 1900's, youth organisations, such as the Boy Scouts, were developed as a response to a concern that poor youth, who had not had the benefit of middle class values and education, might be the cause of civil unrest, if left to their own devices. Along with this grew the idealisation of the life of the child and the appearance of the fairy tale endings in literature that were always happy and that did away with anything that might upset the child or sour the vision of the ideal childhood.

Verhellen (2000) suggests that there were in fact two primary strands of thought relating to childhood that grew from the period of the Enlightenment. Firstly that in which children were seen as inherently 'bad' and needed to be educated to be

made ‘good’ (a Biblical perspective with an emphasis on school and family) and the romantic tradition, which saw children as ‘innocent’ and ‘inherently good’ (Rousseau and Goethe in the 18th Century), in which children needed to be protected from society/culture. Both perspectives, however, looked at childhood as a separate entity from adulthood. Childhood, thus, began to be looked upon as a stage in the development of becoming fully human and children were seen as the future; tomorrow’s potential. In turn, this brought about child-specific fields of endeavour such as paediatrics in the 19th Century and child protection in the early 20th Century. The institutionalisation of children in school could be seen as a further means through which children were closed off from, and prepared for, the adult world. Galie Cannella (1999), in a Foucauldian analysis of education and power suggests that children’s lives, at least in the Western world, have been shaped by the discourse of education that has,

> *psychologized and biologized younger human beings, creating the universal condition of childhood (Cannella, 1999, p37).*

This discourse, she claims, is maintained through an array of disciplinary technologies that are designed to control, shape, and mould young bodies and minds.

Childhood in the period between the two world wars saw the growth of mass youth organisations which reflected the social polarisations of the day (for example, socialist and religious) and, finally, with the post modern era and the development of consumer society Depaepe (1996) contests that, despite the revolutionary nature of the 1960s, the conservative backlash in the 1970s has left children and youth increasingly locked tightly within our definitions and ideals of childhood.

As a result, a number of assumptions have emerged in western society. Firstly that children go through developmental stages in their path to adulthood. Secondly that adults and children display fundamental differences in the way in which they perceive and respond to the world around them: adults are responsible while children are only interested in play; adults display rationality while children are overly emotional and irrational; adults are capable of abstract thought while children are not; and adults are sexual beings while children are asexual. Finally that, until children become adults, they need to be separated from the adult world in places where they can be gradually assisted, in accordance with their maturity and age, in their destiny of becoming fully human, or, in other words, an adult (Skolnick, 1983).

Such assumptions fit neatly into positivist thought, where children can be seen as separate and different: as a part of a whole; part of an adult; part of a person; not yet a person. As a result they have become a subject of research and fragmented into separate parts; psychological, physical, cognitive, and emotional; objects to be studied. As Theresa Richardson (cited in Depaepe, 1996) contends, children are:

> *Caught as a historical euphemism placed in the ironic position that the more we have tried to define and capture 'real' child life, the more we have reinforced childhood as a metaphor for something other than the biological entity we have singled out to manipulate' (Depaepe, 1996 p 63).*

The 'sociology of childhood'

Although the CRC has become one of the main catalysts for changing notions of childhood, at a policy level in many countries, over the past two decades, there has also been a growing interest in the study of children in academic circles.

Previously unquestionable authorities on child development (Piaget for example), have increasingly come under scrutiny as new understandings of childhood have been cast on to the academic arena (Ackerman et al., 2003). Coupled with this has been a growing awareness that childhood is not all we would like it to be or, perhaps, pretend that it is. Over the past 10 to 15 years, particular issues concerning children have received intensive media coverage. 'Child labour', 'child slaves' and 'child soldiers' are now common and confronting phrases used in most newspapers around the world (Doming, 2002).

Perhaps most of all (at least in the Western media), the issue of child sexual abuse has brought to light and questioned the now commonly accepted ideal of childhood. This issue can be explored as an example of the complexity behind our present construction of childhood. Jenny Kitzinger (1997) in her article *Who Are You Kidding? Children, Power and the Struggle Against Sexual Abuse,* sees issues of sexual abuse closely bound up in the contemporary discourses on sexuality, family, gender class and race (Campbell, 1988, Parton and Parton, 1988). Also these debates draw on a variety of discourses on childhood, as child sexual abuse, above all, is presented as a crime against childhood.

Kitzinger's research is based on interviews with 30 women who were abused as children, as well as on newspaper articles that have appeared in British newspapers, other forms of media, leaflets, educational videos, books and articles on child abuse. She contends that these are discourses on childhood innocence, passivity and innate vulnerability and argues that the portrayal of child sexual abuse is a violation of childhood:

is an assertion of what childhood really is or should be (Kitzinger, 1997 p 166)

Our contemporary (Western) view of childhood is one that assumes that this period is a time of untroubled play. That a child could be considered a sexual being (or any other sort of being apart from one in the making) is seldom considered.

However as Kitzinger observes:

> *...what is happening now...is a fetishistic glorification of the 'innate innocence' of childhood, and, indeed, a rhetoric which implies that sexual abuse stains that innocence (Kitzinger, 1997 pi 67).*

Kitzinger argues that this concept of innocence is now exploited to incite public revulsion and that this is problematic for three primary reasons. Firstly, portraying innocence may actually serve to encourage the would be abuser:

> *if defiling the pure and deflowering the virgin is supposed to be erotic, then focussing on children's presumed innocence only reinforces their desirability as sexual objects (Kitzinger, 1997 p168)*

Secondly, she points out that portraying children as innocents actually stigmatises those children who could be considered flirtatious or sexually aware:

> *If the violation of innocence is the criterion against which the act of sexual abuse is judged then violating a 'knowing child' becomes a lesser offence than violating as 'innocent child (Kitzinger, 1997 p168).*

Finally and most crucially, she contends that the focus on innocence is counter-productive, as it is an ideology that denies children any access to power, knowledge and responsibility and, therefore, actually increases their vulnerability to abuse. An 'innocent' child is, by definition, to be shielded from, or in other words denied access to, the adult world.

As a result of the prominence of the CRC and the renewed academic interest in children, the modern study of childhood has become multi-disciplinary, challenging previous (Western) understandings of childhood that would see children as adults in the making and childhood as an age of innocence and learning to 'become'. According to Alan Prout (1996), four theoretical models of the sociology of childhood have emerged in recent times. Firstly, 'childhood as part of a social structure' (e.g. Qvirtrup 1990 and Sgritta and Saporiti 1989), which argues that childhood is a permanent feature of social structure. Secondly, 'children in their social contexts', which analyses childhood in terms of the different environments that children inhabit. It holds the notion of children as agents of interaction between these different environments (e.g. James 1997, Solberg 1990 and Bluebond-Langner 1979). Thirdly, children as a minority group, which bears similarities to feminist studies and which sees children as a group with common features, particularly relating to their exploitation and oppression (by adults) (e.g. Oakley and Mayall 1994). Finally, there are those who view children and childhood as a social construct of their historical context (e.g. Jenks 1986 and O'Neil 1995). Prout claims that all of these perspectives can be seen in the light of two theoretical dimensions:

> *Reductively these can be stated as: the socially determined character of childhood or the agency of children; and the extent to which childhood is thought of as a unitary or pluralistic entity (Prout, 1996 p155).*

James and Prout (1997), therefore, seek to identify a new paradigm for the understanding of childhood. They claim that rather than a 'training ground' for adulthood, childhood should be seen as a social construction and as a variable of

social analysis (alongside such issues as class, gender and ethnicity) and that children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right. They contend:

> *that children must be seen as active participants in the construction of their own social lives, not passive subjects of social structures and processes (James and Prout, 1997 p8).*

This perspective is reinforced by others who argue that children construct their own social worlds, forming relationships with both adults and other children and that such relationships are influential not only in terms of how adults 'socialise' children but also in the way in which children influence adult lives (Mayall, 2002). More recently, James and Prout (1997) have argued that underlying our understandings of childhood are four dichotomous themes; agency and structure, universalism and particularism, local and global and continuity and change (James et al., 1998) and that childhood exists somewhere along these planes.

Such academic theorising has encouraged the development of different perspectives of rights and has even brought into question the dominance of the child rights paradigm itself. Karel Mulderij (1996), for example, asserts that children have three fundamental rights: the right to vital freedom, which is the right to express their nature and their vitality; the right to instrumental freedom which refers to the freedom of action by virtue of being able to make choices; and the right to give things meaning and to be allowed to keep their own perspective. She observes that vital children are happy children and that sick children lose that vitality. Happiness, although a somewhat simplistic notion at first glance, is probably a very clear indicator of how children are feeling about themselves within

the world that they inhabit and by inference their ability to communicate and participate in activities and decisions being made around them. Defining happiness inevitably leads to acknowledgement of the importance of physical, mental and emotional well being and those factors that will lead to inclusion, acceptance, and the ability to participate.

A recent study, *Other People's Children,* conducted into childhood in the United Kingdom (Thomas and Hocking, 2003) acknowledges the limitation of the Convention and makes some alternative and often controversial suggestions. It proposes that a 'quality of life' approach to children will be far more effective than the present fragmented and over legislated system found in the UK, and that quality of life can be defined as a combination of four areas: individual standard of living, shared resources, happiness and emotional well-being and trust and inclusion. Their study is another example of how ideas around childhood are progressing beyond the confines of rights and the concept of childhood as an age of innocence.

Thomas and Hocking suggest that, despite huge progress for many children in terms of medical, health, financial and educational well-being, there have been many casualties as well. A major feature of modern societies, they argue, is that progress has been linked to the increasing prevalence of individualism and that the increasing likelihood of major change (divorce and moving house for example) and greater exposure to different kinds of media have made life more emotionally demanding for children. Although families have adapted to this, other institutions in

society have failed to do so, leading to increased pressure on children, particularly in areas such as educational performance.

The report contends that children are reliant on social capital and informal community networks for their growth and well-being and that, due to increasing individualism and the growing hysteria around issues such as abuse and paedophilia, the likelihood of any shared responsibility for children is greatly decreasing. This work shows that the overall response to change in society has been one of fragmentation, not holism, which is required for quality of life for children. The impact of this fragmentation is expressed in the numerous contradictions of modern society, such as the assumption that paid work for children is frowned upon, while children complete 35 million test papers each year (in the UK), and that there is an increasing reluctance to allow children in public places while obesity goes unchecked.

The report suggests that while a rights based approach to children, childhood and issues affecting children is a good starting point that:

> *Drawing up individual entitlements could easily entrench compartmentalised responsibilities for children's lives and encourage a blame and compensation culture. Legal and quasi-legal rights do not necessarily build shared commitment to children or strengthen collective capacity for adapting to wider social and economic change (Thomas and Hocking, 2003 p 13).*

In what might be seen as a radical departure from current thinking about democratic process and childhood, the writers of this report suggest that children need to be seen as an active constituency, not just as silent appendages to their parents, and that the only way in which this will happen is if children are given the

right to vote. The report presents a model for looking at childhood, which may prove valuable in the creation of new models for examining notions of participation. It suggests that a process of 'colonisation' of children's lives (i.e. adult based supervision and agenda setting and influence over children) has been a recent trend that has arisen as a result of 'privatisation, risk aversion and the reach of modern communication' (Thomas and Hocking, 2003 p22). This increases the pressures on children and decreases the amount of self-directed time that children have available, thereby reducing the social capital they are able to develop and reinforcing the gap between adults (other than parents) and children. In turn the responsibility and interaction that adults beyond the immediate family unit have taken for children in the past has greatly diminished - hence children being seen by society as 'other people's children'.

Associated with the decline in community responsibility for children has been a corresponding pressure on parents to deliver the quality of life that was previously, at least in part, a broader community role. This has lead to the creation of a vicious circle, whereby parents feel that they must provide more control and take greater responsibility over their children.

In turn, this has lead to increasing separation from the broader community (and the social capital for children that those relationships bring) and the growth of the 'privatised culture':

> *The overall trend, therefore, is towards a situation in which children and young people are secure only when in functional, supervised environments, which seem in many ways to be increasingly segregated from the rest of society. Children are shunted into specially created*

'zones' - of which schools are the most potent example - to gain particular kinds of experience. The exclusion of communities extends to the design of buildings: the acceptable venues for children are designed with high walls and locked doors, and are only populated by children and 'authorised' adults (Thomas and Hocking, 2003 p52).

While focusing on a highly industrialised society, this report provokes some relevant insights into the participation of children more generally. Growing individualism, common in the United Kingdom and other industrialised countries, is not always the case in many developing countries, where traditional community institutions such as the extended family and social and religious bodies, such as the church, mosque, or temple, continue to provide rich networks through which social capital can be developed. Could it also be argued, therefore, that a greater richness of participation, as discussed previously, is commensurate with social capital? Some recent studies would support this hypothesis. Gordon Jack and Bill Jordan (1999), for example, argue that the emphasis of formal child protection and family support services on increasing parenting skills may be counter-productive. They propose that the most effective means of caring for and nurturing children is through the building of social capital; that is, through the cultural resources and inter-personal relationships of the community.

Thomas and Hocking also claim that a child rights approach alone does not provide a framework through which children's access to resources, opportunities or power can be determined. They suggest that a rights-based system runs the risk of creating an overly bureaucratic structure that may raise the profile of children's issues but not equip people to solve them. They acknowledge that there are different kinds of rights all of which are open to interpretation, usually by those in

positions of power. They observe that one of the defining characteristics of childhood is that children are dependent on others for their well being and, therefore, lack power, voice, and status, and are easily Ignored or exploited. Finally, they claim that rights-based approach might form a good starting point but that it does not always provide a good working model for intervention.

The report goes on to observe that consultation with children (an element of participation that appears in both Hart and Franklin's models) is not universal and does not always take place in those areas most important or relevant to children (such as in the family or at school) and is not often linked to the exercise of power. It is this last point that is of primary importance in the analysis of participation, at least at a structural level. A key recommendation stemming from the report, designed to give children a greater and more influential vote is that the age of majority be brought in line with the age of criminal responsibility, which in the U.K. is 14 years. This recommendation is made, along with a range of others, based on the quality of life framework and is designed to provide both the space, policy level and structural environment for children to be able to create and maintain social networks of their own and to become active participants in society on their own terms.

This framework (Figure 6 below) bears some similarities to the learner's permit approach advocated by Melton (1999), in which children are allowed to gradually assume independence only after experience in the decision or task has been allowed as with learning to drive. In the case of the Quality of Life Framework, children are supported by high quality and integrated services, safe access to

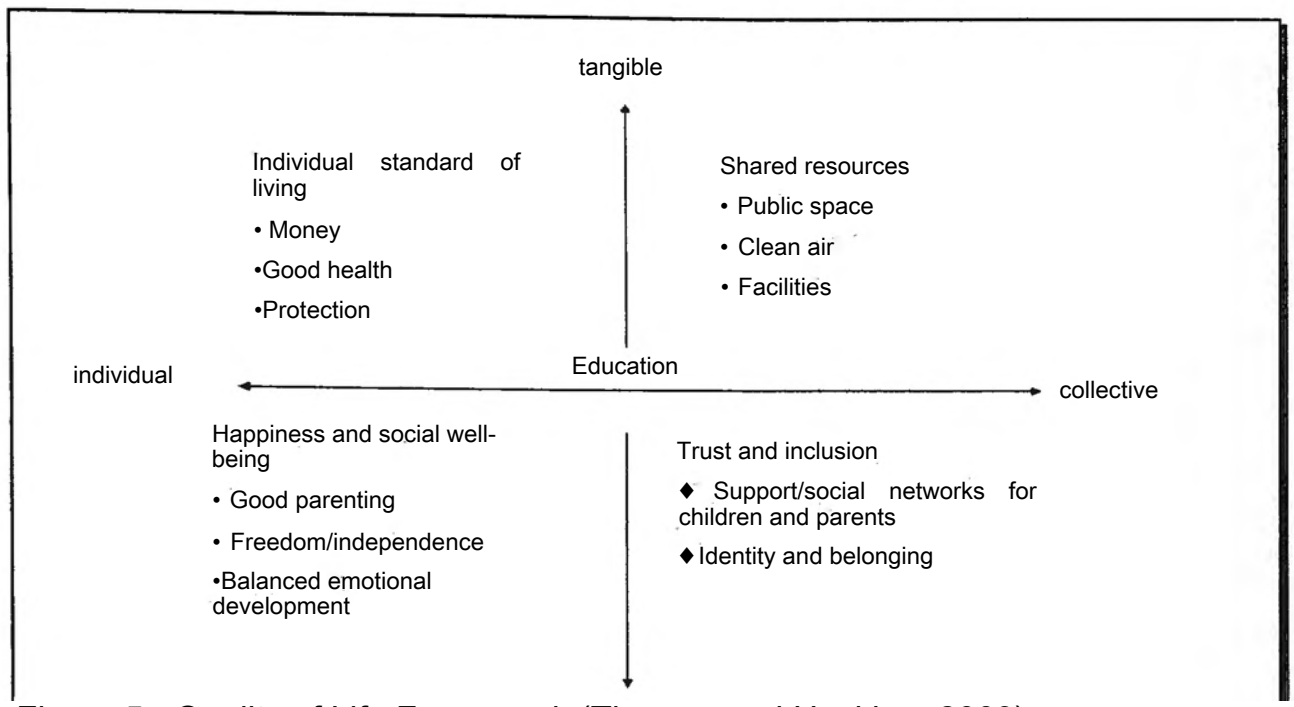


Figure 5 - Quality of Life Framework (Thomas and Hocking, 2003)

public space (including the media) and the freedom to create networks of trust and social support. Such an approach would then allow children to make their own decisions as to when, how and in what they would like to participate.

Despite the focus on children in the U.K., the underlying concept of providing space for children to develop their own social capital and space for participation in society should be seen as fundamental. This does not take place in a linear fashion, as illustrated in the models of Hart and Franklin. Increasing participation must mean, to some degree, moving from a nominal sense to a far more comprehensive state in which children not only make decisions about situations they face but take control of the decision-making process itself. Wyness (2000) contends that the two conflicting paradigms around the status of children have developed around protectionism (based on the idea of children and childhood in a state of crisis) on the one hand and liberation on the other. He argues against the

crisis perspective and suggests a reappraisal of the protectionist relationship between adult and child. However, the reconstructionist critique, he argues:

> *does not necessary entail a model of the liberated child. Nor do the possibilities for identifying different models of childhood make the claims for children's formal adult status more compelling...! occupy the middle ground with slight leanings towards loosening the bonds of dependency and patronage....Whilst I do not believe it is desirable of feasible to 'liberate' children, I nevertheless contend that schools, in particular, need to be quite radically restructured with a more democratic, citizen-based ethos (Wyness, 2000 p6).*

Conclusion

The history of the child rights movement and the recent academic theorising around the sociology of childhood raises pertinent considerations regarding participation. Firstly, though the CRC has provided a solid framework and a justification for children's participation, protection has often taken precedence over participation which, due to its controversial nature (VanBueren, 1996), has, until recently, not received sufficient consideration. The CRC itself is, arguably, open to misinterpretation and has at times been seen as an instrument of instilling Western values of the idealised childhood. In the worst case scenario misinterpretation of the CRC could result in political and economic disadvantage for children and see them forced into situations of exploitation, as was the case with the Harkin Bill and its impact on child workers in Bangladesh (discussed previously).

Secondly, new sociological understandings suggest that childhood is not a universal entity. However, while culture must be taken into account in deliberations of children's participation, not all that is culturally legitimised is always in the best interests of the child. Participation based on a strictly cultural interpretation of

childhood is therefore questionable. Thirdly, institutions within society that are established to support and protect children, while in many cases allowing for their growth and protection, are often not integrated and do not intentionally seek to provide space for children to become social actors on their own terms. Finally, society is changing rapidly across the globe, bringing challenges to parents and families and working against the ability of children to develop social capital and to create their own networks through which they might be able to choose where and how they might participate.

Within these growing dilemmas, humanitarian organisations in both the industrialised and the developing world have developed a multitude of ways in which to introduce participatory processes for children. The following section will analyse some of these.

What are child participation 'projects'?

It is clear that participation, now seen as a vital element of community development programs, has complex antecedents and is not easily defined. Increasingly, participation has been seen as an element of the human rights discourse and relates to involvement in democratic decision-making processes. Literature relating to children and participation is a recent, yet growing, body of knowledge. Very much framed within the Convention of the Rights of the Child, the child participation discourse is becoming increasingly recognised in the development world, particularly amongst some of the larger child focussed organisations, such as UNICEF, World Vision and Save the Children. The participation of children as delegates at the United Nations General Assembly on Children, held in 2002, was indicative of this increasing focus.

The different theoretical models presented in the literature review section show a progression in understanding the complex nature of participation, from social, cultural and psychological perspectives. The following section will look at some practical expressions of children's participation.

Broadly speaking participation programs might be understood in the following way:

1. "Child-led" organisations such as the child clubs organised through the Save the Children Alliance in Nepal;
2. Programs focussing on particularly vulnerable groups (such as street and working children or child soldiers) that seek to involve children in a variety of ways;
3. Programs that focus on children as peer educators such as the child to child approach which is being increasingly used in the area of maternal and child health;
4. Mainstream development programs focussing on adults that seek to include children's perspectives;
5. Entire organisations (such as Save the Children, World Vision and PLAN International) that claim to have child focussed or child centred development as its core business.
6. Child participation projects of a global scale such as the Global Movement for Children (led by the UN) and the Children as Partners (CAP) initiative which has been spearheaded by the International Institute for Child Rights and Development based at the University of Victoria in Canada.

The following looks at examples of these projects in a bid to further understand theoretical implications and to assist in the development of a new framework for the analysis of child participation.

The child-to-child approach

The 'child-to-child' approach has been used for some time in the delivery of health education and early childhood learning programs for children and youth. It involves developing the knowledge and skills of older children (between the ages of eight and fifteen) who are in a position of influence over their peers or younger siblings and associates. The approach requires an adult 'initiator', who takes the role of mobilising children's interest, providing training and ongoing mentoring. Initiators are likely to be from health, education and social work fields. Most child-to-child programs originate from the formal school environment, although this is not exclusively the case. Indeed, the increasing number of child headed households as a result of the HIV pandemic (particularly in Africa) has meant that many children are becoming more than just health educators for their younger siblings.

The aim of the approach is to use participatory educational methods and for initiators to 'act as a catalyst to encourage children to help each other and their communities' (Landers, 1988). In other words, initiators are meant to work with children to explore their own health needs and those of their communities and to come up with achievable means through which to meet these needs. Such programs can vary from small group and village level initiatives, involving a handful of children, to much larger (often school based) initiatives, involving many more participants. Landers (1988) has identified a number of factors that characterise successful programs of this sort, that include both local, concerning the interaction

with the child (such as creative teaching methods), to the more global environmental and structural issues, such as the support of relevant ministries and policy makers. She goes on to identify numerous benefits to participants, such as increased knowledge of health and education and improved health practice. An increase in self-esteem of the child teachers was also noted as a benefit to teachers and other initiators who became involved in the programs. Indirect benefits to families and the community, in terms of changed health or cultural practices, have also been observed.

Children's involvement in governance and children's parliaments

The involvement of children in parliament and the creation of children's parliaments, two quite different approaches to involving children in policy level discussion, have both met with mixed results. Perhaps the most notable example of children involving themselves in parliament is that of street children in the Brazilian parliament. Prior to, and following the collapse, of the military dictatorship in the 1980's, the incidence of children on the streets of many Brazilian cities became an increasing concern to government and child rights advocates alike. The 'minor's issue', as it became known, was a result of a number of economic and social factors, not least of which was the economic model of rapid industrialisation prevailing at that time. This prompted rapid urbanisation and concentration of income which, in turn exacerbated poverty levels, seriously impacting on the status of children and young people. Early entry into the labour force, school drop outs all led to in increasing numbers of children taking to the streets (Pangaea Organisation, 1994).

Concern for this situation resulted in the creation of the National Movement for Street Boys and Girls (Swift, 1991), an initiative partially funded by UNICEF and made up of numerous social and religious groups and NGOs, concerned for, and working with, children who had taken to the streets. This movement (led primarily by adult advocates but involving many child and youth representatives) mobilised an incredible public interest in the issue, resulting in the formulation of the children's section of the constitution which was supported by a petition of over 1,000,000 children and adolescents and 200,000 adults (Swift, 1991). The chapter on the rights of children and adolescents was heavily based on the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child[6] and was approved by the Brazilian Constitutional Assembly in May 1988. This was followed by the 'Child and Adolescent Statute' which translated the constitutional amendments regarding children into legislation. The policy level implications emanating from this participatory process was substantial and resulted in moving from a repressive and punitive welfare system to one based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Dewees and Klees, Feb 1995). This, in turn, has led, amongst other things, to the inclusion of children in participatory municipal government. Guerra (2002) describes this process whereby 18 boys and 18 girls have been elected, since 1998, as child councillors to represent children's needs in the development of budget priorities for children. As she observes:

> *The elected children learn how to represent their peers within democratic structures, to prioritise based on available resources, and then to develop projects within the complex and often slow political and bureaucratic process of city governance (Guerra, 2002 p 71).*

[6] Proclaimed by General Assembly resolution I386(XIV) of 20 November 1959.

Not all experiments involving children in the parliamentary process have been successful however. The Philippines, recognised for its 'people's power', has made a concerted attempt to involve children and youth in Youth Councils, known as 'Sangguniang Kabataan' (SK). These are composed of seven members who

> *tasked to formulate policies, co-ordinate with appropriate organizations and agencies, and initiate and implement programs and activities designed to enhance the social, political, economic, cultural, intellectual, moral, spiritual and physical development of the youth (Racelis and Aguirre, 2005)*

These SKs have met with mixed results, with the majority not meeting the needs of many children or youth, particularly those not in school. The SKs consist of better educated children and children who are the sons and daughters of privileged families and are often hand picked by adults in position of authority. SK's themselves report having little voice in local government affairs (Racelis and Aguirre, 2005).

Child clubs in Nepal

The Children's Clubs of Nepal are a similar but less ambitious attempt at children having a voice in local decision-making. These clubs (supported through Save the Children Norway and U.S. as well as a number of other international organizations) began in the early 1990s, growing out of the child-to-child training programs that took place at a village level. Clubs have a similar structure to other adult village level organizations and have limited adult influence, primarily through a facilitator who assists the club where necessary. This structure includes an executive committee and a number of elected positions as outlined in Figure 7 below.

Club activities vary across a broad range, including development work, play, recreation, national rallies, informal discussion, and song and dance. A survey conducted of these clubs in 1999 (Rajbhandary et al., 1999) found that out of 180, less than ten were completely initiated by children, with most children having little idea about the clubs when they were first introduced to them by an adult in the

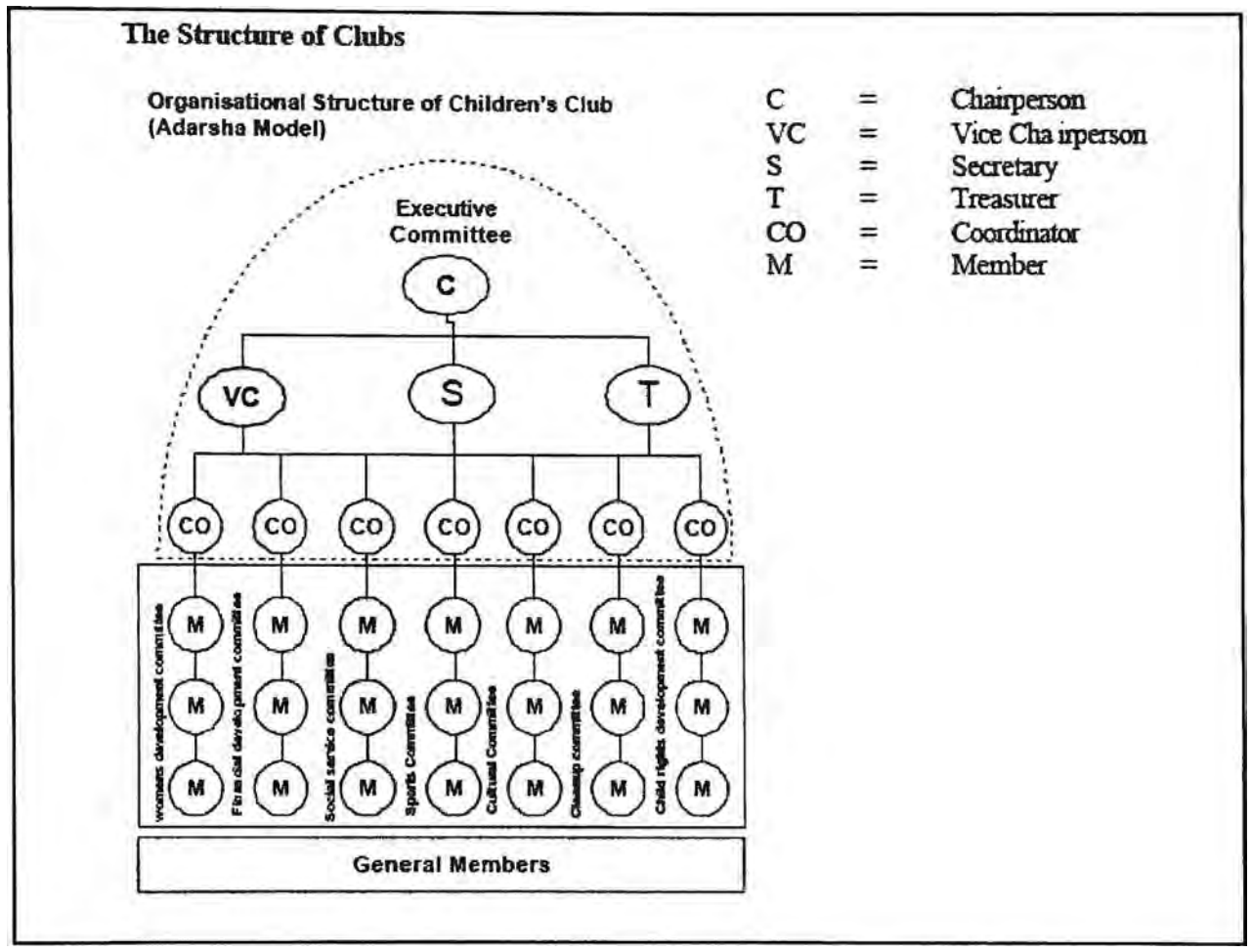


Figure 6 - Structure of Children's Clubs in Nepal

village. The survey found that benefits to the children in the clubs included working cooperatively, practice in decision-making, managing their own organisation and managing relationships in democratic ways. While finding few, if any, negative comments about the clubs from either adults or children, the review made some significant recommendations for change. These included recommendations relating to democratic governance, inclusion of younger children, girls and disabled children and alternative structures to enable greater participation (Rajbhandary et

al., 1999). Overall, however, the clubs were seen as an extremely effective means through which children can participate within the community. Perhaps the major omission of this report was the lack of information about the way in which the clubs influenced the formal decision-making structures of the community, if at all.

Children as researchers

There has been a growing trend towards including children in research tasks, with the recognition that children are most likely to have the best insights into their own situation. Pole et. al. (1999), studying children's paid work in the U.K., examined the extent to which it was possible to include children in the design and implementation of research. They found that most children who are the subjects of research have little control over how that research is implemented, or in what happens to the findings. They noted that the primary causative factor for this was the failure of adult researchers to take children seriously, due to a concern for lack of academic rigour. Also, similar to the notion of social capital (discussed previously), they suggested that children lacked 'research capital' due to their age and lack of experience.

Since Pole's work there have been significant advances in more inclusive and academically respected participatory research by children. A number of manuals and articles have been written, suggesting how children might be included meaningfully in the research process (e.g. Lyer, 2001, O'Shaughnessy and Doming, 2001). Kirby (2004) suggests that there are three different types of research approach with children. Firstly, consultation in which children and young people are consulted by researchers. Their perspectives and points of view are taken into account but they are not involved in decision-making processes neither

about the research methodology nor the recommendations. Secondly collaboration in which there is partnership with young people in the research process and the resultant planning based on recommendations. Finally, as 'user-control', in which the power to decide upon the research focus and the subsequent decision-making is with the children and young people themselves. This does not imply that young people control or take part in every stage of the research, nor that 'professional' researchers are excluded from the process altogether (Kirby, 2004).

Participation in schools

One of the most obvious ways in which children are offered the possibility of participating is through activities in their own schools. Often such participation has taken an environmental focus (Hart, 1997). Both formal and informal education settings have incorporated participative programs. In India, for example, children from St Xavier Night School for Disadvantaged and 'Alor Riday', put into effect a plan to address growing environmental problems in Kolkata (Cook et al., 2004). They confronted the local mayor to ask for dustbins and plants:

> *After much confrontation at the mayor's office, the plants and dustbins were given to us. We then planted the trees and now they have become large and they will clean the air...we found appropriate places [for the bins] and now everyone in the slum community uses these dustbins instead of the ground (Cook et al, 2004 p 27).*

There appears to have been some genuine, albeit modest, progress made in integrating some participatory involvement of children in Vietnamese schools through what has become known as the 'child friendly schools and neighbourhoods program' (Beers et al., 2006). However, despite considerable investment in

encouraging participation, and along similar lines as findings relating to the child clubs in Nepal, a recent review of these programs found that:

> *Children's participation is regarded as a children's activity - not related to adults' participation rights - since (thus far) there is no evidence of shared (adult-child) participation. Nevertheless, it is stated by many that children should be involved in adult organizations (but with some caveats) (Beers et ai, 2006 p 137).*

Global initiatives for participation

Beyond these more localised projects, there have recently emerged a number of international child participation initiatives. The Children as Partners (CAP) network is one of the largest of these. Born in Canada as an initiative of the International Institute for Child Rights and Development, it began with a meeting of international NGO representatives (including Save the Children, World Vision and Plan International), academics, child rights advocates, politicians and members of the UN Committee of the Rights of the Child. The aim was to create an international network to support partnerships between children and other children, children's organisations and youth organisations, adult organisations and children's organisations, adult workers and children's groups, children and their parents, and community groups and children. To date there have been two international workshops, bringing together adults and children from different organisations around the world (including UNICEF and a number of the larger child focussed NGOs). An interactive website has been established, and a number of publications produced, around the issue of participation.

Another international children's initiative, The Global Movement for Children, was launched during the UN General Assembly Special Session on children (May

2002). Both have included children's participation. The UN Special Session was the first occasion on which the General Assembly solely discussed children and the first time in which children were members of official delegations as representatives of both government and non-government organisations (UNICEF, 2003b). The lead up to the Special Session which was conducted over a number of years, included regional consultations to which child delegations (sometimes elected) from different countries gathered together to give input. The process that led up to the Special Session and the impact the presence of children had on the Special Session itself is reflected in the words of Kofi Annan quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Emanating from the Special Session was a commitment by government signatories to work with children in the development of national plans of action for realising the CRC. The ongoing process of the development and implementation of Plans of Action has met with mixed results and, in most cases, is too early for any systematic analysis of the outcomes. It is not mandatory for countries to include children in these discussions, nor is there a specific process, although guidelines have been produced by Save the Children for this purpose (Save the Children, 2002).

Most recently the UN initiated study on violence against children (Pinheiro, 2006) encouraged NGO and civil society organisations to engage children[7] in a world wide study in to the effects of domestic violence against children. This study, commissioned by the United Nations General Secretary aimed to better understand

[7] Even though one aim of the study was to engage children as participants, the degree to which that took place was varied. To illustrate this, the author was contracted to assist World Vision in the Pacific in developing a participative research methodology and to coordinate data collection and analysis in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu for the UN study. Despite the participative plan, time constraints limited participation. To generalize about the participative nature of the entire study is therefore problematic.

and seek solutions for all forms of violence against children in the context of family, school, care and residential institutions as well as detention facilities and prisons, in work situations, and in communities and on the streets . A range of cross cutting issues featured including trafficking and exploitation, refugees, separated and internally displaced children, and children affected by HIV. Children affected by armed conflict were not covered in this report.

From child participation projects to child participation theory

The factors that influence the potential for children's meaningful participation are complex. Likewise, the results of participatory activities have shown mixed efficacy. Cook et al. (2004) suggest that while children participate with or without the assistance of others, the key to successfully engaging children in participatory conferences or projects or policy discussion is a sense of partnership. This is dependent on a number of factors, including the development of trusting and nurturing relationships, a child's own agency, supportive social and environmental circumstances that allow for dialogue, addressing of power imbalances between adults and children and the opportunity for children to affect change as a result of their involvement (Cook et al., 2004). These thoughts are echoed by Johnson (1998) who suggests also that transparency and confidentiality in interactions between children and adults are vital.

A growing focus on evaluation and monitoring of the impact of development programming has seen a corresponding growth in evaluation of children's participation. Joachim Theis (2004), for example, suggests that children's participation must be viewed as a process, rather than an activity and that organisations seeking to involve children should develop a 'culture of participation'.

This culture is characterised by an increasing involvement of children following a number of steps. Children are consulted and listened to; children are involved in some decisions; children are involved in all decisions that affect them; children and adults share decision-making power and responsibility; children make their own decisions and are supported by adults (Theis, 2004). The framework itself is not markedly different to Hart and Franklin's models (discussed previously). It is linear and progresses towards children taking control and is very strongly regulated by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Perhaps more beneficial, however, are what Theis suggests to be underlying principles of participation. Organisations should strive to be transparent, honest, democratic and voluntary. They should aim for equality, inclusion and non-discrimination. They should create child-friendly environments (that is organisational structures, rules and systems that are easy for children to understand and operate within). Theis also notes that participation should be relevant to the age and maturity of the child and should enhance the child's personal development. Child protection and safety should be ensured and staff should be competent in dealing with children and that follow up and feedback with children should be integral to any involvement. He does not address the issue of proper representation, however, and who decides how, when and where children are represented and in what manner. Neither does he provide clarity on the cultural dynamics of children and childhood and how they might affect participation.

Michael Wyness (2001) contends that children's lack of ontological status relegates them to the realm of family, intimacy and emotion and they are, therefore, devoid of social significance. Based on an assessment of young people's councils, he

suggests that children's interests can be analysed around four areas; mobilisation of children's interests in organisational terms, participation during which time children get involved in political structures of the organisation, influence where children are able to influence decisions affecting them and representation where children become directly responsible for organisational matters and through which we can identify organisational commitment to participation. These broader categories allow for variation in cultural and other dimensions (lacking in the Theis framework above) and, most importantly, for the development of less prescriptive narratives around areas of participation. However the basis for the four categories remains essentially a Western rights-based model in which formal political structures are the fundamental means through which participation should be analysed.

A further alternative is suggested by Tolfree (1998), who classifies participation in terms of three areas, consultation where children's views are sought, allowing them their voice in actions affecting them; organisation where children themselves organise actions and events and protagonism where children act as advocates on their own behalf. Theis (2004) suggests a similar three categories: consultation, representation and inclusion and inclusive decision-making and empowerment. These recent conceptualisations articulate a more nuanced understanding of participation than do older models such as Hart and Franklin's. However, they focus on decision-making as a key indicator of children's involvement and, therefore, risk ignoring contemporary theoretical perspectives of the sociology of childhood.

The benefits of participating are many: new skills, increased influence, shared responsibility and the opportunity to contribute are just a few. Kim Sabo (2001) in reflecting on the benefits of participation for children and youth, suggests that two key benefits stood out from her own work in this field. Firstly, that young people began to see themselves as agents for social change, and, secondly, that there was a feeling of increased ownership over the program. She suggests also that although the benefits of participation are often seen as gains to the individual (new skills, feeling of empowerment or the growth in self-esteem for example) that the greatest benefit lies in the possibility of new relationship that might form between children and adults and with each other. As one of the children with whom she worked said:

> *It* was *cool we did a lot, we learned a lot, we're doing a lot of learning. A lot of leaning about each other...and we learn from both sides because we do have adults in there, so we're seeing it from both sides. You know, sometimes we agree, sometimes we disagree, but there is always a respectful way, you know what I'm saying? (Sabo, 2001 p 51).*

Overall conclusions

The first section of this chapter looked in detail at definitions of participation within the context of community development. Inherent within the discourse of participation is the underlying philosophy that people have a right to make their own choices. In the past, human rights discourses have often ignored the reality for people in communities, and participatory development approaches have ignored the structural rights issues that limit systemic and sustainable change. Many rights based approaches to development have focussed on legalistic interventions and failed to understand the reality of people's situations and how

rights might be understood within them. They take a legalistic starting point to people's problems, whereas good development practice, in contrast, takes people's experience as the catalyst for change. However in recent years, as a result of deepening inequality, poverty and the realisation that both development and rights need to work in greater harmony, there has been a growing convergence between the two. This has led to a recognition that both discourses could benefit from a more thorough appreciation of each other's theoretical and practical approaches (VeneKlasen et al., 2004). From this we can conclude that good development and a respect for human rights should go hand in hand.

As the key human rights document relating to children, the CRC has been of immense value. Many governments have used the document to develop plans for the development and inclusion of child focussed agendas within systems of national planning. However, the CRC is not without difficulties. Apparent ambiguities within the CRC such as the protection-participation dilemma as well as definitional concepts such as the 'best interest' of the child may actually serve to undermine children's rights. In addition, although key concepts of the CRC, such as the best interest clause, could be seen as an underlying call for all concerned with children to actively engage in dialogue around such issues, this presupposes supportive and safe structures and institutions within society.

Rights can appear individualistic and could undermine existing structures of traditional societies (including those associated with social capital), in which children often play a vital role. Many children in the developing world, although they may have little voice in overt decision-making, do play a major role in their

homes, either through caring for siblings, working around the home, or working to bring in some income for the household. However, such participation does not always give children the voice in matters affecting them, that the CRC espouses, and risks being undervalued or ignored by child rights policy and practice.

Child Rights have, in some instances, become a tool for the globalisation of a particular concept of childhood. Bissell (2003) notes that globalisation has led, not only to the expansion of economic markets but also to the export of the ideal of innocence of childhood. She suggests that globalisation is largely economic in nature and that the globalisation of childhood is a part of that much broader economic rationale. Within that, international treaties, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, are at risk of becoming a tool for those who would seek to maintain economic and political dominance.

As a result of the Child Rights 'movement', many forms of child participation projects have emerged and, no doubt, will continue to grow and develop in number and sophistication. The different strands of literature reviewed in this chapter, along with a brief look at some types of participation projects, provide a number of 'markers' that help to identify factors that might assist children's participation and, possibly, provide some guiding principles for future development.

Firstly, it is vital to recognise that participation does not just take place in projects run by NGOs, governments, school or community programs. Such programs do not have a monopoly on children nor ownership over children's ability nor their interest in participating. If we are to accept that children have agency, that they

can be social actors in their own right, then situations must be created to allow children to participate of their own volition and in areas of interest to them.

Secondly, children must be allowed to create their own social space and to develop their own social capital. Denying them this means reducing the possibilities of their participation. If children are to create their own social space they must be able to form relationships with adults as well as with other children, so that they are not viewed simply as “other people’s children”. As children are allowed to develop their own social capital they become better to play a role in bridging different social contexts. This should be acknowledged as an important form of participation.

Thirdly, if children are to be encouraged to develop their own agency and social capital, there needs to be sufficient inbuilt mechanisms of protection to prevent harm and abuse. This is a major challenge for society and one that has no easy solutions. However, the increasing isolation of children into walled institutions and under the constant vigilance of parents who are too scared to let their children out of their sight will continue to ‘disempower’ children and will decrease the likelihood of their participation.

Fourthly, it is important to recognise that children have expertise on matters that affect them. This is not to deny an adult’s perspective but simply to state that the ability of children to understand their own circumstances should not be under-estimated and that, as a matter of plain logic, it makes sense to seek children’s opinions.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that there is a vast array of factors that might affect the way in which children can participate. Very broadly, these relate to the individual child, to the political environment and to the cultural and social environment in which the children live. Participation initiatives must seek to take all these factors into account, as they are developed.

Chapter 3

Children in Burma: Social, Political and Economic Context

Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview on the limited literature concerning children in contemporary Burma. The review will draw on the recent and historical texts, along with reports from the UN and from other international organisations and various worldwide web resources. It will consider Burmese childhood from various perspectives, to gain a contextual understanding of the broader political environment that governs policy and practice around children and childhood.

The few publications on Burmese childhood, written by Burmese and accessible in English, paint quite an idyllic childhood in which children are often allowed great freedoms until they reach puberty, at which time they are sent to monasteries where they are disciplined and educated (Khine, 1945). On the other hand, the existing (limited) body of Western research into Burmese childhood often paints quite a contradictory picture. Studies conducted by British and American psychologists and anthropologists during the 1940s to 1960s characterised Burmese parents as 'monsters', using a mixture of violence, threats, repression and deception to bring up their children (Skidmore, 2005).

There are undoubtedly elements of truth at both ends of this spectrum, and the reality for life of children in Burma today is highly complex, extremely challenging,

often tragic, and cannot be seen through any single perspective. Skidmore (2005), in her article the 'Future of Burma: Children are Like Jewels', brings a welcome insight into this complexity. She traces the evolution of modern academic involvement in the understanding of Burmese childhood and points out that much of the early 'Western' view was often poorly researched. Biased and extreme views, such as the alleged link between a hypothesised lack of good parenting and loving family relationships and the growth of the revolutionary and nationalistic movements of the mid 1900's (as claimed by Pye, 1962) have resulted. An alternative view of child socialisation is presented by Skidmore, based on contemporary research amongst Burmese women. She articulates a rich tapestry of religious (Buddhist) and cultural nuances that form the basis of Burmese childhood and she warns of the growing influence of the modern world, complete with fast food chains and corporate consumer culture. Refuting the often negative vestiges of past research, she concludes that to many Burmese, children are seen as the future, and are often referred to as jewels, both in name[8] and in metaphor:

> *Children are consistently compared to jewels because of their rareness, preciousness, and because of their need to be protected or watched over' (Skidmore, 2005 p 376).*

In a 'representational' sense she notes that children are often valued as coming from the blood of the mother (yin-thway - breast blood) or from the bone marrow of the father. She concludes that children are invariably seen as or 'represent' a parent's greatest asset and as an integral component of their future:

> *When asked the question, 'What are children?' Burmese people will overwhelmingly answer, 'Children are the future. ' Children represent the strength of the present and past generations made manifest, and they are bundles of potentiality.....U Chit Phyo answered the question*

[8] **Many Burmese names contain words for precious stones or silver and gold**

by stating, 7 think it's obvious. They are my heritage. They are a part of me and they are my success. I am a happy man now. My grand children are wonderful as well. I cannot ask for more.' (Skidmore, 2005 p 260)

However, notwithstanding the love and affection that Burmese have for their children, the predicament of most children in Burma is dire and the military regime has created an environment in which quality of life has seriously deteriorated over recent years. Preventable diseases such as diarrhoea, respiratory illness, dysentery, typhoid, malaria and tetanus are the leading causes of morbidity and mortality and TB infection rates are rising. Four percent of new patients are presenting with multi-drug resistant TB, and the national figures report an increase in HIV-TB co-infection and an increase in children with TB, including TB/HIV co-infection (Myanmar Ministry of Health, 2006).

The dominance of the state

No critique of Burma would be complete without a thorough understanding of the ruling military regime, and the 'politics of power[1] that governs the way in which people live their lives and shapes their perceptions. Understanding power in Burma is at the same time illusory yet imperative. Foucault's metaphor of power, being exercised through a net-like organisation, (as described in Chapter Two) is an apt description of what takes place in Burma. The government's tentacles reach out at many levels, reinforcing its hegemony in both subtle and overt ways. To analyse any aspect of life in Burma today, including the experience of childhood, requires an understanding of military rule and the impact that this has had on communities and

individuals, as well as on the traditional belief systems and behavioural norms that form Burmese culture.

To a significant degree all that the military junta does must be considered fundamentally illegitimate. Following its refusal to allow the legally elected government to take the reigns of government following the elections of 1990 they usurped control from the popularly elected government. This was hardly surprising to many 'Burma watchers', as the political history of the country is mired with conspiracy, intrigue and power plays. George Orwell (1934) introduced the English speaking world to the complexity of Burmese politics, in his fictional description of U Po Kyin, a magistrate in upper Burma who:

> *...even for the vastest bribe would never sell the decision of a case, because he knew that a magistrate who gives wrong judgements is caught...his practice, a much safer one, was to take bribes from both sides and then decide on the case on strictly legal grounds...he was too absorbed in intrigue ever to fail through carelessness or ignorance (p 6).*

Not long after Orwell's book was published, actual political intrigue swept the country, with the assassination of General Aung Sang and of a number of his colleagues, just prior to independence in 1948. There is still uncertainty as to who was really behind the murders (Kin Oung, 1993). More recently there was the arrest and detainment of General Ne Win (along with a number of his family members on the 4th March 2002). He was the ruler of the country throughout the Burmese socialist period that ended with the pro-democracy uprisings of 1988. He was detained by the very generals whom he had nurtured and, following his official 'retirement' from power, supported from behind. General Khin Nyunt, former Prime

Minister and head of military intelligence, followed not long after (on the 18th October 2004). He was arrested for corruption and is now serving a lengthy term under house arrest. He was not quite as careful as Orwell's fictional U Po Kyin!

To the present military leaders of the country there is logic in such behaviour. Pedersen (2004) argues that ideas of national sovereignty and national unity are the two underlying concepts that guide the regime. This has resulted in xenophobia, as well as a mistrust of any internal element that might influence political stability. The term 'axe handles' is used to describe Burmese nationals who wish to cause unrest; the wood from the tree being used to attack the very tree from whence it came. National unity is 'advertised' everywhere. The three main national causes are posted on bright red signboards around the country:

Non-disintegration of the Union.....

Non-disintegration of national solidarity..... .....

Perpetuation of national sovereignty..... ..... .

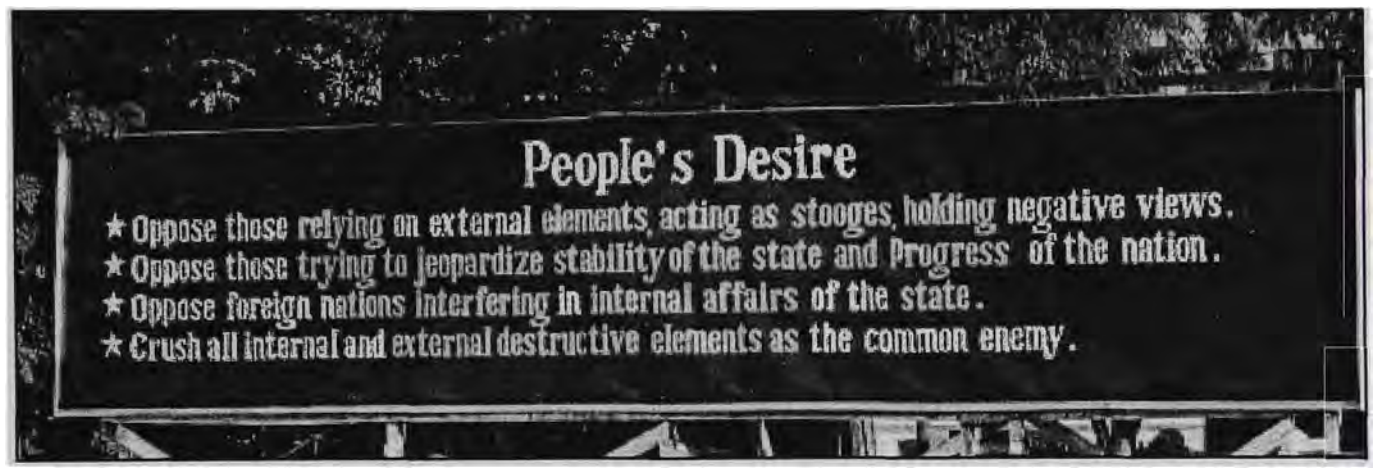
Figure 7 - The 3 National Causes of the Union of Myanmar

Pedersen (2004) suggests that this has replaced the previous socialist ideology and provides the military with a rationale for their ongoing role in civilian government as well as a justification by which any one in opposition can be seen as an enemy of the state.

The national causes have been augmented by a series of 12 objectives for political, economic and social reform (see Appendix 3). They stress the importance of the political stability of the union, in a manner reminiscent of Mao's China: *'Stability of the State, community peace and tranquillity, prevalence of law and order'.*

Economically, they advocate a state controlled market economy and socially for the 'uplifting' of the collective morality. Not only do these signboards appear around the country but they are also in the beginning of every school text book, in every newspaper and beamed over television and the radio. They urge the people to keep the peace by putting their trust in the state.

There are many other popular signboards that communicate something of the mindset of the military regime. One of them, *The People's Desire* (Picture 1 below), has been erected in the downtown area directly opposite the US Embassy.



Picture 1 - The People's Desire

The confrontational and threatening 'People's Desire' can generally be seen alongside the 12 national objectives. Together these overt statements of military authority provide the government with a blue print for the development of the country with a raison d'être for its continuing grip on power.

The armed forces, known in Burmese as the *'Tatmadaw',* are the ultimate tool of state control. There have been many widely published examples of the extent to which the military will go in order to maintain their control. The massive and violent

repression of pro-democracy supporters in 1988 culminated in tens of thousands of killed. More recently, the 2004 attack on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her supporters in Depayin resulted in numerous deaths, in the detainment of Suu Kyi (and many of her party members) and in her return to house arrest. The military presence is ubiquitous and is a constant reminder to the populace that the country is under authoritarian rule. It has increased substantially from the 168 battalions used to quash demonstrators in 1988 (Fink, 2001). As reported by the Democratic Voice of Burma:

> *Military observers estimate the strength of the current SPDC army which consists of 12 regional military commands and 10 divisions to be about 350,000 active personnel. To give the correct number of battalions, there are 329 Light Infantry Battalions and 197 Infantry Battalions and each battalion consists of between 500 and 700 men. Furthermore, experts pointed out that with other support and logistics battalions including 12 Military Intelligence battalions, 27 communications battalions, 55 artillery battalions, 55 engineering battalions, transport and other logistics support battalions, plus the Navy and the Air Force combined, the total strength could well exceed 400,000 men (Democratic Voice of Burma, 2004).*

Different reports estimate that spending on the military accounts is up to half of the national budget (Heppner, 2002). There is no obvious reason to have a military of such strength, as Myanmar is not threatened by its relations with its neighbours. Rather, the presence of this overwhelming military force is directed internally, to ensure the three ‘causes’ and the first political objective of a ‘unified sovereign state with law and order prevailing’.

Big brother **is** *watching*

George Orwell may well have been looking Into the future of Burma when he wrote his novel, '1984'. The State Peace and Development Council's (SPDC's) scrutiny of its citizens is ever present and invasive. While the technology for surveillance is not always sophisticated, it is highly effective. Integral to the SPDC structure is a leadership hierarchy that devolves from national, to state and division, to township, to village, and finally, to ten household level. This mechanism is particularly strong in the central Burman heartland, although weaker in some of the outlying states. It is tempered by the presence of various ethnic armies and cease-fire groups that maintain a certain degree of control and autonomy. It is the responsibility of the 10-household leaders to report anything that might seem irregular, and so on, up the chain of command. This system enables the constant monitoring of activities within a household and promotes a sense of mistrust and apprehension[9].

In addition to the SPDC, there are a variety of other mechanisms of surveillance. 'Military Intelligence' and the 'Special Branch' (MI and SB as they are known) are two of a number of 'intelligence' agencies that regularly scrutinise the day to day activities of Burmese people. There are a host of others; local government organised NGOs (GONGOs, as they are called within the international community, and which will be discussed in detail further on), the Rangoon City Development Council responsible for enforcing city bylaws, the police and even the traffic police. Together, they create an intricate web of surveillance and a state of constant vigilance in which little goes unnoticed.

[9] Some years ago, a Burmese colleague of mine who worked in the border area and became involved at a superficial level with an anti-government movement, travelled to Rangoon to attend a work meeting. His parents, who lived in the capital, and were concerned that the authorities might have found out about his covert activities, reported him to the police. He was arrested and sentenced to five years jail.

As well as these human surveillance mechanisms, there are many other forms of scrutiny. All citizens are required to carry a national registration card (NRC) recording name, sex, age and date of birth, birth-place, nationality, residence and marital status. Failure to produce an NRC could result in fines and imprisonment. However, many Burmese citizens do not have an NRC and, therefore, are constantly vulnerable to harassment and discrimination. The card is of particular importance to children as it is officially required for parents to enrol their children at school. Without an NRC it is impossible to hold a job that provides anything more than a daily wage. They are required for all matters of bureaucracy and they acknowledge one's existence. Understanding the complexity around the outwardly simple process of acquiring an NRC illustrates the ultimate power and control of the state. Once a child is born, the birth should be registered and a birth certificate issued. This must be done at a government hospital and with the local authorities. A child's name must then be entered onto the family registration list. Upon reaching the age of 12 a temporary NRC is issued, following presentation of the birth certificate and the household list. At the age of 18 a full NRC is issued. The process on paper appears quite straightforward, however, in reality, it is far from so. In the first place, access to a government hospital or clinic is impossible for many communities and many children are born only with the assistance of a traditional midwife. For a child to obtain an NRC, parents must have the necessary documentation or they must return to their birth place to get a copy of their birth certificate and their family registration, assuming that their own birth was registered in the first place. If families have moved, their family registration must be transferred to their new township[10]. The table below (Figure 9) presents statistics

It should be noted too that many people live in little more than straw huts with little if any storage space

	State/ Division	Birth is Registered	birth is not registered because: must travel too far	did not know it should be registered	too busy	cost too much	others	reason did not know	total
Region	Kachin	73.1	1.2	8	6	0.4	1.4	3.7	100
	Kayah	46.6	0.8	33.5	6.7	1.3	1.3	6.2	100
	Kayin	34.5	1.9	42.2	6.1	0.1	1.3	4.2	100
	Chin	47.1	2.8	26.1	10.8	0.9	1.7	6.1	100
	Mon	72.9	0.1	13.9	5.2	0.5	2.1	1.3	100
	Rakhine	54.2	3.1	21.4	9	2.4	7.1	0	100
	Shan (North)	64.1	4.9	11.4	7.4	2.2	0.4	4.7	100
	Shan (East)	48.1	3.9	28.2	6.1	0.4	0.8	2.6	100
	Shan (South)	55.4	0.8	27.3	6.1	0.4	3.2	3.2	100
	Ayeyarwady	53.3	0.8	20.3	10.5	0.8	1.5	1.7	100
	Bago (East)	54.4	1.4	11.7	16.3	1.2	6	5.4	100
	Bago (West)	63	1.2	14.9	9.9	2.1	3.8	0.2	100
	Magway	64.7	2.7	12.9	9.2	0.4	1.9	2.3	100
	Mandalay	73.8	2	9.8	5.3	1.2	4.7	1.1	100
	Sagaing	82.8	0	9.7	1.6	0	2.4	1.4	100
	Tanintharyi	92.5	0.5	1.9	3.7	1	0.2	0	100
	Yangon	87.8	0.7	0.4	5.7	1.8	0.9	0.4	100
Area	Urban	88.2	0.6	0.7	5.9	1.5	1.6	0.2	100
	Rural	58.7	1.7	4.5	8	0.8	3	2.6	100
Sex	Male	66.1	1.4	3.4	7.2	1	2.7	1.9	100
	Female	63.7	1.5	4	7.9	1	2.8	2.3	100
Age	<6 months	59	2.4	3.4	12.2	0.7	5	2.2	100
	6-11 months	62.7	1.4	4.4	9.5	1.2	2.8	1.6	100
	12-23 months	64.7	1.4	3.8	8.2	0.9	2.8	2.5	100
	24-35 months	65	1.4	3.6	7.5	0.9	2.3	2.1	100
	36-47 months	66.6	1.5	3.3	5.6	1.1	2.9	1.6	100
	48-59 months	67.2	1	3.8	5.7	0.9	1.7	2.4	100
Mother's education level	Below primary	43.9	2.6	5.5	6.2	1.7	4.5	4.1	100
	Primary	62	1.5	4.3	8.3	1.1	2.8	2.4	100
	Secondary +	77.3	1.1	2.1	6.9	0.4	2	0.8	100
Total		64.9	1.5	3.7	7.6	1	2.7	2.1	100

source: Survey data from Department of Health Planning.

Figure 8 - Survey data on birth registration from the Department of Health Planning

on birth registration from the Myanmar Department of Health Planning. It shows that in ethnic states (apart from Kachin State), birth registration is very low (around 50%). This is not particularly surprising given the history of armed conflict in many of these areas. However, some central Burman areas, notable Ayerawaddy and Bago (East), which are but a few hours drive from Rangoon, show similar statistics. Given the lack of credible data from Burma and that government figures are often manipulated to show a more favourable situation (Falco, 2003), these are likely to be conservative estimates and the actual number of unregistered births to be much higher. If we are to accept the government data, however, this means still that 35% of the population in Burma is not registered.

and the added challenge of extreme heat and extended rainy periods making the storage of documents extremely difficult

Political control is also expressed through propaganda. It is everywhere, although often so blatant as to be unbelievable. In addition to the government sponsored billboards discussed previously, the media is strictly controlled by the state, as the following excerpt from the New Light of Myanmar (Sunday 11th July 2004) illustrates:

> *The Union is the foundation for the National Convention. The delegates attending the Convention are the brethren of a single family, who will live in the nation in weal or woe or through thick and thin. They are collectively striving and making coordination for the emergence of a State Constitution, while bearing in mind Union Spirit, loving kindness, sympathy, forgiveness, and the spirit to rejoice at others success or prosperity. Moreover, they are striving in accord with the six objectives of the National Convention — non-disintegration of the Union; non-disintegration of national solidarity; perpetuation of sovereignty; flourishing of a genuine multiparty democracy system; further burgeoning of the noblest and worthiest of worldly values namely justice, liberty and equality in the State; and for the Tatmadaw" to be able to participate in the national political leadership role of the State .*

Skidmore (2004) notes the similarities of the use of propaganda in Burma with that of other fascist regimes that used existing myths and stereotypes, such as the unity of the state and the onward march of national progress, to mobilise popular support. Simultaneously, the underlying message of such myth is designed to ensure that the masses recognise their own (lowly) place within the hierarchy of the structure of the state, *'seeking legitimacy from some gut feeling held by Burmese about their place in the world ' (Skidmore, 2004 p 99).*

[11] The Tatmadaw is the Burmese military forces.

It is difficult to gauge the true impact of propaganda. Definitely within the more educated strata of society in Rangoon, there appears to be an unspoken, and sometimes overt, contempt of the regime's attempts to impose itself. This observation was reflected very strongly in the empirical data collected for this thesis, as will be discussed in Chapters Five and Six. However, in the countryside, where people do not have access to education and there has been limited external influence, it is reasonable to expect that government propaganda might receive a greater degree of acceptance.

Responding to fear

Understandably, most people in Burma do not become overtly involved in politics. Yet the situation described above would suggest that no one really escapes the 'net-like' power of the regime. After spending many years in Burma, it seems that there is a political sub-theme to any event, even if it is a choice made not to be political. Dealing with this environment on a day to day basis is a challenge for every Burmese citizen and it leads one to question how people cope when there is no obvious solution in sight.

Fink (2001), in her book Living Silence , refers to the 'collective amnesia' of parents who raise their children to

> *...conform and even to become part of the system..... In order to protect their children, many parents discourage them from critically examining military rule (Fink, 2001 p101).*

Not all Burma scholars entirely accept this perspective however. Skidmore (2005), for example, suggests that the home is the last bastion of defence from the regime and within the privacy afforded by this space, that children continue to learn a *'soft and quiet form of resistance',* promulgated through the teaching of values directly in contrast to those of the authoritarian state. There is, most likely, a degree of truth to each viewpoint and, on a daily basis, there are many small examples of both defiance and submission, illustrating the multiplicity of ways in which Burmese people deal with circumstances that are ultimately beyond their control. For example, each 8th August many Burmese don the traditional longyi (sarong) of the NLD, to commemorate the student uprisings of 1988.

Civil Society

Another way in which individuals and groups are beginning to actively reclaim power from the regime is through social engagement. Despite the seemingly overwhelming and increasing presence of the military, since 1992 there has been a growth of what could be considered civil society organisations. Civil society can be defined as:

> *... an intermediate realm situated between state and household, populated by organised groups or associations which are separate from the state, enjoy some autonomy in relations with the state, and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend their interests, values or identities (Manor et a!., 1999 p 4-5).*

Civil society in Burma has been identified as the means through which long-term political change might be achieved (Steinberg, 2006, Skidmore, 2005, Doming, 2006, Purcell, 1999). In the Burmese language there is no direct translation of 'civil

society', nor is there an indigenous translation of its conceptual nature, as defined above (Steinberg, 2006). There are, however, a broad range of community groups, although it is difficult to estimate their number and be totally sure of their character. As the term is used today in the context of international development in Burma, civil society generally refers to groups that have taken on a role of social concern. This includes a diverse range of activity including funeral services, child care centres and orphanages, homes for the aged and free clinics.

Civil society can be seen either as the result of social capital or, conversely, as its origin. Either way, civil society has begun, usually surreptitiously, to fill the gaps in the delivery of goods and services that otherwise might be the role of the state. It also, at least theoretically, contributes to pluralism, diversity and democracy (Steinberg, 2006). Civil society groups work with a low profile, as many are not registered and members therefore run the risk of fines or imprisonment.

Some civil society groups have been established around specific areas of concern, such as Pyi Gyi Khin, a recently founded local NGO that focuses on women and health, particularly HIV. Others have a far longer history and are substantial in size such as the Muslim Free Hospital in Rangoon. Still others are small home based concerns that care for orphaned or neglected children. A recent publication (International Non-Government Organisations Working in Myanmar, 2004) listed sixty-two local NGOs in Rangoon alone. They were working in a range of areas, some with a practical, more welfare oriented approach and others with more a process-oriented approach, focussing on issues such as capacity-building and non-

violence. The table (Table 2) below gives a summary of the number of groups and the focus of their work:

Focus	Number of Organisations
Agriculture	11
Capacity building	5
Credit	10
Education	31
Environment	8
Health	25
HIV prevention and care	14
non-violence	1
Nutrition	7
Other	8
Religious based	20
Social welfare	20
Water & Sanitation	15

Table 3 - Local NGOs in Yangon and their area of focus (International Non-Government Organisations Working in Myanmar, 2004)

Religious groups generally form an active part of civil society and this is particularly so in Burma. Buddhism, in its many and varied expressions, is an overpowering presence throughout the country. It permeates almost everything in its external, physical existence through the thousands of pagodas, monasteries, shrines, monuments, artefacts, religious orders, festivals and rituals. It has a subliminal presence also. There is a rich discourse that constructs the lived experience of so many Burmese and strongly influences the way in which people relate to each other. During the Bagan Era, from the 11th to the 14th Centuries, the influence of Buddhism grew substantially, resulting in a great interest in learning about the religion, along with the growth of monastic schools which were designed to promulgate the teachings of the Buddha (Bischoff, 1995). At this time, the role of children and youth became central as they attended the monastic schools, learnt about Buddhism, law and governance, and, in turn, passed this knowledge on to their parents.

Buddhism, therefore, is a long-term, integral part of the lives of many Burmese and, as the following chapters will show, has a substantive influence on children and childhood. However, not only does the military regime impose itself on the lives of individual citizens of the state, but it has also sought to systematically subvert key Buddhist structures and belief systems. Schober (2005) asserts that religious reforms during the colonial period sought to separate Buddhist culture from the influence of traditional, mythical, cosmological and ritual aspects of its past. Simultaneously, the sangha (the monastic order), was reordered to reflect this reformation. The present regime, she suggests:

> *Seek to institute a scripturaiist, otherworldly, non-political, and centralized sangha that can be entrusted with legitimating the fundamentalist religion promoted by the state (Schober, 2005 p 117).*

In essence, the regime has attempted to colonise Buddhist expression through the control of the sangha and their own patronage of religious sites and revered monks. They have systematically attempted to remove, or co-opt from the monastic domain, all aspects of social and political involvement, apart from their own.

Other smaller and less established civil society groups have met worse fates. Since the recent political changes resulting in the removal of the previous Prime Minister, Khin Nyunt, the new military leadership has become highly suspicious of any community group that it has not officially sanctioned. Increasingly civil society is being drawn more conclusively under the auspices of the regime or simply closed down. The case of *Shwe Na Lone Thar* (Golden Hearts Health Care Team) is a

disquieting illustration of the growth and demise of a local organisation[12]. This small community organisation was initiated five or six years ago by a group of three or four men who met regularly at a local tea shop in a town in the dry zone, just north of Mandalay. Noticing a lack of care for the sick and dying in the hospital, they decided to forgo their daily tea ritual and put the money instead into a fund to support patients who were terminally ill. Then, following patient deaths, they helped to fund funeral expenses. Other friends and acquaintances became interested and in the space of a year *Shwe Na Lone Thar* had established a small office and consisted of a staff of over 20 volunteers. They had learned, too, that many people entering the hospital were dying from HIV related illnesses. Wishing to prevent further suffering, they began investing time in HIV prevention activities, at bus stops and amongst migrant workers and taxi drivers. The group began to gain a reputation in the town and soon came to the attention of the local authorities and then of the local area commander. By October 2005 it had been closed down. The official reason given was that it was not registered to provide support to the sick, and that hospitals should play this role. What is more likely, according to local NGO workers, is that the regime, fearful of any group that displays initiative which might lead to a destabilisation of the state, closed it down.

Another reason for the demise of groups such as *Shwe Na Lone Tha* is the desire of the regime to promote its own 'civil society' organisations, or GONGOs. These consist of a number of national associations, such as the Maternal and Child Welfare Association, which is headed by the wife of Secretary One[13] of the military regime. This association is tasked with the welfare of women and children and has

[12] This was related to me in the course of work I was doing with UNDP and is based on conversations with members of Shwe Na Lone Thar itself.

[13] One of the senior leaders of the regime.

branches in all townships, under the chair of the local area commander's wife. The links with the regime are obvious but, despite this, there have been instances of positive outcomes from their work - encouraging mothers to bring their children for vaccination programs, for example. More ominous is The Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA), the political youth wing of the regime, led by Senior General Than Shwe (head of the SPDC) himself. Recent government policies have seen the USDA asserting its desire to accompany ICRC officials on prison visits, and to take over the implementation of International NGO programs. Even internationally affiliated organisations, such as the Myanmar Red Cross, are also widely considered to be a quasi-governmental structure and through these organisations, the regime seeks to build its own form of civil society and social capital.

Progressively, international NGOs are being forced to implement their programs through the GONGOs, and local civil society groups are being forced to officially register (a process that can take years). New guidelines for international and local organisations were released during 2006 (Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development) and, if properly imposed, could see far greater restrictions on implementation and an increasing push for GONGO / INGO partnerships. This will reinforce the control of the state and test the resolve and ingenuity of the international community, as well as the nascent civil society movement.

The impact of the Burmese state on children

The overriding climate of fear and oppression and the overt and subtle ways through which the regime exerts influence has had a substantial impact on the lives of children. Basic indicators of childhood wellbeing reflect a grossly inadequate

situation, in which the rights of children to survival, protection and development are consistently challenged (Havel and Tutu, 2005, UNDP, 2004).

Basic indicators of child wellbeing: health, education and gender

There are an estimated 21 million children and adolescents in Burma amongst a population of approximately 47 million[14]. Basic indicators for children's health are amongst the lowest in the world. Out of the 1.3 million children born each year, over 92,000 die in their first year and a further 138,000 before the age of five. Tens of thousands more suffer from diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, diarrhoeal diseases and acute respiratory tract infections. UNICEF (2004) reports that Myanmar continues to have unusually high rates of infant mortality, estimating that 50% of child deaths are attributable to preventable causes and that one in three children suffer from malnourishment.

Public spending on education is very low; 6.98% of the state budget went to education in 1998-99, compared to 49.93% for defence (Grumiau, 2003). Only three quarters of eligible children start primary school, and one quarter of those will drop out over the first or second year. Less than half of those remaining will complete primary school (fifth standard), and less still (one in four), will continue to high school (UNICEF Myanmar, 2001). UNESCO reports that there are 39,000 primary schools in the country but many of these are situated far from villages and have extremely limited facilities (Grumiau, 2003). Often this means that schools do not even have teachers, let alone books and tables[15]. The situation regarding high schools is far worse with less than 3,000 in the country, meaning that many

[14] Though there has been no census in Burma for over a decade.

[15] In 8 years living in Myanmar, I have visited many areas in which communities have had to find their own teachers. This is particularly the case in ethnic areas where government teachers that have been sent to rural areas (if they have been sent at all) have no understanding of the local language or customs and often do not attend the school at all.

children, if they are fortunate enough to complete primary education, have no prospect at all of attending high school at all.

In many societies education is seen as one of the most important aspect of a child's socialisation and as a preparation for the adult world. However, the limited attendance at school, indicated by the figures above, are indicative of both a lack of trust in the education system, as well as limited access to schools. The curriculum committee responsible for the development of the school curriculum was previously headed by the then Prime Minister and the head of the Military Intelligence, General Khin Nyunt. Under his leadership, some authors claim that the curriculum was purposely written to encourage children to see and accept the role of the military in the government of the country (Fink, 2001). Competitions are held each year to find the best students in the country. This depends on exam results which, as the discussion in the following chapter will show, depends more on the ability of children to regurgitate government propaganda or even on bribes to examiners than actual intellectual ability.

As well as the propaganda included in the school curriculum, high school students are encouraged to join the USDA which, according to a number of sources, was responsible for the recent attack on Aung Sang Suu Kyi and her party at De Pa Yin (NCGUB, 2004). Joining the USDA brings with it the benefits of reduced fees and better grades (Fink, 2001). For young people without national identity cards, membership with the USDA can quickly alter that situation (KMA, 2003).

Teaching, once a highly revered profession, has now become corrupt. Teachers' wages are so low (around $US 8.00 per month) that teachers are forced to ask their students for gifts, or even bribes, and to require them to attend private tuition classes for which they must pay. As one teacher noted:

> *'In my primary school, which achieves quite good results, the pupils need between 15,000 and 30,000 kyats (between 15 and 30 dollars) a month on average in order to attend classes, including their schoolbooks and private lessons. I know that is too much for most parents, particularly if they have a lot of children, and I do not like to force the pupils to attend my private lessons, but I have no choice: after a 10-year career I only earn 5,000 kyats per month (it was 3,000 at the start of my career, but at the time the kyat* was *worth more).*
> *When I retire my monthly pension will only be 1,500 kyats. My rent is 28,000 kyats per month; I have to pay 52 kyats a day for the bus to and from school, plus food, clothes. So to survive I have to encourage my pupils to attend my private lessons. School starts at 9am and goes on till 3.30pm, from Monday to Friday. From 3.30 to 4.30pm I hold a first series of private lessons at the school, which cost 1,000 kyats per month. About 20 of the 30 pupils come to them. Then, from 5 to 6.30pm I hold more advanced private lessons in my own home and about 12 pupils attend them, each paying 4,000 kyats per month for* 3 *days per week. I have to run that kind of system in order to survive myself, but it makes me sad to know that not all my pupils have the same opportunities since they cannot all afford to attend the private lessons' (A teacher quoted anonymously in (Grumiau, 2003).*

The impaired state of the education system is due partly to lack of resources and is partly intentional. The regime has an underlying mistrust of students, as they have long played an activist role in society. The historical roots of the present military regime itself lie within a student activist past. The founder of independent Burma and the Tatmadaw, Aung San, as a young student, spoke out vigorously against the oppression of the British colonisers. Students played a major role in the democracy

uprising in 1988. Many students as young as 11 and 12 took to the streets to protest for a new government and an end to military rule, and many were killed as a result of their passion and commitment to see change (Fink, 2001).

As a result of further student unrest in 1996, all schools were closed for a year and new university campuses were built across the rivers from Rangoon. This was done primarily to get the students away from the then capital and the seat of power. Any student unrest in the satellite campuses could be easily controlled by closing the bridges, thereby making any advance on the city impossible. It was also a tactic to either encourage students to live away from home or spend the day travelling long distances, making them too tired to even think about protesting. The impact of interrupted schooling and, for many, lack of any access to education what so ever, has not been systematically documented, nor is this likely under the present regime. Empirical data collection in the following chapters, however, will suggest that the social and psychological ramifications of these policies are already taking their toll on Burma's youth.

It is not unusual for access to health and education to be affected by gender roles within society. In Burma's case, while gender discrepancies exist, they are perhaps not as significant as in some other countries. In general, the Myanmar government considers that laws and policies relating to gender are compatible with the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2000). UNDP's Human Development Report (UNDP, 2004) shows equity with men, in terms of life expectancy, adult literacy rates, combined (primary, secondary and tertiary) school enrolment ratio, and income. UNICEF

(2001) estimates that 46% of women in Myanmar are economically active, including those in unpaid domestic work. Reproductive work (childbearing, care and household work) is generally the responsibility of women, as is much of the unpaid work in any community (van Zuijlen, 2005). There are strong societal expectations defining appropriate feminine and masculine behaviour, with girls expected to be shy and modest and boys to be active and more outspoken. Decision-making in the household is generally seen as the male's domain (van Zuijlen, 2005), although in reality this is not always the case.

Child work

For most families in Burma life is a constant struggle. Daily wages, even for most professionals, are nowhere near sufficient to feed, clothe and provide the educational and health costs for the average family (Grumiau, 2003). The economic situation, combined with the limitations of the education system, begs the question of what happens to those children who are not in school. Despite a lack of recent clear empirical data, NGOs that focus on children (such as Save the Children and World Vision Myanmar), along with simple observation, suggest that many end up working. In fact children can be observed in a wide variety of work environments throughout the country. This is not to imply that all work is bad for children. Indeed the author's own research would suggest that many working children are able to balance school, work and social activities and to feel quite proud to be able to work to help support the family. However, the extent to which children have to work appears indicative of economic hardship and necessity, more so than children taking part in a family activity. According to the ILO in 1995, there were 1,236,000 economically active children between the ages of 10-14, representing 24.51% of this age group. Of these, 538,000 were girls and 698,000

were boys. For the year 2000, the ILO projected that there would be 1,228,000 economically active children, 534,000 girls and 694,000 boys between the ages of 10-14, representing 22.94% of this age group (ILO, 1997). While these statistics are difficult to confirm conclusively, given the school attendance figures quoted by UNICEF they are, If anything, likely to be an underestimate. More concerning, however, is the type of work in which children become involved.

A Human Rights Watch Report released in 2002 claims that Burma is the largest 'employer' of child soldiers in the world, with over 80,000 young boys engaged in the government military or anti-government militias (Heppner, 2002). A subsequent report (Heppner, 2007) observes that, although precise numbers are difficult to estimate that the current situation of forced recruitment does not appear to have significantly changed. Trafficking of young people, particularly girls, in the sex industry and in other exploitative labour situations in Thailand and further afield, is also of grave and growing concern (Wille, 2001). Research conducted in Rangoon in May 2002 into the situation of boys working in tea shops and girls in domestic service (Ar Thit Consultancy Group, 2002) found that many children, both boys and girls, have been brought systematically from rural areas to Rangoon to work. Children interviewed in this study reported very long hours of work, with little pay and, usually, limited opportunity for recreation, let alone educational opportunity. However, by comparison, many of these children can be considered the lucky ones, having at least food and a roof over their heads. Many children face far worse situations, surviving on and around the streets and living from hand to mouth each day. While again there is no accurate estimate of the number of children living and

working on the streets, numbers of up to 7,000 children in Rangoon have been estimated and similar numbers in Mandalay[16].

Children and the law

Legal systems have also suffered as a result of military control and the lack of an independent judiciary. Laws that might assist in the fulfilment of children's rights are either inadequate or inadequately enforced (Falco, 2003, Havel and Tutu, 2005). The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)[17] enacted the Child Law (Law No. 9/93) on the 11th Waning Day of 1st Waso, 1355 ME or the 14th July 1993 (State Law and Order Restoration Council). While the Myanmar government signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, accepting the definition of child as anyone under the age of 18, the Myanmar Child Law contradicts this:

> *The following expressions contained in this Law shall have the meanings given hereunder:*
>
> *(a) Child means a person who has not attained the age of 16 years;*
>
> (b) *Youth means a person who has attained the age of 16 years but has not attained the age of 18 years (State Law and Order Restoration Council, 1993)*

The Child Law explicitly states its support for the Convention on the Rights of the Child as one of its aims (State Law and Order Restoration Council, 1993 p4), and refers directly to the law being a tool to achieve the best interests of the child in Burmese society. It does not, however, elaborate on what that might mean.

16 According to World Vision Myanmar reports.

The SLORC was the name of the military regime that took power following the 1988 pro-democracy uprisings. It latter changes its name to the SPDC.

The committee charged for overseeing the Law (headed by the Minister of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement) has the duty of 'protecting and safeguarding the rights of the child' (State Law and Order Restoration Council, 1993 p6). Chapter Five of the Law affirms the right of children to survival, development, protection and care, as well as to 'achieve active participation within the community' (State Law and Order Restoration Council, 1993 p8). This includes the child's right to citizenship, echoing the CRC by stating that,

> *Every child who is capable of expressing his or her own views in accordance with his age and maturity has the right to express his own views in matters concerning children. ..the views of the child shall be given due weight in accordance with his age and maturity, by those concerned (State Law and Order Restoration Council, 1993 p10).*

The Child Law affords every child the right to freedom of speech and expression in accordance with the law and affirms the need for children to be able to play, to engage in leisure and to participate in age appropriate sporting and cultural activities. It acknowledges the right of children to engage in work 'in accordance with law and of his own volition', and designates the Ministry of Labour as the responsible ministry for monitoring this.

The age of criminal responsibility for a child is 7 years, although this is further qualified by maturity:

> *Nothing is an offence which is done by a child above 7 years of age and under 12, who has not attained sufficient maturity of understanding to judge of the nature and consequences of his conduct on that occasion,* (p 15, Chapter VI 28 b).

The Child Law describes a code of conduct for children under the heading, Ethics and Discipline of a Child (See Child Law, Annex 4, Chapter VII, p8). Children are tasked with upholding the law and abiding not only by parental discipline but also by the discipline of teachers and the community as well. Parents, teachers and guardians, on their part, are tasked with ensuring that ethics and discipline are 'infused' into children. The idea that responsibility for childhood discipline is a community one reinforces the notion that children's worlds exist beyond their families and, in terms of allowing for children to develop their own social networks, could be considered quite positive.

While the Child Law leaves much to be desired in some respects, the reference made to the Convention on the Rights of the Child indicates at least tacit acceptance by the regime of elements of the convention. Indeed, the government has put in place (at least in name) Committees on the Rights of the Child in every township, State and Divisional level. The role of these committees is to ensure adherence both to the child law and to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Since the early 1990s UNICEF has worked with the government to train members of the CRC committees, as well as officers of the law and the Department of Social Welfare officers with responsibility for children. Particular effort has been put into combating child trafficking, a topical child protection issue.

As a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Burma is obligated to provide periodic reports to the Committee on the Convention of the Rights of the Child. The last report, submitted in November 2003, articulates a reasonably

comprehensive description of the way in which the regime conceptualises childhood. It speaks of children as 'precious gems', names of gems being commonly used for many things in Burma. Skidmore (2005) calls this a metaphorical alchemy, noting that many names of businesses, journals, people, and indeed just about everything, commonly include names of precious stones or gold and silver. The 2003 report emphasises the importance of Myanmar tradition in relation to childhood and it identified Buddhist teaching as playing a key role as the nurturer of social cohesion; *'The parents are the first mentors of a child',* thus, parents call their children 'precious gems' (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2003 p8).

The parental role, according to the report, is to discourage their children from misbehaving and to assist them in learning. Children are to attend to their parents in both social and business affairs and to do 'good deeds' for them both during their life and after their death. Teachers are to impart both knowledge and to model good behaviour. They are to protect children; *'to speak well of their virtues and attainments and to keep them from danger',* and pupils to be obedient towards teachers, to serve them and supply their needs and to learn *'carefully and respectfully'* (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2003 p8).

Apart from those in immediate contact with children, the report also calls on the community and the extended family to engage with children, stating that this is *'an inborn social task'* (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2003 p8). Given the observations made by Thomas and Hocking (2003) in the previous chapter this attitude also has some positive connotations for children. The report suggests that

children's rights have been fully realised in this way, through: culture and tradition that presupposes parent's responsibility for their children (paragraph 45); the 'best' services afforded by the state in education, social and health (paragraph 48); and the services afforded by the state to orphans and disabled children (paragraph 49). Particularly relevant for the topic of this thesis, the report goes on to claim that children's views are taken into account according to the child law section 13 a, b & c which state (the first two points quoted directly from the Convention on the Rights of the Child):

> *13. (a) Every child who is capable of expressing his or her own views in accordance with his age and maturity has the right to express his own views in matters concerning children;*
> *(b) The views of the child shall be given due weight in accordance with his age and maturity, by those concerned;*
> *(c) The child shall be given the opportunity of making a complaint, being heard and defended in the relevant Government department, organization or court either personally or through a representative in accordance with law, in respect of his rights.*

This has been achieved, so the report claims, by virtue of the fact that children are able to express their inner feelings through such means as paintings, colouring and wall journals, on which there is no prohibition (paragraph 60), and through their artistic abilities aired through radio and television (paragraph 61).

There is much in the report on the positive interaction that exists between parents and children in the Myanmar family (paragraph 97 for example). To a large extent

this is claimed to be a result of Buddhist teaching and obedience to the duties and responsibilities towards each other.

The report acknowledges the need and right of all children to work in support of their families, in accordance with The Child Law (Section 24 (a) (ii)). It claims that not many children are in fact working and those that do are not exploited nor exposed to hazardous jobs (paragraph 233). Only children 13 years and older are permitted to work under law and a child between the ages of 13 and 15 may only work for a maximum of four hours a day and not between the hours of 6 p.m. and 6 a.m.. A young person between 15 to 18 years old may be allowed to work as an adult, as long as he/she has a medical certificate stating fitness for work.

The report concludes with a statement more reflective of the ideal Myanmar childhood than of the reality faced by the majority of children:

> *Myanmar society is founded upon gentleness and kindness and there is no discrimination based on sex, culture, class or colour. Children in Myanmar are regarded as jewels by Myanmar society and systematic child-rearing is practised, and thus it is one of the most child-caring countries among the developing countries. The upbringing of a Myanmar child is also influenced by his or her own religious teachings and guidance aimed at becoming a noble and worthy person of the society. Theravada Buddhism, the predominant religion in the country, naturally plays a vital role in this respect (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2003 paragraph 247).*

The Committee on the Rights of the Child (2004), responding to Myanmar's report, raised some obvious concerns. In general they noted that traditional attitudes ensured that respect for the views of the child was limited and that society at targe

tended to favour a paternalistic and authoritarian approach to children (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2004 paragraph 32). They refuted the claim of universal birth registration (paragraph 34) and expressed deep concern over the widespread economic exploitation of children and particularly of practices of forced labour and recruitment of children into the armed forces (paragraph 68).

There are other obvious contradictions between the government report and the reality of life for many children in Burma as observed in other sections of this chapter. However, it does provide an insight into the way in which Burmese society (at least from the regime's perspective) think (or like to think that they think) about children, childhood and the way in which children should be raised. The fact that childhood comes to an end at the age of 16 is perhaps a reflection of the reality of life in a country where children are expected to work from an early age. This may be a result of the predominantly agrarian nature of a society where children often have responsibilities, working on the farm or caring for younger siblings. However, as will be shown, the increase in urbanisation and the severe economic decline of the country over the past ten years has brought about conditions in which children have not only been forced to work but have become vulnerable to many of the worst forms of child labour[18].

What is apparent in the analysis of the child law and statements and reports on the Convention on the Rights of the Child is that there is a very clearly articulated concept of childhood in Burma. It is one in which children are respectful to their

[18] The International Labour Office (ILO) convention number 182 recognises that the total abolition of child labour will be an incremental process but that certain forms of child labour are intolerable. It seeks to suppress extreme forms of child labour including slavery and forced labour, trafficking, prostitution, pornography and illegal activities and hazardous work such as mining.

elders, are brought up with deep religious (Buddhist) beliefs, are supported by a nurturing and supportive extended family environment and are both expected to study and work hard and to bear responsibility for the care of their parents. That childhood ends at the age of sixteen would suggest that such responsibility is placed on children from a relatively young age. As Skidmore suggests, the family is perhaps the least invaded space of the junta (Skidmore, 2005) and while that may be true in an overt sense, it has been shown that the policies and practices of the Burmese regime do indeed have a visible and debilitating effect on the lives of children and their parents. This has been especially evident in the increasing demand for children to become economically active from a very early age, as a result of poverty. This leads often to children dropping out from school and taking on responsibility, not only for younger siblings and elderly family members, but in many cases becoming the main bread winners for their entire families. At the same time, the junta maintains an illusion that childhood is sacred and that all children benefit from a well rounded education and have prospects for a bright future.

Buddhism and childhood in Burma

> *'Answering the question 'What is mankind's treasure?' Lord Buddha said, 'Children are mankind's treasure.' They are not the parent's treasure alone, but of mankind; as such they should receive the tender care and affection of the entire human society'. (Thero, 1993)*

The military regime grounds much of its policy and law relating to children in Buddhist teaching and philosophy. Thus, a more detailed understanding of Buddhism, as it relates to children, helps to further illuminate the way in which childhood is embodied in Burma. There is much in Buddhism about the nature of

children and their rights and responsibilities. Buddhist teaching outlines five responsibilities of children to their parents.

> *i) As the parents have supported the child, so should the child support the parents. Sons and daughters should support their parents. They should wait upon them when they are sick or old. In fact they should deem it a great blessing and privilege to minister to, wait upon and look after their parents when they become helpless, old or destitute.*
>
> *ii) The child should do the parents' duties. Children should always try to understand what are the requirements and necessities of their parents, and they must try to provide them to the best of their abilities. Children should not hesitate to provide anything that their parents need for their satisfaction. They should see to the comfort and happiness of their parents.*
>
> *Hi) Children should uphold the family tradition and lineage. It is an important duty of children to continue the good works started by their parents. They should preserve the family tradition. They should carry on any philanthropic or social work started by their parents, especially after their death. The good name of the parents should be preserved by their worthy children. Good, cultured children do nothing to bring discredit to the good name of their parents.*
>
> *iv) Children should act in such a way as to be worthy of their inheritance. Whatever legacy or property they receive from their parents should be protected and, if possible, increased. Children may earn a lot in later life, but they should always preserve the ancestral property with due honour and care.*
>
> *v) Furthermore, children should offer alms in honour of their departed relatives. It is one of the noble duties and customs to remember and revere parents after their death. Children offer alms to monks and the needy, and then transfer the merits acquired thereby to the departed ones. (Thera, 2002)*

In the Buddhist consciousness then, children bear a great deal of responsibility for their parents, in particular. Buddhist teaching dictates that the fulfilment of children's responsibilities should be based on their abilities; no reference is made to their age. It encourages children to take responsibility for their parents, in gratitude for the sacrifices that they have made for them. Buddhism in Burma, as in other predominantly Buddhist cultures, has its own idiosyncrasies and a basic understanding of these sheds light on the way in which Burmese today view their children and childhood. There is no complete agreement as to when and how Buddhism was first brought to Burma, although it is clear that the two major strands of Buddhism, Mahayana and Theravada, have both influenced Buddhist practice and belief. This has been influenced by spirit worship, magic and the Tantric system (a mixture of magic, witchcraft and Siva-worship) which is still reflected today in the worship of Nats (spirits) (Ko, 1913). It is a regular occurrence for parents to seek the advice of fortune-tellers or astrologers to assist in the naming of the child. Planets are believed to be the abodes of the nats and the planet that presides over a person on the day of their birth is believed to have an influence over them for the rest of their life (Tun T, 2000). The planet under which one is born helps to shape the person's character and fortune in life and determines one's name. The Burmese alphabet (of 33 letters) is divided amongst the 7 days and a person's name will then contain the associated character. In addition, each day also has an animal or creature associated with it, that again helps to shape a person's life (Han, 1963).

One of the most important scholarly philosophical works in the history of Burma is the Lokaniti produced by the famous Myanmar philosopher, Caturangabala, who lived in the 14th Century in the ancient city of Pyay. The Lokaniti or 'guide to life' draws on both Buddhist and Hindu sacred writings and is still used throughout the country as a handbook for parents, teachers and elders when instructing youth (Tu, 2000). The Lokaniti stresses the importance of education for the young:

> *If during the first period of life one acquires not learning.....how then will one acquire these during the fourth period of like? (16)*
>
> *Beloved son apply thyself to learning...the untrained have to labour for others (17)*
>
> *The mother is deemed the enemy of her son, the father is deemed the enemy of his son who does not make him study in his youth. (18)*
>
> *Study increases learning, learning increases knowledge, knowledge brings understanding and understanding brings peace[19]. (21)*
> *In life there is no friend like learning; no enemy like illness; no person worthy of affection as oneself; and no strength like the merit of one's deeds. (23)*
>
> *Eating, copulating and sleeping are common to men and cattle, it is learning which distinguishes man. Take away learning and men are as cattle. (22)*

Learning is a tradition of which the Burmese have long been proud. Teaching is one of the Buddhist 'charities' (an act by which one can gain merit) and monasteries have been the centre of learning for centuries.

The tradition of sending young boys to the monastery for education is a well established part of Burmese Buddhist culture. In the past, the monastery was the

[19] Peace of mind according to the Burmese

only place of learning. Although the state now provides as education it is still customary for Buddhist boys to complete at least a week in a monastery as a novice. This is a vital time for boys and it signifies their coming of age (Han, 1963). While in the monastery, boys are expected to follow the routine of the monks, which includes begging for alms in the early morning, learning prayers and receiving religious instruction. Girls do not generally enter the nunnery but they undergo an 'ear-boring' ceremony to signify their coming of age. These ceremonies are important landmarks for children and are the beginning of their acceptance into the adult community.

Picture 2- Three young boys prepare for their novitiation ceremony

The *Lokaniti* contains a number of other references to children, such as the following, which implies that children have potential to change their circumstances:

> *The son of low-born parents may become a king's minister; the son of fools may become a sage; the son of poor parents may acquire great riches. Do not, therefore, despise any man. (37)*

Discipline for children is also addressed:

> *The potter does not strike his pots to break them but to bring out their excellence; the teacher does not strike his pupils to cause them suffering but to increase their learning and opportunities in life. (39)*

Responsibility of the parents to children is also mentioned:

> *If a son does evil the mother is to blame; if* a *pupil does evil the teacher is to blame; if the subject does evil the king is to blame; if the king does evil his counsellors are to blame. (128)*

That children can and should take some control over their own destiny is emphasised in Buddhist teaching. Teachings based on the Buddhist scriptures, such as the *Lokaniti,* speak of the importance of education and the reciprocity of care between parent and child. The centrality of Buddhist teaching, although in many families influenced by belief in astrology and the ever present Nats, lends itself to openness and indeed to an expectation that children take responsibility for themselves and for their moral and spiritual education, from an early age.

Civil society and children

The embryonic civil society discussed previously has had a marked impact on children. A World Vision Myanmar report (Gyaw, 1999) uncovered an extensive network of different institutions, organisations and individuals providing support for children who, for one reason or another were no longer receiving care and support from their biological families. Reasons included: poverty, education and displacement due to armed conflict. The report estimated over 300 groups or individuals providing long term care to well over 30,000 children between and including the cities of Rangoon and Mandalay. These were often small groups belonging to religious bodies (churches or mosques), comprised of individuals who had an interest in the welfare of children or who were receiving some kind of remuneration for their services. They are indicative of a fledgling civil society and of one that has the best interests of children at its core. There are also formal and well established mechanisms of civil society, such as the monastic system, caring from children. It has long been a means through which poor children (both boys and girls), in particular, can receive a basic education. In many communities the

only schools are monastic schools. They teach the government curriculum, usually relying on volunteer teachers and they operate up until the end of primary school (standard 5). At the end of the last century, there were approximately 1,600 monastic primary schools around the country (Union of Myanmar, 1998). There are also just fewer than 50 middle schools and a handful of monastic education high schools that will take children up to the end of high school and enable them to qualify for university entrance.

Most children attending monastic education schools do not become novices, apart from their traditional noviciation period of a week or so. However, monasteries all around the country allow for children to become novices for as long as they or their parents wish. Estimates of the total number of novices around the country are likely to be around 350,000[20]. Novice nuns are less common and number under 100,000 by similar estimates. Increasingly, monasteries have become homes for children whose parents are unable to care for them. In this way they form a welfare safety net for the disadvantaged. For some children, becoming a novice is the only way in which parents can afford to send their children to school. Some monastic high schools, like the Phaung Daw Oo Monastic Education School in Mandalay, have thousands of students from many different parts of the country.

Since 1992 there has been a steady, although modest, increase in the presence of international aid and development agencies. UNICEF supports programs in the areas of health, education and child protection. International child focussed NGOs, including World Vision and Save the Children Fund, now have a well established

[20] This figure was arrived at by asking a number of monks and teachers in monastic schools. Given the isolation of some parts of the country and the communication difficulties it is really impossible to get an accurate count however.

presence in the country. These international agencies engage the regime in different ways, with the aim of increasing the health and development outcomes for disadvantaged children in the country. They join with government social welfare services and the expanding number of local organisations[21]; schools, orphanages, and welfare groups, in providing a mechanism through which the needs of the country's children are, to some degree, being met. However, the structure of this nascent but growing 'civil society' is vague and insecure, ultimately controlled by the vicissitudes of military leadership that seldom seems to put children as their first priority.

Conclusions

There are many complexities associated with understanding children and childhood in Burma in the present time. Literature reviewed to date indicates that the political environment is an especially important factor influencing the way in which children are brought up. Strongly embedded cultural values and laws are being eroded through lack of resources, poor policies and a climate of fear and mistrust. Many children are unable to attend even basic schooling, the long term impact of which is yet to be fully understood. Families that can afford to, create an alternative world for their own children, enrolling them in schools for the elite or sending them out of the country to study. For the majority of children, however, work, responsibility and an 'adult' life begins from an early age. A large and apparently increasing number of children are being forced into exploitative working situations, including the

'Unknown' as many of these groups choose to keep a low profile for fear of government closure. Officially such groups must register with the Department of Social Welfare, however, based on my experience in the country, this is an extremely time consuming and usually ill-fated endeavour. I base the claim that the number of such groups is growing based on the course of my eight years working with World Vision Myanmar, during which time we had requests from an increasing number of local groups as the economic situation declined, often one or two a week.

military and the sex industry, despite protestations from the authorities that this is not the case.

The Myanmar Child Law articulates what could be seen as a 'diluted' version of the CRC, insofar as it stops short and compromises on some of the basic principles of the convention, particularly the age of childhood. The participation of children is an integral component of the Child Law but it is reflected in a naive and simplistic manner; consisting of art and dramatic expression. This is a far cry from the intention of the CRC that gives credibility and authority to children's voices. Notwithstanding its inherent flaws, if the Child Law were to be put into practice it is possible that the situation for children might improve. However, the present legal, health, welfare and education systems are poorly resourced, often corrupt and are ultimately unable to provide the support to children and families that is needed so urgently. As a result, the growing civil society movement is playing an increasing role in the nurture and care for children and youth. However, increasing government scrutiny on such groups raises questions about their long term ability to operate.

Other factors, particularly religion and culture, have in the past been crucial in the way in which children are nurtured. They have traditionally mapped out the socialisation of children and their path into adulthood. Increasingly, however, traditional ways and religious associations, such as the Buddhist sangha, responsible for leadership within the Buddhist community, are being influenced by military rule, raising valid concerns for the well-being of children and resulting in the deterioration of behavioural norms and values that have in the past been so

important to Burmese society (Schober, 2005). However the Burmese consistently articulate a sense of love and respect for their children, no matter what their political affiliations, social class or religious heritage. What is not evident in the literature to date and the reporting of commentators on the situation of children in Burma, is the voice of children themselves. The following chapter will, therefore, explore contemporary experiences of children and their communities, in an attempt to further understand the impact of the present situation and the way in which children themselves are responding.

Childhood and Childhood Experiences in Burma: Narrative, Socio-Economic and Political Perspectives

> *What is Buddhism? Buddhism is free thought....! will tell you one thing [about] one Myanmar Buddhist monk; he* was a *very famous monk during the colonial times and maybe 60 or 70 years old. One day he paid his respects to a young novice only 7 years old, and some people asked him, 'Why do you pay your respects to a young boy?'*
> *And he answered, 'he is wise and intelligent so I show my respect to him (From interview with The Venerable U Nayaka).*

Introduction

Chapter Four has two objectives. Firstly it will add to the existing limited knowledge of childhood and children in Burma through an analysis of the different social, economic and political influences that affect their quality of life. Different themes identified in Chapter Three will be elaborated upon, particularly the role of religion, education and, as is the case for many children, their role in the (mostly informal) economy. The second aim of this chapter is to understand how children's potential for participation is affected by the environment in which they live. This has resulted in the chapter being divided into three distinct sections: one that looks at the way the 'narrative' of Burmese childhood is constructed through culture and history (the 'Narrative Realm'); one that that identifies specific social, political and economic influences on childhood and the influence of contemporary events (the 'Socio-Political Realm'); and finally one that looks at the role that the child plays in

determining his or her own childhood, in other words, the personal agency of the child (the 'Personal Realm').

To this point in the thesis it has been shown that participation is not simply the act of taking part. Understandings of participation have been influenced by many factors, including history and politics, and more recently through the growth of participative community development methodologies and tools. People participate for many reasons and in many forms. Western democracies are founded on certain principles of participation but these are not necessarily embraced across the globe. Participation has been interpreted by some as a fundamental human right (for example Arnstein, 1969, Boyden et al., 1998, Hart, 1997, Theis, 2004, Verhellen, 2000, Ahmad, 2005, Lansdown, 2004), and by others such as Gujit and Shah (1998) as a disguise for other agendas. More recently, participation has been identified as the 'new tyranny' of the development industry (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Notwithstanding these diverse opinions, most authors agree that the fundamental idea of inclusion within a participatory process remains a positive development strategy. Furthermore, it is accepted wisdom that people's ability to participate is dependent upon a multitude of factors, including their social and political environment, gender, education and motivation. The complexities of participation relating to children are further compounded as age, psychological and social development demand consideration. The question of children's citizenship and the conflict around protection issues adds further depth and nuance to understanding participation (for example Jans, 2004).

Callincos (2000) talks of postmodernism being the absence of a meta-narrative and in the previous chapters it has been argued that participation within the development discourse is fundamentally postmodern in nature: that is, there is a rich diversity of interpretation. Although It can be argued that there is no single grand narrative of participation, all perspectives assume elements of decision-making, collective action, inclusion, human rights and, vitally, encompass commonly accepted democratic principles and practices that are articulated in numerous human rights treaties.

If this is the case then Burma, governed by a military regime, must, by definition, be counted as one of the least 'participative' countries in the world. However, the situation of children in Burma that is outlined in Chapter Three suggests that such analysis is overly simplistic. It has been shown through the review of relevant literature that children play a vital role within Burmese society, both in a practical sense, through their labour (paid and unpaid) and in a representational sense, through what they embody for their parents and the community more widely. While this is not necessarily indicative of 'participation', if defined in terms of human rights discourse, the varying roles children play in Burmese society demand greater scrutiny.

The nature of data in Burma

Empirical data was collected from a range of key informants: adults who are either parents or cultural guardians of knowledge about children (including teachers, parents, grandparents and religious leaders); and children who represent different socio-economic strata of contemporary Burmese society. In addition to focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews, data gathered also included

observations and personal reflections about children within different social and community contexts. Fink (2001) refers to a 'collective amnesia' within Burmese society; a strategy employed by many Burmese (usually subconsciously) to maintain a sense of dignity and to put up with the contradictions and the fear of living under a military dictatorship. Data collected for this thesis supports such a hypothesis insofar as it made clear that nothing in Burma is ever really as it seems. Rather than a collective amnesia, however, I prefer to see the life experience of many Burmese more in terms of a collective illusion. There appear to be two distinct elements to this. Firstly, the regime creates an illusion; through the media, the education system and other communication channels, that the country is developing and prospering despite, as Chapter Three indicated, that this is very clearly not the case. Secondly, people accept the illusion, even though they might not believe it to be true, in order to maintain a semblance of normality and, more importantly, for self-preservation. These parallel realities colour the way in which people construct their day to day lives and, particularly important to this thesis, influence the way in which childhood is constructed and expressed. There is, of course, the actual reality which is, in most cases, a very different story. Uncovering that required a great deal of perseverance and the ability to look beyond the obvious. Empirical data collected revealed all realities and, in order to be as objective as possible, was supplemented by secondary sources, as well as personal observations made during the eight years that I spent in the country.

The following sections of Chapter Four focus on those factors that both directly and indirectly shape the way in which Burmese society constructs childhood. This construct is influenced by, among other things, history, religion, literature, politics

and the media. Often as members of a society we do not readily search behind why we believe certain things to be the way they are. We simply accept that they were always that way. This was integral to the argument used so forcefully by Ariès (1960), as described in Chapter Two. It is, therefore, important to understand the way in which the narrative or the 'story' of childhood has been constructed and the various factors/both historical and contemporary, that have created it. This, in turn, assists in understanding how, what could be considered new ideas (such as participation as described within the Convention on the Rights of the Child), might be perceived and accepted within the existing construct.

The narrative realm of Burmese childhood

As Chapter Three identified, there are many apparent contradictions when looking at the situation of children in Burma. On the one hand, according to Skidmore (2005), they are much loved and referred to as jewels and the hope for the future, yet government policy and practice disadvantages and neglects children. Regarding education, for example, it has been shown (Chapter Three) that many children have limited and sometimes no access to school. Even children who do manage to complete school find little meaning in education, as it is corrupt, lacks challenging and stimulating curricula, and has little bearing on future employment opportunities (Lwin, 2000). Of greater concern, Burma is said to have the highest number of child soldiers in the world (Heppner, 2002). This does not suggest a great concern for its young. The common practice of working children is yet another example of the way in which children are potentially open to exploitation and abuse in unregulated workplaces (as argued by Ar Thit Consultancy Group, 2002). It appears that childhood and children in Burma are under assault from all

directions, and it is surprising that any child is able to develop, let alone survive, in the present circumstances of the country.

These conditions have led to the existence of many different 'childhoods'. In Burma today there are rural children, urban children, migrant children and refugee children, all with their own unique experience of growing up. There are children without families and those who live away from home. There are working children and children who have the opportunity to attend school in foreign countries. Similar statements could be made about many other countries in the region, or around the world, although the long-term presence of an authoritarian regime and the isolation of the country for a protracted period makes Burma idiosyncratic. Identifying commonalities amongst the multiple realities of childhood is a daunting task. However, in the course of data analysis certain broad, commonly accepted aspects of children and childhood emerged, and parents, opinion leaders and children alike spoke of a variety of experiences that informed the 'narrative' construction of Burmese childhood. Three (inter-related) dimensions in particular stood out:

1. The overwhelming influence of *religion* (particularly Buddhism)
2. Common understandings about different *stages of life* (childhood, youth, adulthood),
3. Certain facets of Burmese *culture* that influenced relationships between child and adult.

Buddhism

U Nayaka, dressed in his crimson and earth brown robes, appears a wise and thoughtful man. He wears large dark rimmed glasses and changes them often to adjust for reading or distance. Good bifocals are not easy to find in Burma and they

are expensive. U Nayaka, his brother U Jotika, and another monk U Ponyananda, now all in their mid to late fifties, met in a monastery not far from Rangoon when they were only boys. They have lived

Picture 4 U Nayaka (left) & U Ponyananda, two of the founders of Phaung Daw Oo Monastic Education School

Mandalay in search of an education.

They wore the novice robes more from economic necessity than from any particular commitment to Buddhist philosophy. Novices can beg for alms and live in a monastery for next to nothing. Apart from the novices, the school was composed of poor children from the surrounding townships.

On the wall in the central school office building was a large wooden sign board that stated boldly in English, *'Free Education, Free Thought',* U Nayaka informed me that it was initially the lack of fees that attracted parents to send their children to the school. In Burma, despite government policy that education is free, the reality is that many parents cannot afford to send their children to school. There are costs for uniforms and books, for computers (even when there is no electricity), for

buildings, for toilets, for tables and chairs and of course for teachers. In most schools, these costs do not amount to a great deal, perhaps $30 or $40 a year per child but for many parents this is simply too much.

Phaung Daw Oo is a very different school, when compared with others in Burma. Along with the large classes and chanting children so common to other schools, there is an unusual, palpable energy. Many of the teachers, paid substantially lower than their government counterparts, were school graduates themselves, and, enthused by their own education and the underlying philosophy of the school were happy to work for much less. As the school has grown over the years the free education has been helpful for impoverished families but it has been this philosophy of free thought that has appealed to parents and children alike and is the driving force behind the school's success. Of the 6,000 students at the school at the time of data collection, there were over 600 novices from eastern states and an increasing number of children, coming from other parts of Mandalay and the Dry Zone, who had heard of the school's reputation.

Picture 5 – Some of the novices at Thoun Htat Kyaung

Over the past four years, U Nayaka has sought to develop a presence in Rangoon, where he has bought a small monastery just near the foot of the Sh wed agon Pagoda[22].

[22] The Shwedagon is the most famous pagoda in the country and is surrounded by many monasteries.

Thoun Htat Kyaung (literally, 'three storey school') is far more modest that its older brother in Mandalay. It houses a group of 20 novices and a handful of adults who teach and care for them. There are also classes in English and computer for the community that operate from the school and help to raise income to ensure the school's survival.

Sitting in the computer room of Thoun Htat Kyaung with me on the day of his interview, U Nayaka revealed a deep understanding and committed vision for monastic education. He talked of the growth of Buddhism and the monastic system in the Bagan era and how the philosophy of that time is reflected in what he is currently attempting to achieve. He feels that Buddhism has been a vital aspect in shaping the way in which people perceive children and childhood in contemporary Burma. Central to this is that the attainment of 'higher knowledge' or 'enlightenment' or 'free thought', as U Nayaka might now define it, is not dependent upon age. The short story told by U Nayaka, quoted at the beginning of the chapter, illustrates this point.

With responsibility for over 7,000 young lives who attend his school, U Nayaka has reflected deeply about what constitutes childhood in the Buddhist Burmese context. He states:

> *Buddhism does not close any people [sic], any children. So, Buddhist monks, they like all the children to be able to stay happily and also they like all the children to think happily but without bad deeds...Maybe some traditional Buddhist people, they think [that a] child is a child, adult man is a man but according to real Buddhism, [it is] not like that. That is not real Buddhism. Because I will tell you about Buddha's higher knowledge...at the age of Buddha, one novice, maybe 7 years old, he can attain higher*

knowledge...The intelligence is not different. Not defined. And also according to Buddhism...! answer you with more information. Men and women [are] not different. Some pagoda trustees write, 'Women are not allowed to enter', that is not real Buddhism, because [both] men and women can attain the higher knowledge. That is real Buddhism. (U Nayaka)

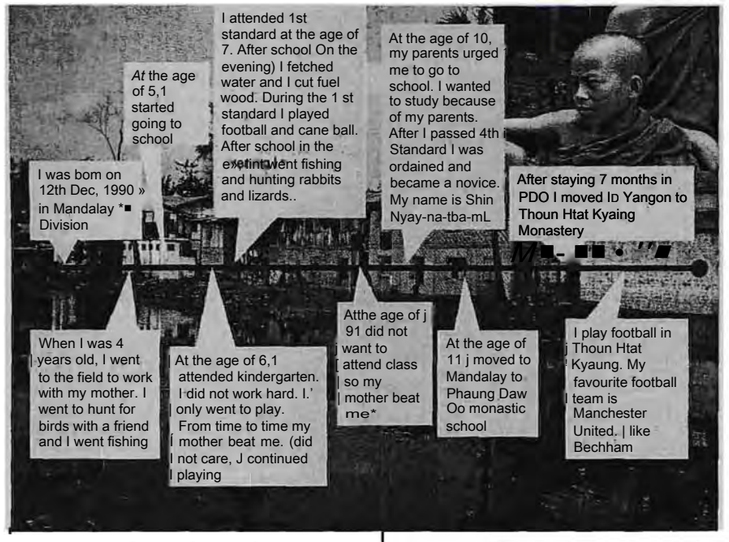
According to the abbot, children have played an important role in the promulgation of Buddhist teachings from early times, taking what they learned from the monasteries to teach their parents. The current practice of boys entering the monastery as novices for a short period of time maintains that tradition. The excerpt above suggests that enlightenment (higher knowledge), a central principle of Buddhism, is neither dependent on age nor gender. While U Nayaka is the first to acknowledge that his ideas about Buddhist teaching and theology may be different to some, the notions of childhood which he espouses remains a valid interpretation and one that does not seem uncommon. This perspective has a number of ramifications for the school and its students:

....students, they can choose, it is their right...they have a chance. I think my school is very open-minded. I will tell them or the teacher or the pupil, you think freely, you have a free thought, don't close your mind and then you have a right, I tell them you have a right, OK you think a free thought, and then you can do according to your free thought. At that time, [if] your deeds disrupt other people, other's rights, that is no good. And also if your deeds disrupt yourself, that is no good, so your deeds if your deeds do not disrupt any other people, you can do freely [sic]. That is according to my school rules. (U Nayaka)

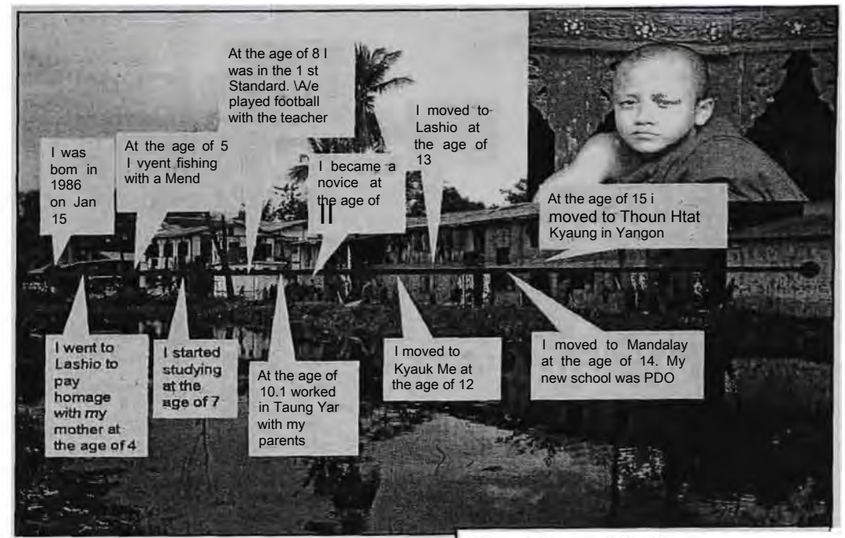
U Nayaka is conversant with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and has attended training with UNICEF and received funding from them for elements of his school program. His simple explanation of some of the fundamental philosophical foundations of rights discourse is refreshing and clear and is very closely linked to Buddhist teaching, as described in the previous chapter. This has a profound impact upon the way in which children are treated in his school, as well as on the way in which children themselves relate to others. Age, gender and physical maturity become secondary to wisdom and enlightenment.

Freedom of thought is evident in some structural ways in the school, for example, through the election (by children) of their own class monitors. In the Rangoon monastery, it was most evident in the reciprocal sense of duty and responsibility between adults and novices. Novices would go about their duties and chores without the need for any kind of enforcement. Adults would provide their education and ensure their other needs (health, nutrition, social) were met. There was an expectation that everyone needed to play their respective role for the 'greater good'.

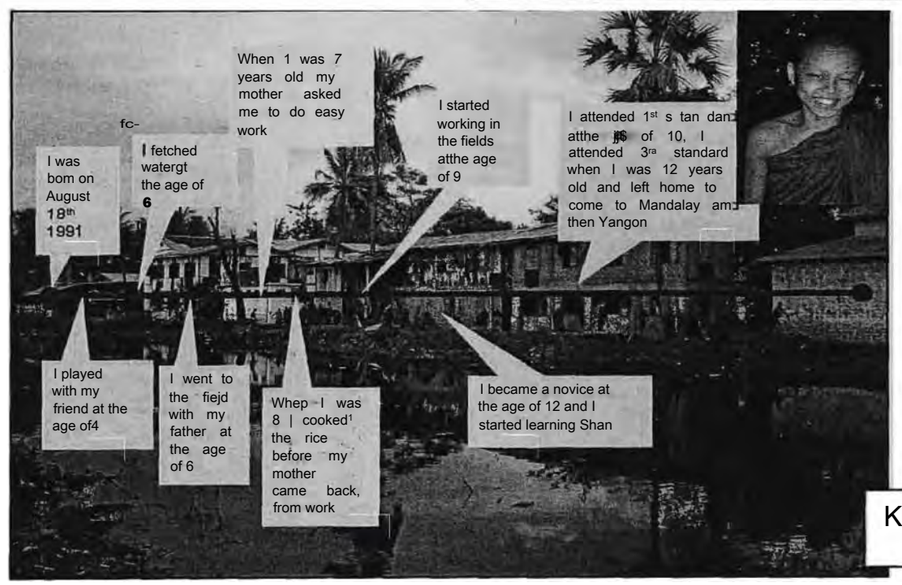
A novice at Thoun Htat Kyaung has very few possessions. Each owns a small chest in which he keeps his belongings, usually a spare set of robes, soap, toothbrush, books, perhaps a picture of his family or other keepsakes that he has collected along the way. Stretched out on the floor, next to his chest, is a thin woven sleeping mat, with a neatly folded blanket. A mosquito net, trussed and tied with plastic string to nails or wire, is suspended above the sleeping mat, ready to be unfolded each night. The relatively deprived nature of the novices' lives does not



Maung Soe Oo Life-line



Saw Maung Life-line



Kham Lu Life-line

Figure 9 Novice Life Lines

Life for the novices in the monastery is arguably harsh, although they are diligently cared for by a small team of monks, students and volunteer teachers. Their day, outlined in Figure 11 on the following page, begins at 4.00 a.m. when they wake to prepare breakfast. Duties around the monastery that include sweeping, cleaning and washing, begin at 5.00 a.m. and are followed by an early breakfast. As with all novices around the country, they leave the monastery to collect alms for the day, returning only at 9.30, in just enough time to begin their school lessons, which go throughout the day. The evening time is spent doing jobs again, as well as opportunity for play, prayers and study. As monks and novices are not permitted to eat after noon, the last meal of the day, at around 11.30 in the morning, must be sufficient to see them through the remainder of the day and night until the routine begins again the next day. Daily prayer and meditation appeared to play a significant role in the lives of the novices and was promoted as a means of dealing with the stresses of everyday life and of developing wisdom and patience.

Although the majority of children in the country, whether novices or not, have very few possessions, the added discipline of the religious life makes circumstances for teenage boys seem quite implausible to an observer with a 'western democratic[1] perspective. These are not expectations placed on many teenagers in other countries, yet there they are, boys who are happy, studious, polite, interested, articulate, engaged, almost the antithesis of what we might expect of teenagers as constructed in our common Western discourse of childhood development. After many hours of observation and interaction with the novices, it seemed that they were genuinely happy about their circumstances and that they even considered themselves privileged. There was seldom the need for any imposed discipline to

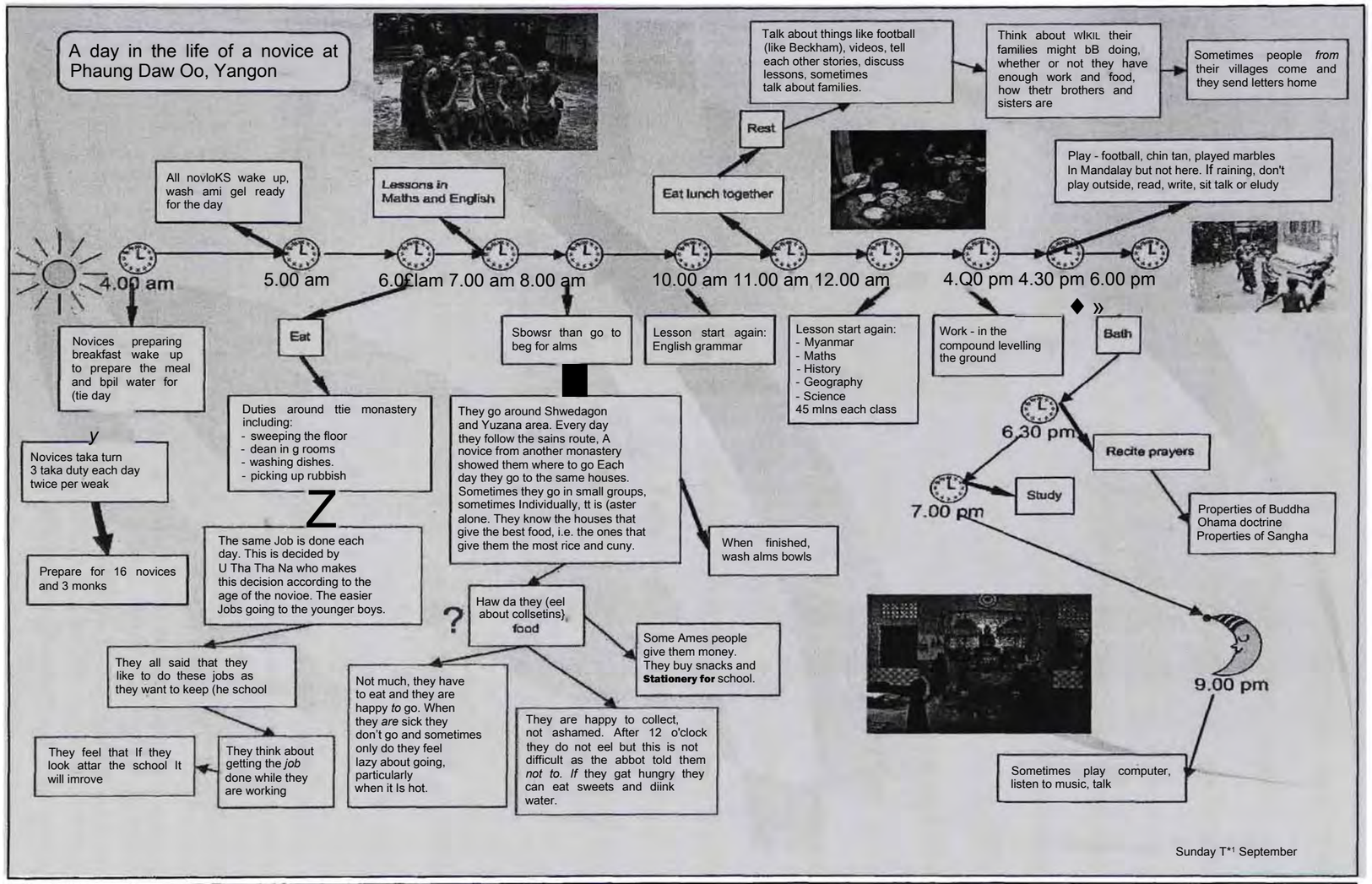


Figure 10 A day in the life of Phaung Daw Oo Yangon Novices

maintain this daily regimen; instead things got done (cleaning, jobs, study, cooking, play and recreation) with a minimum of fuss, few arguments, in fact seldom even a raised voice. When questioned about this state of calm, the novices were somewhat bemused that I would think things might be any different.

Another obvious dynamic was the sense that these boys had about being a part of a religious order. They took pride in adjusting their appearance each morning before setting off to collect alms. They took their daily prayers seriously and they listened to and respected their elders and teachers. Yet they also questioned and gave their opinions and were allowed the space to show their youthful exuberance for activities such as playing soccer in the dusty courtyard of the monastery. This was a particularly popular pastime. The mutual respect between novices and their teachers was a vital element in the functioning of the monastery. Although it was expected that the boys fulfilled their responsibilities around the monastery, the same expectation was made of the adults.

Picture 6- A novice ready to set out to collect alms

Novices did not play a substantial role in the day to day decision-making processes of the monastery, although the choice to move from the Mandalay school to pioneer the Rangoon monastery was entirely theirs. Interview findings suggested that this decision was based on a number of factors, including interest, a feeling of importance, and a sense of adventure. Most importantly, they demonstrated a

great sense of duty and responsibility to their families and seeking an education to benefit their families was a primary motivation for most of the boys. This respect was also directed at the people who cared for them in the monastery and to each other. Academic achievement, active participation, and contribution to the monastery were highly valued. Even though this sense of responsibility was encouraged, the novices were free to return to Mandalay or to decide to return home at any time. One novice, after completing a year in Rangoon, moved back to Mandalay and then decided to return to a different monastic school in Rangoon that would enable him to complete his education there. He took personal responsibility for the entire process[23]. This was indicative of the ability of the boys to create their own social networks, or at least to take advantage of those that already existed within the monastic system. The ability to connect to these social networks was also illustrated by the fact that a number of novices had been able to attract ongoing donations from 33C0||C|C (a *hlu shin* - donors) that enabled them to attend private tuition and to buy school supplies. All the novices survived on the generosity of the surrounding community as they begged for alms each day; an example of social capital deeply rooted within religious custom, through which, undoubtedly, many people are able to survive.

As U Nayaka does not see the possibility of short term political change or a sudden blossoming of democracy, the underlying philosophy of the school has a long-term intent. U Nayaka believes very firmly that educated children, capable of independent and reasoned thought, will create a more enlightened future and his school is an investment in that. As would be expected, however, given the nature

[23] He later returned to the school in Mandalay to continue his education, not happy with his new environment

of the military authorities, such intent, no matter how benign it might outwardly appear, can be dangerous. At the time of one of my visits to the school, the electricity supply had been cut for some days. U Nayaka, having many and varied roles with in the school, decided to investigate the cause and we set out together in the school's car to find the linesman. In Burma this is common practice as he is crucial in the maintenance of the electricity supply (as a result of low wages, linesmen often cut the supply and wait for 'tea money' to be offered to them before they will turn it back on again). At some stage in the journey we passed a military truck, stopped by the side of the road, and armed soldiers glared nervously as we drove past. U Nayaka turned to me saying:

They are afraid.... Because they have a gun!

I cannot quite remember what became of our quest to find the linesman (no doubt we did and the power was restored) as I was distracted, contemplating the great truth behind this short statement and the potential danger in which U Nayaka, his school and his staff, were living and working in each day. A philosophy of free thought can lead very quickly to undermining authority: fear does not arise so much through the use of power, but from the threat of losing it and a fearful military regime can lead to severe consequences. To create a supportive operating environment, U Nayaka has needed to tread a very fine line with the authorities, attracting their patronage and support but not their control. He achieved this through advocating for the support of General Khin Nyunt (then Secretary One of the SPDC) who opened a number of the school buildings and this has enabled the school to expand its registration to high school status. U Nayaka does not seek to undermine the regime, however his belief in education is that, as people learn, they will see different options and alternatives to the present. This is a long term view of

a solution that can affect the current political deadlock that grips the country. Children play a crucial role in this vision; children who are able to analyse and make choices and be able to bring about change.

Buddhism beyond the monastery

The role of Buddhist principles within the school was clear; they provided a guiding philosophy for all that occurred. However, one school does not necessarily reflect the view held within the wider community. To discover how Buddhist teaching was incorporated into life beyond the school environment, a number of interviews and focus group discussions were conducted. As Chapter Three observed, Buddhist teachings are open to interpretation and are often inextricably entwined with other traditional belief systems, such as spirit or 'Nat' worship (Houtman, 1999). However, it was evident from these data that many people attempted to live their lives according to Buddhist principles.

Daw Nwe Lwin Htwe lives in a small but well appointed apartment close to the inner city area of Rangoon. Working these days with a shipping business, her husband is often away and she has taken the major responsibility for raising their two teenage daughters. Nwe Lwin Htwe would be considered middle class. She has an education and a small printing business and she speaks proudly of the role that the business played in reporting pro-democracy activities in the late 1980s. This resulted in her husbands' imprisonment for some years and in the closure of the presses, but she has opened them again, although political reporting is necessarily a thing of the past. In the corner of the main room where we sit, a Buddhist altar presides over the house. There are pictures of grandparents and lights and

offerings. Buddhism has been an important influence in Nwe Lwin Htwe's life, particularly when she was a child:

> *My parents gave us some freedom. We could decide whatever we like but we have the responsibility for the consequences....They never said, 'Don't do this' but 'please think it over'....When I became older every time I asked my father, 'should I do this?' He said, 'Please think it over' he never said, 'don't do this'. If it was not right he said, 'Oh I think this is not right but if you want to do this you can but you are responsible for the consequences. ' I took their suggestion because I only have my father and mother....I like this way. We Buddhists like this way. Buddhist parents are like that. A majority of the Burmese Buddhists are like that. We informed our parents about everything but doing or not was up to us. I think this is a good way. Now I am doing this way to my children now I am in the position of a parent [sic].*

The attitude of Nwe Lwin Htwe's parents and those that she has taken on as her own, reinforce the idea of personal responsibility for one's own actions. As with U Nayaka's ideas of free thought, there is a deep sense of guiding, rather than being told, and of allowing children to find their own way, albeit within the safety of parental advice and open communication. In Nwe Lwin Htwe's family there is a relationship between the amount of personal freedom that she gives her daughters and the decisions that she encourages them to make. She believes very strongly in responsibility towards the family and the community and so involves them in decision-making that will affect the family as in the example below:

> *Not long ago, we were searching for a plot of land and we found it.*
> *My husband did not like it much but I liked it a lot. What we did* was *to take our daughters to show them the land and took their advice. We all voted and based on the vote, decided. We do everything the same way.*

Personal freedoms, on the other hand, are secondary and more closely guarded and monitored. She worries about what her daughters wear when they go out, particularly the older one, who she sees as headstrong and always wanting her own way:

> *For example, if they go to tuition where the boys also attend, they have to be careful about what they wear. I don't want them to wear trousers and skirts. I do not know when they get older and when they attend school abroad but now it is under my guardianship and we live in Burma. If it is not right in my eyes, how can it be good in other people's eyes? For example, when they go to Blazon [shopping centre] without me to see a musical stage show, if they go without me I tell them to dress carefully because I don't know how to say that there are many good and bad people around.*

Nwe Lwin Htwe and her husband see Buddhism as a vital element of their own lives but not something that can be imposed on their daughters:

> *What my husband said to my daughters is that you don't need to be Buddhist because of us. I want you to know what Buddhism is. My elder daughter went to retreat not long ago. She said that she wanted to do some meditation on her birthday. So I sent her to the meditation centre. In fact, I really want my two daughters to be ordained as 'Thi La Shin' (nun) because I don't have any son to do 'Shin Pyu'. But I never force them so they don't want to!*

Instead she teaches Buddhist principles by example. She tells me of the nunnery that she has founded in Dagon, a poor satellite township of Rangoon and to which she donates now on a regular basis:

> *I frequently make donations so my daughters said they would emulate me. When they grow up they will do the same. They really wish they will do the same. I told them that if they want to they can. And I told them that they should purify their minds and do whatever they can.*

And I said that reciting the scripture and praying every day is not necessary.

Another respondent, Aung Thein Kyaw, points out that while, in general, people believe that Buddhism demands that children are brought up not to question their elders, that 'true' Buddhism is different:

The main thing is that we are not allowed to question our elders and teachers but in fact even our Lord Buddha allowed us to do so.

These attitudes were common amongst middle class Burmese parents who were interviewed. This was despite an acknowledgement that culture often dictated that things should be different. May Ohn, a staff member from an International NGO, spoke of her own upbringing in the following manner:

In the family, you know you have to pay respects to the elder brothers and sisters and if you happen to be the youngest.. .it is something I never liked. But my father he is flexible and he never controlled us that much.../ could talk to my father about many things, like for example my future plans, even about marriage.

There is, however, another side to religious belief, as was argued in Chapter Three. Schober (2005) which suggests that since the pro-democracy uprisings in 1988 and the establishment of the present military regime, that two competing interpretations of Buddhism have emerged. One reflects the nationalistic centralised authority of the regime and benefits from their patronage; a tool for powers of the state in the absence of any other moral authority. The other interpretation sees Buddhism very much as a vehicle of social engagement and responsibility. Schober (2005)

equates the latter interpretation with democratic change, observing that it focuses on personal and social engagement, ethics and meditation, which are qualities, she argues, that are espoused by Aung San Suu Kyi. However, as U Nayaka's school indicates, the division between the two is not always clear cut, as the patronage of General Khin Nyunt, clearly a figure of regime authority, was a crucial element in the schools growth and influence, itself, clearly an example of social change.

However, there appears to be a growing public mistrust of the military's influence over the Buddhist sangha. The following newspaper article from the New Light of Myanmar (the regime's English language daily) illustrates the way in which the military pay homage to the sangha, while at the same time ensuring their loyalty through the donation of substantial gifts:

> *RANGOON, 14 Sept - Families of Defence Services (Army, Navy and Air) and well-wishers this afternoon donated rice, edible oil, salt, medicine, gram and cash ... Secretary-2 Adjutant-General Lt-Gen Thein Sein attended the donation ceremony and presented provisions.*
>
> *Chairman of Rangoon Division Peace and Development Council Commander of Rangoon Command Maj-Gen Myint Swe, Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Maj-Gen Sein Htwa, the vice-mayor, senior military officers, departmental officials, chairmen of Rangoon District (West), Kamayut and Kyimyindine townships peace and development councils and well-wishers also attended the ceremony. First, the congregation received the Five-Precepts from Kyimyindine Township Sangha Nayaka Committee Chairman SayadawAgga Maha Pandita Bhaddanta Paninda.*
>
> *Next, Lt-Gen Thein Sein, Maj-Gen Myint Swe, and senior military officers presented offertories to the members of the Sangha.*

Next, senior military officers, the commander and well-wishers presented provisions to Sayadaws (New Light of Myanmar, Monday 15th September)

A number of participants noted that the sangha had lost its independence and that it was increasingly seen as a tool of the regime. There was a feeling that the gentle and reflective nature of Buddhism and the belief in 'karma' leaves people open to exploitation. This is a double edge sword, simultaneously helping people cope with their suffering, while making them more pliable and easier to control. As one respondent (Than Zaw) claimed:

> *The government knows the weakness of the people; they know how to use the gentleness of their religion to control them (Than Zaw, 32 year old male respondent from Yangon).*

However, despite the military's increasing control over the sangha, Burmese continue to find strength and refuge in Buddhism and Buddhist ritual and Buddhist teaching remains a great defining influence over the way in which children are treated and childhood is defined.

Stages of Life

Besides Buddhism, the 'narrative' influences over childhood are affected by culturally biased understandings of what it means to be an adult, a youth and a child. Chapter Two provided detail about the different ways in which children and childhood have been perceived over the centuries and postulated that Piaget's (1950) theory of different developmental stages and similar notions, by others, such as Vygotsky (1962), still provide the basis of our understandings of childhood in the Western world. More recently study into the sociology of childhood (for example James et al., 1998) is bringing the dominance of such developmental theories into

question. The application of these emerging theoretical models to non-Western environments has been limited, although Bissell (2003), for example, has looked at the social construction of childhood in Bangladesh. However, an analysis of that depth is beyond the scope of this thesis. It is important to recognise the way in which Burmese people differentiate between childhood and adulthood and the way in which this differentiation is constructed. An analysis of this type will engender a clearer understanding of the cultural expectations of children's contribution and participation within the family and community context. This, in turn, will assist in clarifying what might be acceptable or unacceptable, from a cultural perspective, within the confines of a development project. The following section seeks to do that through analysing data collected from key informant interviews, focus groups and participatory activities with both adults and children.

The Child

Nay Nay Lay is 16 and lives with her grandmother. She has no parents. She lives in Hlaingtharyar, one of the satellite townships just outside of Rangoon. It was established following the student uprising in 1988. Many of the people living in Hlaingtharyar were relocated from slum areas in Rangoon. They were sold land quite cheaply and had to develop it, including water and sanitation systems, roads and electricity. Today, many people rent in Hlaingtharyar, unable to afford rooms or houses closer to the city. Most houses do not have power or water. During the wet season roads flood and are washed away. Even houses built on stilts to escape high water are sometimes partially submerged after heavy downfalls. One gets the impression in Hlaingtharyar that people are merely camping temporarily.

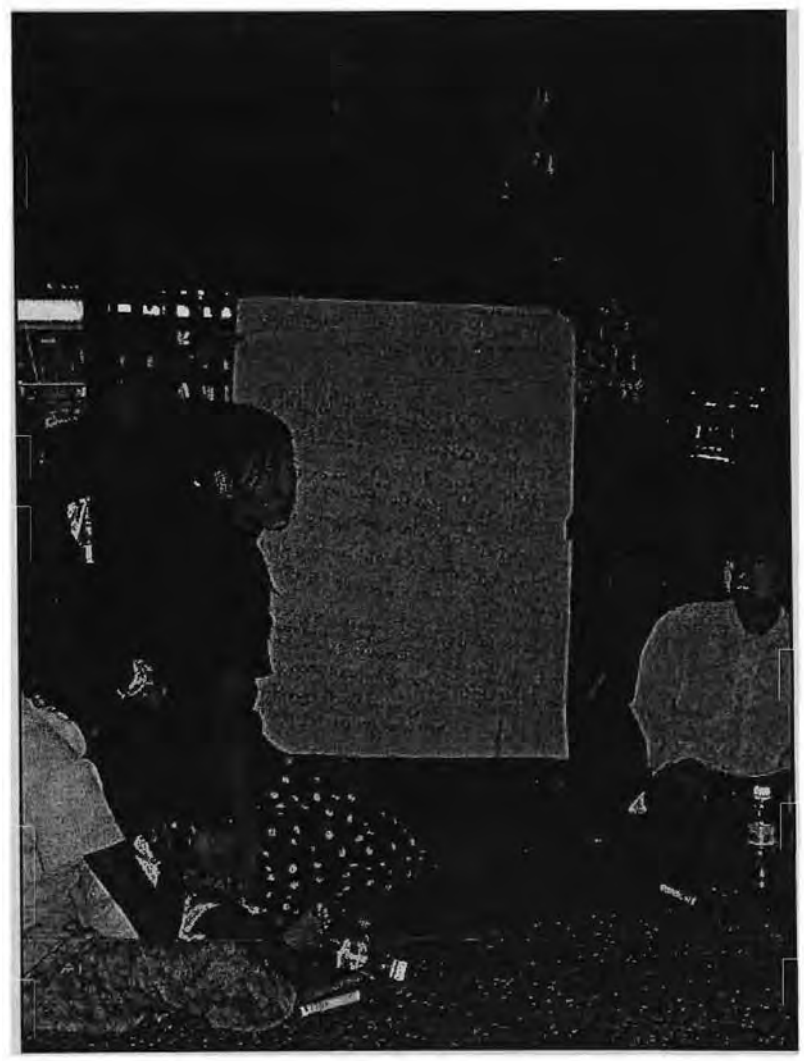
A group of 15 young people aged between 12 and 17 sit on the floor around me in a circle, in a World Vision Myanmar community centre, and we talk about the past, the present and their aspirations for the future. Most of these young people are part of a World Vision Myanmar project to prevent poor children drifting on to the streets in search of work. The program had been running for some two and a half years. It aims to assist poor families through small business loans, assistance with school fees and skills training for employment and non-formal education activities for children who cannot go to school at all. The group are either attending some kind of skills training or working in one of the many factories in the industrial area on the other side of the town.

Nay Nay Lay and her peers can remember many of the changes to the community since it was first established. The children tell me that when they arrived thirteen years ago there were no roads, nor school, and there were great distances between houses. Basic services such as electricity were non-existent and it was a long hour's walk to fetch water from the reservoir. Even buying food was problematic, as there was no market nor stores close by. Medical complaints were taken to the only (poorly resourced) hospital in the vicinity, and there were no clinics. Access to Rangoon itself was hard, as when they first settled, there was no bridge and all travel to the capital was by boat down the Hlaing River. There were local authorities, along with a monastery. Finding work was also difficult, as there was no industry to speak of.

Now the children report that it is more prosperous. Small unsealed roads (primarily for walking) have been built, making the major arterial roads to Rangoon more

accessible and two bridges have been built across the river, enabling road travel to Rangoon. Water pumps have been installed, usually by international NGOs, delivering a supply of clean water. There are now market stalls where it is possible to buy food and there are factories for employment. The population has increased and housing has become more established. Overall, the children see many improvements.

Nay Nay Lay reports that being a child in Hlaingtharyar brings many challenges . She gets up each day at 5 a.m. to cook the rice and to clean the house.



Picture 7 - Research activities with Nay Nay Lay and other young people in Hlaingtharyar

She lives with her grandmother; her parents having died some years ago. She is the only child with her grandmother and so she has to do a lot of the work around the house. After cleaning, she cuts the fire wood and sets it to dry outside then goes to the closest well to fetch water for the day. Nay Nay Lay washes the clothes and takes a bath herself. Once she has done all this it is 9.00 a.m. and she goes to work. Work is a World Vision Myanmar training program set up for girls and young women who

no longer attend school. There she learns how to sew and gets paid for the work that she does, generally making blankets for the local market. Each day Nay Nay Lay earns about 300kyat, which is about equivalent to the wage of a construction site worker but not nearly as tiring or dangerous, so she considers herself quite fortunate. She gives all she earns to her grandmother who, in turn, gives her everything that she needs. Work is from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. with an hour for lunch. Nay Lay enjoys the time she spends there, as she has friends and can make some money. When she has finished she returns home to cook, then takes a bath and has dinner with her grandmother. She likes to talk with her grandmother while they eat. She cleans up after they finish and is in bed between 10 and 11 p.m. each night.

Nay Nay Lay is not unlike other children in Hlaingtharyar or in other poorer townships around Rangoon. As has already been observed, many children live in even more difficult circumstances. As illustrated by the story above, Nay Nay Lay's life is very different from a teenage girl in Australia or in the United Kingdom, Europe or America. Indeed, comparing childhoods across such cultural divides is problematic and preconceived notions of childhood brought about by Western scientific thought cannot be wholly applied. It is important, therefore, to appreciate what Burmese children and their parents and communities understand childhood to be, not simply through the application of foreign norms and expectations. To that end, children and parents interviewed were asked to reflect on experiences, definitions, and culturally defined norms and values around childhood.

Adult respondents were asked to consider both their own childhood and that of their children and to identify interpretations around what it means to be a child, a youth and an adult. Not surprisingly, there were differing opinions. In Hlaingtharyar some parents, notably those who had been exposed to child rights education programs[24] answered from birth up to eighteen as the age of a child but others disagreed. Some mentioned from birth to 9 or 10, others up to twelve. U Nayaka acknowledged that there are many definitions of childhood but suggested that a strongly held belief in Burma is in customary law, which delineates childhood up to the age of thirteen. Most did not assign a chronological age but spoke rather of the things that children do:

o^ooo^ooaDocooG^Guo *(Hlu hlu lat lat nay me- live free)*

Or by the fact that children can not identify what is good and what is bad nor, in Buddhist terms, what are good and bad deeds:

33a^3^c6^c *cr^d^co Ahku and ku do*

Buddhism was a major influence on defining childhood to parents in Hlaingtharyar. They saw children being defined as those unable to comprehend the Buddha's teachings:

Children do not know the Buddhist Dhama
They do not understand Buddhist principles of giving

Some parents felt that children were those who had not yet grasped the importance of other people's property or who did not have a concept of economics, giving the example that they demand things that they wanted, not understanding the financial constraints or whether or not their parents had sufficient financial resources. Some intimated that childhood depended in part on socio-economic status and that the

[24] Through World Vision Myanmar programs in the community

need for children to begin to take on more adult-like roles grew out of economic necessity:

> *In our community we are not rich, that is why 14 year old boys need to start cooking and doing household chores and for girls, from 10 they need to begin to cook and do house work...for the rich they only go to school and study, they don't do house work. They start to work and take responsibility after they get married*

Others felt that children were characterised by an apparent lack of respect for elders:

> *They don't know how to respect elders; they just speak when they want to!*

Some qualified childhood by the gaining of wisdom that accompanied a certain age:

> *They do not have wisdom yet, all they know is how to eat, drink and watch videos. But they will start to understand when they reach 18 or 19. Then they will identify what is right and what is wrong.*

It is clear from such comments that, while most parents equated childhood with the period of life between birth and puberty, the majority did not dwell on its chronological aspect. Rather they saw childhood as a stage characterised by limited responsibility and by a general lack of empathy for those around them. Their distinction made between the socio-economic statuses of families indicated that the construction of childhood was affected by poverty and economic circumstance. Once the child began to take on responsibility for contributing to the household income, the days of childhood were numbered.

The Adolescent

Logic would dictate that if, in the Middle Ages in Europe, there was no childhood (as discussed in Chapter Two), then there would also not have been a period of adolescence. Such observations were made early in the last century. For example

Hollingworth (1928), who noted that it was only at the time during which children were taken out of the work place (usually factories) and institutionalised in school, that adolescence became recognised as a distinct phenomenon. Adolescence in the West is generally seen as a time of transition and even rebellion, when children, seemingly overnight, turn from being pleasant and helpful into grunting, non-communicative, unsociable beings (Parry, 2005). Empirical data collection suggested that in Burma, the period between childhood and adulthood, was identifiable as a time of physical and emotional change that took place somewhere around the age of 14 or 15. A number of common Burmese phrases were used to describe this period of life, mostly relating to the blossoming or growth of trees:

33(^j|Gol oo *A pyou bau - a girl in the bloom of maidenhood*

c\jj>c^j|Gol oo *Lu pyou bau - a male adolescent, a stripling*

(üsgoooc go] oo *Myi gaung bau - a fledgling*

Parents observed that adolescents would begin to talk back to their elders and that they needed more control. At the same time, parents became more understanding of the moods of children at this age, saying that they needed to be soothed more and that being rough would not have any affect:

> *If you are rough they just do what they would like to. Especially those who are very shy. If you are rough with them they get worse.*

Parents felt that it was good for adolescents to have a sense of shame as this would help them control themselves. They acknowledged that disciplining adolescents was more difficult than children. Some parents suggested that there were two kinds of teenagers, those who are difficult to manage and those who follow their parents' advice. For some, they felt it was possible to be strict and

autocratic but that parenting for most needed encouragement and cajoling. Some felt that a kind of ‘good cop/bad cop’ approach was useful, in Burmese, GsyocoojgS

(k*yaw ta le; chau ta le* soothe them; make them scared). However, in

most cases, parents felt that children did not respond to rough treatment, *‘if you soothe them, they will work more’,* remarked one respondent. According to Buddhist teaching, they saw their duty as parents to tell adolescent children what is right and wrong and they agreed that both children and adolescents liked to be pampered by their parents.

Adolescence was marked by an interest in the opposite sex for both boys and girls. It was seen as a time when they would want to be with friends, where girls spent time making themselves look attractive and boys liked to spend more time away from home and began imitating their fathers.

Days for residents of Hlaingtharyar are long and often arduous. As a result there was little time for parents and children to actually sit and talk together. When there was opportunity, parents said that they generally discussed financial matters relating to the future of the family, with older children. With younger children, pocket money was often discussed. Parents also spent time talking about how their children might decide what is right and wrong and encouraging them to learn from their experiences of the day. Parents said they often found particular companionship with the older child of the family, in discussing more serious issues affecting the family wellbeing, a sign of adolescents being drawn into the adult world of responsibility.

In comparing their own childhoods to those of their children, parents felt that the most obvious difference was fear; that when they were young they were scared of their own parents. Now they say children and young people 'don't speak back but they don't listen and they don't care'. This difference was attributed to outside influences, particularly the video huts. Allot (1994) notes that thousands of video parlours have opened up around the country and Skidmore (2004) concludes that their popularity is due to the escapism provided by entering the world of cinema. Video huts are simple affairs, usually a small shack that can be blacked out with plastic sheeting, with a television and video, often powered only by a car battery. While a lot of the films shown in these video huts are locally made drama, imported films, including hard core pornography are common. Although such films are officially banned in Burma, these rules are rarely enforced. As a result, parents felt that foreign films had brought about a greater awareness of sex, illustrated by the fact that children talked about sex at home now. Parents reflected that when they were young they were not allowed to join in with adult conversations. They were not even allowed to listen but now they felt that it was much more open:

> *They have more knowledge and even talk about HIV openly. Nowadays children are becoming more daring to do whatever they like. Before boys did not dare to give love letters to girls and did not easily have a girl friend. It is much easier now and easier to get pregnant!'*

The Adult

Out of all of the 'stages' of life, perhaps most enlightening in terms of defining childhood was more the question of what defines an adult in Burmese society. In the eyes of parents in Hlaingtharyar, adulthood meant marriage, something that usually happened after the age of 18, although not everywhere:

> *Children get married at a very young age but in Hlaingtharyar they don't. In Hlaingtharyar most of the girls work in the industrial zone and most of the boys work as casual labourers. In the morning the girls rush to the factory and if they are late their salary will be cut. In the evening when they get home it is already dark and they are exhausted and hungry so they do not have time to think of boyfriends or marriage.*

Parents said that the majority of girls in the community were working in the garment factories well before they reached the age of 18.

Other respondents added further insight, Thiha for example saw adulthood as being able to 'stand on your own two feet' but that this was generally not solely dependent on the child:

> *Many people even though they are 20 or older do not see themselves as an adult. They think they are immature and not ready to stand on their own. When I was 18 I did not see myself as an adult. I could not make decisions. From 19 I could do that, when my mother told me that I should think on my own and do things on my own. Most parents do not do and say these kinds of things to their children, they still want their children to stay with them. Even when young people are 25 they are still with the parents. They only leave home when they get married and then a lot of people still even stay with their parents... People think they are an adult when they can do whatever they want.*

A focus group discussion with adult staff from World Vision Myanmar suggested that adults were defined by appearance, characterised by wearing adult clothes and having physical stature; by achievement characterised by working 'for their own good', holding down a job, supporting parents, by being over 18 and married; by intellectual ability characterised by having passed the final year of school; and by the ability to think independently, characterised by being able to solve problems and

make decisions on their own. A number of adult respondents felt that a person became an adult when they left home, usually for marriage, but that in the parent's eyes, their children would always be children. It should be acknowledged that even adults are, in reality, unable to make many decisions or, more precisely, that their ability to make decisions is bound by the constraints of the political system. The years of socialist and military rule, combined with a culture that defers to those superior in age and education, has meant that initiative and personal responsibility for making decisions is neither encouraged nor, in general, sought out by people.

In summary then, most respondents initially found the categories of child, adolescent and adult easy to define. However, further investigation revealed that definitional boundaries were often blurred and the reality of childhood sometimes appeared to be contrary to what was culturally ascribed. This was possibly due to the reliance adults placed on religion and on their own memories of a happy childhood, in the face of an oppressive political system that deprived them of being able to treat their own children in the way that they would like.

Cultural concepts

The final element of the 'narrative realm' deals with what I have termed cultural concepts. The Burmese language is rich in metaphor and contains countless terms and expressions that defy direct translation into English. Many are embedded in Buddhist belief systems and describe certain ways of social and emotional behaviour and interaction. Others are less related to religion but share a similar historical and cultural depth. It is not the intention of this section to look at all such concepts. Rather, some specific examples will be examined, to show how significantly they can affect interpersonal relationships, including those between

adults and children and the way in which they might contribute to behavioural patterns and the construct of childhood.

3x>s$OCDCQ ah-na-de

Ah-na-de stems from a feeling of respect for others and the wish not to hurt the feelings of others or upset them due to one's own action. It is a common term in Burmese; one hears it everywhere, everyday. Primarily the concept of ah-na-de is a selfless response to a situation, one that reflects the reluctance of the individual to cause harm or upset to someone else. Ah-na-de is illustrated in the following story about Zin Min Oo (pictured opposite), a street child who had been abandoned by his mother at a railway station in Mandalay when he was around 10 years old.

Picture 8 - Zin Min Oo

He eventually tracked her down in Rangoon some months later:

> *I found where she* was *working and told her that I wanted to live with her but she said that the people she worked for did not want to have her children around so she was going to leave. But I felt so sorry for her so I decided to leave instead.*

Zin Min Oo related how he then left his mother and eventually found his way to the World Vision Myanmar street children's centre. He had not seen her since. It is difficult to be conclusive about how children can make such deeply felt emotional decisions, particularly when they are related in the course of an interview. Perhaps he did not like his mother but that would be unlikely, as he found his way back from Mandalay to Rangoon by train, alone and sought her out. Perhaps he was not made welcome in the home in which his mother working, perhaps even thrown out. However, the use of *ah-na-de* translated here as 'feeling sorry', gives some clue. The term implies that one does or does not do or say something that might cause

pain or injury, out of respect for someone else. So when Zin Min Oo was saying he felt sorry for his mother, he implied that he did not want to put her in a difficult situation, nor to make her 'lose face' in front of her employers. Obviously there could have been a vast array of factors contributing to this decision, or the possibility that the boy's mother did not want him. However, assuming an element of truth, the fact that Zin Min Oo left his mother is illustrative of the power and influence of such cultural and religious norms[25].

Respect

Respect is often seen as an integral part of Asian society (Fukuyama, 1998) and was mentioned frequently by respondents as an important aspect of child-adult relations.

> *.. .there are some parents who are quite strict and you know there is a saying that you have to listen to your parents and normally, if you want to say something back to your parents, they think that it is wrong, you cannot say something back to your parents you cannot contradict them (Thiri)*

It is not only parents and grandparents and other immediate family that command respect; monks and teachers are particularly important:

> *.. .and also there are teachers at school and they have to listen to their teachers, they can never contradict their teachers and sometimes even when the teacher is wrong, I mean that was my experience when I* was *at school, I know that the teacher was wrong but I didn't have a chance to say it (Thiri).*

Another respondent identified how difficult it can be to overcome such deeply entrenched cultural practices:

[25] Following this interview, the World Vision project manager responsible for the street children's program where Zin Min Oo resided undertook to find the boys mother and facilitate their reconciliation.

I think the adults they do not want their children to speak out. The moment you get to school you are told to listen to your teacher and the moment you understand to interact with your parents you are told to listen to them. So that is the culture and it is very difficult to overcome all this (May Ohn).

However, as with the influence of video huts discussed earlier in this chapter, there is an acknowledgement of change as a result of external influences, in particular for children in urban areas:

It's changing because if you look at this generation, the kids are exposed to a lot of things you know like they have MTV and HBO. So I think the kids who have access to TV - kids in the cities [are] different but [for] kids in the rural areas they do not have the awareness (17 year old male respondent).

Such observations could, no doubt, be made in most countries of the world, as increasing globalisation and mass media challenge many aspects of established culture and behavioural norms. However, as suggested at the beginning of this chapter there is an alternative reality; a negative side to the way in which customary practices, such as respect, are being affected, not by MTV or HBO but by the military regime. One example is the way in which giving gifts to teachers, a commonly accepted practice and a sign of respect, has, due to insufficient salaries, necessitated a reliance on such gifts. Now children are penalised if they do not provide their teachers with presents or attend after-hours tuition classes, where they must pay[26]:

Grandmother gave me tuition but in 9th standard the teacher failed me because I did not attend the teacher's own tuition classes. I hate them, I don't care (17 year old female respondent)

[26] Even though the regime has attempted to stop this practice, it remains out of economic necessity.

This practice has gone even further and children attending school and university are able to buy their way through:

> *It is so corrupt, you can buy marks; one for 20,000 kyat (Male 16 year old respondent)*

The narrative realm - conclusion

The way in which the narrative of childhood is constructed in Burma has a great influence over the ability of children to participate. There are factors that both enhance and diminish the possibility of participation. Most importantly, there are both philosophical and practical facets of Buddhism that promote the respect of children. Enlightenment, a key concept, is neither dependent on age nor sex and the concept of free thought encourages children to make their own decisions and to be responsible for them. Simultaneously, there is generally found within Buddhist practice in Burma deference to elders that might lead to the exclusion of children from certain aspects of life. The life of the novices, however, suggests that more important than lines of cultural authority is the importance of mutual respect and the encouragement of 'free thought'. Both can lead to numerous 'participative opportunities' for children. On a more subliminal level, elements of Buddhism such as 'karma' encourage people to accept their current circumstances and remain silent; factors that detract from the development of an open and robust democratic society. To an increasing degree, Buddhism is becoming a tool of the state. As the regime has found ways in which to dominate the Sangha and control outspoken monks, it has sought to influence and control the masses, and, simultaneously to legitimatise their own existence.

Common understandings about childhood, adolescence and adulthood also have an impact on the ability of children to participate in Burmese society. Although some adults consulted had an awareness of the CRC, most did not. Burmese law (as described in Chapter Three) defines a child as being up to the age of 16 and customary law to 13. There is also the conflicting attitude that one remains a child until married and living separately from parents, which could happen at a very young age or, alternatively, not at all. There is a feeling that modern influences, such as video halls, have had an impact on the way children behave, and in their knowledge about what has been seen in the past as an adult domain, particularly around issues of sexuality. At the same time there is acknowledgement that children, especially in more rural areas, tend to marry and have children of their own at a very young age. This indicates an acceptance of children into the adult world and, by inference, expectation that they will participate as an adult.

Findings show that definitions of childhood vary according to a number of pertinent variables. The economic status of the family and the degree of responsibility children take for family income generation is a very strong determinant of when children come to be seen as adult. Closely associated with this is the opportunity to stay in school. School children are, on the whole, dependent upon their family for support, although many school children also work part time. However, it can be concluded that there is some correlation between the degree of economic productivity of a child and the amount of influence over family affairs. For working children, living with a boy or girl friend is not uncommon and 'being married' in this way is another key indicator of adulthood.

Gender was another factor that influenced the degree to which children were treated in a more 'adult-like' fashion. Girls generally took more responsibility in the home, cooking, cleaning, and caring for younger siblings and often being the first to leave school for paid work, to supplement the family income. From this perspective, they were treated more like adults than boys who, in general, experienced a greater degree of freedom. Overall, childhood in Rangoon could not be seen as a uniform entity. The nature of 'childhoods' was dependent upon social, economic and political realities, despite the culturally ascribed narrative of what it means to be a child. This led to a variety of experiences for children, some which involved considerable responsibility for themselves and their family members.

The socio-political realm: maintaining the collective illusion

> *Last year I had to volunteer to dissect a frog on Khin Nyunt's[27] visit to our school. I had never done this before so had to practice for a week before hand. The Education Minister also came and noticed how nervous I was and observed that I had never done this in school before. It was like, we are lying to them and they are lying to us. Everyone knows the situation but no one does anything about it. (Zaw Win, male medical student, age 17)*

In the beginning of this chapter I referred to the collective illusion of Burmese society: an existence that has been created both through the stringencies of military rule, as well as the overt pretence of normality created by a people who understand their oppression but who cannot see any way from which to escape it. There is, therefore, an illusion of calm and peacefulness in Rangoon. To the casual visitor, the city appears like many in the Third World: friendly and welcoming people; busy

[27] Khin Nyunt was then Prime Minister.

and bustling; lots of noise and traffic; and a sense indeed that things are on the move. It is a good disguise.

As Chapter Three argued, there is a deep sense of fear and desperation felt by many people. However, it is no accident that a naïve outsider visiting Burma for a brief holiday would not recognise this and be surprised to discover that the reality is very different to that which they first observe. Indeed, life for many is a carefully constructed façade and there is complicity around maintaining a collective illusion that all is well. During the wet season of 1997 for example, following severe floods north of Rangoon around the Bago area, thousands of villagers left their homes and fled to the high ground surrounding the railway line. The Minister responsible for disasters and relief made a trip to the area by train to survey the damage and the impact on the populace. All those sheltering around the railway line were moved away before he arrived so as not to upset the minister[28]. As a result, he deduced that the situation was not as serious as first reported. Had the minister been told of the real situation and allowed to see the extent of the impact of the flood on the people, his response may well have been different. The point of this story is not to excuse the minister for poor analysis but to point out the way in which people can become complicit in creating a façade that in the end risks becoming self-perpetuating.

The 'socio-political realm' in which children live includes the social, economic and political factors that impact upon the way in which children are treated within a society. This realm takes into account the institutional framework of a country as it

[28] This was learned through personal experience when providing relief to flood victims as part of my work with World Vision Myanmar.

relates to children, particularly the education and the legal systems. It also includes policy factors more broadly such as the impact of law on child work, or economic policies and the way in which they impact upon families. Finally, the socio-political realm refers to the mechanisms through which policy is enacted at a practical day to day level within the community; through the media for example.

The following section will, therefore, provide an analysis of this socio-political factors that affect children and childhood, focussing particularly on the education system and on the economy, as these have perhaps the most significant impact on the lives of children. It will also highlight the way in which government propaganda is used to maintain the illusion of peace and tranquillity, using a number of examples particularly relevant to children, including the issue of child soldiers and the way in which the Myanmar Child Law is made operational.

The media - we have no child soldiers!

The most blatant and constant reminder of this façade is the media, including the television, radio and the daily newspapers (the *Myanmar Ah Lin* and its English translation, the New Light of Myanmar). When I ask people about the media, they joke about the television channels as being green and gold; all you see are generals and pagodas. The New Light of Myanmar is often referred to derogatorily as, 'The Dim Light of Myanmar' (Skidmore, 2004).

Children are represented in a very superficial manner in the public media. On the television they appear in advertisements, usually chubby, smiling and pampered; the antithesis of the experience of most children in the country. In the written press

children are represented through stories about competitions for essay writing or national day poems. They are photographed in their school uniforms, neatly groomed and receiving prizes from a government (usually military) official. On very rare occasions, there may be an article relating to a UNICEF initiative around the CRC. Surprisingly, a recent article in the New Light of Myanmar reported on the inaugural meeting of the Committee for Preventing Recruitment of Child Soldiers (New Light of Myanmar, Saturday January 17th 2004) and it acknowledged the recruitment of child soldiers and the role of a committee established to halt this practice. Another referenced Myanmar's ratification of the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and its protocol on Trafficking in Persons especially Women and Children. Both of these issues were reported to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (Daw May May Yi, 2004). Yet reports such as this are rare and generally ambiguous as can be seen below:

> *The Government of Myanmar is deeply committed to the protection of children including the important issue of child soldiers. Under the Myanmar Defence Services Act of 1974 and War Office Council Instruction 13/73 a person cannot be enlisted into the armed forces unless he has attained the age of 18. Recently, a Committee for the Prevention of the Recruitment of Child Soldiers was established...The Committee at its first meeting on 16th January discussed ways and means to render strict observance of rules, regulations and directives concerning the prevention against recruitment of children for military service (Daw May May Yi, 2004 p 5).*

The report begs the question as to why there is a need for a committee for prevention of recruiting children if children are, by law, not able to enlist in the first place!

The recruitment of child soldiers however, continued as a practice. During the time that the World Vision drop-in-centre in Rangoon has been opened staff have documented well over 200 cases of boys (some as young as 10 years of age) being forcibly picked up or lured by the promise of food and clothes by military recruiters[29]. Lyn Lyn spoke very openly about his experience, when interviewed as a part of this research. He was recruited at around the age of fourteen, after having made contact with the World Vision Myanmar Street Children's program about a year before. According to staff, Lyn Lyn had always been a mischievous but very likeable boy. He tried to enter school and when that did not work attempted numerous small business ventures such as selling ice-water or betel nut. He often spoke about joining the military and one day, friends reported to World Vision staff that he had gone with a recruiter[30].

Picture 9 - Lyn Lyn (left) as a child in the drop in centre and (right) on leave from the military six years later

Lyn Lyn reported that in many ways life in the military had been a positive experience. He had developed a sense of discipline and purpose and a pride in being in the military, 'now people respect me'. He had even saved a little money. He felt that he now belonged somewhere and acknowledged how he struggled to find that same sense of belonging while living on the street. However, there was a

[29] According to project records and staff interviews.
[30] . I interviewed Lyn Lyn three years later when he visited World Vision Myanmar while on leave.

strangely distant expression in his eyes. As I probed further about his experiences in the army Lyn Lyn related how on his first raid on an enemy (Karen) village his platoon has been ordered to torch all the houses and crops and find everyone who remained, all men women and children. They gathered those who were not fortunate enough to escape and Lyn Lyn's commanding officer then pulled a knife from his belt, gave it to the boy and ordered him to slit the throat of one of the villagers. According to Lyn Lyn the villager was not an enemy soldier, he was ordered to do this as a rite of passage, to prove that he had the courage to kill. I asked Lyn Lyn how he felt about this. He said that he had no choice and would do it again if he had to. He spoke of nightmares but he tried to ignore those as much as he could.

World Vision Myanmar staff reported that they tried to find the boys who were picked up by the military and to get them back, sometimes successfully. I personally had this experience, when, on one occasion, along with some of the Burmese staff, we managed to track down a recruiting house and find four children from the drop-in-centre (all under twelve years old) who had been 'picked up' from the street. The house was at the back of a pagoda, just outside of Rangoon, and as we left with the boys in a van, the recruiting sergeant asked if we could give him a lift to his base, a kilometre down the road. He was most appreciative and told us that had he known the boys were 'our children' that they would never have been taken. He smiled and thanked us as he departed. The boys in the back of the bus heaved a noticeable sigh of relief.

Some staff tried to form relationships with recruiters and discovered that a main aim of their recruiting others was to enable their own resignation from the army. If they could bring in five new recruits they would be able to leave themselves. The fact that these recruits might be children seemed to have little bearing and many recruiters felt that the children were better off in the army than on the streets. Others saw no difference between recruiting an eighteen year old to a thirteen year old. One staff member reported speaking to a recruiter about the CRC, informing him that Burma was a signatory and explaining the relevance of this for military service. The recruiter appeared at the drop-in-centre a week later with a boy known to the staff. The boy had told him that he wanted to join the army and the recruiter had wanted to get the permission of the staff before proceeding!

In the end, however, the lives of street children are of little consequence for most people. They can disappear and often no-one cares or often even knows. Both children interviewed as a part of this research, as well as in documented cases that have been published elsewhere (for example Heppner, 2002), spoke of the arbitrary nature of conscription:

> *...I was walking in the market and someone grabbed me.*
> *... They asked me to come and have team with them; I was hungry so I did.*
> *...I was just playing in the street and they took me away.*

It is not uncommon for many children not to know their birth date and they reported being threatened, prior to medical examinations for recruitment, to give a false age. Doctors pretend they are older, recruiters do the same and the children have little choice. It is children from poor communities and particularly children who are

obviously living on the street who seem most at risk. Often recruiters give them a choice, 'come with us or we will send you to a detention centre', was the way in which a number of street children said they were approached. Although World Vision Myanmar staff reported a decline in the incidence of recruitment following a Human Rights Watch report on the issue (Heppner, 2002) in 2002, the practice, according to personal communication with the ILO liaison officer in Burma, continues.

In most instances, the regime categorically denies the use of children in the army:

> *The conspirators are framing the Tatmadaw*[31] *for the alleged forced recruitment of juvenile soldiers for the front lines, and trying to raise the matter at the UN for the global body to take action against Myanmar. Thus, the committee will have to pay attention to refuting the matter. Concerning the accusations of child soldiers, the Secretary-1 said that the Tatmadaw is an armed force systematically formed according to laws, bylaws, rules and directives, and also an institution with fine traditions. In accord with its rules and regulations, the Tatmadaw is enlisting only the persons who have reached the age of 18 and who meet the required standards, and they are the steadfast rules and regulations strictly adhered by the Tatmadaw. In 2004, the Tatmadaw invited the UNICEF resident representative to study the recruitment rules, orders and directives for Defence Services (Army) Recruiting Units in Rangoon and Mandalay and also to visit the recruits (New Light of Myanmar, 2005).*

The illusion is maintained, Myanmar has no child soldiers.

[31] The Tatmadaw is the Armed Forces.

Educational 'excellence'

Education is seen around the world as a vital part of a child's growth and development. Some time ago, the United Nations acknowledged the importance of universal access to basic education, pledging an 80% completion rate of primary school (UNICEF, 1990 p 12). In Burma, most recent estimates of the situation fail to live up to this commitment:

> *Nearly half the school-age children never enrol, and only around 30 per cent complete five years of primary education (International Crisis Group, 2006 p 2)*

Older parents and grandparents who were interviewed spoke of the high standards of the education system when they were at school during the socialist era and they reflected on the declining standards of the present day. A focus group discussion with 17 year old students from one of the medical faculties in Rangoon[32] elicited the following:

> *I thought that medical school would be not so bad but it turned out to be complete rubbish so I dropped out...Because it was under-resourced and there was bad teaching. Also I had to attend tuition. Mother had forced me to go initially but after 6 months let me leave (Nilar, 17 year old female medical student).*
>
> *My situation is similar. There were no medical staff in the first year just generalists from the other faculties and they treated us like school students, not like we were at university. [That meant] parrot learning, it is very popular here and the only way to get good marks (May Lay, 16 year old female medical student).*
>
> *Class sizes at the medical school were up to 300 in each class. Sometimes the microphones did not work so you could not even hear*

[32] Many students begin university studies at the age of 16 or 17 as high school extends only to 10th standard.

> *the lecturer. Sometimes the roof leaked. Everyone had to write the same thing, we didn't have to learn, just remember (Zaw Win, 17 year old male medical student).*

Like many aspects of life for children, education has become politicised. Following the pro-democracy uprisings in 1988, the government embarked on a policy of moving universities outside the central Rangoon area. The main universities in the middle of town were closed down. In the media, the government proudly reports the number of new universities that it has established. Students attend as they have little else to do and, therefore, contribute to a semblance of normality, often ignorant of the fact that life elsewhere might be different:

> *...most other students don't know things in the outside world are different. Most people have limited information and are not interested; they don't want to be open to the outside world. To them scores in exams is the most important thing. Good marks mean good status and that the parents can brag about their children (Thidar, 17 year old female medical student).*

As with many countries, medical students in Burma are the elite and only those students with exceptional marks are selected for entry into medical school. By comparison to other disciplines of study, medical students seem well serviced by the state education system. Others do not fare so well. For example, Peter, a young 17 year old law student at the distance university, reported that he only needed to attend university twice or maybe three times a year. Once to pick up the questions and answers for the examinations, the second time, to sit the exam and a third time, if he failed the exam (not remembering the answers verbatim as was the requirement) to give a present to the examiner to enable his mark to be

‘reconsidered’. Universities are open, teachers are there, students enrol, and the illusion is maintained.

Students in primary and secondary school are treated in a similar fashion, although there are of course many teachers wanting to actually pass on some learning to their students but who find themselves compromised by a system that denies them adequate pay. Phaung Daw Oo Monastic Education School, discussed earlier, is one example of a school and teachers who have been able to thrive, despite the status quo. Even though public education is ostensibly free, students need to pay a range of fees; each year a levy is taken - for books, for computers (despite not having electricity), for furniture and more. Many cannot afford this, as was the case with most parents interviewed in Hlaingtharyar.

Parents, who have the resources, pay large sums of money to get children into government schools that have a good reputation. This was the case with a number of middle class parents interviewed. However many wealthy parents have given up any hope in the public system and enrol their children in the growing number of private colleges that have appeared over the past seven or eight years.

Legally, only government schools can be registered, so these private colleges for the wealthy register as business or language training centres. The largest, ILBC (International Language and Business Centre) has three campuses, a student body of well over 1,500 and a number of foreign teachers. It advertises quite openly on national television. Two years ago, there was an attempt by some in the regime to close the college down, as it was operating contrary to laws that allowed only for

the state and monastic system to open schools. However, the folly of such a move was soon realised, as many of the children at the school were sons and daughters of the military or high ranking public servants. Those who can afford to, send their children overseas to Thailand, Singapore or Malaysia, some even further afield, although this generally happens once children have completed their high school years (10th Standard).

Not surprisingly, there is a sense of despondency about the education system:

> *Even medical qualifications are not recognised overseas, before education was a very high standard...even kindergarten is overcrowded, there are 100 kids in each class. My younger brother is in the 6th Standard and has not had his book corrected once as the teacher simply does not have the time with so many children in the class...the pass rate in 10th standard last year was 93%, after independence it was between three & ten percent. (Zaw Win)*

Nilar and Zaw Win related that everyone passes now and that there is a feeling that even once accepted international principles around medical practice have been commandeered by the government, to meet its own purpose,

> *The government has changed the Hippocratic Oath. It should be that doctors treat anyone who is sick or injured but they say they have discovered an ancient Myanmar Hippocratic Oath that says they should not treat people who are 'bad' (Nilar).*

For students and young people who question the system, there is little that can be done. May Lay remarked that she simply ignores it, that no one dares to question the system. Even her friends, she says, think she is too interested in foreign things

so she does not discuss her ideas with anyone, anymore, apart from a very small number who are like-minded:

> *Government officials are uneducated and do not value education, my uncle was an economist and was fired because he disagreed with them...they [the government] do not think, they only want people who agree with them so they can maintain power (May Lay).*

The impact of educational policy on children and young people is immense. 'Lost generation' is a common phrase used to describe the young today. However, many who have lost their faith in the education system still see educated children as important. While most parents interviewed in Hlaingtharyar said that they felt education was more important than having a trade skill, they noted the limitations of the present situation. A number agreed that if children had a trade they would be able to stand on their own in the future.

Partly in order to enhance their school education, but primarily because they have little choice, most children attend tuition. This is run after school hours by teachers, who rely on the tuition fees to supplement their meagre wages (along with regular 'gifts' from students). Some years ago this practice was made illegal but teachers have no other choice and officials turn a blind eye. Children who do not go to tuition risk losing favour with their teachers, something that inevitably affects their marks:

> *Those who can't afford tuition are left out in the rain (Thidar).*

Despite the obvious contradiction with the education system, pressure is put on to children to do well, both from parents as well as from other family members. There is much honour or, conversely, loss of face, dependent on a child's graduation marks:

> *Family honour is very important, it is important to do well in exams, particularly to get into medicine, otherwise the whole family will see you as a failure (Thidar).*

Children seem to cope in different ways with the education system. Many drop out, particularly when poverty is an added factor. Others accept the state of the education system as normal, never having experienced anything different. For many students, however, the rules become too overbearing:

> So *many rules are made but everyone breaks them. There is a culture of rule breaking. Some university students are starting to rebel and do things against the rules like wear their hair long and wear earrings (boys). Children are rebelling but in the wrong way. The rules are so detailed. Even the way you wear your bag should be over the shoulder, not across. Teachers don't care anymore as they have to survive themselves. If they discipline children, then the kids won't attend their tuition classes so they keep silent...(Zaw Win)*

Questioning any rules or part of the system is dangerous; it means that someone might be thinking. Partly this is culturally ascribed; Zaw Win noted that in the tenets of Buddhism, children are brought up to respect their elders, particularly teachers:

> *But they change the meaning to say that we can't question them*

With the (relative) liberalisation of the economy that took place in 1992 and the limited introduction of computers and foreign media (particularly films) both children

and adults are falling under the influence of new thoughts and ideas. But what they learn is often tinged with a Hollywood reality,

> *Parents see American movies showing the extremes of behaviour and then treat their children that way...there is no limit on the age kids can smoke and drink and often families encourage this...rules are there but they are not enforced (May Lay).*

Network gaming of war simulation games (such as 'Counter Strike') has become increasingly popular, particularly amongst boys. Game parlours are often owned by the military and they are encouraged, according to May Lay and Zaw Win, to keep young people distracted from politics. Tournaments are held and boys form clans in schools around the games, which sometimes result in real violence between opposing sides. Such 'gang warfare' conducted by children of the rich has, until a recent clamp down on such activity, been a common occurrence in the streets of Rangoon. Hapless police officers called to restore law and order generally end up simply diverting traffic around the clash, unable to arrest children of the military (as was observed by one foreign acquaintance from his balcony window and, on another occasion, by myself, one night while driving past the Kan Daw Gyi Lake Hotel in Rangoon).

Another function of the education system has been as a means of control over ethnic minority states, where all instruction is conducted in Burmese and ethnic languages are not permitted for instruction. Schools are an avenue for recruitment to the government sponsored mass organisations, notably the USDA. Children must join and those who become active receive incentives and rewards, sometimes in the form of better grades. Through such organisation and the constant propagandising in the history books and large billboards that adorn the major

roadways, children from a young age, are taught to believe in the might and achievements of the military. For many boys, as in other societies, the idea of becoming a soldier holds a certain mystique and a sense of romantic adventure. The vast majority of boys coming to the World Vision street children drop-in-centre in Rangoon, despite often being treated badly by the military, said they wanted to join the army when they grew up.

This is illustrative of the state of education in Burma; an intricate net of subtle power relations, teacher, to child, to parent. It is a system that thrives on corruption, not of seemingly grand proportions but something more subtle and banal that seeps in to pervert the cultural values of respect and honour upon which Burmese society has been built, a system in which both exploiters and the exploited play their role in preserving. Underlying this is ignorance or, more accurately, pretence, that nothing is wrong. For once fault is recognised, one is forced to search for its origin which in this case, ends with the military regime and challenging this would be at best futile and at worst deadly.

Economic mismanagement

Another element of the collective illusion of contemporary Burma relates to the economy. From a national to a local level, the economy has been poorly managed and, as a result, has a direct impact on children. This is particularly apparent when families decide whether or not they have sufficient resources to send children to school. The following table (Table 2 from Turnell, 2006) records annual GDP growth, according to the Central Statistics Office of Myanmar. However, as Turnell argues, these figures are little more than fiction. The country suffers from hyper inflation; it has no viable banking system (the system that was growing collapsed in

2003); and much of the formal economic activity of the country is controlled by the ruling military elite, as is much of the informal activity that relates to illegal trade in timber and drugs.

Claimed Annual GDP Growth Rates (% p.a.), 1999-2004				
1999	2000	2001	2002 2003	2004
10.9	13.7	11.3	10.0 10.6	10.0

Table 4 - Claimed Annual GDP Growth Rates 1994-2004

The UNDP indicators rank Burma as 148 out of 176 countries (Hável and Tutu, 2005). Yet Burmese newspapers and government statistics would have us believe a very different picture, one of prosperity and growth.

Nowhere is the contradiction between truth and reality more palpable than in the many satellite townships of Rangoon and Mandalay. Data collected for this research (both secondary and empirical) looked at the economic activity of poor families in one such township, named Hlaingtharyar, just outside Rangoon. This township has been the centre of much INGO attention over the past 14 years. Two INGOs, Médecins San Frontières (Holland) and World Vision have operated community based programs there since 1992. Initially both focussed on health and HIV. World Vision now has broader based community development initiatives (including micro-finance programs) and AZG has broadened its health focus to include public health approaches to HIV and AIDS. Local groups such as the YWCA and the YMCA also have community development programs in this township along with a number of other groups. In some respects, Hlaingtharyar

has benefited far more that other comparable townships around Rangoon but despite this, poverty indicators show distressing conditions.

Hlaingtharyar has a population of around 200,000 people living in an estimated 35,000 households. There is an industrial zone in the south of the township comprising numerous factories. According to World Vision data approximately 10 - 15% of the population is migratory (Clawson and Keller, 1998). Hlaingtharyar is a resettlement town, first populated by Rangoon residents, whose homes were destroyed by fire in 1986 and then, in 1989, by slum dwellers who were cleared from their home in central Rangoon, following the pro-democracy uprisings. In the same way that universities have been constructed away from the city centre, Hlaingtharyar is across a river, with bridge access controlled by armed guards, ensuring its easy isolation, should there be any sign of civil unrest. Many Hlaingtharyar residents commute to the city each day for work, despite the travel time and cost, which can substantially eat into the meagre earnings of a daily wage earner. Infrastructure in Hlaingtharyar is extremely limited, with few sealed roads, limited access to health and education facilities, lack of drainage and extremely poor communication networks. Flooding in the wet season is a constant problem and easily contained public health problems such as diarrhoea, acute respiratory illness and febrile illness are common, particularly affecting children (Clawson and Keller, 1998). Secondary data collected for this thesis from World Vision project records of 217 households in Ward 12 of Hlaingtharyar elicited the following demographic information:

Household Data Ward 12 Hlaingtharyar Township		
Household Type	Number	Percent

Both parents + children only	150	69.1%
Both parents + children + other relatives	41	18.9%
Single mother and children	14	6.4%
Single father and children	3	1.4%
Single mother and children + other relatives	6	2.8%
Single father and children + other relatives	0	0%
Other	3	1.4%
Total	217	100%

Table 5 - World Vision Myanmar Household Data of Ward 12 Hlaingtharyar Township

There was an average family size of just under six people per household. The ward was predominantly Buddhist and Burman, with only a few representatives from other ethnicities. Common forms of employment and daily income are captured in Table 5. Although this data is some years old now, wage versus cost of living rises have resulted in a depreciation of the value of the income of most residents. In 2003 the consumer prices inflation rate was estimated to be 49.7%, making it the second highest in the world out of 176 countries (Havel and Tutu, 2005). Even though work is available for people in Hlaingtharyar, much is on a daily basis and within a poorly regulated workplace. The following table illustrates the main forms of employment for people in one of the Hlaingtharyar wards:

Common forms of labour				
Type of Work	Family	Men	Women	Children
Selling alcohol	500+			
Tea shop	800			
Vendor (mostly women and children		200-300	200-300	50-100
Construction worker		200	125	80-100
Government worker		100	100	
Trishaw driver		100-800		
Laundry			50-150	
Painter	400	170-250		180

Factory worker		200	200	
Farm help		100-150	80-100	60(girls) 75(boys)
Ditch digger		150-200	120-150	120

Table 6 - Common Forms of Employment and Daily Income, Ward 12 Hlaingtharyar (extracted from World Vision Myanmar Project Records)

Daily income and low paying jobs mean that children must work. World Vision Myanmar estimated that an average family or three children in Hlaingtharyar required at least 30,000 Kyat a month to meet their basic minimum needs of food and housing (World Vision Myanmar, 1999).

This data was reinforced by figures gathered for school attendance which was considerably lower that UNICEF estimates for the country (as discussed in Chapter Three). World Vision estimates (in Table 6 below) showed the following school attendance in Hlaingtharyar Ward Twelve (Clawson and Keller, 1998).

Age	In School (%)	% that are girls	Out of School (%)	% that are girls
5-7	53	69.8	47	38.3
8-10	30	70	70	38.6
11-13	17	58.8	83	36.1
14-16	16	62.5	84	35.7
17-18	12	75	88	34.1
18+	6	66	94	28.7

Table 7 - Estimation of School Attendance in Hlaingtharyar Ward 12

According to these statistics, nearly half of the children in the community do not even begin school and that by the age of 14, only 12% of children remain enrolled. Perhaps the only encouraging aspect to these data is that there are a comparatively higher number of girls in school than boys. This may be attributable to the earning capacity of boys, as illustrated in Table 5.

Empirical data collected for this research focussed on two groups of children, 8 to 12 year olds and thirteen to eighteen year olds. Research conducted with both groups consisted of participatory activities which aimed to understand children's daily activities and their participation in family and community.

Of the first group (10 to 13 year olds), six had never attended school and were illiterate, two had dropped out from kindergarten (the first school year), one had dropped out during the first standard (the second year of school) and four had remained in school until the third standard (the fourth year of school). One of the respondents noted that, even though she had attended school until the third standard, she could still not even read a word. All children worked around the home to support their family and, despite not being in school, had full and demanding days. Beginning at 3.00 a.m. on alternate days, children would queue for government subsidised food, which most did not enjoy, although some found it a good time for socialising with friends. Adult (parent) respondents from the same community indicated that this was a job that even younger children (seven years old) had to undertake and that the queue could take anywhere up to four hours. Other jobs consisted of cooking the rice for meals, cleaning the house and, predominantly, looking after younger siblings.

Caring for younger siblings was particularly demanding and time consuming and children noted, humorously, that they had developed a number of techniques for doing this:

When the baby cries, first we 'kyaw de' buy snacks, put the baby into bed and last of ail, smack them (10 year old female participant from Hlaingtharyar).

Apart from these jobs, younger children usually found some time to play outside on the streets. They observed that under the house was too muddy (houses are generally build on raised platforms above the ground, due to constant flooding and poor drainage). Games involved football for the boys and toe-se-toe (a traditional game) for the girls. They noted that video halls were an alternative when they did not want to play. Children calculated that they had about two hours each day when they were able to have their own time. In general, life for younger children in Hlaingtharyar involved a relatively high level of responsibility, particularly in the care of younger siblings. Many youngsters were withdrawn from school in order to allow parents or elder siblings to work, thus playing their role in the economic survival of the family. These children had a negligible role in decision-making in the family, apart from their direct responsibilities, i.e. how to look after and discipline a younger brother or sister.

On the whole parents acknowledged a great deal of love and concern for their children and were eager to see them in school where they could learn and create opportunities for the future. Economic circumstances were cited as the main reason for not being able to do this. Parents delighted in the children and were very inclusive - many accompanied them to focus group discussions and were allowed to sit and listen or play in the background. Some were engaged in discussion around issues as the focus group proceeded. Parents in Hlaingtharyar, unlike some of the middle class and better educated parents interviewed did not relate their (often dire) circumstances to regime policies (or lack of). Survival from

one day to the next was the highest priority and there was little time or energy to think and reflect on why they were in their present situation. Data collection activities with older children (thirteen to seventeen year olds) elicited far more information than their younger counterparts. They spent on average just under three hours a day on household chores. They did not report finding this onerous although most would have liked more time for recreation. All but two who took part in focus group discussions could be considered 'working children', however, for a number, work consisted of training in World Vision community centres for sewing or bicycle repair (during which children were paid for piece work or repairs made while being taught skills). The graph below (Figure 11) provides a number of insights into their daily lives:

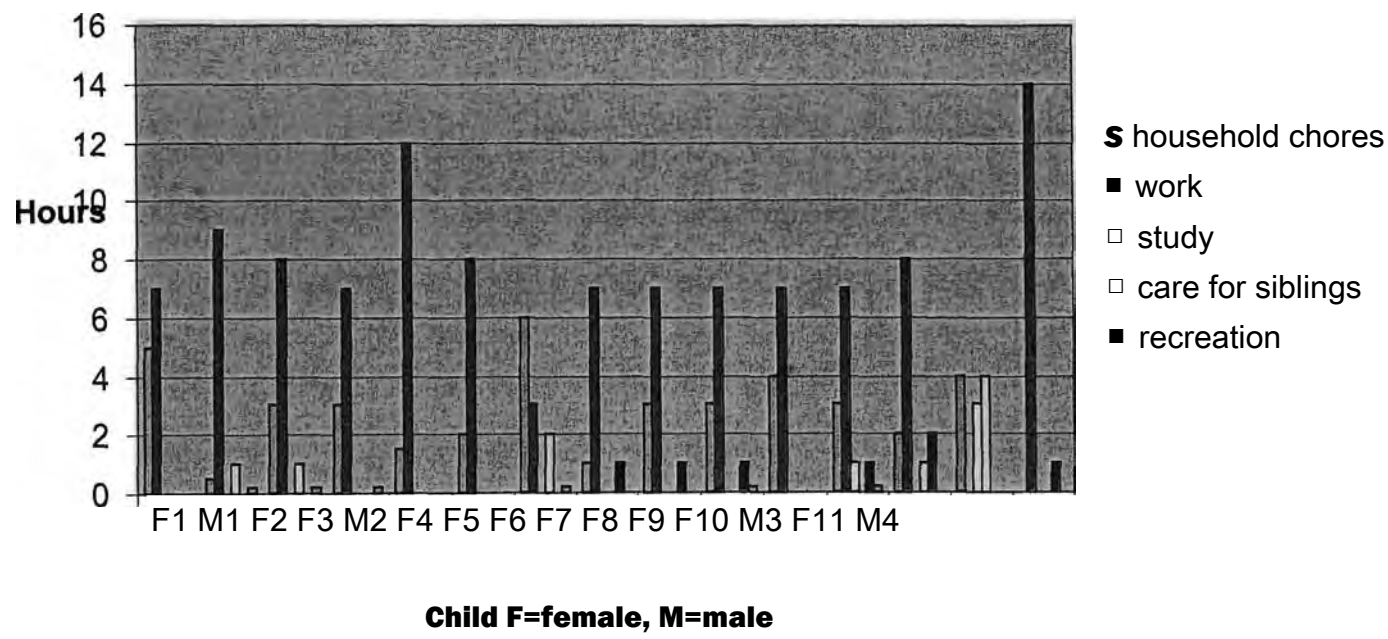


Figure 11 - Activities of Teenage Children in Hlaingtharyar

All children had long days that included a multitude of tasks. Household chores included preparing food, washing dishes, collecting firewood, queuing for oil rations,

looking after animals, cleaning and odd jobs. Girls played a greater role in the home, although boys interviewed tended to work longer hours. M4 worked fourteen hour days, contributing his pay to the family, but did nothing to help with family chores.

Most children played a variety of roles requiring a diverse set of skills including those related to work, to cooking, to caring for younger siblings and elderly relatives. Fewer than half the children had any time for recreation. While only six of the 15 children spent time praying, all said that they thought religious values were important. All children contributed part or whole of their wage to the family.

The majority of children admitted that they would prefer to be at school, although they articulated a certain conflict here, feeling also a strong responsibility to look after their families:

> *I am happy to work...I don't want to go to school. If I have a skill, I can support my mother (14 year old boy, Hlaingtharyar).*
>
> *If you don't have education, you don't have dignity. If you can't read, then people will speak badly of you (16 year old girl, Hlaingtharyar).*
>
> *Ah, if I have education, I can just sit and eat! (15 year old boy construction worker, Hlaingtharyar)*

Attitudes of these children are represented in other studies as discussed earlier in this Chapter (for example UNICEF Myanmar, 1996, Ar Thit Consultancy Group, 2002), and they reflect a deep rooted sense of responsibility towards family, along with a certain sense of autonomy and pride in the ability to work and protect or look after their family. Parents of the children (fourteen interviewed as part of the data

collection) felt, on the whole, that education was valuable and would prefer their children to be at school although a number (five) said that they preferred their children to have professional (working) skills, as they would be able to stand on their own feet. All parents agreed that the education system was corrupt and that it relied upon having money to pass exams.

Children's work, as indicated in Table 5, is often in similar professions to their parents, generally for a lower wage than men, though not for women. Work is generally on a casual basis and is dependent on availability and seasonal change, resulting in a child needing to work in a number of different jobs over the course of a year. Vending and construction work were considered the two most common jobs for children.

Khin Htwe Yi (F16 yr)
6 am - get up, wash
7 am - cook rice and curry, wash dishes, clean house, wash clothes, fetch water, bath, have breakfast, go to work
9 am - start work
12-1 pm-lunch
1 pm - work
5 pm - clean up work place, go home, cook rice, wash dishes, go to market, cook curry
7 pm - have dinner
9.30 - go to bed

Po Thada (M 16 yr)
5.30 am - get up, wash, fold bedding, breakfast
6.30 am - go to work
12-1pm-lunch break
1 pm - work
7 pm - close shop, change clothes, returns home
8.30 - arrive home, change, sometimes watch video at video shop then go to bed

Figure 12 Examples of Child's Working Day

This was reinforced by World Vision statistical information about Hlaingtharyar citing that vending accounted for 30% and 50% of child workers in the township (Clawson and Keller, 1998). Children did not consider their household chores to be work despite the fact that it often took up a good deal of time as illustrated in the daily activity outline of Khin Htwe Yi in Figure 13 above. Rather work around the home was seen as familial responsibility.

Focus group discussions with parents indicated an acceptance of the reality of work for children. Although most parents saw the value of education, they were all pragmatic in their acceptance of the economic reality that, if they did not work, they would starve.

A majority of the older children had taken part in community works tasks on a regular basis. The practice of community labour in Burma has been much criticised and in June 2000, the International Labour Organisation voted to invoke Article 33 of the ILO Constitution for the first time in its history, calling on the Regime to take concrete steps towards the elimination of forced labour practices (International Labour Organisation, 14 June 2000). Older children in Hlaingtharyar reported numerous instances of assisting with community work projects, that included road building and ditch digging.

The socio-political realm conclusions

While it is not possible to generalise these findings, Hlaingtharyar is not unlike other urban townships around Rangoon and Mandalay. In many ways it is better resourced, as a result of the long term INGO interest in the area. It is also a hub for industry and transport and, therefore, has seen the development of factories that provide employment for many. The economic reality for children in Hlaingtharyar enables us to draw certain conclusions about childhood and aspects of participation.

Firstly, children take responsibility from an early age but they often have little choice in this. The need to work is not always dictated by parental demands but

sometimes by economic necessity that children themselves acknowledge and respond to. Children's income is generally given to parents apart from a small amount of pocket money. If children are unable to make money, punishment could ensue. A working child's income could be equal to that of parents and in some cases the working child is the sole bread winner for the family. Working children are seen as an economic necessity and, while not all children within the same family need to work, using scarce resources to send children to school is often seen as too much of a burden and parents would rather that their children to be fed than be in school. The tendency towards sending children to work is reinforced by the lack of trust in the government schooling system. Education, therefore, is not always seen as a viable, option although children and adults alike see its benefit.

Children are included in community work tasks, such as road and ditch digging and, in this way, are seen as on a par with adults. Children's lower status in the family makes it more likely for them to be nominated as the family conscript for community work. Some children felt proud to be able to contribute to the community through these jobs, while others did the minimum of what was required. In terms of paid work, the value of children and women's work was more or less the same.

Women are usually seen as being responsible for the family, including making sure that children go off to work each day and ensuring that they have something to eat when they return. Fathers interviewed were not nearly as active in getting their children out to work, *I don't force them to work, they do it on their own*...said one father from Hlaingtharyar.

The personal realm

Another aspect to be taken into account, when considering the factors that affect the way in which children participate within a family and a community, are those factors relating to the child's own 'agency'. Agency can be expressed in an overt sense through children's own ability to make decisions and act upon them. It can also be expressed in a more subliminal sense through 'representational' contributions that children make. That is through what they contribute ontologically to the family and community, by virtue of the fact that they are children.

Predominant themes arose in the course of data collection, including the responsibility children take either by choice or circumstance, contributions children make and the reason for this, the social capital that children build up amongst peers as well as adult community members and the types of decisions children make and the underlying reasons. Each of these themes will be discussed below, to develop a more complete understanding of the way in which a child's agency impacts upon their opportunity for participation within Burmese society.

Taking responsibility

> *I take care of my family because my brothers are overseas and I have to look after grandmother and father (who is an alcoholic). Mother has to work so I have to do it all myself. At first I hated my brothers because they were not there to help. Now it is not so bad. Taking responsibility makes me emotionally stronger. (May Lay, 17 year old female respondent)*

The comment above, made by a girl from a relatively privileged family in Rangoon is echoed by many of her peers in poor urban slums (and even those from rural

areas) interviewed as a part of this study. Children tend to have a great sense of responsibility, no matter what their economic or social status. Responsibility is shown, both through children 'doing things', that support the family and through the way in which they adhere to familial and societal expectations.

The young people interviewed in the wealthy urban demographic made a significant contribution to the life of their families. For example, while obviously in the upper age range of 'childhood' (as defined by the CRC), May Lay had, at least for the time being, given up the opportunity to travel overseas to study in order to look after the family. Caring for a family in Rangoon requires a high degree of initiative and innovation. As May Lay described, this role consisted of caring for grandparents, doing the household chores and looking after the running of the house. In Burma this is not a simple task, requiring dealing with the local authorities, contracting trades people, paying bills (no easy task at times in Burma), managing staff (a maid or gardener for example) and much more.

Young people had mixed feelings about too much responsibility but ultimately felt it important, not only for what they could do for others but for what it meant for their own development:

> *Taking responsibility is very important as it makes us more mature.*
> *But sometimes we feel frustrated (Thidar)*

There is often little choice but to contribute; as power based hierarchies within Burmese familial traditions require children to respect the wishes of parents and care for their parents and grandparents. Nilar, the only child that remains at home out of three siblings, said that she takes all the responsibility for her parents. Thidar

said that she is so used to living up to parental expectations that sometimes she feels like ‘messing up’ just to see what would happen.

Some children are more assertive of their own ambitions as is illustrated in the story (Figure 14 below) from Tin Ma Myint, an eleven year old girl who arrived at the World Vision drop-in-centre from Mandalay with her younger four year old brother. She had been registered at the centre in Mandalay prior to her journey south so knew of the work of World Vision and had the wherewithal to find the Rangoon centre. While such independence and self-will would be seen as uncharacteristic of Burmese children, it is by no means unusual and was a common aspect of all groups of children involved in this study. Her story illustrates a number of salient points. Firstly, the responsibilities that she is required by her parents to take might, by some standards, seem beyond the capabilities of an eleven year old girl: working from the age of five and caring for siblings and a household. The choice she makes to escape from this situation and the fact that she takes her three year old brother with her is, if anything, more astounding.

I lived in a makeshift house in Mandalay with my parents and three siblings. Before I was 51 had to sell ice water. One day, my sister was hit by a car. I was beaten because of this. Three months after the accident I climbed up to the top of Mandalay hill and fell from a ladder. I spent 20 days in the hospital. My brother got a fever and my mother had no money so I had to go and beg when I was young. My mother was sick too but my father was well and did not do any work. He made me go out and beg. I went to school until 3rd standard but failed my exam so I dropped out. In the house I have 6 siblings and I had to cook, wash and beg in the daytime. Sometimes I went to the pagoda to sell flowers and mangoes. I love my father but not my mother because she beats me. I came to Rangoon (but did not tell my parents) because I did not like to beg. My grandmother lives in Rangoon but I cannot remember where. I brought my little brother with me because I don't like him to beg either. The guard let us jump the train in Mandalay. He asked us why we were going to Rangoon and took pity on us. When the conductor came he asked what we would do in Rangoon. I told him that we would work. He said that they could only look after us until we arrived In Rangoon. When we arrived we found the LPK centre. If I go back home I want to take some money and a present for my family.

Figure 13 - Tin Ma Myint's story of her trip from Mandalay to Rangoon

Whether or not children should be put in the position of having to make such decisions is one thing but that an eleven year old can negotiate free passage on a train, travel almost 1000 kilometres and find her way to a safe haven illustrates considerable ingenuity and courage. Similar sentiments are detailed in the brief life line drawn by Maung Htein Lin, a 12 year old boy at the World Vision Myanmar drop-in-centre:

"When I was *young I lived with my mother. In the end she dies. When I was ten my sister asked me to sell watermelon. When I was 121 left home. At the end, when I got on to the street, I got to the Youth Training Centre. After that I ran away. After that I arrived at the World Vision Centre. Now I have become a good boy. Now I am attending school. I am in second standard. When I am older I want to do* a *singer or the leader of a band. If there are many mistakes, please forgive me." ((Maung Htein Un, 12 year old male respondent).*

Taking responsibility is a vital aspect of participation. In a variety of ways as illustrated above, many Burmese children either take or have responsibility thrust upon them. What was not as clear through data was the reciprocal nature of this, i.e. the manner in which adults allowed children who took responsibility greater freedom and opportunity to take part in decision-making processes in the home.

Contributing

Popular (western) understandings of childhood encourage the belief that children, particularly teenagers, are so overwhelmed with hormonal change and a fascination with the self that notions of contributing for a greater good are most unlikely (see for

example, Parry, 2005). Yet all groups of children taking part in this study expressed great pride in being able to contribute to their families, to their communities and, in the case of street children living away from home that were consulted, to the centre in which they were living.

For the novices at Thoun Htat Kyaung, the feeling of contributing was not something that originated simply from their belonging to the monastery. Most of the novices noted that from a very young age (some as young as three years old), that they were required to work on the farm or sell merchandise to contribute to the family economy. Maung Soe Oo, for example, recalls working in the fields with his mother from the age of four and Saing Kham Lu doing the same from six years of age (see Picture 9). All of the novices noted that their family life involved helping in some kind of work from a very young age, often taking responsibility for siblings. The novices felt happy that they could do this; proud to be able to contribute to the family. This was common in Hlaingtharyar as well, with all but one child acknowledging their time spent in contributing to family chores, as outlined in the graph in Figure 10. Children who had experienced a rural upbringing were particularly aware of the need to contribute to the family. Tin Myo (picture 6 below), a 12 year old boy who eventually ended up at the World Vision Myanmar Street Children's centre related his story:

My father didn't do anything much, he was a drunkard. My mother worked on a paddy farm. I used to help my mother in the paddy fields. One day my mother became sick and so she stopped working so when I was *10 I had to keep working to buy medicines for her. I got a job with a farmer looking after his cows for 7000kyat a month and 5 pyi of rice. He also gave me food and accommodation to work for him. I had responsibility for 32 cows. I had to take them out to the fields every morning after breakfast. At 11am I would bring them back. I would have to cut grass up and make feed for the cows and feed them. After that I would have my own lunch at about midday then I would take them out to the fields again until 4pm when I would bring them back and put them in their pens.. .1 was the youngest worker on the farm (10 years old). I gave my first salary to my mother. During the second month, a woman who worked on the farm came to tell me that my mother had died...After that the owner of the farm let me bring my little sister (two years younger) to live with me on the farm. I took her out to look after the cows too. Now she is living with my aunt in the village.*

Picture 10 Tin Myo in the Drop-in-Centre

Tin Myo's life bears similarities to many of his peers. Leaving school early to work for the family, as observed previously, is the reality for a large number of children in Burma. The early independence and responsibility of Tin Myo's life - watching cattle, dealing with employers, caring for his sick mother, is not uncommon. The way in which Tin Myo became carer for a younger sibling is unusual, although not exceptional in Burma. Eventually, once his

aunt was caring for his sister, Tin Myo travelled with his father to Mandalay to find work. Tin Myo's father deserted him in Mandalay at the train station. The boy took up with other children living around the station, eventually finding his way to the World Vision Myanmar street children's centre. Like many of the children who found their way to this shelter, Tin Myo had finally exhausted his social safety nets and networks. When I spoke to Tin Myo he was recovering from being hit by a train. After a month in hospital and losing an arm, most of his other hand and one foot, he was bouncing around with irrepressible energy. It Is hard to be totally objective about a lived experience such as this. Life Is indeed harsh for many young children in Burma.

Children in Hlaingtharyar, as illustrated in the previous section, were all active and, in some cases, were the primary economic contributors to their families. Children's contributions were not just observed in families from poor socio-economic backgrounds. Children from middle class families all noted significant input into the family, in terms of caring for siblings and/or grandparents and in managing the household.

Children also contributed in a representational sense. Buddhist children, particularly boys, played an important role in gaining merit for their parents when they become novices and monks. Nwe Lwin Htwe, quoted previously, was keen for her two daughters to become nuns. Through participating in religious customs and by achieving in school, children contribute greatly to their parents' and community's sense of place in the world.

There can be a fine line between a reasonable contribution that benefits the child and the family, and exploitation. Certainly, most of the street children who took part in this research reported a degree of exploitation by their parents:

> *When I was about 5 I went to school (up to the 5th standard) but I had a lot of difficulty. I had no books, no slippers, only three exercise books a year. In the morning I had to sell things at the market then prepare things for school. Sometimes I had no lunch to take with me.*
>
> *From the time I was young, my father took another wife and would not give us any money but gave us a lot of trouble. The two families lived together in a big house, my grandmother's house, but father did not look after the house. When mother was not around, he would beat me and mother would not do anything to help me. I don't know why I can't understand. Then there were four children, now there are eight. My father taught me how to come to the market and collect fish and vegetables which I did while he* was *selling beetle. One day I was too tired and fell asleep and al the vegetables I had were stolen. He beat me and mother did not do anything. She just took sides with my father. (Aye Myat Thu, 15 year old girl living at World Vision Myanmar Street Children's Program).*

There were other stories children told about spending day after day picking up old cans and bottles for recycling to make money for the family, only to see their parents (usually fathers) buy alcohol and to drink it away. On the whole, however, even the more disadvantaged street children intimated that they were proud to be able to support their families; both through economic as well as 'in kind' contributions, as illustrated in the sentiment expressed by Aye Aye, a 14 year old girl from Hlaingtharyar:

> *I would like to do another job like my mother who sells old clothes. I would like to learn and work with my mother.*

Decision-making

The opportunity to make decisions is indicative of a recognised ability and a social space in which one's perspective is valued. The greater the opportunity for children to be involved in making decisions around issues that affect them, the more meaningful their participation is likely to be. The kinds of decisions children are encouraged and able to make, therefore, give particular insight into cultural and socio-political boundaries of participation.

Data was collected from both adults and children about the types of decisions that children should and should not be able to make and at what age. It suggested that while there was a perception about what was appropriate that the reality was often quite different. Thiha (32 year old father of a ten year old daughter) noted the importance of children deciding upon their own religious convictions (being a Christian he referred here to baptism) around the age of 16 and that from middle school (approximately 12 to 14 years old) children should be making their own choices about educational directions. The age at which children should be able to enter sexual relationships, arguably one of the defining differences between childhood and adulthood, he suggested was between 16 and 18 years old, although he noted that often younger children (13 to 14 years) became sexually active within contemporary Burmese society[33].

During a focus group discussion, staff from the World Vision Myanmar street children's program were asked about societal expectations of children (not only of the street children in their program but children in general) and the decisions they

[33] Which he noted might have a direct impact on their future through unwanted pregnancies and associated complications.

should and should not be able to make. At a 'functional' level staff suggested that children were given considerable responsibility over decisions relating to day to day activities, such as the types of chores they might do around the house, the clothes they wore and, depending on availability, what they ate. While it was acknowledged that most parents would probably want their children to attend school it was felt that the economic situation meant that children would often have to work to supplement the family income (concurring with the view expressed by parents in Hlaingtharyar, discussed previously in the chapter). World Vision Myanmar staff felt that children often took part in deciding the type of work and even in assessing whether or not they should work or not . They also felt that under the age of 15, children were not generally able to decide whether or not they should enter a relationship with a boy/girl friend. However, one participant mentioned the fact that in her neighbourhood there was a couple who were only 14 years old and their parents had agreed to their marriage.

Focus groups with children elicited further insights. Thirteen to 17 year olds in Hlaingtharyar thought that they should be able to have choice regarding their education:

> *We want to choose what we are interested to learn and whether we should study or not.*

This group were very clear in defining how their path into adulthood might be expressed:

> *We should be able to decide about boyfriends or girlfriends between the ages of fifteen and twenty... After 10th standard we should be able to decide upon our own career... We should be able to marry when we are over twenty (although some thought that should happen before then)...We want to deicide about our own ambitions...*

Certainly, when given the opportunity, children and young people were very clear in expressing their thoughts and desires. However, the small sample of young people interviewed, and the fact that most of those were involved in some way with a child-rights focussed NGO, would suggest that their experience might not be representative of children in general. As Mae Ohn, a senior staff member from Save the Children recalled:

> *I think the adults they do not want their children to speak out The moment you get to school you are told to listen to your teacher and the moment you understand to interact with your parents you are told to listen to them. So that is the culture and it is very difficult to overcome all this. Because Karl you know what I found out for example now sometimes when they invite me I go to the YWCA or the YMCA to give lectures and what happens is that when I talk to the audience and if I open the floor up, they are so happy, it is such a big chance to them to have these kinds of discussions. Whenever I open the floor they are so happy because it is something they want. But what people are not aware of, people who are giving lectures, that this is new, we should encourage. And even though they are kids, I had some interaction with some youth from the YMCA. They were, some of the questions were out of the context but then I even entertained them because I wanted them to use their initiative that's why I encouraged them to ask questions, just to encourage them. So I would say that participation, it might become very popular*

However, according to the focus group discussion with the children who attended university, culturally established patterns about the way in which children should be treated, such as those May Ohn refers to above, are being eroded. As Nilar explained, her parents have allowed her to make even some of the most important decisions in her life:

The only thing my parents decided about was the medical school but once they saw this wasn't the right thing for me, they were happy for me to drop out (Nilar)

Zaw Win felt that on the whole children were only able to make minor decisions and noted that increasing affluence in some parts of the community is leading to children being pampered and indulged. Thidar said that this was most obvious within the growing private school sector in Rangoon, where she said, the children are from families of the *'nouveau riche'* and that this has resulted in children becoming increasingly rude, breaking down existing cultural norms of deference towards teachers, ".. *.it's trendy to be rude."*

May Lay saw this breakdown encroaching on family life as well, observing that children can smoke and drink at any age and that often parents have modelled the treatment of their children upon American movies which often show extreme behaviour, in the belief that this is how children are brought up in the 'outside world'.

There are no universal trends that appear from these data, rather the implication that there are numerous factors influencing decision-making, in different ways, in different socio-economic groups. Perhaps the only common element within the data is that life is changing for children in Rangoon, either as a result of the increasing affluence of a small number of families or the increasing poverty of others. Both trends are influencing the way in which children are treated, the amount of responsibility they have to bear and the decisions that they have to make.

The personal realm - conclusions

Children from each of the study groups showed a very independent and often mature attitude to the choices and decisions that they made. Many displayed a great deal of responsibility, to the extent, in some cases, of becoming sole providers for the family. While there was not always an element of choice, these factors would suggest that children and teenagers can and do make conscious decisions that contribute to the greater good of those around them. This is an important element of participation, albeit often a subconscious one, and might suggest that our expectations of children, for example the rebelliousness of teenage years, are to an extent, socially constructed in the West.

There were a number of correlations that appeared in the data, most significantly the one that existed between the education level of the family and the extent to which children's perspectives are taken into account. All children from the wealthy demographic played significant roles within the family and were able to make major decisions relating to their own life choices, as well as decisions that would have a direct impact on the family. In a similar way, children from poor socio-economic status appeared to have increasing influence within the family, roughly commensurate with their economic productivity. Once children moved beyond the stage of dependency of early childhood, age did not appears to be a significant marker between childhood and adulthood, although deference to age, social status and religious authority was maintained no matter what age.

Personal observations suggested that the political and economic trends within the country have only seemed to worsen, despite momentary periods of optimism. The following insight leads one to question how people survive:

> *According to calculations based on the 1997 and 2001 government household surveys, the proportion of people living under the poverty line increased from 23 per cent to 32 per cent over this period. A UN survey from 2005 set the number at 'more than 30 per cent' in the country as a whole, but much higher in Chin state (70 per cent) and Eastern Shan state (52 per cent). It further indicated that, everything else equal, an increase of just 15-20 per cent in food prices would push 'well over 50 per cent' of the total population below the poverty line...(International Crisis Group, 2006p 2)*

Young people had the ability to be extremely reflective about the impact of the military regime over their own personal predicaments, as is clearly illustrated by Zaw Win below:

> *Isolation brought about by the government makes us value things more, both physical things as well as humanity. It makes people more united because of the isolation. Having responsibility makes you mature (Zaw Win).*

Zaw Win has at least in part answered the question of how people have survived. The Burmese have, to varying degrees, been united behind the common cause of anti-regime sentiment. Sometimes this is overtly stated, such as when individuals throw their support behind the National League for Democracy[34] (NLD), but more often, there is an unconscious acceptance that the regime, at least at this point in time, holds absolute power. This has led to the development of a variety of formal

[34] The NLD maintains offices throughout the country that, over the past 10 years, have been either open or closed depending on regime sentiment. Direct association with the NLD results in military surveillance and holds a significant risk.

and informal social and economic networks, through which survival becomes possible. The growth of civil society referred to in the previous section, is illustrative of this fact. Young people have contributed substantially to the social capital of Burmese society and, by inference, are active participants. Despite this, however, the various illusions discussed previously are, for many, the thin guise under which a semblance of normality is maintained.

Overall conclusions

Difficulties with existing riahts-based models of participation

Hierarchical models for participation (e.g. Hart's Ladder) become problematic, insofar as they fail to take account of the true extent of children's social, economic and cultural participation and insist on a rights based paradigm as the standard against which all participation must be measured. The focus on decision-making, so highly regarded in rights-based discourse, and strongly reinforced in the CRC, is not necessarily the only way in which children consent to participate, or not. A framework for participation must, therefore, take into account the fact that children's decisions are not always verbally articulated.

An associated difficulty with existing hierarchical models of participation is that many are situated within the context of a specific development project. In that regard, such models can be useful tools for helping organisations identify how they may be more inclusive of children in decision-making, within any particular activity. However, children's lives do not simply exist in the context of a project or program. Many children interviewed as a part of this research were involved in projects operated by NGOs in Burma. However, they also had other identities as, for example, members of a family, a community, or a workplace and in each of these

contexts there were factors that inhibited or promoted their participation. It was obvious from data collected that, in a number of instances, individual children had great influence over economic, as well as other social decision-making, in the family context.

Asian values and rights-based participation

Findings illustrated some of the conflict in the human rights and Asian Values debate. Jacobsen and Brun (2000) identify four arguments used by advocates for Asian Values to refute the idea of legitimacy of universal human rights. Firstly they suggest there is a cultural argument that human rights emanates from particular historical, social, economic, cultural and political conditions. Secondly they identify a reflexive, collective argument that Asian societies differ from Western by being communitarian in spirit, putting family and community above the needs of the individual. Thirdly, they suggest there is a disciplinary argument, that Asian cultures are more disciplined in their social, economic and political life, leading to the idea that social and economic rights take precedence over civil and political rights, i.e. a conflict in prioritisation over first and second generation rights. Finally, they suggest that there is an organic argument that sees state and society as one, in the Asian context with a mandate to rule for the common good of all.

The present findings suggested that children often made decisions based on the needs of their family rather than on their own needs. At a certain level this might be seen to concur with proponents of Asian Values. However, drawing such conclusions could be overly simplistic. That children made decisions for the good of their family, sometimes at great personal expense, does not automatically imply that they did not at the same time see that their own rights as individuals were any

less important. Buddhism is an underlying framework upon which much of Burmese social and cultural values have been built. U Nayaka suggested that there are many principles within Buddhist teaching that reflect both a sense of individual rights, as well as the communal rights espoused by Asian values advocates. Within his school he has tried to create an atmosphere in which the individual is respected and encourages their individuality (free thought) but not at the expense of the common good. This illustrates that the notions of individual rights and Asian values are not necessarily mutually exclusive. This issue will be discussed in greater detail on the following pages.

Socio-economic status and participation

In a number of the families interviewed children were frequently consulted about major decisions. This appeared to be more representative of the middle class, however, such as in Nwe Lwin Htwe's family, implying that education and children's space and ability to participate might be closely connected. Children from poor socio-economic backgrounds did not, on the whole, appear to have a great deal of choice about their lives and the manner in which they contributed to the family. For example, they could not choose to go to school if the family could not afford it. Education, which was often very closely linked with economic status, may be a key variable to the potential of children to participate in a decision-making capacity. The education of adults with which the child had immediate contact (family members and teachers in particular) had a direct influence in shaping an environment in which children's participation could be acknowledged and developed. Children from families with a lower socio-economic status, although they did not often have an influence in decision-making processes, did participate within the family. Their contributions through work (paid and unpaid), care for

siblings or elderly relatives, and contributions to community work tasks, gave them a certain status within the family, even though this did not often result in influence over decision-making processes. Children were proud to be able to contribute to their family survival and well-being in this way. In addition, the harsh economic circumstances denied all family members decision-making capacity, insofar as their main choices each day related primarily to how food was to be put on the table that night.

Gender and participation

There was no doubt that gender had an impact on the way in which children were treated. It was more common for girls to be left at home to watch over younger siblings, and to be withdrawn from school more readily than boys. Girls took more responsibility for the running of the family, although boys were often expected to bring in some kind of income. In terms of decision-making in the home, there did not seem to be a significant difference between boys and girls, although there was definitely an expectation that girls should be more responsible.

The power of the narrative

Due to Burma's isolation, there have been remarkably few external influences on the way in which people bring up there children. This is particularly so in the poorer socio-economic areas of Rangoon. It has only been in recent years, following the 'economic liberalisation' of the 1990s, that communities have had access to foreign media and entertainment on any scale. Such influences, along with the increasing presence of international NGOs, have introduced new thoughts about childhood. Hlaingtharyar, the community in which a number of interviews took place, is one area in which the impact of concepts about child rights on both adults and children was obvious. Rights had been discussed at a conceptual level and some adults

had changed their disciplinary practices as a result of the CRC. One parent noted how learning about the CRC meant that he no longer had to hit his children in order to discipline them!

Urban middle class families have, since the beginning of economic liberalisation, been gradually introduced to foreign ideas, both Western and from other Asian countries. The most popular television program in Burma at the present time is a Korean "soapie". Still, these have only a minor impact on the way in which Burmese view life. The predominant influences are traditional, stemming from Buddhism and cultural heritage. This narrative is being affected from within, however, as a result of the increasing pressure of poor governance and the resultant harsh economic environment. Where childhood was once seen as a carefree time, with few constraints, poverty is driving children into the workplace, often open to exploitation and abuse.

Living in multiple realities

Poor governance has led to an increasing number of 'realities' for children. There is polarisation between the few with access to resources and the majority with access to very little. Adults interviewed, who were children during the Ne Win socialist era in Burma, now look back on those days with fond memories of everyone being poor together but never wanting for anything. The situation now is very different, with poor children being expected more frequently to take on what were once considered 'adult' roles, in some instances becoming the sole bread winner in families. In families that cannot cope, this often results in children being forced on to the street or into monasteries or orphanages where they will, at least, be fed. Others fall for the lure of the border and travel to Thailand in search of

work. It is a decreasing minority that are able to remain in school and go on to study at university. The reality for them, however, is little better. With large classes, rote learning and a corrupt education system, even the wealthy find little satisfaction.

Is Buddhism an alternative to rights?

One aspect of Burmese culture that seems to have changed little since the current regime has been in power is the overwhelming presence of Buddhism, despite what has been an obvious push by the regime to influence the sangha. Clearly this informs people' understandings of childhood and constitutes certain rules and cultural norms about how children should be treated and how they should treat adults who exert some kind of authority over them. There are different interpretations of Buddhist teaching as with any religious doctrine. However, the idea of respect and honour for children is very strong. Many people try to live their lives according to Buddhist teaching, and for this reason it is highly influential in the social construction of Burmese childhood. Buddhist teaching has a very clearly articulated code of understanding about mutual rights and responsibilities between children and significant adults such as parents and teachers. Although different to the CRC, particularly from a legal perspective, this includes discussion of rights and responsibility and has the fundamental freedom of the individual at its centre; as U Nayaka so aptly described, the simplicity of Buddhist teaching as *"free thought".* In addition, Buddhism would suggest that even very young children can be considered to be fully matured. Returning to the fundamental philosophical dilemma of the thesis, one is forced not simply to ask whether or not this Buddhist discourse is more valid than others (the CRC for example) but rather to make the point that

Buddhist discourse should be listened to and understood and taken into account in the course of any “development “ initiative in Burma.

This chapter has demonstrated that in order to understand notions of participation in the current political and economic climate of Burma, current hierarchical models of participation are often inadequate. A more nuanced approach that identifies different realms in which children participate is more reflective of the complexities of daily life faced by children in contemporary society. Data collected suggests that three realms should be taken into account. Firstly, the narrative realm which considers the way in which childhood is conceptualised within the Burmese psyche. This develops from historical and cultural antecedents and has a strong influence over the way in which society identifies appropriate and inappropriate behaviour and treatment of children and even in the way in which children and childhood are defined and articulated in every day life. These factors are further complicated by the second realm, the socio-political realm. This acknowledges the broader contemporary contextual factors that influence the way in which children are treated within society. Data suggests that factors such as education and the increasingly harsh economic circumstances faced by many are placing increasing pressure upon children to fulfil what were once seen as adult responsibilities. Finally, there is an urgent need for children’s perspectives to be taken into greater account in defining how they perceive their own lives and define their own participation. Children’s decisions to undertake roles within the family and community that may seem contrary to having their rights realised (such as children choosing to work rather than pursue and education) need greater acknowledgement and understanding. The following chapter will, therefore, identify how three different

organisations deal with issues of children's participation and will build on emerging themes from the present chapter. Together, they will contribute to the presentation of a new framework for which children's participation might be understood, presented in chapter six.

Chapter 5

Organisational Approaches to Participation

Introduction

This chapter will look in detail at how some child focussed organisations working with children in Burma have specifically aimed to increase children's participation and the extent to which they have taken into account the different factors that influence children and childhood, as outlined in the previous chapter. Three organisations will be studied: World Vision Myanmar, an international NGO, working in Burma for many years; Phaung Daw Oo, the monastic education school already discussed in some detail in the previous chapter; and the Child Focussed Network (supported by UNICEF, Save the Children and World Vision Myanmar) which sits as a hybrid between the two, part international agency and part local. While all organisations will be included, greater analysis will be made of the World Vision Myanmar Street Children's project as, out of the three organisational approaches, this illustrated the most intentional and sustained attempt to encourage participation. After a descriptive section for each program, an analysis will be made of the 'types' of participation evident in each of the organisations and from this further conclusions will be drawn, to help formulate a new framework through which participation can be understood.

A detailed analysis of these programs will achieve a number of objectives. It will add to the body of knowledge on children and childhood in Burma, explain the

genealogy of participation as it evolved in the context of a specific program, identify the impact of the different realms of influence within the context of development projects, raise questions about who benefits from participatory initiatives and why, and make observations about the impact of participatory processes upon children and the adults directly and indirectly involved.

To this point it has been argued that children's participation cannot simply be seen as a linear process; rungs on a ladder that one proceeds to climb to reach a notional ideal of full participation. While such models are extremely useful to engender discussion around participation issues (in the course of a development project for example) they present an image of participation that is simplistic, neglecting the complex factors that affect children in society, the way they are perceived, and the roles they play, both representational and practical. These models emerge from a discourse on human rights and democracy that makes certain universally applicable assumptions about the way in which people in general 'should' or 'want to' participate. Because of this, they risk undervaluing children's roles in some societies, that are participative in certain domains but not in others, for example, in citizenship and decision-making.

The challenge for development organisations working with children, therefore, is to ensure that, while encouraging citizenship and increasing the voice and role children might have, cultural, representational, and practical contributions which children already make are valued, respected, yet challenged when they cause obvious harm to children. These factors were discussed when looking at the narrative, socio-political and personal realm sections of the previous chapter.

It is also important that Western models of participation are not always held up as the first or only alternative. As argued in the previous chapter, in the case of Buddhism, as it is expressed in parts of Burma, there is a deep philosophical base and associated traditional teachings upon which society has grown, and through which relationships between adult and child are defined. Within this there is a reciprocal respect and a belief that even young children can reach a state of enlightenment and maturity. Such cultural realities should not be ignored.

If participation is not simply going to be seen as an end in itself, a number of issues require consideration. For example, organisations might want to know if participation is actually going to make a difference for the children they are tasked with assisting, not only for the direct participant children but for the broader child clientele that may not be active participants in a process. The impact of children's participation on adults within an organisation and the way in which this might be measured and processed is also a consideration. Assuming that participation will necessarily bring adults and children closer together may seem a reasonably obvious conclusion to draw, but could participation also have negative ramifications for an organisation? These and other questions will receive consideration in the following chapter.

World Vision Myanmar - working with children on the street

Background to the World Vision partnership

World Vision Myanmar is part of the World Vision Partnership, one of the largest international NGOs in the world. At the very heart of the organisation is a vision explicitly focussed on children:

Our vision for every child, life in all its fullness. Our prayer for every heart, the will to make it so (World Vision International, 2004 p *4)*

This vision also reflects the Christian roots and values of its founding father, Bob Pierce[35].

World Vision maintains that it is child focused and that children are the centre of their ministry: the reason for their assistance. This means that children's social, developmental and spiritual 'status' is put at the centre of their analysis of development issues. For example, World Vision programs would not simply seek to address the impact of HIV on a community in general but would look specifically at the impact of HIV on children and then build their analysis from considering the child's perspective. This would result in such interventions as addressing the needs of child headed households, or the economic needs of children whose parents are sick from AIDS and are unable to work. Such an approach might imply that seeking the views of children on matters that affect them (one of the major CRC principles of participation) would be a key strategy for programming and that the participation of children within the organisation might be prioritised. There have been individual World Vision country offices that have made in-roads into participatory processes and activities such as World Vision Cambodia (2004) and World Vision Myanmar (O'Shaughnessy and Doming, 2001). However, the World

[35] Bob Pierce, an evangelical pastor from the United States of America, founded World Vision following his experience of the Korean War. The current mission statement of World Vision states that it *is an international partnership of Christians whose mission is to follow our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in working with the poor and oppressed to promote human transformation, seek justice, and bear witness to the good news of the Kingdom of God. WORLD VISION INTERNATIONAL (2004) World Vision: Who we are. World Vision.*

Vision partnership does not have any united nor clearly articulated approach to the participation of children within the organisation, except nominally as expressed through their support of the Convention of the Rights of the Child:

> *While World Vision promotes active youth participation in planning and implementing its programs, there is still much to learn about doing this effectively and appropriately (International Policy and Advocacy World Vision International, 2003 p24).*

World Vision Myanmar

In Burma World Vision has had a relatively long presence compared to other INGOs; opening initially in the 1960s, withdrawing through the 1970s and 1980s due to inoperative banking systems, and reopening their office once again in 1992, soon after the SLORC took over control of the country. Post 1992 programs began in satellite townships around Rangoon, including Hlaingtharyar (referred to in Chapter Four). Programming initially centred on addressing the health needs of vulnerable communities through medical and public health interventions for women and children. Soon the program expanded to address the then rapidly increasing HIV epidemic along the border of Thailand. Growth in both government and private funding has enabled World Vision Myanmar's program to expand rapidly to other major urban and rural centres around the country.

Programs are now conducted in most states and divisions using an integrated development approach, known as Area Development Programs (ADPs) that focus on the health, education, social and economic needs of vulnerable communities. In addition, World Vision continued to conduct specific programs for particularly vulnerable groups, such as street children, and women and children who were at

risk of being trafficked. As will become clear, there was a significant difference between the ways in which children were engaged in ADPs, as opposed to the more child focussed vulnerable children's programs.

During the data collection phase of this research there were seven ADPs in the country (primarily in Rangoon and Mandalay) targeting a total population of around 550,000 people[36]. Theoretically ADPs aim to apply participative development models and build the capacity of communities to identify and address their own development needs (health, education, economic, and social). In practice there is a great divergence in approach between the respective ADPs, with some communities establishing management committees to direct the development process at one end of the spectrum (a more developmental approach) and at the other, total reliance on World Vision staff to deliver assistance to those in need (what might be defined as a welfare approach). The difference is due partly to the capacity of the World Vision Myanmar staff, particularly the ADP manager, to engender participative processes and community ownership. However, to a great extent the community control of an ADP is dependent on a host of factors, including community cohesion and the way in which government authorities allow for the operation of programs or impede their progress.

Children are seen as the primary beneficiaries of ADPs, and ADPs rely on child sponsorship[37] for funding. In general terms, the way in which sponsorship operates necessitates certain children being singled out for assistance (amongst other things, for schooling support and medical care). In an average township the

[36] Based on the approximate size of a township being between 70,000 and 120,000 people.
[37] Individual sponsors overseas contribute money each month to a particular child in a community.

optimum number of sponsored children ranges from 2,500 to 3,000. There are numerous ethical issues related to child sponsorship approaches[38]; however, it is not the intention of this research to analyse sponsorship models, merely to identify this as one of the approaches used by World Vision Myanmar to focus development aid on children. One aspect of child sponsorship relevant to the degree of participation that might be possible is that it is often younger children (around the age of five) who are recruited as sponsored children, as it is generally easier for them to attend school. However, despite the participation of younger children being arguably more difficult to conceptualise, as Lansdown observes in her discussion about the issue, no matter what age, "if children are able to express their views, it is necessary for adults to create opportunities for children to do so" (Lansdown, 2005a p2).

In addition to the more standard community development activities (that include health, education, water and sanitation, agriculture and income generation) ADPs integrate more issue specific, usually shorter term, interventions. Again, many of these focus on children. For example, anti-trafficking programs have been established in a number of ADPs in a bid to alert children and their communities of the danger of cross border travel and exploitation. This program also provides reintegration services for women and children who have been trafficked. Children and young people have been involved as peer educators in this program.

Another example relates to HIV programming in which World Vision Myanmar has been involved for many years. With increasing numbers of people being infected

[38] For example choosing one child for sponsorship over another in a family or community could promote favouritism and, therefore, bring division.

with HIV (UNAIDS (2007) estimated that about 350,000 adults (15 to 49 years) were infected with HIV, representing 1.3 percent of the population) there has been an ever growing need to provide care and support for orphans. This has been largely addressed through ADPs and child sponsorship within World Vision Myanmar program areas.

Finally, World Vision Myanmar operates programs for street and working children in both Rangoon and Mandalay. These programs aim primarily to reunite children living on the street with their families. However, in the majority of cases this is not possible or will only occur in the longer term, if at all. As a result, medium to long term shelter is provided along with health, education, life skills and social interventions aimed at providing care, protection and developing the potential of each child. It is this program that has shown the most intentional and practical progress toward child participation. A discussion of the Street Children's program will, therefore, form the core of this chapter.

Street Children: who are they, why study them?

'Street children' as a social concept defies modernistic classifications of children and childhood. They confront adults as they step outside the stereotype and do things children are not meant to do; smoke, take drugs, have sex, work and survive alone, speak out and disregard authority. In short, they defy the ideal of childhood innocence that was discussed in detail in Chapter Two. In many countries, street children have, at times, been seen as barely human. Brazil has been arguably the most infamous with the systematic execution of street children by the notorious death squads, usually teams of off-duty policemen, in the 1990s (Dimenstien,

1991, Human Rights Watch, 1994). Street children exist on the periphery, usually as an embarrassment or, as was the case in Brazil, a perceived threat to the moral fabric of society.

Before looking at the participatory processes that were developed at the World Vision Myanmar Street Children's program, certain terms require clarification, in particular, the phrase 'street children' itself. The term is, in fact, little used today in an academic sense (Panter-Brick, 2002), but rather absorbed into a host of other expressions such as 'Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances' (CEDC), 'Children in Need of Special Protection' (CNSP), 'vulnerable children', or 'children at risk'. In the past distinctions have been made between children 'on the street' or 'of the street', once used by UNICEF to indicate the degree to which children inhabit the street. The word 'street' should itself be seen as a metaphor indicating more a space outside the home than anything else. We do not talk so much of 'market children' nor 'garden children' nor 'railway children' but children fending for themselves exist in each of these and in many other such environments.

Panter-Brick (2002) identifies five criticisms in identifying 'street children' as a specific identity. Firstly, she suggests that as a catch all phrase it risks treating street children as a homogenous group. There are obviously many reasons for children ending up on the street and staying there. Children use the street in a variety of ways such as for work, for play, or to escape unhealthy home environments. They might see the street as their permanent abode; living, working and sleeping there. For some children, the street may be a place in which they

spend a short time before returning home. There is, therefore, a great diversity in the way in which the street is used and perceived by children.

Secondly, Panter-Brick suggests that the term gives inadequate representation to the multi-dimensional experiences of children, and that the use of the term offers no illumination into the many and varied reasons why children take to the streets in the first place. Thirdly, labelling, particularly with a term like 'street children', can be stigmatising and, therefore, a barrier to understanding why children are on the street and what might be done to assist them. Fourthly, she suggests that a limited term such as this elicits a limited response. Street children, she claims, are the most visible manifestation of child poverty but not the only one. While children living primarily on the streets need attention, this should not be at the expense of the greater number of children in many countries who are living in situations of poverty. Finally, she suggests that the 'street children' issue has become politicised and manipulated for the benefit of other agendas and interests, such as funding for welfare agencies and NGOs (Panter-Brick, 2002).

Essentially all definitions are problematic, as they fail to grasp the multiplicity of factors that keep children separated from the care and protection of a family and community. As West (2003) observes, inadequate definitions can result in inadequate statistics, so the true dimensions of the issue are difficult to measure in numeric terms. However, despite the lack of adequate terminology and statistics, the fact remains that there are children in many countries for whom the street, in its broadest sense, is the place where they spend a majority of time (Panter-Brick, 2002). For the purpose of this thesis, therefore, the term will be used, although

recognising its limitations, to refer to the wide range of children that inhabit the street in one way or another.

An in-depth understanding of World Vision Myanmar's street children's work contributes in a number of ways to this study. Firstly, many children in Burma live in poverty but they do not end up on the streets. However street children, particularly those who have experienced long term separation from family and community, exemplify what happens when all customary forms of support have deteriorated. Because they are in many ways quite different to the norm or at least the expectation of childhood, looking at the lives of street children can elicit valuable insights into concepts such as social inclusion and exclusion and, by implication, the related notion of participation.

Secondly, the World Vision Myanmar street children's program was the most 'labour intensive' child-focussed program in terms of contact hours face to face with children and, unlike other World Vision Myanmar programs, it had developed specific strategies to increase the participation of children. Because this program had the longest history of intentionally engaging the participation of children and had documented significant elements of the program specifically designed to increase participation, it provided the greatest insight into the way in which participatory methods had been applied and the results that they had elicited.

Finally, in the context of this research, the street children's program and the children within it were the only group known first hand to the author to have experienced an active longitudinal program to increase participation. By

understanding the lived experiences of children on the street and as part of World Vision Myanmar programming, it is possible to elicit further insight into participation and the factors that affect it.

Street children in Myanmar

In Myanmar, 'street children' exist in a realm characterised either with ignorance, pity, denial or, perhaps most commonly, hostility. A traditional term, 'Ian pyaw kale', meaning 'children who are happy on the street' has been a part of the vernacular for some time, to refer to children living on the street. Indeed, to the casual observer, there are many happy and smiling children on the streets of Burma and, unlike some countries in South East Asia, the phenomenon of 'street children' is not an immediately apparent problem. For ease of reference the term 'Ian paw kale' or LPK will be used when referring to the World Vision Myanmar Street and Working Children's program and the children who are part of it. The direct translation of this means simply, 'children on the street'. LPK[39] is, for better or worse, the term generally used by World Vision Myanmar staff and children to refer to their program.

The Myanmar Government seldom acknowledges the existence of street children. An editorial in the New Light of Myanmar commemorating World AIDS Day in 1999 (the theme of which was *Listen, Learn Live* and focussed on children and youth) stated that there were no street children in Myanmar (Pe Thet Htun, 1999). The official government report to the Committee on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Government of the Union of Myanmar, 2003), makes two references to

[39]. **Children in Burma who took part in this study did not like the term street children for many of the reasons outlined above even though they continue to use the term themselves. For reasons of expediency and recognising the conceptual inadequacies of the term, the abbreviation LPK will be used.**

street children, one that acknowledges a regional workshop help in Nepal on the issue and the other referencing the opening of the World Vision Myanmar drop-in-centre in Rangoon. It is more common to read reports such as the following article on 'Burmanet News':

> *Rangoon: The Myanmar police detained over 1, 500 jobless street wanderers in Rangoon in August as part of its bid to crack down on crime makers, the local Myanmar Times reported Friday.. .Among the wanderers arrested, over 300 are homeless gypsies, nearly 350 are beggars and nearly 1,000 are rubbish collectors, most of whom are under 16 years old, the police were quoted as saying...Although some 800 were sent home, they returned to the street due to economic difficulties, the police said, adding that they are being transferred to the social welfare department for resettlement (Xinhua General News Service (online), 15th Sept 2006)*

Such 'projects' or *si man kyet* (as they are known in colloquial Burmese) for clearing the streets of 'undesirables' are common in Rangoon and other towns and cities around the country. This is one of the reasons why children stay away from more conspicuous areas.

World Vision Myanmar first began to work with street children during the late 1990s. At this time the issue of street children in Burma had received scant attention. A small drop-in-centre operated from the YWCA existed in downtown Rangoon for a group of around 30 children but it was closing for lack of funding at the time World Vision Myanmar began to look into the issue. An initial situation analysis and research phase conducted by World Vision Myanmar (1997) resulted in the identification of areas in Rangoon where street children congregated. It also elicited a range of information about the children, including the types of work they

pursued, information about their lifestyles, places of origin and the amount of time they spent on the street. The study identified the nature of vulnerability faced by these children, including arrest, violence and sexual assault, forced recruitment into the military, poor health and nutrition, and lack of social and emotional support. It recommended the establishment of a drop-in-centre based program to provide nutritional, educational, health and social support. Centre based programs raise issues around sustainability, cost and appropriateness. However, as the government response to the situation consisted of arrest and referral to social welfare institutions, the development of a visible centre based model seemed the most appropriate at the time (World Vision Myanmar, 1997).

Outlining the experiences of children who drift or are pushed on to the streets helps provide a context in which to reflect upon the World Vision Myanmar interventions with street children and the way in which participation has become a part. The following discussion, based on document review, interviews, observations and participatory data collection activities provides an overview of the various factors that result in children being on the street, as well as their experiences while they are there.

Taking to the streets

The story told by Nyi Nyi Naing (below) describing the reasons he ended up on the street is not an unusual one:

> *When I was three years old my mother made cheroots. One day it was quite dark and my mother dropped the cheroot tray, so grandmother beat her. From that day my mother stepped down from our house. Father and mother quarrelled and they divorced. I had to live with my grandmother. When I was eight, there was nothing to eat in our house. My aunt told me to pawn some clothes. The clothes*

that my aunt wanted me to pawn were not accepted. But I managed to do it. It was quite late and I dared not go back home, because it was late and I would be beaten. For that I bought some jaggary [palm sugar sweet] and donated it to a monk. I became friendly with the monk. I stayed at the monastery. I met with my aunt. I was afraid that she might take me home so I ran away and fell asleep on a train as I was so tired. Next morning I reached Rangoon. From that day I rode many trains to go back home. But I didn't make it. Then I was adopted by a street family. When the adopted father was drunk they fought. Again I ran from that family. Near Su Lay I was caught by the police and sent to Kyauk Da Ta police station. From there I was sent to Inya Road Boys Training School (Nyi Nyi Naing)

Estimates of people living below the poverty line in Burma are as high as 75% (Havel and Tutu, 2005) but, as the number of street children appears relatively small in comparison to the number of children living in harsh circumstances, poverty alone cannot be the only factor that results in taking to the streets. Indeed, many more children are poor and do not leave home. World Vision Myanmar records show that violence and abuse, particularly from a step-father, was cited by over 70% of children as a primary contributing factor for their taking to the streets (World Vision Myanmar, 1999). Nyi Nyi Naing's story above identifies a range of other issues including alcohol, step-parents (particularly step-fathers), drifting in and out of relationships with 'foster' families and relatives. They are all common themes within the stories that street children tell and both girls and boys share similar experiences:

From the time I was young my father took another wife and would not give us any money but gave us a lot of trouble. The two families lived together in a big house, my grandmother's house, but father did not look after the house. When mother was not around, he would beat me and mother would not do anything to help me. I don't know why I can't

understand...Then there were four children, now there are eight. My father taught me how to come to the market and collect fish and vegetables which I did while he was *selling beetle. One day I* was *too tired and fell asleep and all the vegetables I had were stolen. He beat me and mother did not do anything. She just took sides with my father. (Aye Myat Thu, 15 year old girl at the drop-in-centre)*

Poverty is often compounded by a lack of educational opportunity and LPK centre records indicated a clear link between the level of education and increased risk of taking to the street. This is further complicated by issues of trust in the education system, where parents choose to keep their children out of school as they question the viability of the system (as noted in the previous chapter during discussions with parents from Hlaingtharyar). For many families, low income, coupled with the ability of children to work, makes the choice between sacrificing to send children to school and having them out working and contributing to the family income a very easy one to make. Once children begin work, however, the pressure upon them is often substantial. Some children reported being the only breadwinner in the family, with fathers staying at home and buying alcohol with the money that their children provided. Boys living on the streets vastly outnumbered girls by a ratio of around 80% to 20%. In general this can be attributed to a greater expectation placed on girls to work in the family and a greater degree of freedom and encouragement to find jobs outside given to boys (Wernham, 2003).

Both boys and girls were vulnerable to violence in the home and, as the following shows, in the workplace as well:

I have parents. My father's work is not so good and mother fries snacks. Sometimes they don't have anything to invest because both of them like gambling. We cannot have regular meals. If they lose they mortgage our cooking utensils for money. During the rainy season, we

grow rice. I have seven siblings and one died. At home, I was beaten so I told them I would go to Rangoon. I had to work as a housemaid in Rangoon. My mother sent me and took all my salary. She told me that I had to stay there for one year. I could not stay there even a month.

They threatened me that they would send me to the police if I stole money from them. Because of me, a TV was broken and they threw hot water over me. On that night, I ran away (Thida, 16 year old girl in the drop-in-centre)

This kind of experience is quite common, according to a UNICEF report into the experiences of domestic servants, where 17% of girls interviewed claimed that they suffered severe forms of discipline, including beating and verbal abuse (Ar Thit Consultancy Group, 2002). Violence against children is part of a complex mix of factors of a troubled home life that includes hunger, poverty, lack of education and broken relationships. It is often the final straw pushing children out of home and onto the street.

However, not all children related stories of overt violence. For some, they simply drifted on to the street when parents died and extended family members could no longer afford to nor want to provide care. Children often spoke in a matter of fact way about parents dying and the resultant impact on their lives:

> *I remember that when I was five I had to attend school. When I was five I told my mother, 'Mother I'd like to go to school'. Mother said, 7 don't have any money to send you'. Mother said she will borrow some money to send me to school. I felt very happy and even told my friends, 'Hey friend, now I am going to school'. They also were happy to hear that. Mother went out to borrow money and got it. When the time came for enrolment in school I reminded my mother. Mother told me, 'Please go to school next year as your father needs the money to renew his licence'. I was astonished. After a year my mother died.*

Then I left the house. I stayed on the street. One boy took me to LPK. (Soe Soe, 14 year old boy)

Father worked in South Dagon. We stayed together with father at his work place. I have four siblings. One brother and two elder sisters.
One day father came back late with a huge wound in his arm. When we asked him, he lied that someone mistook him and stabbed him.
After that he became ill. Slowly and slowly it became worse. His employer sent him to hospital. The hospital referred him to Rangoon General Hospital. When he was hospitalised in YGH we found out that he had been bitten by a mad dog. Father died in hospital and his relatives took us to Hlaingtharyar. We did not get on with our relatives. They made my brothers and sisters work. Later one elder sister was sent to another house for adoption. Elder brother left the house. One sister was sent to a restaurant to work. I was left alone feeling sad. Later I quarrelled with my cousins and left the house. I stayed at Sanpya fish Market. Then I made friends with some boys and together with them I stole fish, gambled in ail ways and became an expert. And then one of my friends took me to LPK. (Aung Naing, 15 year old boy)

Others cited particular incidents that encouraged them to leave home. Chit Oo (A fifteen year old resident of the drop-in-centre) who lived in a township just outside of Rangoon, had once been accused of stealing:

I felt 'Sei Nyit de' [frustrated] because the community thought that I was a thief. I know that because I would overhear people talking. For instance, one day a boy had lost his slippers and they accused me...One day I ran away. I did not tell my parents. I caught the train and arrived at Pun Hlaing Station and then walked around until I found the market (Thiri Mingalar). A boy I met, named Nge Maung Htwe, took me to the LPK Centre.

The stories above indicate that there is a broad range of factors, amidst the poverty, that is common to many families in Burma, that influence whether or not children end up on the street. Violence and educational status appeared as major contributing forces that led to a life on the street, however, no matter what precipitated instability within a family, once home life became unstable it seemed usual for children to oscillate between street and home for a period of time. From that peripatetic existence, only a small push was required for the street to become a permanent abode.

Life away from home

Once on the street, experiences of street life were quite varied. Mostly children spoke about finding odd jobs or petty theft and wandering from place to place. Commonly children would end up at some stage of their street experience within the social welfare or prison system. Most children who had been in any of the welfare or child and youth detention centres, reported extremely harsh circumstances. Nyi Nyi Naing's story above continues as a concerning illustration of what can happen to children once they are on their own:

> *...I was there [Inya Rd Boys Training School] for two and a half years and again I ran from that school. I started to stay again on the streets. It was not long before the police arrested me. I was kept in Huntharwidi police station. After five months I was referred to Kymindine police station. I wanted to go out so much. When I saw cars going on the road and trains passing I cried. Later I was sent to the court and sentenced. I was thirteen and was sent to Hnyet Aw San Children's Prison. It was hell for me with a lot of cruelty in that jail. But I tried to make myself happy The rice was not good, the curry* was so *watery and on top of that there was no salt in the curry. Boiled rice for breakfast was without salt. Dead rats were in the boiled*

rice. They told me to do things that I could not do for my age. I had to clean a drain 3 to 4 hundred feet long. The width was about an adults height. It was *quite thick and the bushes that I had to clean up were full of termites and ants and thorns. Whether it rained or not I had to work. When it was hot I felt thirsty, when it rained I felt cold. Some children could not do the work. The group leaders beat them. The tools were not sharp enough to chop. The children got very tired.*

Some even died. After one and a half years I was free from that school. I felt so happy. I decided that I would never end up in that place again. After that I started to work in a construction site. I survived with my earnings. (Nyi Nyi Naing 14 year old boy at the Rangoon drop-in-centre)

Government facilities for children differ in levels of security. The children's prison was infamous amongst those who had lived there. Children had different backgrounds and those serving sentences for crimes were mixed with children picked up off the street as vagrants. Other facilities such as the Inya Road School also referred to by Nyi Nyi Naing above, is quite a different environment. Life in the training facilities was reportedly harsh but security often lax. Inya Road School is located on a major arterial some eight kilometres from central Rangoon and, within seconds of getting out of the front gate, an inmate could disappear into the crowded street. According to a principal of one training school in Rangoon, children who live on the street struggle in disciplined environments and constantly run away:

Although we have strict discipline, some can't cope with it. If you are too strict too, they [street children] can't follow. If you are too soft too, they won't obey you and may not change. The best thing is to be flexible (World Vision Myanmar, 1999)

Recently, with UNICEF support, conditions have improved slightly for institutionalised children. The continuing reality however is that the vastly under-

resourced Department of Social Welfare cannot provide children with the care that they need.

Work

Most children survive on the street through money gained from odd jobs. A survey conducted with residents of the Rangoon drop-in-centre in 1999 (World Vision Myanmar, 1999) showed the following:

Job	No of respondents	%
Picking up garbage	51	43%
Selling/vending	16	13%
Carrying/collecting bricks, sand etc.	10	8%
Picking vegetables	5	4%
Picking fish	12	10%
Collecting rice	7	6%
Other	19	16%
TOTAL	120	100%

Table 8 - Type of work conducted by street children residents of the World Vision Myanmar LPK centre 1999

Often the distinction between 'work' and 'stealing' is blurred. Children who pick up fish, rice and vegetables from the markets often snatch produce that falls to the ground as it is moved or dropped by vendors and their clients. Many children had a number of jobs in order to make sufficient money for food in the day and spent anywhere from four to twelve hours each day working. Children were happy to be able to work and, to a degree, enjoyed the freedom of the street. Those who had ongoing contact with families often took money home to give to their parents. Many children worked at night, particularly those in the markets. Work appeared to play a significant role in children's self-esteem and a majority of children Interviewed said that they valued the chance to work and the independence that it afforded.

Violence

The violence that was often so influential in forcing children from their homes was not something they escaped on the streets. Children were vulnerable to numerous risks and dangers. Perpetrators of violence included authority figures, usually the police or the council staff. World Vision Myanmar found that 34% of street children in Rangoon citing abuse had suffered abuse at the hands of the police (World Vision Myanmar, 1999). Street sweeps such as those reported in the Burmanet News report quoted earlier are regular occurrences, particularly around key government occasions such as Armed Forces Day. Children sleeping on the street were found to be especially vulnerable:

> *I slept at the market with an Indian boy. His legs were very long and while we were sleeping the police came around and they saw his legs. So we were arrested. (Chit Oo)*

This stroke of bad luck resulted in Chit Oo spending three years in a series of training centres before eventually being released. It is illustrative of the arbitrary nature of street life and the severe consequences that may result from something as innocuous as sleeping next to someone with long legs.

Abuse by the military has also been common. World Vision Myanmar records (World Vision Myanmar, 2003a) estimate that over 200 boys had been conscripted by the military within a three year period. Children spoke about a variety of methods of recruitment. Forcibly taking children from the streets was not unusual although more subtle forms of coercion, whereby children were promised food and shelter and money, were more likely. Reports on child soldiers in Burma (Heppner, 2002, Emmons, 2002) concur with this data. Once in the military it was extremely difficult to leave. Records show that a number of boys deserted and

sought assistance from the drop-in-centre. Other children reported being underfire and seeing friends killed or, as related in Lyn Lyn's experiences recorded in Chapter Four, being forced to take part in extremely violent acts.

Exposure to sex

World Vision Myanmar documentation suggests that street children were often exposed to sex at an early age; some as young as eight. Witnessing sexual acts, as well as sexual contact (both voluntary and involuntary) with other children and adults on the streets was not uncommon. World Vision Myanmar reported that:

> *There is a tremendous amount of exposure to both exhibitionism and sexual violence as well as some evidence of sex trafficking (World Vision Myanmar, 1999)*

A World Vision study that looked in detail at the extent of sexual encounters of children (World Vision Myanmar, 1999) found that both boys and girls were engaged in a range of sexual activity. Often this began with curiosity and the fact that life on the street exposes children to the sexual activity of adults also on the street, both of a heterosexual and homosexual nature. Children also spoke of learning about sex through pornography (shown in the video halls and parlours mentioned in Chapter Four), or 'poor man's movies' as they are known (as the characters have no clothes).

The perpetual poverty experienced by street children meant that for some, selling sex to adults was one way to make money relatively easily. Boys spoke about being propositioned by older men for sex:

> *His arse is itching he said. He said he'd give me 50...at the market a man took two friends to the park, he asked one boy to masturbate him...afterwards the man asked for anal sex and the boy obliged (World Vision Myanmar, 1999 p 119)*

Girls, on the other hand, spoke more of being physically and sexually abused, even by the police:

> *On some nights the police would round us up in threes or fours and take us to dark places and accuse us of having sex (being prostitutes). Though we refused they asked us to take off our panties and lie down and would look at our private parts with a torch light and use their fingers to explore us (World Vision Myanmar, 1999 p121)*

Police were said to demand sex free of charge, threatening girls with imprisonment if they did not comply. A number of girls using the drop-in-centre found that prostituting themselves enabled them to earn money more easily than working in the markets. Generally they were introduced to this by 'friends' or people in the markets. Pimps would control the girls, often forming protector relationships with them, providing them with food and shelter in return for a share of the profits.

Child soldiers were the perpetrators of sexual violence, as the following story indicates:

> *When I was in the army, making a shift from Pyinmanar to Beelin at Pyinmanar railway station, while sleeping beside the station, three ladies about 25 entered our mosquito nets, persuading us to have sex with them and give them money...when we reached Bago, a woman and her daughter were sitting beside us. Our corporal said it would be easy and possible to approach that woman ...so he approached the woman and in a few minutes, he brought the woman together with her daughter. The girl was crying at that time for she didn't want to have sex but her mum forced her to do it. We all had sex with both of them.*

At the very least, this early exposure to sexual activity increases the risk of infection from sexually transmitted infections. In response to this situation the LPK centre had instituted sexuality and sexual health programs as part of their non-

formal education program and the knowledge about sexually transmitted infections and the dangers of unprotected sex have become better understood. However, the ability of the LPK program to address the vulnerability of children on the street to sexual violence remained limited.

Battling perceptions

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of all for children living on the street to cope with was not so much the overt violence and danger of street life but the underlying attitudes that influenced people's perceptions and behaviour towards them. During the course of an evaluation of the LPK program (which is discussed later in this chapter) one of the key informants interviewed, a pastor from the Baptist church compound[40] in which the initial LPK centre was located, made the comment that the program was simply, 'watering poisoned plants'. He saw no future or hope of redemption for these children and viewed the World Vision Myanmar attempt to assist more in terms of aiding and abetting potential criminals. This view was shared by numerous people at varying levels of intensity. One policeman in Rangoon said:

> *We call them kids without hope. They are either orphaned or their parents have re-married. As for the kids who beg for a living, we call them 'beggars without hope. '*

This is a confronting perception and one that, on a personal level, I have struggled to understand. Such attitudes are complex and, I believe, stem from a variety of causal factors. From a Buddhist perspective, there is an overwhelming belief that people's present lives reflect the deeds of their past. Like the many neglected dogs wandering the streets of Rangoon, children living from the streets are left

[40] This was a large area which housed some two hundred households, a theological school, a church, small market and a dusty playing field.

alone and ignored; there is a belief that it is their karma. This is not to say that Burmese people are not compassionate. There are numerous homes and projects established for disadvantaged children, older people, the sick and disabled. However, street children are viewed as somehow different to the norm: undisciplined, crude, thieves.

Some adult respondents looked beyond the individual child and these common perceptions, identifying the social, economic and political antecedents to children's vulnerability:

> *This is a social problem. Actually it is also an economic and political problem. All these are connected together like a triangle and so confusing (Training School Principal)*

Others sought solutions:

> *Their communities are mostly coolies and vendors. We should engage with businessmen, shop owners and workshops and send children to those places and follow up on them (Teacher from local school where LPK children attend).*

The children's perceptions of themselves were far more illuminating and in most cases, more hopeful. The LPK centre had given him cause to hope that the future could be different as Chit Oo relates:

> *I want to help poor people like street kids and poor families. I will study to be able to do this. I come top in my class now. Being accused of stealing has changed me the most as I did not do it and I want to prove to everyone that I am not a bad person.*

Others were not so optimistic, acknowledging the gravity of their situation, and that it would take time and energy to change, or, perhaps not change at all. More positive attitudes were expressed by younger children. Some looked at the immediate:

I will try, make bracelets, at the centre I will look after the younger children, I will work in anything apart from 'bad work' (Nyein Nyein, 14 year old girl)

Older children in particular identified the importance of structural factors that affected their vulnerability such as the lack of national registration cards (NRC):

I will help in the kitchen. I will go and ask for a painting job and continue painting (houses). I will save money. I will get my NRC if the staff help and I will do odd jobs (Naing Lin, 16 year old boy).

I will continue to go around selling household things, needles, thread, and moth balls and things. I will continue painting houses and save money. Then I will rebuild my mother's house. I have to get my NRC. Then I will live with my mother and feed her. (Naing Naing 17 year old boy)

Many children had some idea of what they wanted to do in the future and how they might achieve their goals:

When I am big, I want to work in a car workshop to fix cars and weld. (Thu Ya Aung 15 year old boy)

I want to continue my education and go to university to get a degree. I want to become a soldier. (Zaw Zaw 11 year old boy)

Now I am attending the Centre for Vocational Training (E4Y[41]) and I am trying very hard. I want to learn computer. I want to go back to school and finish up to 10th standard. I must learn about all the different places in the country and get a lot of regional knowledge so I want to travel and learn. Then I want to go to University and become

[41] This was a vocational training program operated by a small local initiative, supported by UNICEF and World Vision.

> a *teacher. If not I want to work in an office. When I am 30 I want to buy a house and save money. I don't want to get married. (Si Thu 14 year old boy)*

Some, younger children in particular, used to living from hand to mouth could see only the immediate:

> *I will sell mangoes and flowers at the pagoda (Tin Ma Myint 11 year old girl)*

These stories capture the essence of the lived experience of children in Rangoon who have made the street their home. It was clear, despite their lived experience and the preconceptions that adults have about them, that street children interviewed often had a clear understanding of their circumstances and what they might do to change them.

On a daily basis World Vision Myanmar staff at the drop-in-centre dealt with the lives of these children. Initial observations of the centre suggested that there was a fragile sense of trust in this relationship as street children, based on their experiences had learned one lesson very early: that adults are not to be relied upon.

At the time of collecting data for this research World Vision Myanmar had expanded its work with street children in Rangoon, opening a similar program in Mandalay. In a bid to meet some of the longer term needs of children who were unable to return home a network of hostels had also been opened. Some provided care for children attending regular schooling and others for children learning skills and trades. In total, on any given day in both major cities, over 350 children were receiving support through the LPK program. In terms of overall numbers, more

than 1,500 registered street children had received assistance from World Vision Myanmar by the beginning of 2003 (Wernham, 2003). Many others had used the centres once or twice and had not been officially registered. Early on in their programming World Vision Myanmar (1999) identified four 'sub-categories' of street children:

Category	Description
1.	Children who lived and worked on the street (collecting rubbish or working odd jobs and sleeping in markets or other public places) with no family contact;
2.	Children who spent most of their time on the street each week with limited family contact, returning home at least once a month to visit family members and perhaps to pass money to a parent of sibling;
3.	Children who lived at home but did not attend school and made their living on the street through odd jobs, collecting rubbish or other low paid endeavours
4.	Children who lived on the street with their families.

Table 9 - Typology of Street Children used by World Vision Myanmar

Despite the arguments around terminology related at the beginning of this chapter, these groupings were purportedly useful for some specific purposes, such as planning and reporting. For example, statistics were kept on all children coming into the centre and ongoing analysis showed that if children could be encouraged to return home within three months of cutting ties with their family (sub-type one), there was an increased likelihood of them staying there.

As well as direct interventions with street children, World Vision Myanmar had also begun what they termed preventative programs in poor satellite townships, including some of their ADP communities, which aimed to develop opportunities and support for children in communities at risk of taking to the street, children who predominantly fell into category 3 in the typology above (Table 7). These programs

provided non-formal education classes, skills training and income generation opportunity to parents to older children and parents, school support and health care. At the LPK centre itself similar activities were conducted with the aim of increasing education opportunities; addressing health needs; offering a protective environment and seeking out avenues for family reunion (see Figure 15 over page). In essence, the LPK centre quickly became the permanent home for a core group of around 80 children and a floating population of at least 50 more at any given time.

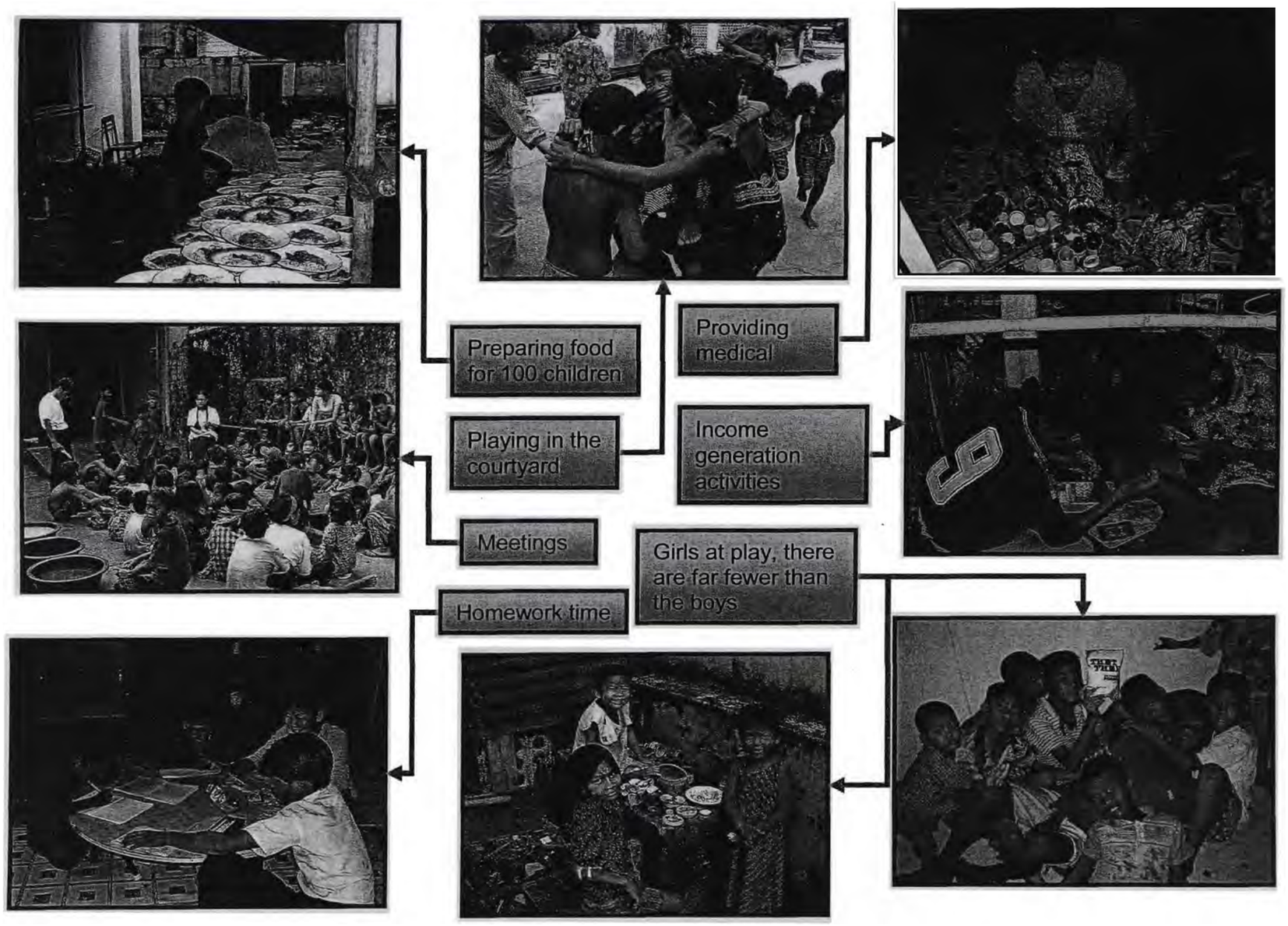


Figure 14 Activities in the LPK Centre

Genealogy of change from Welfare to Participation

This section draws on observations and document review, as well as interviews and participatory data collection activities with children and staff from the LPK program and others in World Vision Myanmar. Observations (conducted over an eight month period) added substantially to the data from focus groups[42]. Most observations were unstructured, i.e. times when I would just drop in at the drop-in-centre, spending time observing different activities at the centre and talking with staff and children. Some observations were structured around specific activities that I was coordinating as part of my role within World Vision Myanmar.

Focus group discussions with children included a number of participatory activities (as outlined in Chapter One) and sought to unearth children's broader understandings about World Vision and why the organisation was assisting them. These included personal reasons for coming to the LPK program, aspects of child rights discourse, their feelings about the program and what it offered them and specific insights into participation and decision-making. In addition, semi-structured and unstructured interviews with supervisory staff and management, document reviews and observations were conducted at the drop-in-centre over the eight month data collection period.

First Steps - the growth of relationship

Children's participation was a notion that evolved in the course of the operation of the LPK project and in exploring its genealogy some important lessons can be learned. Staff and children were asked about the history of the program and documentation was reviewed, in order to plot a historical record of how

[42] Observations were not intrusive; both staff and children were used to my presence as I had been a regular visitor for years.

‘participation’ became a part of the discourse of the LPK centre. These data, summarised in the following section, identify the key issues relating to the evolution of participation within the LPK centre, as well as some of the specific activities that brought about a realisation that children’s participation was possible, even beneficial to all concerned.

The first staff members employed at the drop-in-centre (the same that conducted the initial research) were predominantly young and in their early twenties. A coordinator (an ex-teacher and mother of four) was the only member of the team with any real experience in dealing with children. As this was the first project of this scale to be implemented in Burma, none of the staff had any real idea of what the program was supposed to do, nor how it was meant to function. For all, therefore, it was a case of on-the-job learning.

As mentioned previously, a location for the centre was sought in proximity to the wholesale market where children would often go to find work or scavenge, but sufficiently away from the streets to enable the program to run without the overt attention of local authorities. Eventually, within a Karen Baptist Convention compound, no more than a kilometre from the market, an appropriate building was found. Children were invited by the staff to come to the centre to join a program of non-formal education and to receive a meal each day. Residents of the compound were quite bemused by the sudden appearance of a substantial number of ragged and often loud and quick tempered children into their once peaceful domain and staff discovered very quickly that these children were quite different to children who they had experienced before.

One of the most immediate concerns in the day to day operation of the program was the maintenance of discipline. Squabbles and fights, sometimes quite violent ones, would regularly erupt over seemingly trivial matters. Staff, quite naturally, chose to employ familiar methods for maintaining peace and control. These included physical punishment, and it was often observed that staff would conduct their activities with a stick or cane firmly clasped or somewhere close at hand. Project records (meeting minutes and reports) that were reviewed indicated numerous discussions amongst staff about the use of corporal punishment and the difficulty with both understanding and introducing alternative non-physical disciplinary strategies. Staff claimed that alternative methods would not work and that this was the way in which they were brought up and was effective for them. However the World Vision program manager insisted that corporal punishment should be banned and this, in turn, initiated discussion about disciplinary techniques that involved children having a greater feeling of ownership over the solutions to misbehaviour and, more broadly, of children taking greater responsibility over decisions that affected their lives within the centre program.

A process was put into place in an attempt to provide staff with different options for discipline. This involved working with the staff to re-envisage the project within a child rights framework; assisting them to see that a child rights approach put the onus on them to develop alternative disciplinary strategies. Disciplinary problems and the impact of the children's often violent behaviour on the surrounding community, the centre, and the children themselves, became the topic of ongoing discussion, both during staff meetings and the regular children's meetings. Staff began to ask children what they thought could be done. As might be expected, children's solutions were often to respond to breaches in discipline by physical

punishment, even more harsh that the current practices. However, gradually staff came to realise that a longer term, more holistic, solution was needed; one that addressed the need for children to begin to set longer term goals for their lives, including strategies to deal with any behavioural issues. This, in turn, led to a case-management approach that included children setting mutually agreed upon goals and working towards them, and being more intentional about increasing the possibilities for re-uniting children with family and relatives or developing other long term options for care. Along with the changes in dealing with individual children, it was decided that one way to respond to discipline problems would be to increase the children's authority within the centre. This would be achieved through the development of teams (headed by older children) that had specific responsibilities, such as cleaning and cooking, thereby providing the older children with opportunities of leadership and essentially encouraging them to 'own' the discipline problem as well.

While these changes appeared to have some effect on the day to day activities, according to those interviewed and the review of staff meeting minutes, they did not change the underlying attitudes of the majority of staff. In a similar way to participants in a Save the Children program on child rights in Vietnam (reported in Beers et al., 2006), staff were able to articulate a growing understanding of children's rights but they did not have a real commitment or belief in them.

Two things, however, were to have a substantial impact on changing this situation. The first of these was longitudinal, that is, it took place over a period of time without a recognised understanding that change was evolving. It concerned the growing trust that children began to put in their adult supervisors and the resulting affection

and respect that the adult staff began to feel towards the children. In effect, a form of social capital began to grow (according to Putnam's (1993) analysis of social capital being the growth of social networks for mutual benefit), exemplified in the growing personal interaction that developed between individual staff and children. Staff saw value in developing relationships, initially as it made their job easier but then because they began to value the relationships themselves. The children, so used to mistrusting adult authority figures, began to see that these new adults in their lives had their best interests at heart and were not about to throw them back into unworkable family situations nor into the arms of the social welfare authorities. A mutual respect formed and these relationships played a vital role in staff beginning to see possibilities in treating the children, if not as equals, as human beings worthy of respect.

The importance of interpersonal relationship and respect is often ignored by models of participation but it became a vital aspect of the continuing process of changing attitudes between both staff and children. Relationships between adults and children in Burmese society, as discussed in Chapter Three, are, on the whole, hierarchical. Implicit in this Is that children should always be respectful towards and defer to their seniors. Two very subtle changes occurred as a result of the growing relationships between the children and the staff. Firstly, the street children who had become used to relying on their own initiative and had learned not to trust nor respect adults began to see the staff in a different light. Secondly, the adults, most of them quite youthful themselves, saw that they did not need to rely on the accepted cultural precepts that regulated adult/child relationships. As relationships formed, the cultural restrictions succumbed, opening channels for increased understanding, mutual respect and greater potential for children to participate in a

wide range of activity and decision-making processes. At a deeper, more structural level, power relationships began to be questioned, not outwardly and openly but in a more subconscious and nuanced manner. As Gittens (1998) observes, power and power relations are crucial determinants of inequalities between men, women and children:

> *At a discursive level, power relations imbue discourses which define and delineate who and what groups are entitled to what resources, who has control over others, who is represented in certain ways (ibid p 10).*

It was this unspoken discourse that began to be 'deconstructed' through the development of relationships that no longer relied on culturally dictated power structures for their nourishment. However, as new children arrived they would often bring disruption to these growing relationship patterns and so, despite some relatively major breakthroughs between the staff and some of the long term 'residents' of the centre, and the changes in disciplinary policy, behavioural and disciplinary patterns remained difficult to regulate and were maintained on an individual basis, dependent on the relationships that formed between a specific staff member and a particular child.

Participatory evaluation

The second factor affecting change was the introduction of a participatory evaluation process and this event was to have a substantial and sustained change on the entire program and the individuals within it (O'Shaughnessy and Doming, 2001). The evaluation process took place in early 2001 and included a number of distinct phases. The first was an explanatory phase, during which stakeholders in the program were introduced to the idea of children leading an evaluation process.

This took place with both the children involved in the program, as well as adult 'stakeholders' (including staff, community members, parents, public officials, and shop owners) and aimed to clarify questions as to the purpose of the evaluation and the suggested process and to allay any potential fears or threats. The explanatory phase sought to gather questions (from all stakeholders but particularly children) about the program from as broad a range of perspectives as possible and it was conducted in the form of interviews and focus group discussions around the question, 'What do you want to know about this program?' From over two hundred questions initially compiled, a shorter list of eight was distilled to guide the evaluation, forming the basis of focus group discussion guides and recommendations that followed. The questions, while worded in language accessible to children, showed that children were concerned about significant program issues including long term sustainability, motivation and how to make the program more accessible to others in need.

1. *How long will the centre remain open?*
2. *Why did we open the centre?*
3. *What do we want to have happen to the children through the centre?*
4. *What are the differences between street and centre children?*
5. *How can we help other children like us?*
6. *How far can we go?*
7. *What will happen to us if the centre closes?*
8. *Do you have a plan to open more centres?*

Figure 15 Questions addressed by World Vision Myanmar street children's participatory evaluation process

Secondly, there was a training Phase. During this an evaluation team of children was selected by their peers (other children who used the centre and hostel). Involving all children on the evaluation team was not going to be possible so it was

necessary for children to vote for representatives. This process was in itself a vital step in understanding participation. The idea of representative democracy, somewhat foreign in a military regime, was explained to children and staff who, themselves, had never really experienced mature democratic process. A set of criteria was developed for the team members that included the ability to read and write and a proportionate gender representation. Secret ballot elections were held and a team of 15 children was elected to be trained as evaluators. The training process was broad ranging, including understanding the rationale, purpose, structure and possible tools for evaluation. Due to time limitations, a number of elements of the evaluation were decided upon by the evaluation consultant, in particular the use of focus group discussions and interviews as the primary method for collecting data. Training was provided in conducting and recording focus groups and interview teams were selected.

The next phase consisted of the identification of key respondents and the development of question guidelines based on questions collected during the explanatory phase. A sample of the question guide developed for other children who used the centre appears in Appendix 5. It sought to gather extensive data around why children liked or disliked their life on the street; home and centre; ways in which the drop-in-centre program might be improved; and how to reach out to other children not aware of the LPK program. Teams of children were then formed and a data collection timetable drawn up. Children then had just over a week to collect data. The analysis phase followed, during which children brought interview records into plenary discussions with the evaluators and the staff members who

were part of the evaluation team. Findings and recommendations were jointly arrived upon.

The majority of staff had moved to other positions within World Vision, during the time of data collection for this thesis. Likewise, a number of the children had moved on but project records and key informant interviews with the few staff and children that were still in the program reflected the power of this process and its lasting legacy. Overall there was great surprise at the ability of the children to maintain their interest in the process over such an extended period but more so with their ability to learn new skills and to provide sophisticated analysis of their own situation. Staff remarked that they had never expected the children to be able to do this. One of the most significant changes brought about by the process was the way in which staff changed their attitudes to the children, particularly those involved in the evaluation. It was almost as though a 'discursive shift' had taken place and that previous cultural and social definitions and attitudes that the staff had held, had somehow been transformed. Staff found this change difficult to articulate but talked about seeing the children much more as equals than they did before. One staff member remarked how about how surprised they were to find out that children's perceptions of their own problems were quite different to their own:

> *It was observed that the problems raised by the children were far removed from the thinking of the adults. They identified issues that affected negatively their daily lives (O'Shaughnessy and Doming, 2001 p10).*

A further significant change was noted by the children, about their view of themselves. Again, children found this difficult to articulate but they talked about

growth in confidence to speak to adults and to express opinions; increased self respect and a feeling of importance and achievement for having done something that they found difficult and challenging. However, the process and implications of this exercise did not stop at the completion of the evaluation. Most notably, the children went on to facilitate a similar process in the community based preventative aspects of the program and led much of the process, including a workshop for analysis and consensus of over 200 participants from Rangoon and Mandalay.

Sustainable change?

The evaluation was an event that took place some year and a half before data collection for this thesis began. Staff and children interviewed about the process naturally had positive memories. However, many of the staff had moved on to other jobs, while a number of the children had, for a variety or reasons, left the centre.

Two particularly significant implications can be drawn from the evaluation process and the retrospective insights of staff and children involved and interviewed for this thesis. Firstly, the evaluation was a process that officially validated the informal relationships that had grown between staff and children. Having children involved in decision-making roles sent a very strong message to other children in the drop-in-centre, as well as to the staff, that it was appropriate and expected that children should have a voice, and that there were processes through which this could now happen to all, not only to a favoured minority.

Secondly, the evaluation gave space for both adults and children to move the informal relationships that they had created into a more professional sphere of operation. This was a significant conceptual shift for both groups to make: children were required to look at themselves differently, as valued members of a team, capable of making decisions and acting upon them; adults were required to move beyond the cultural constraints that had previously affected their apparent need for control and superiority.

The evaluation process resulted in six major recommendations suggesting: the ongoing involvement of the evaluation team; the inclusion of children in child rights forums; the inclusion of children as project implementers; the development of a relationship between donors and children; the inclusion of the empowerment approach in all future funding proposals (O'Shaughnessy and Doming, 2001). Identifying what took place as a result of the evaluation recommendations is a starting point for reflecting on sustainability and the legacy of the evaluation process, and was important in understanding the present context and 'status' of participation.

The first recommendation suggested the:

> *Creation of a children's committee (of between six and 10 members) elected by the children themselves to suggest initiatives, seek feedback from other children about the program and ways to improve it. This sub-committee should sit on the Steering Committee of the project and take part in regular staff meetings (O'Shaughnessy and Doming, 2001 p11).*

While this group was initially formed and consisted of most of the children who had taken place in the evaluation, due to some children being transferred to the hostel

and the departure of some others from the drop-in-centre, the committee became difficult to maintain, in the format recommended. However, an alternative arrangement was agreed upon, whereby ad hoc committees were formed around specific issues on a time bound basis.

The response to the second recommendation has been mentioned previously:

> *Continued involvement of the 18 elected children evaluators in the monitoring of the Yangon LPK Centre and in M&E training of other project participants (in Hlaingtharyar and Mandalay) (O'Shaughnessy and Doming, 2001 p11).*

The team of evaluators maintained their role and went on to provide assistance in the evaluation of the entire street and working children's program that included preventative work in communities and another drop-in-centre program in Mandalay. The children acted as trainers and researchers, completing the task by co-facilitating, with adult staff, a meeting to discuss results and implications of the evaluation with a group of over 200 men, women and children from Rangoon and Mandalay. Unquestionably, this was one of the most successful outcomes.

Recommendation 3, suggested the inclusion of:

> *Children's participation in all forums that focus on children's issues such as the recently formed International NGO Theme Group on the Convention on the Rights of the Child...* (O'Shaughnessy and Doming, 2001 p11)

Even though children did not become involved in the Theme Group[43], their inclusion in other forums was considerable. Major planning meetings were held in the LPK centre on a yearly basis. Following the participatory evaluation, these

[43] **The Theme Group, facilitated by UNICEF Myanmar met infrequently and was eventually disbanded.**

meetings began to include children, both elected (by the other children) and chosen (by the staff). Annual planning was a substantial exercise, often taking up to a week to complete and expanded on a project 'logframe'[44]. Observations were conducted during annual planning that took place in August and September 2003 and records of this event (see Appendix 6) show a high degree of participation by children. For example, during the first session, children were asked to draw up a list of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and constraints (SWOC Analysis[45]) concerning the LPK program. Children noted a number of pertinent points relating to participation, identifying that learning about child rights had enabled them to think and plan more about their future. Major opportunities provided by the LPK program had included being able to take part in a range of different forums at school, as part of the centre, and as part of the CFN, and that understanding their rights had enabled them to participate more in all matters affecting them. A later planning session in September saw children and staff working together to identify specific inputs for the program to further develop children's participation and to work towards realising their rights. Meeting minutes (World Vision Myanmar Street Children Project Staff, 15th September 2003) from these sessions record that children in the boys' hostel felt that they should work together (with adults) more and that they should be more involved in discussing issues and making decisions with staff. Children in the drop-in-centre felt that they should have the right to express their feelings and thoughts more fully and the right to choose their own religion; that they should be able to participate in things that interested them; and in

[44] A 'logframe' or 'logical framework' is a planning and monitoring tool that sets out the goals, objectives and activities of a project in a logical hierarchical sequence. It is used to create a sense of logic in a project whereby the completion of a set of activities will lead to accomplishing a certain objective; a series of objectives when completed will achieve the goal etc. The logframe is commonly used in development projects.

[45] A common tool used by NGOs for review and planning.

the organisation of major events (referring to the Child Protection Day organised by the Child Focussed Network). When asked what specific activities could further participation, the children made a number of suggestions including regular meetings, group as well as confidential individual meetings with staff where necessary and children from the drop-In-centre felt that they could organise the regular meetings themselves with assistance from the staff. Boys from the boys' hostel went into significant detail in outlining their thoughts:

> *Children's meetings will be held twice a month where everyone can participate. There will be a facilitator, note taker and snacks will be provided. At these meetings they will break into groups and talk about the food, the place, behaviour and discipline, health and personal hygiene, education and vocational training, community participation.*
> *They will all decide in groups how to deal with issues relating to these areas and bring back to the whole group (notes taken during meeting observation Monday 15th September 2003)*

Children became involved in other, non-World Vision forums, as well, particularly in the Child Focussed Network, as will be discussed further on in this chapter.

The third recommendation suggested that there should be:

> *Training of children to become project implementers, e.g. outreach street-life-skills educators; street children advocates; literacy trainers of other street children (O'Shaughnessy and Doming, 2001 p11).*

This was found to have met with considerable success with children, particularly the older ones. A number of outreach programs were started in the LPK centre. One a general outreach program focussing on identifying other children on the street who did not know of the LPK centre and alerting them to the services of the

centre and others that were issue focussed, particularly trafficking and HIV. The process of engaging children as HIV peer outreach workers was particularly relevant as it aimed to engage children in a long term process on a paid basis. Initially, the role of peer outreach worker was advertised and children could apply as if for a job. Criteria were set, relating to age (12 to 17), literacy, availability and reference from a staff member (World Vision Myanmar, 2003b). Children were then asked to submit written applications for the positions (eight in all). Applicants were short listed, interviewed and selected following a similar process to recruitment for a normal job. Once selected, children were paid the equivalent of a daily wage to attend weekly training and development sessions. Over the course of a year, along with two local staff, they were taken through a training process by a consultant child psychologist who worked with the children, drawing on their personal experience, to develop peer education materials and strategies. Children were then responsible for trialling the materials and working with the staff again to update them. Following the completion of the program the children (only one had dropped out) presented their activities at a major forum held by World Vision Myanmar in an international hotel in Rangoon. The forum was attended by over 300 people. They also continued to provide HIV education to their peers.

The fourth recommendation regarding pen-pal relationships was the only one that did not appear to have yielded an ongoing response. The aim of the recommendation was to encourage donors (in this case the Australian Agency for International Development - AusAID, and the Department for International Development - DFID, the British Government's international aid program) and their beneficiaries (the children) to have an opportunity for direct communication, rather

than second hand, through ongoing reporting mechanisms. In this way, it was hoped that questions raised about the project, particularly those that related to funding, might be addressed. While no written relationship developed, the LPK centre became a regular port of call for visiting delegates, from numerous donors and foreign governments, even high profile visitors such as the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Alexander Downer who visited the centre in October 2003 (Picture 3 above). During such times, the children were often asked to perform (a drama or a dance for example) or to speak with visitors about their life on the street and in the LPK centre. Such occasions fall directly into level two (young people are decoration) and three (young people are tokenised) of Hart's ladder (as described in Chapter Three). Staff of the LPK centre, when asked about the reason behind such 'participative' activities, felt that, despite their limitations, they assisted with the development of self-confidence, team work and cooperation, friendships among children and social skills, all important in enabling children's right to participate to be more fully realised.

Picture 11 - Visit of the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs to the LPK Drop-in-Centre in Yangon October 2003

The fifth recommendation advocated for:

Future funding proposals to reflect the 'children's empowerment philosophy' as a central theme (O'Shaughnessy and Doming, 2001 p11).

While it was apparent that proposals for the LPK program became very focussed on rights based and empowerment theory, proposals for ADPs did not, reflecting perhaps a lack of co-ordination within the different parts of World Vision Myanmar and an inability to share valuable lessons across the organisation.

As well as observations and questions focussing on the legacy of the participatory evaluation, time was spent asking children and staff about the present status of participation within the LPK program. Children's responses ranged from the functional to the more sophisticated. At a functional level, they saw that participation included taking part in various domestic activities around the centre, such as cleaning, cooking and marketing, as well as taking part in the various programs that the LPK centre offered, for example, income generation, sports competitions, and non-formal education. Additionally they were able to identify participation at a more conceptual level, indicating that taking part in children's meetings where they could explore their feelings and were able to discuss and fulfil their needs was integral to participation within the context of the drop-in-centre. Children also saw the logical consequences of participating in different activities. For example, they talked abut learning how to cook and how these skills enabled them then to "arrange curries on their own". They saw that participation in the education program would enable them to learn and, therefore, to get better jobs when they grew up. Older children in particular saw that participation meant taking

greater responsibility around the centre in caring for younger children or imparting knowledge that they had acquired, such as in teaching their peers about HIV.

Five of the more recently employed staff (who had joined the centre in the past two years and had not been through the participatory evaluation) were asked to list the types of participation that went on in the centre. Their answers are quantified in the table below:

Number of responses	*Type of participation*
5	*presenting (role plays, paintings, poems, sports)*
4	*organising and leading*
4	*discussing or giving suggestions at meetings*
4	*being involved in problem solving*
3	*doing, learning or studying*
3	*Listening*
2	*giving suggestions*
2	*Making decisions*
2	*recounting their experiences*
2	*Helping to do work*

Table 10 - Types of participation according to a sample of staff at the LPK drop-in-centre

While the prioritising of ‘presenting’ by the staff might indicate a lingering tendency to tokenise children’s input, this is balanced to by other suggestions, particularly ‘organising and leading’.

The LPK program is an example of one organisations’ approach to participation. In the beginning, it evolved out of a specific need, becoming an integral part of the way all things were done. Significant events such as the evaluation were catalysts for moving the participation of children into more advanced stages. Further analysis of the program will be made at the end of the chapter.

The Child Focussed Network (CFN)

The second program that will be considered is the CFN which was formally established with a grant from the Australian Government in September 2003 (Child Focussed Network, 2003). At the beginning of the chapter it was referred to as a hybrid, as it is essentially a network of local agencies established with the support of international NGOs and UNICEF. The CFN was an initiative of World Vision Myanmar, Save the Children, UNICEF and a few small local organisations, with World Vision Myanmar providing the initial impetus to begin. The aim was twofold; firstly to bring the support of international child focussed agencies to assist local organisations, working with children but without access to technical assistance and, to a lesser degree, funding. Secondly, a forum for like minded organisations to discuss issues of mutual interest and concern. In the longer term, assuming a change in regime attitude to the existence of and potential role of local NGOs, the aim was to create a peak body for children's rights in the country (Child Focussed Network, 2003 p1). Despite the ambitious nature of such a goal, by the time this research was conducted the CFN had over 20 members and has grown now to a network with over 40 partners[46] around the country, predominantly in Rangoon and Mandalay.

Initially the seeds of the CFN were sewn when World Vision Myanmar began a process of consultations with 12 local and international organisations (see Figure 16 on the following page). Those that were involved undertook to attend a series of meetings to discuss the network role and function. The only criterion set from the outset was that children and adult representatives were required from each

[46] **Numbers have fluctuated somewhat due to government pressure on some organisations to close.**

participating organisation. Selection of both was left up to the organisation, with the condition that adults had a high degree of authority within the organisations and that children were able to read and write and willing to take part in the meetings and workshops and to report back to their peers. This was an organisation that planned to include children's participation right from the beginning!

3 International NGOs
2 United Nations Agencies
6 Orphanages
1 youth organisation
2 Monastic Schools

Figure 16 - Participants at the first meeting of the Child Focused Network

The opening workshop held on the 29th April 2002 at the Summit Parkview Hotel in Yangon (an international hotel often used by international organisations for meetings and workshops) was attended by 38 adults and 20 child participants. The children came from a range of different backgrounds. Those from Phoo Mooler, Karen Baptist Convention, KBTS and Htaw Mae Ba were predominantly from border areas, either sent by parents away from the conflict in Karen State or orphaned as a result of the fighting. Save the Children and World Vision chose representatives from their own programs, World Vision being represented by children from the street children's program. Children from the YWCA were from the community program in Hlaingtharyar and novices represented the two monastic schools. The meeting sought to identify, through discussion and consensus, the

Picture 12 Children's discussion during the first meeting of the CFN partners

major issues faced by children in Burma. It aimed to look at how a 'children's network' might develop; what its aim would be, what it would do, and how it would function. The workshop consisted of group discussion, with adults and children in separate groups and the four children's groups being facilitated by adults trained in the task. This was done to enable children to be more comfortable in sharing their thoughts. The results of the meeting, obtained as part of the document review during data collection, offered a number of different perspectives on the situation of children in the country, as captured in the table below:

Children's groups	Adult's groups
Poverty was underlying most issues, relating particularly to school attendance, violence and abuse against children, parental neglect	Poverty (family)
Lack of education due to poverty, children working, lack of awareness of importance, oppressive school discipline	Poor education, lack of skills for alternative livelihood
Increasing vulnerability to risk - children identified drugs, neglect by parents, drifting on to the street and working in or being trafficked to neighbouring countries as significant risks.	Social problems (broken homes/ orphans) Physical and sexual abuse Child labour ~
Lack of health knowledge (parents and children), limited access to health services, danger of HIV, dengue fever, malaria, tuberculosis, as well as common curable diseases such as diarrhoea and respiratory infections, poor basic personal and environmental hygiene	Big family size (lack of family planning) Unavailability of free basic health services (nutritional deficiencies) Lack of basic health knowledge
Gambling by both adults and children, associated with poverty and lack of education, led to family breakdown.	
Misunderstanding and impatience of adults towards children	No knowledge of CRC
	Lack of religious teaching
Table 11 - Identification of children's needs by children	Lack of child participants of the CFN

The comparison between adults' and children's views provides significant justification for ensuring that children are consulted in matters that affect them. For example, there is a distinct variation in the amount of detail and analysis between the two groups, with children's reflections appearing far more authoritative. This is illustrated clearly in the identification of poverty as a key social issue. Adults simply state the problem but the children not only link poverty to its causal factors but also show a clear understanding of the results of poverty on child wellbeing, the family and the community. Of course, this may well have been due to the skill of the facilitator or the thoroughness of the note taker but according to meeting minutes, the ability of the children to articulate the issues they were facing surprised many of the adult participants; more so as the children worked in groups having met for the first time. As one of the (adult) facilitators of the children's groups remarked:

Picture 13 - A child presenting findings to CFN members during the first meeting

> *After a slow start, the discussion picked up. Even the quietest children spoke about problems and difficulties they are faced with in their everyday life...For instance, when some of the younger children spoke about their relationship with their families or caregivers at the institutions, they expressed how they were affected by lack of love, affection, attention, understanding and caring on the part of these adults. They admitted their occasional misbehaviour but they expected more tolerance and understanding from adults. This issue of adults'*

attitude towards and treatment of children came up strongly from both boys and girls. Some of the adult groups at the meeting also identified the need to develop understanding of staff and caregivers in working with children. The children were also able to see the relationships between causes and effects in the issues they identified such as reasons for children dropping out of school...On the whole, the children participated well. They all gave their opinions and views. Most of the interaction was between them and the facilitator rather than among themselves as this was the first time they met each other and they are not much used to group discussion. (Meeting minutes from first CFN meeting 29.04.2002, held at Summit Parkview Hotel)

Notwithstanding the facilitator role, children were able to identify issues and their root causes in a succinct manner, indicating that they had considerable powers of analysis. The first meeting came to an end with a commitment to the concept by those in attendance and some initial thoughts on various models for the network and ideas about how it might function. Following this initial meeting seven further meetings were held to finalise a structure for the network and to develop a proposal for funding. All meetings, apart from the proposal writing workshop, included child representatives. Finally, in response to the identified needs, the CFN developed a number of basic working principles to guide their organisation and that it should adhere to the principles as stated in Table 12 on the following page.

The initial stages of establishing the CFN met with a number of challenges. The greatest for the children (at least according to the adult participants interviewed) was the conceptual challenge of imagining what a network might be and the purpose behind it, having little experience with group processes and uncertain as

1. *Be based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC);*
2. *Be open to all organisations working with children around the country;*
3. *Actively promote the CRC through training and skills building with members and their respective communities;*
4. *Include children in all areas of planning and implementation;*
5. *Undertake further research into the area of vulnerable children in order to get a thorough countrywide understanding of types of vulnerabilities, current responses and gaps in programming;*
6. *Seek to provide technical assistance (e.g. child rights training, social work training) to groups around the country working with vulnerable children and young people*

   (Child Focussed Network, 2003)

Table 12 - Principles of the CFN

to what their contributions in the meetings might lead to. However, minutes from the second meeting indicated that children could see a very clear purpose behind the network. There was arguably even too broad an agenda given the political and economic realities of the country. Discussion during this meeting focussed on confirming the need for a network and planning what it might realistically begin to do. Again children and adults were split into groups and children's groups were facilitated by adults. They voted unanimously for a network to be formed by organisations that could, 'practically implement child related matters' and that the network should focus on assisting children, where the government was unable to provide adequate support. A number of high level objectives for the network were recorded, including, 'for children's futures to be beautiful' and for the 'CRC to be disseminated all over the country'. They felt particularly that the needs of 'children in far away places' should be fulfilled by the network. Children were also asked to suggest how the network might function. They saw themselves already as decision

makers in the process suggesting that they would need ongoing meetings, 'assisted' by adults with knowledge of the CRC and that they should decide and then discuss with adults, thereby taking responsibility wherever possible (see Appendix 6 for copy of minutes from the second meeting of the CFN).

After some time a proposal was funded by the Australian government and the CFN was formally established in September 2003. Upon funding, the entire membership, including both adult and child representatives of the fledgling CFN, elected a committee of management that included both local and international organisations. A further aim was to then establish a series of technical committees that would be responsible for the specific areas of focus of the CFN. These focussed on child abuse and neglect, health, education and the CRC and legal issues. Diagrammatically, the structure of the organisation took the following form:

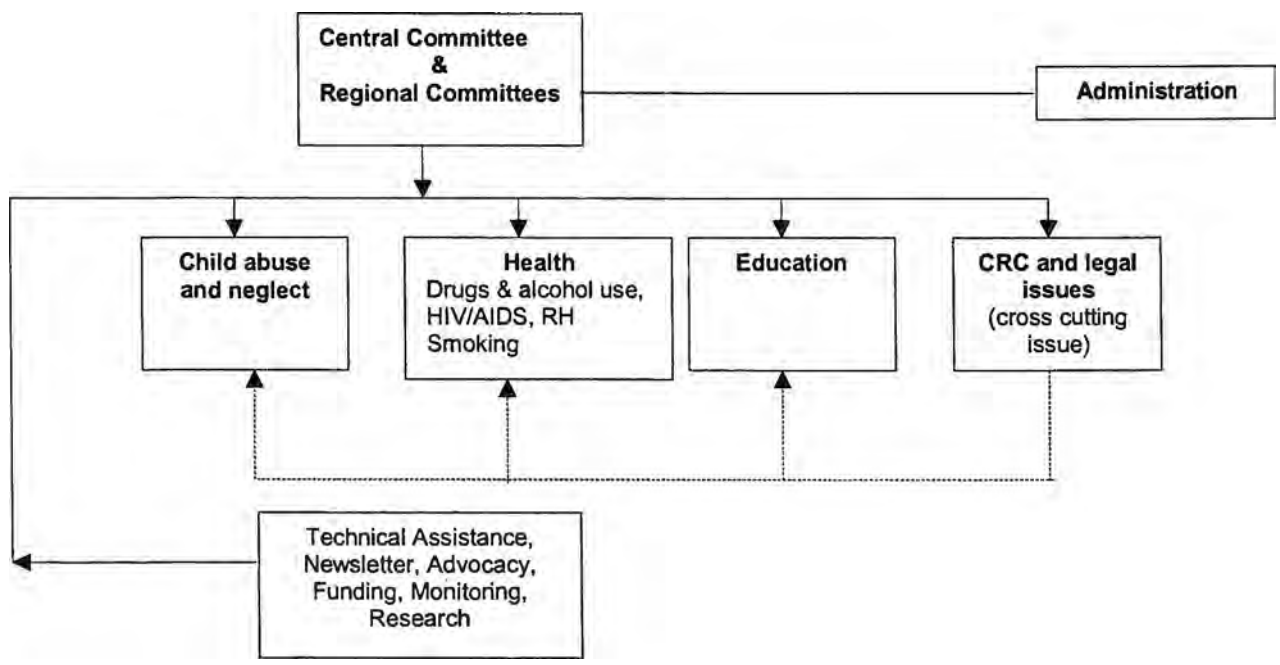


Figure 17 - Suggested structure of the CFN according to project design

The first task of the committee was to appoint a co-ordinator. This process, conducted by a team of three children and three adults, involved advertising, short listing and interviewing prospective candidates. May Ohn, a senior staff member from an INGO and member of the CFN, related how the children took their role very seriously:

> *In CFN children were on an equal footing and that even when we are recruiting staff we have a panel including children and they are tougher than us! They are not afraid to raise the questions. They were really good, for example, 'if you found a child abandoned in front of your house what would you do?' That kind of question. 'Are you genuinely interested in children, can you tell me why?' And actually people being interviewed really took the questions of the kids very seriously (May Ohn, adult committee member)*

When data was collected for this research, the CFN was still in its early formative stages. During the first six months of operation most of the energy of the CFN was directed towards establishing its office, formalising its membership structure and organising a major event, the child protection day that brought all members together for various competitions, games and presentations around the theme of child rights.

The committee has not been as active as envisaged when the CFN was originally established. Time, availability of children (over and above their other duties and interests), distance to travel to meetings and the commitment of network members have all influenced the ability of participants to take part in activities. The length of time between meetings has resulted in a loss of momentum between meetings and varying degrees of ownership from partners.

The separate sub-committees originally planned had, at the time data was collected (and up to the present day), never been established. The CFN has maintained its focus on child rights and has established a code of conduct and membership of the CFN is contingent upon signing. This requires certain standards of child protection and participation in accordance with the CRC. However, there is limited ability for the CFN to actually monitor organisational implementation of these standards or to hold organisations accountable.

CFN programs have focussed on training for network members in the CRC and child protection. They have also worked with UNICEF each year for the celebration of CRC day in November. Increasingly, they have been brought into discussions with international NGOs and UNICEF's government counterparts, to represent the views of children and local organisations. Children have become participants in CFN activities to varying degrees and their involvement has increased overtime as they have gained confidence and adults have gained confidence in them. Now they represent the CFN in meetings with government as well:

> So *child participation can happen but at one time when we had the meeting at UNCIEF for CRC day, U Myint Thein [Deputy Director for the Department of Social Welfare, he* was *monopolising the meeting and our kids from the CFN were getting very frustrated so I had to ask him, 'Can you listen please' and then he had to listen. They said that he was not listening to us and they were very frustrated and they started to dislike him and even wanted to leave the room (May Ohn, CFN executive committee member, Save the Children)*

Thiha Sane, the CFN coordinator, thinks the children have come a long way since the network first began:

CFN promotes child participation. Children can participate in their own processes. In the beginning of the CFN children were asked to participate, they just did what they were told. Now children can participate and understand that they have a right to do so. They have been involved in producing materials, gathering information, research etc. They can express their feelings and have found that adults are concerned about their feelings.

He notes a number of times when children's participation has been the most beneficial and effective: the start up phase in which the CFN was being planned; during staff recruitment where children were involved in the interview panels; and implementing activities where they can participate in decision-making. He noted that one of the most effective instances of child participation had been a 'child only' planning meeting, during which time the children discussed the theme for the upcoming Child Rights day and submitted their ideas to the Steering Committee and UNICEF. Thiha recalls that the initial intention for children to be part of the steering committee had not been realised but that this was due more to the fact that children were busy with school and other activities, rather than lack of capacity of the children or a reluctance of the adult members to involve them.

While the steering committee essentially decides on CFN activities according to Thiha, children's input is always gathered. Usually this happens during the meetings that are held, where children and adults work in separate groups to discuss ongoing programming. The CFN has maintained this practice of separating groups for discussion, as they still believe that children feel more comfortable discussing issues amongst themselves. Thiha notes how assertive the children have become because of this:

> *Sometimes children can not think in such a detailed way, they don't know the consequences so adults explain to them until consensus is reached. For example in the planning for Child Protection Day at UNICEF, the children wanted to call the day CRC Day as they felt that protection was only one component of the CRC and wanted a title that encompassed the whole of the CRC. The UNICEF staff didn't want this. The meeting was attended by the DG of Social Welfare and he said that if they wanted to use CRC they would have to inform the CRC Committee. The children still wanted to go ahead with the name change and in the end settled for CRC/Child Protection Day.*

Informing the CRC committee meant that government (military and township) authorities would need to become involved, the implications of which Thiha did not think the children fully understood. However, the name change went ahead. Thiha did not know whether or not UNICEF informed the CRC committee but he assumed they did:

> *The day* was *very good for the CFN and DSW provided a lot of assistance in identifying the location. First they contacted the sports minister to see if they could get Thu Wa Na Stadium, then Aung Sang Stadium but finally had to settle for La Tha High School. The Deputy Minister for Education attended the day to encourage them.*

Thiha suggested that the optimum participation for children would be that they begin to initiate activities and issues, rather than the adults that were involved in the network. He still felt that there was a degree of tokenism in the way in which children participated but he saw a certain process for participation developing, whereby the children would initiate an issue that would then be passed on to the steering committee which, in turn, would result in adults working with children to facilitate the activity. He felt that the children had changed substantially as a result in their involvement with the CFN:

They feel proud of the CFN and that they are a part of a broader network. Some children in orphanages are very isolated, they feel that they are just orphans with nothing and that they have no relation with other children. One child attending the CRC day said in his speech that he felt that the CRC day encouraged him as he discovered that there were lots of other children like him and that he was encouraged in discovering that he had rights.. .At first they [the children] had no confidence, they were not sure of their roles and responsibilities. They knew they were representing their organisation but not sure why and just listened to the adults. They seemed to agree with everything. Then they started to mention their feelings and ideas but they still seemed to agree with decisions made [by adults].

Now it is different, a little bit changed; children can present their ideas after separate (all children) discussions. Even though not all can express themselves in front of adults some of them are able to present their ideas and decisions.

As for member organisations, Thiha was not conclusive about the changes that had taken place as a result of their membership with the CFN. He felt that some of the smaller organisations were more open to change but that the more established and larger ones were reluctant to give children a greater voice in the way things were run.

Despite its youth, the CFN had taken some major steps towards including children's participation as an underlying operational principle. This had resulted in children being a part of each step of the planning process; from the identification of needs, to the design of the network and funding proposal. Apart from input from the CFN coordinator, data was not gathered relating to the impact of the network on the individual agencies and the children and staff within them. However, as the CFN was only six months old during the research, a fair evaluation of this could not

be made. Observations of the LPK centre indicated that children who were members of the CFN committee, formed for the celebration of Child Protection Day took part with interest and commitment. Child participation within the CFN was not without its challenges however. The committees which were envisaged (depicted in the organisational structure Figure 17) had not materialised. This was primarily due to time constraints on children who had to study and had other responsibilities. Children had yet to take on roles of significant responsibility within the CFN, apart from in the ad hoc committees formed for special events or for interviewing prospective staff and it was not clear as to how this was going to happen. The most significant challenge was one that was beyond the control of the CFN and its members; the difficulty in registration of a rights-based entity within a military regime. Further reflection on these issues will be made in the final chapter.

Phaung Daw Oo Monastic Education School

Phaung Daw Oo Monastic Education School and its small sub-branch in Rangoon is a very different organisation to either World Vision Myanmar or the CFN. The previous chapter already outlined much about the school and this section of the thesis will only focus on those elements of the school which are directly relevant to aspects of children's participation. Reading from the school's website[47] the mission statement clearly articulates its focus on children:

> *Phaung Daw Oo is dedicated to providing quality, free education to the under-privileged children of Mandalay. We will not close our doors to any child in need. We are committed to providing the highest quality of*

[47] The military regime closely monitors access to the internet and the school's website has been constructed outside of the country through a Buddhist organisation and is, in fact, quite difficult to find. While there is nothing critical of the regime on the website and intelligence sources will be aware of its existence, it has managed to continue though is difficult to update.

standards in our curriculum. To this end, our teaching staff must meet the highest expectation of our program. We believe that all children can succeed in life and find the path to which they may find happiness (U Nay aka)

The school is based on the founders' passion for education and their commitment to achieve their goal against often overwhelming odds, including limited funding and an adverse political environment. The growth of the school was largely possible due to a carefully constructed relationship with the previous Prime Minister, Khin Nyunt, who ensured that registration for the high school was possible (Chapter Seven elaborates further on this). When the research for this thesis was conducted the school was in a period of sustained growth, with support from a number of large donor bodies and individuals and increasing numbers of international teachers and organisations.

A vibrant network of committed groups and individuals has contributed significantly to the rapid growth that has taken place over the past 10 to 15 years. They are not only Burmese, as funding for the school has come principally from foreign donors, both individuals and government. It is illustrative of a model of social capital which will be explored later in this section. Fuelling it firstly is the strength and leadership provided by U Nayaka. The Buddhist principle of 'free thought' (discussed in Chapter Three), which the principal seeks to infuse, provides a solid basis for the inclusion of children in decision-making processes. Working against this, however, is the sheer scale of the school and the overwhelming number of children passing through its gates each day.

Chapter Five looked in some detail at U Nayaka's ideas on childhood and free thought; what he considers to be the central tenet of Buddhism. However, despite various interpretations of what constitutes 'a child', U Nayaka maintains that Buddhist teaching defines maturity as the attainment of higher knowledge, which can happen at any age. This is a promising basis from which participation can grow, however, along with the positive manifestations of free thought and higher knowledge, there are a number of a number of challenges. The first of these is the sheer size of the school. With around 130 staff and over 100 children in a class, participatory processes of any form are difficult. As already noted, this generally requires a focus on discipline and extremely didactic teaching which, given the excessive class numbers, is hardly surprising. Physical punishment of children, however, is not allowed. In addition to direct teaching staff there is an administrative body of around 30. The clinic program, an integral component of the school, is staffed by volunteer doctors and 4 school graduates who have been trained in basic nursing care. The management structure appears in Figure 18 and illustrates how, for management issues, staff refer to U Nayaka for many decisions. This deference is reinforced by the culturally ascribed high esteem in which senior religious leaders are held. This is especially true of the children at the school who have been brought up to revere monks. Thus, despite his protestations and urging staff and students to use their own initiative and rely on 'free thought', on a daily basis, this translates into many people seeking out U Nayaka's advice or approval for even the most straightforward of decisions. Participation is therefore hampered by a 'disconnect' between the cultural authority of monks along with the traditional management hierarchy of the school, and its underlying progressive liberal

philosophy that requires people to take responsibility for their own actions and to utilise their own freedom of thought.

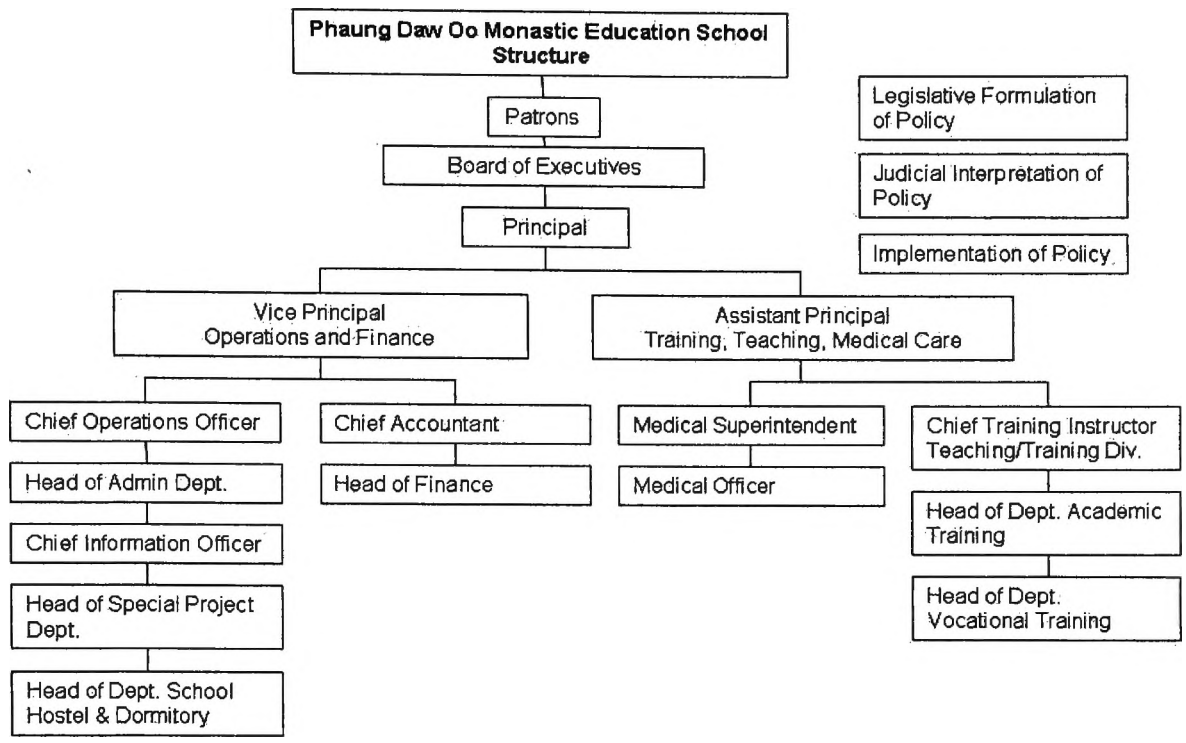


Figure 18 * Structure of Phaung Daw Oo

The second challenge to participation lies in the political environment in which the school operates. Simply because the school is registered, has substantial infrastructure and is highly successful on many levels, does not guarantee that it will not be closed at any time by the authorities. In fact, U Nayaka suggests that this is a constant risk. He revealed to me that the success of his school has resulted in many parents withdrawing their children from nearby government schools and sending them to PDO to get a better education. This has raised the ire, suspicion and jealousy of the Ministry of Education and, in turn, the Divisional

Commander of Mandalay (himself very senior in the regime hierarchy). However, the patronage of a senior government official (Khin Nyunt) allows the school to operate unhindered by other government bodies[48]. The impact of this situation on the ability of the school to implement participative processes is not immediately evident. However, as the school is under the watchful eye of the authorities, any aspect that stands out from the norm raises suspicion. Chapter Three referred to the active role of students in the political movements of the past, as well as the contemporary government policies of moving university campuses away from key strategic cities. The regime is wary of students and any move to empower them or to encourage their independent thought could be seen as a threat.

Despite these deep-seated impediments, U Nayaka has attempted to develop systems through which his staff and teachers can begin to take greater responsibility for their own actions and to participate more fully. U Nayaka sees education as a life long process, both in terms of ongoing learning, as well as ongoing involvement within his school 'family'. He begins to nurture future leaders from a young age. This is evident in a number of ways. Firstly, it can be seen in the development of what U Nayaka calls 'special classes'. One of the more innovative aspects of the school has been the selection of more gifted students to study entirely in English (apart from regular Myanmar lessons) with small classes of between 20 and 30 children. These children (totalling about 150 in ail, in standards one to four) not only have access to modern learning facilities (such as a language laboratory and English library[49]) but also to foreign teachers who

[48] Reference has already been made to the downfall of Khin Nyunt which took place after data was collected for the thesis. The result of Khin Nyunt's fall on the school are documented Chapter 7.
[49] Constructed through donations from foreign donors.

volunteer their time on a regular basis[50]. These students have already been earmarked as leaders of the future and are encouraged to be more outspoken and to participate more in both their own learning as well as the day to day decision-making of school life.

The second way in which U Nayaka seeks to nurture young leaders is with students who have recently completed their high school examinations. Promising leaders are encouraged to take on roles within the school, either in administration or in tuition or teaching. Opportunities are then given for these children to continue their study in English, computer or other fields of interest to them and the school while simultaneously maintaining their volunteer role at the school. This reflects an 'enclosed social network', relying on young leaders to be identified in their early years and to be groomed gradually to take a role in the school when they complete their studies. Often this means they are still only 16 or 17 years old. Hazalit and Ko U were both only 16 when they moved to Rangoon to look after the tutoring of the novices in the monastery, at the same time as furthering their own education at the local British Council. These two boys took on much of the responsibility for the discipline, extra curricular activities and tutoring of the novices who were only a few years younger then they were.

U Nayaka's approach to the participation of children was neither an intentional strategy for children's involvement in decision-making as was the case in the CFN, nor was it a means for children to become more influential within the management of a particular program, as was the case in the LPK Centre. Rather, it reflected the

[50] There are generally at least 10 foreign teachers in the school at any given time. However, following Khin Nyunt's demise the situation for these teachers changed substantially. This will be further elaborated upon in the final chapter.

particular Buddhist philosophy that underpinned the entire school and echoed respect, responsibility, free thought and wisdom. The sheer size and nature of the school program made options for the participation of all children very difficult to orchestrate, indeed this did not appear to be U Nayaka's aim. Rather the school environment allowed for children to take initiative if they so desired, and children who showed interest and potential for leadership were identified to take on more responsible roles progressively within the school hierarchy, as time, interest and encouragement dictated. This approach raises questions about the extent to which organisations can allow for participative inclusion of all children and the degree to which participative strategies are either selective or universal. These issues will be discussed further in the following section.

Implications and discussion

The previous chapter indicated that children play numerous roles within Burmese society. Unlike most Western countries, many children in Burma do not spend an extended period at school. They often work from a young age and carry a considerable amount of responsibility for the family. Because of this, they appear to be far more integrated into the day to day events of Burmese society, if for no other reason than that they are not invisible (isolated within a school building for long hours) but at work, in the streets, in shops, in farms and fields, often working side by side with adults. However, involving children in the decision-making processes of an organisation or a community and society is quite a different phenomenon. Chapter Six has described the way in which three organisations seek to involve children, in a variety of ways, in their respective programs. In turn, a number of conceptual and practical implications arise.

Time and praxis

Time is imperative and must be allowed for ideas of participation to be understood and implemented. Both children and adults needed the space to overcome the often culturally based, preconceived notions of inter-generational communication. World Vision Myanmar's street children project needed substantial time for adults involved in the program to see that there were alternative ways in which they could relate to children. Children needed time to overcome their mistrust and suspicion of adults and to gain confidence in their own ability to voice their opinions. In a similar way, children and adults involved in the CFN needed time to understand new concepts and to learn to work together. Time was needed in PDO for cultural constraints in communication to be overcome.

There was a fundamental difference between the CFN and the other two organisations, in relation to the role that time played in the development of participatory processes. For PDO and, in particular, the World Vision Myanmar LPK program, time allowed for the 'evolution' of participatory ideas. For the CFN, however, time was programmed for specific participatory activities to take place. Unstructured time, as was the case in the World Vision Myanmar LPK Centre, can allow for interpersonal relationships to grow. If children are to feel comfortable in participating, there is a need for trust and understanding that can only come about through allowing less structured opportunities for interaction between children and adults, during which traditional hierarchies or culturally ascribed roles can be put aside. As was the case with the LPK program, however, new participants have the potential to disrupt participatory processes and participatory frameworks and strategies need to be developed to incorporate this possibility.

Developing participatory processes does not always need the significant time that was the case in the LPK centre. As the CFN meetings showed, given good facilitation and structured events, in which children are allowed the space to voice opinions on their own terms and in the absence of adults, participation can occur with relative speed. Given the time bound nature of most development projects, structuring interaction between adults and children under the guidance of a skilled facilitator is the most likely course of action for the development of participatory processes. However, the principles of allowing space for children and adults to process ways of relating, that can often be at significant odds with their own cultural preconceptions, remains a vital consideration.

Leadership

Leadership was shown to be a vital element in the development of participatory processes from two perspectives. Firstly, organisational leadership has a significant impact on the way in which children's participation is integrated within a development program. It is an important aspect of any organisation, as leaders can intentionally plan to take on the structural changes that child participation might demand. Leaders can provide a clear vision for participatory processes and the inclusion of children. The strongest leadership in this regard was found in PDO where U Nayaka led by example and, despite cultural expectations placed on him by both adults and children, always maintained that children should make their own decisions and exercise their own 'free thought'. The leadership of the CFN, and the intentional planning for participation that this resulted in, was also a key factor in pushing forward the participation agenda. In the LPK centre, creative leadership

identified strategies (such as the evaluation) to help both staff and children see the benefits of collaboration and participation.

Secondly, the opportunity for children to develop their own skills and to take positions of leadership within programs had a significant influence over the manner in which participation progressed. Each organisation displayed different strategies to develop child leaders. Phaung Daw Oo, as mentioned previously, identified promising students as they made their way through the school system. This began in the early years where a small percentage of students were selected for the 'special (English language) stream'. Even though positions of leadership within the school for these younger students were some years away, it was clear that they were being groomed to take such responsibility. Older children, in the senior grades of the school took a number of different roles, including mentoring other students, office and administrative work and peer leadership roles. These children were generally selected by teaching staff and the schools' leaders, including U Nayaka. There was no single way in which children were identified for leadership. Often it was because their elder sibling had taken such a role, sometimes a student volunteered or stood out from their peers and was chosen by a teacher for some purpose.

Child members of the CFN were selected by their own organisations using criteria set by the CFN, that children had to be literate and already holding some kind of authority within their respective organisations. Most organisations called for volunteers to come along to meetings. Some appointed children based on the criteria. In the course of CFN activities, children often volunteered for specific

tasks, such as being part of the interview panel for staff or for the organising committee for the child protection day.

The LPK Centre was the only program in which children were elected by their constituents, although this strategy was not sustainable in the long term. The team of children elected for the evaluation, which was recommended to maintain its leadership role, was disbanded as some children moved from the LPK Centre to the hostels and others left the program. Ongoing elections to replace children who had left were problematic, as the nature of the centre meant that children came and went as they pleased, and there were always new children arriving and existing children moving on. Thus, constantly explaining the rationale behind elections and the importance of having children in positions of leadership became onerous. The more formal system of elections was replaced by a system, similar to PDO, in which children were identified by staff for their leadership potential and given positions of responsibility. The LPK Centre was also the only program to experiment with the idea of children applying for peer leadership roles (in the HIV peer education program) as though for a job. This strategy, while it was for a specific purpose, proved highly successful, at least for the duration of the peer outreach program.

All three organisations found it challenging to enable all children to participate. Each organisation managed this situation in a different way, identifying leaders to represent their peers; through election, through selection by an adult staff member or through self-selection. The dilemma in each of these scenarios is how to ensure that the selection of child leaders (no matter how it takes place) becomes an

equitable process. There is no single solution to this and perhaps the best that organisations can do is to be constantly aware of the repercussions of choosing one child over another and to discuss processes with children and gain consensus with them about the best way forward.

A second challenge to developing leadership amongst children, emanating from this analysis, is the degree to which adults themselves become involved in children's participation. Again, all three organisations had different approaches to this, although it was unclear as to whether or not this issue was ever openly discussed in any of them. Obviously none of the organisations bore much resemblance to the Child Clubs of Nepal (discussed in Chapter Two) which, from their inception, sought to be child led. Nor did any of them set out to place *'children in charge'* where, *'children decide what to do and adults get involved only if children ask for their help'* as with the upper level of Franklin's (1998) model of participation (also discussed in Chapter Two). However, this does not necessarily make them any 'less participative' in nature. Rather than being prescriptive about the manner and degree to which adults might become involved with child participatory process, some general principles for the involvement of adults arise from the examples above. Firstly, a consistent dialogue with children must be maintained. Data collected from all three programs suggested that children are able to understand sophisticated dilemmas and to make rational decisions. They can help guide adults in understanding when their input is needed and when it is not. Secondly, processes that allow children to take on the level of responsibility with which they feel comfortable, need to be established. The LPK program found some creative ways through which to do this, through the election process they

developed and, subsequently through allowing children to volunteer their time on ad hoc committees. There are many simple and non-threatening tools that could be used to communicate with children, allowing them to make their own decision as to the degree they feel ready to participate. Notice boards, regular meetings and news letters are strategies that are easy to use and are accessible to all. Finally, adults within programs must constantly remind themselves and each other of the need to engage children about all issues. Consultation is a basic principle of good development and one that is equally applicable to children.

Organisational structures

Leadership is integral to organisational structure and it also plays a vital role in integrating children's participation into programming. Structure refers to both the

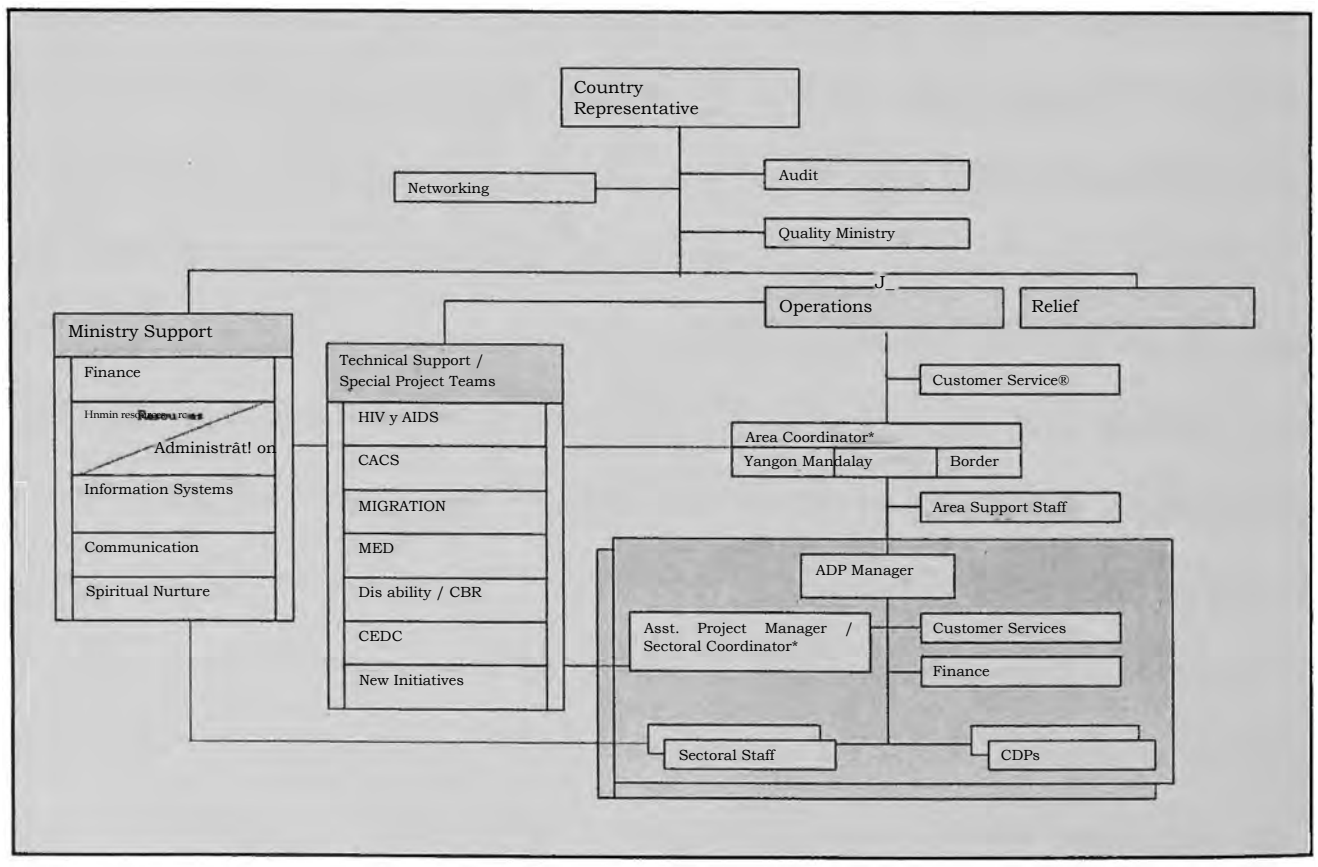


Figure 19 - World Vision Myanmar Organisational Structure

staffing hierarchy as well as the type of programs being implemented. Figure 19 below shows World Vision Myanmar's organisational structure, the structure of the other two organisations has already been considered. As the primary focus of all three organisations is on children, it is necessary to reflect on how these structures assist or impede children's participation. PDO's structure (see Figure 18) reinforces the cultural values that place the abbot at the top of the school's hierarchy. In many instances, this directly contradicts the abbot's wishes that staff and students take more responsibility and make their own decisions. In the same way, the structure of World Vision Myanmar, while somewhat less hierarchical, does not include children or any other program 'beneficiaries' within the structure of a project. The only organisation to do this was the CFN (see Figure 17) and it has had considerable success in encouraging the direct participation of children in a broad range of organisational functions. Structure is a vital component of the way in which organisations can either open themselves up to or remain closed to the participation of children. Organisations wanting to encourage participation need a structure that intentionally allows for decision-making to be decentralised and through which children are able to take on positions of responsibility. In each of the organisations discussed above, this has happened in different ways. CFN has intentionally set out to include children in positions of management and decision-making. However, they face difficulties in the individual partner organisations, fully understanding the concept and then allowing time for the children to take on these roles. Children themselves had difficulty in finding the time necessary for ongoing participation. World Vision Myanmar is large and diverse and children participated to varying degrees in some programs but not in others. This was largely dependent on the age of the children, the commitment and understanding of the

staff and the capacity of the children to take on such roles. In the World Vision Myanmar program it was more likely for children without familial responsibilities (i.e. street children and orphans totally dependent on World Vision) to take on roles within the organisation.

The importance of patient and supportive leadership and opportunities for children to take on roles when they feel ready should not be underestimated. As with so many aspects of organisational change, a 'champion' for children's participation in a position of leadership, can have a formidable impact on policy and decision-making. However, a champion is not always sufficient, as illustrated within the PDO school where even the abbot, who champions the cause for children's rights, struggles against the deeply engrained structural impediments within his school.

Organisational history and values

The organisational history and the way in which this influences people's concepts of children and childhood can affect the way in which participation is conceptualised within an organisation. The historical roots of an organisation relate to its institutional norms and values which, in turn, help shape the way in which staff in a development project might treat children. Furthermore, they may have an influence over the way in which children are perceived, for example, whether from a welfare or a religious point of view. This was illustrated in the difference in World Vision Myanmar LPK staff who had worked from a rights based perspective and who showed a far more empowering attitude towards children, when compared with their ADP counterparts who saw children primarily as objects of charity. In PDO, U Nayaka reflected the Buddhist principle of free thought which had a substantial impact on the manner in which children were treated within the

school system. The CFN, taking a rights based approach, intentionally included the participation of children as a prerequisite for organisations wishing to be involved, hence sending a very clear message that children and the views that they expressed were of value.

Organisational values are not static, as they are also influenced by the individuals within an organisation. Even organisations that have a pro-participation ethos must recognise that staff bring with them their own experience and understanding of childhood which will affect the way in which participation is integrated within a development project. Out of the three organisations reviewed, the CFN was probably the only organisation to begin to structurally address this from the outset, ensuring that all new staff were interviewed by children and found to be supportive of a participation agenda.

Good development practice and principles

Good development practices and principles are equally applicable to children and adults. As Chapter Two emphasised, good development, engages those who might benefit from a development initiative in the entire 'project cycle', from its inception through to an analysis of need for planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation. The first step of any development programming should include the collection of data that identifies the problem or development issue to be addressed. This should include prospective 'beneficiaries' in the collecting and analysing data, as was the case with the LPK drop-in-centre program and with the start up phase of the CFN. As Chapter Two noted, involving children in research raises ethical issues and these must be taken into account. Extensive thought has been put into

how children's rights might be upheld in the research process (see Kirby, 2004, Ennew and Plateau, 2004).

Good development practice will ensure that programming for participation takes place from the beginning of a program, as was apparent in the CFN. The World Vision Myanmar Street Children's Program, while it gradually moved towards sound participatory processes, raises the hypothetical question as to whether it would have experienced fewer problems relating to discipline, had it incorporated good participatory development and engaged children in the planning and implementation from the very beginning.

At a micro-level, good development requires the effective facilitation of development processes. As CFN meetings illustrated, when adults and children are thrust together, there is sometimes a need for age based discussions if children are to feel the necessary freedom to voice an opinion. Sometimes children require the assistance of an empathetic adult to facilitate or to be a conduit for communicating their thoughts to others. Children's participation should not necessarily mean that children do everything themselves: just as in a representative democracy, politicians are tasked to voice the opinion of their constituents, so too will adults and more confident children need to represent the opinions of others.

This, in turn, raises issues of representation and it is necessary that processes and procedures are put in place to ensure that all children involved in a particular development project or program have the opportunity for their voice to be heard. The onus must fall on organisations implementing programs for children to be more

inclusive of children's points of view in every aspect of operation. A clear example of representation was found in the evaluation process for the World Vision Myanmar LPK program. This illustrated the fact that even in the most autocratic of societies it is possible to introduce ideas of representational democracy. For a small project, the issue of representation does not appear too daunting. However, for other World Vision Myanmar programs, such as the ADPs, with thousands of children, the incorporation of representational decision-making is considerably more complex. Exploring how this might be possible was beyond the scope of the present research. However, as Chapter Two noted, on an even larger (national) scale, some experts in the United Kingdom are advocating for the lowering of the voting age to 14 (Thomas and Hocking, 2003).

Good development practice does not force people to participate, and ensures that what might be considered new and challenging ways of thinking are introduced in a culturally appropriate way, not simply accepting existing barriers but building on cultural potential to increase the opportunity for participation. U Nayaka's underlying Buddhist philosophy of free thought was a clear illustration of this. Good development practice also allows space for children who do not want to participate and ensures that participatory processes do not themselves become a means through which children might be put at risk.

Social capital

Participation should logically encourage the development of social networks and situations in which children and adults can engage with each other about areas of common concern. This, in turn, is likely to bring about the development of social capital for children, as was the case in the LPK centre when trust, norms and

networks developed which facilitated co-operation for mutual benefit (as per Putnam, 1993). The data collected indicated that social capital is an important element of participation but one that has not yet been fully explored. Participation should not be an activity that is 'done' in a project but an approach that underlies the development of relationships and activity. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Thomas and Hocking (2003) identify that in Western societies (and in particular the UK) there has been a trend towards individualisation, resulting in decreasing responsibility for the care and nurture of children by anyone but the child's immediate family. This is concomitant with early theoretical model of 'gemeinschaft' and 'gesellschaft' and community development and urbanisation as posited by Tonnies (also discussed in Chapter Two). The situation of children in Burma is, obviously, different to that of children in the East End of London. However, this study has uncovered relevant insights into the role of social capital as it relates to participation. Data collected from both adult and child respondents would suggest that children are able to generate quite complex social networks through work, family, cultural and religious interactions. Arguably, such interactions are scarce for children in western societies where individualisation is becoming increasingly pronounced due to a multitude of factors, and the ability of children to move outside of the immediate family circle to engage with others, particularly adults, through their own volition, more and more difficult.

Participation must be kept in balance with child protection but not overridden by it. As Sachs and Mellor (2005) suggest, the issue of child protection in Australia has become one of the most significant issues of our times, resulting in a good deal of fear and panic generated as a result of, amongst other things, the media, specific enquiries, and the evidence of abuse of children within a variety of public and

private institutions. The commonly accepted discourse of child protection would have adults encourage children not to trust or talk to strangers ('stranger danger') and be watchful and vigilant over their children's every move. Logically then, adults will be more likely to discourage children from creating their own social networks and social capital, making them, by inference, less able to participate in the world around them. A country like Burma, with comparatively lax formal and legal child protection measures, may act conversely, being, ironically, somewhat more supportive of children developing their own social networks and social capital and, by inference, more likely to participate in the world around them. Empirical research, as discussed in the previous chapter, would suggest that this is the case, despite the hierarchical nature of society in which adults generally have the final say. As children become part of a social network, they begin to create relationships and therefore able to exert influence. As a result the extent to which children are able to participate changes. Culturally sanctioned norms of behaviour and traditional forms of hierarchy can give way to new ideas and opportunities as was the case with the LPK program.

Conclusion

Emerging from this analysis is the need for a more nuanced theoretical framework for participation. A framework is required that is not as hierarchical as previous models and broad enough to allow for the various realms of influence, described in the previous chapter, to be taken into account. That is, it should acknowledge the participatory roles that children play as a result of the narrative, socio-political and individual influences of which children are integral parts. The following chapter proposes such a framework, suggesting three levels of participation (scripted,

implicit, and explicit) that are influenced by the different realms discussed in Chapter Four. Each level should not be seen in terms of one being more or less 'participative' than the other, even though there is an obvious progression. Rather, the levels seek to capture the environment within which different kinds of participation become more or less possible.

Chapter 6

Participation: A New Framework for Analysis

Introduction

The previous chapters have suggested a number of steps towards identifying a new paradigm for the analysis of children's participation. Firstly, it is clear that participation, now seen as a vital element of community development programs, has complex antecedents relating to a variety of other discourses, including those on human rights and gender. The child participation discourse is becoming increasingly recognised in the development world, particularly amongst some of the larger child focussed organisations such as UNICEF, World Vision and Save the Children. In relation to children, understanding participation demands a sociological re-examination of the meaning of childhood. However, literature relating to children and participation is very much 'rights based' in its conceptual and theoretical foundations.

Secondly, literature looking specifically at the conditions of childhood in Burma has been analysed to show that Burmese children live in a country that is economically destitute, lacks basic health and educational infrastructure, and holds scant opportunity for children and young people wishing to fulfil their potential. Despite this, children and families continue to survive and in some cases even progress. It is suggested that this may be due in part to some of the social networks (and social capital) that have developed in the country. Social capital, while related to

community development has not been well represented in the participation discourse, and there is scant analysis of social capital in relation to children.

At a macro level the ethical dilemma with children's participation lies in defining how and to what extent children should be involved in the totality of the human experience. This can be analysed from different perspectives. A human rights perspective suggests that children are human and therefore have inherent universal rights, including the right to participate. A psychological developmental perspective suggests that children 'evolve' through certain stages of growth which result in particular capacities and end in a mature adult. The capacity to participate is therefore dependent upon a range of psychological, emotional and physical antecedents. A sociological perspective begins to bring rights and psychology together, asserting that children should be seen as social beings in their own right, capable of making their own social networks, and having their own world view.

Overshadowing these different perspectives as a discursive 'umbrella' as it were, are the numerous filters through which adults and children understand the phenomenon of childhood itself. Culture is a particularly important filter and implies that childhood is not the same universal experience. Each culture has developed its own perspective on age and responsibility, familial and community hierarchy and rites of passage. These understandings are reinforced through bodies of literature, religion and changing social values. 'Globalisation' is a more recent filter that acts as a vehicle for the promotion of certain ideals and ideas about childhood that may concur or clash with existing cultural understandings.

Of course none of these perspectives exist in isolation from the other and to a degree they all have some merit. They are also dynamic in that they change as a result of their interaction with each other. For example, cultural norms around childhood can be influenced by globalisation. If we are to believe that participation is inherently good, a comprehensive framework for understanding participation must take all of these different perspectives into account.

Based on the theoretical discussion in Chapters Two and Three, and reflection on the empirical data of Chapters Four and Five, the possibility for a new framework for the analysis of children's participation emerges. This is part of the new contribution that this thesis makes in relation to children and development. The framework delineates three interrelated realms that help describe the way in which society embodies childhood: the personal; the socio-political and the narrative. It also identifies a more nuanced way to look at participation programs for children being implemented through development organisations.

A new framework for understanding child participation

PARTICIPATION	Scripted		
Characterised by	Limited or no choice Relating to power structures Little political influence Little collective decision-making	Some level of autonomy and choice about participating - how, when and in what Limited political influence Little collective decision-making	Children taking primary responsibility High level of autonomy Political influence Collective decision-making

Influenced by:

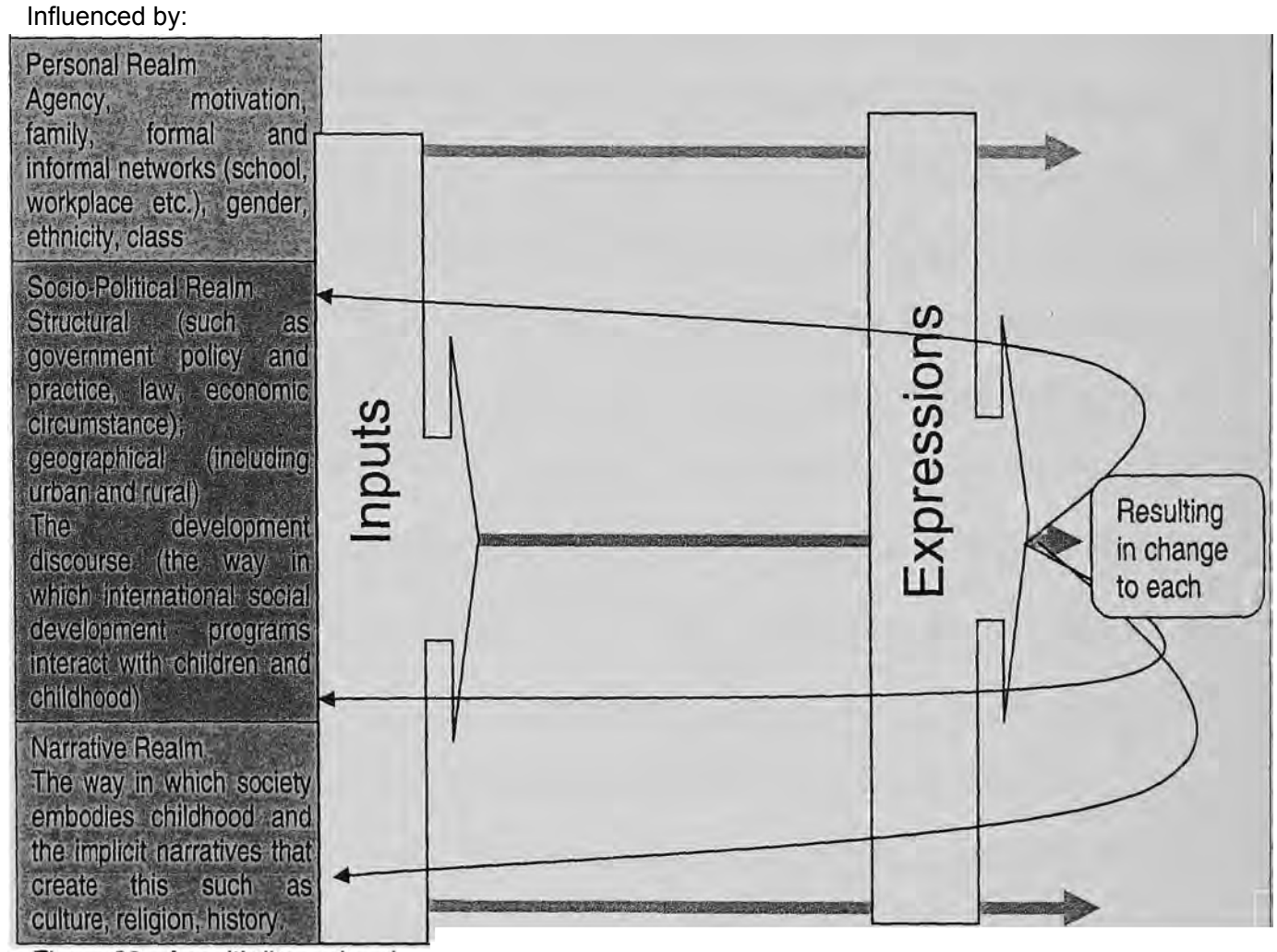


Figure 20 - A multi-dimensional framework for children's participation

This is a multidimensional framework that suggests a progression in participation from scripted to explicit along the horizontal axis and recognises a number of

realms of influence over the way in which participation might be seen and interpreted that form the vertical axis.

Basic principles of the framework

This framework is underpinned by a number of basic principles. Acknowledging that participation is complex and difficult to define, the framework broadly adheres to the definition suggested in Chapter Two that participation is a process whereby participants take control over outcomes through a process of consensual decision-making that benefit the whole (as opposed to individuals within the group). Participation also incorporates the development of skills that enable the act of consensus and necessarily involves the opinions of all involved to be taken into account resulting in an equitable sharing of resources and outcomes of any particular endeavour.

Acknowledging that participation and the ability to participate is in most cases a gradual process through which people learn skills to enable meaningful participation, the framework does not assume evolution in a hierarchical manner or that the ultimate aim of children's participation should be to have children in control. Children participate in many forms which at times may be enforced; however most forms of participation should be acknowledged as that, and interpreted within the broader context of the child's family, community and socio-political circumstances.

The notion of 'community' outlined in the framework refers to the broadest sense of the term and could include physical community such as family or school; a

geographic community such as the neighbourhood in which one resides; a club or a network to which one belongs either formally or informally. The framework sees participation not simply as the act of taking part but also as a mental and emotional perception reflective of the belief that someone else's perspective is of value; that is the value of participation is internalised and seen as of intrinsic value.

The three major categories of participation do imply some form of progression in terms of the child's autonomy in deciding whether to participate or not. They also identify that this progression is based on a complex web of personal, social and political factors that may operate differently in different situations and for different children in similar situations.

The framework recognises the fact that children cannot all be looked at in the same way: an individual child's ability to participate is influenced by a multitude of factors and each child may be affected quite differently by the same factors. There is interdependence within each realm as there is between realms. For example a child may be encouraged by parents to take part in decision-making processes in the home; a decision that has, in part been made as a result of factors from both the socio-economic realm (e.g. parents having had access to educational thought encouraging participation) and the narrative realm (such as a particular religious belief that children's views should be respected). In turn, children given the opportunity to participate will develop greater self confidence and influence and the ability to participate to a greater extent in the future.

Types of participation

There are three categories of participation that form the horizontal plane of the framework:

Scripted participation

It is suggested that there is a societal 'script' (based on culture and social norms) that informs how and when children are encouraged to participate and that children are expected to conform to this. Different communities may have different 'scripts' and therefore different expectations although overall, scripted participation is defined by a lack of real choice for the child. This should not be interpreted as a necessarily bad thing, rather it acknowledges that there are societal and parental hopes and expectations for children that reflect culture and traditions (such as Shin Pyu - novitiation - or baptism) and that these are an integral part of the way in which children are raised and brought to maturity. By participating in them, children learn skills that they will need in later life and at the same time participate in a representational sense.

Scripted participation assumes that there are certain decision-making processes within society that have an influence over what children are permitted to do even though they may be capable of more and that children do not have a great deal of access to them. For example, in most families children are expected to undertake certain chores or duties. Their participation should be no less valued or acknowledged because of this.

Scripted participation assumes that there are certain established power structures in society and children fit into this hierarchy although they are not powerless within

them. One such structure is the family and while it is generally accepted that parental authority is primary within the family, children develop a variety of skills and techniques to have their voices heard.

Scripted participation, therefore, is characterised by little personal choice on the part of the child over whether to participate keeping in mind the fact that we are all expected to do certain things regardless of age and that choice and responsibility go hand in hand. Scripted participation is a part of a learning process to understand and respect the rights and responsibilities of others with little political influence in regards to its impact on structures of power and hierarchy and within that little collective decision-making power (i.e. children are not recognised as an active constituency).

Implicit participation

Implicit participation differs from scripted participation in that family and community show recognition of the inherent value of the child's contribution. This may be in an economic sense or with a child contributing in some way to the running or the home, caring for siblings for example, or in a consultative sense whereby those close to the child consult as they see value in the child's perspective. Implicit participation displays some level of autonomy and choice about participating. The degree, time and nature of participation is characterised by limited political influence. That is, it may have an impact on power structures within the family and community although children as a group will have little collective decision-making ability within the community, despite the recognition that their perspectives should be listened to and understood.

At this point there is a realisation that the child's point of view has inherent value and should be sought out. Implicit participation maintains the status quo, upholding existing values and social norms around childhood.

Explicit participation

Explicit participation is characterised by children taking primary responsibility although not necessarily being in command of matters affecting them. Children are perceived by themselves and others to possess a high level of autonomy and accompanying responsibility and their actions individually and collectively have potential for political influence and affecting power structures. Explicit participation acknowledges that children have their own sociological integrity that is valuable in and of itself. Children within the drop-in-centre, who took on positions of leadership and expressed their views and the views of others in planning sessions, demonstrated explicit participation.

Realms of influence

The framework includes a number of important contextual factors that have a direct influence over the way in which childhood is constructed within society. These factors have been grouped under various realms in the vertical plane of the framework. The realms are overlapping and interrelated:

The personal realm

The personal realm recognises a child's agency. That is the ability or potential of the child to act upon circumstances that affect him/her. This depends on aspects of the child's personality (such as intellect, status, gender) and immediate environment which have a direct influence on behaviour and the ability of the child to exert influence over a given situation. The personal realm includes social

networks that the child has developed and accords the child has status as a sociological entity in his/her own right. Social capital that a child has built is a vital part of the personal realm and recognises the ability of children to develop social capital both within the family context as well as the context external to the immediate family environment - in school, work. Social capital also relates to the way in which the child might assist in linking different external contexts both for him/herself as well as for family members or members of other social networks.

The socio-political realm

There are many factors that are beyond the immediate control of the child (and in most cases the family) that have an impact on the extent to which children can take part in community in the broadest sense. These make up the socio-political realm of influence. Aspects of this realm are contemporary, economic and political. They create an environment which either enables or works against participation or perhaps does both simultaneously. The socio-political realm is about structures of power within society generally beyond the immediate control of the individual. Legal systems for example, are part of this realm: they are decided upon by the state and set limits to behaviour. This realm includes issues such as geographic identity and its impact on childhood, such as the difference between urban and rural lifestyles. The socio-political realm also includes, in the case of Burma, the way in which the country relates to the international political and development arena.

The narrative realm

This refers to the way in which society constructs and articulates its perception of childhood and children. People are conditioned through education, cultural, historical and religious expectations to believe that understandings and concepts of childhood were always looked upon in the way they are at the present time. The narrative realm is not static, however, and subtle changes often occur as new as new influential factors are introduced. This realm is often unspoken and seldom analysed in any depth because people believe it was always like that.

This framework can be used to analyse children as 'individual participants' in the world around them as well as organisations and structures that constitute society and the way in which they either promote or detract from children's capacity to participate. The primary difference between this and linear participation models such as Hart and Amstein is that this framework does not simply accept the dominant rights perspective that seems to be pushing the participation agenda at present. While rights are definitely a part of the socio-political realm and have an impact on children's agency and the legal and policy environment, they are not the only factor that should be taken into account when addressing issues of participation. In addition, the framework allows for the possible identification of examples of children's lived experience that do not always sit neatly in one category or the other as implied by Hart's ladder. Rather, as is arguably the case with most adults, forms of participation cut across and move between categories. The following page shows some examples of how the framework was used to develop the analysis in Chapters Four and Five.

PARTICIPATION	Scripted	Implicit	Explicit
Characterised by —	■ Limited or no choice ■ Relating to power structures ■ Little political influence ■ Little collective decision-making	■ Some level of autonomy and choice about participating - how, when and in what ■ Limited political influence ■ Little collective decision-making	■ Children taking primary responsibility ■ High level of autonomy ■ Political influence ■ Collective decision-making
Influenced by: .Pe^aÇBym.>i ^Agènçy| mbtjvation,- familyi^forrnal/and[5] 'etc.'),; gendér^eihriicltyj'clàss''ïii' •>>.r ;> i* r'•'K ,2V• • . - * : -1 ' vi-c:	° Cultural expectation on girls to stay in the home and to be submissive ° Younger children have responsibility ° Children need to learn how to participate and to develop the necessary skills and attributes for increased participation	° Expectations placed on girls to stay at home leads to greater responsibility in the home for decision-making ° Expectations on boys to play active economic role leads to growing independence and contribution to family wellbeing ° Children need to learn how to participate and are developing some skills and attributes for increased participation	° Opportunity for leadership within community environment (such as the drop-in-centre or the CFN or PDO) enables children to participate with high level of autonomy and influence ° Children and adults given space to form relationships encourages participation ° Children continue to learn how to participate and to develop the necessary skills and attributes for increased participation
Influenced by: Socio-Political Realm «- Structurai ; (such as, government ■ policy ;and practice, : law, economic The development discourse (tne^wsiY in ^programsnteract ' with ^chjidren : :and childhood	° Military regime promotes a climate of fear and mistrust -*• people have very few life choices in general, there are generally no democratic processes at all and, therefore, children have nothing on which to model behaviour ° Military is 'colonising' existing religious structures such as the sangha and using Buddhist systems to maintain control	° Children's work and economic necessity -*■ encourages children's independence from an early age ° Protecting children — can encourage parents or policy makers to allow limited participation ° Children involved in different NGO & community projects have opportunity to participate in various activities	° Children as bearers of rights -*• encourages children and community to allow children a voice ° Social capital - such as in PDO can encourage children to take their own initiative, contribute to different social networks

PARTICIPATION	Scripted	Implicit	Explicit
Influenced by: Narrative Realm The way in which society embodies childhood and the implicit narratives that create this such as culture, religion, history.	▫ Hierarchical society gives deference to ages and positions ▫ Different stages of growth from child → youth → adult dependent upon many factors. Children are considered dependent before puberty. ▫ Existing cultural attitudes → children are children until the leave home and start their own family	▫ Customary law sees children only up to the age of 13. Following that expectations change but still not fully accepted as adult ▫ Once young people leave the dependency of early childhood, they become increasingly responsible e.g. contributing to family income, care for elderly parents or grandparents.	▫ Buddhist narrative of free thought and enlightenment ▫ Working children often take 'adult-like' responsibility for the household ▫ Once children complete school (for those with sufficient resources to do so), they are also put in positions of responsibility for the family.

Figure 21 - Participation Framework showing some examples

Chapter 7

New Horizons for Participation

Participation, seen from the different perspectives explored in this thesis, raise significant implications for theory, policy and practice. Furthermore, implications for the situation of children in Burma also arise through the findings and analysis of the empirical data collected for the thesis. This chapter will highlight these implications and the contribution to knowledge made by the thesis and make recommendations for areas of further research and exploration.

Implications for theoretical frameworks

While it would be helpful in some respects if children's participation could be categorised or fit into some scale such as the rungs of Hart's ladder (1997), all such models have inadequacies when trying to analyse the role or nature of children's participation, as they fail to capture the complexity of this outwardly simple concept. Non-linear models such as Abrioux (1998) make certain progress towards a more complex conceptualisation of what it means for children to participate and how that might be measured but they are still lacking.

To date, the participation discourse has been dominated by rights-based perspectives. However; this thesis illuminates the need to take other perspectives into account. Thomas and Hocking (2003) (see Chapter Two) contend that a 'quality of life' approach is a useful tool for developing a policy framework for children in the U.K. This framework builds on children's rights but suggests that

rights should not be the only perspective from which to generate policy and practice for children.

My own research makes similar claims for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is an ontological imperative, in other words, a need to recognise that children 'are', therefore they think and act and constantly, make decisions to help, to intervene, to remain silent and to be compliant. Many of the decisions children make about how and when to participate in something, even when it seems forced upon them and there seems little choice, are not validated in the current models of participation. These models, despite developments since Hart's ladder, are based on a scale culminating ultimately in the ability to participate at a political and decision-making level. Rights-based models of participation are associated strongly with Western democratic models of governance and risk ignoring children's ontological contribution to the family and community.

Secondly, in Burma it has been observed that children have their own social networks, both with other children as well as with the adult world. While membership of such networks is not always voluntary, neither is it with adults. Within such networks, children develop their own abilities to function, and to participate, often on their own terms. By virtue of their being children, and sometimes by their own intent, children develop social and emotional capital which they use, often to great effect. This was illustrated very clearly by the novices at Thoun Htat Kyaung. The ability to create this social and emotional capital is a vital element of their participation and again, is not sufficiently captured in existing models.

In Burma, children are far more visible as many of them take part in work, family and community life in much the same way as adults. This is unlike many industrialised countries where life, in particular urban life, has become more Individualistic in the way that Tonnies observed many years ago (see discussion in Chapter Two). As a result children have been partitioned from the rest of society; in school, being prepared for adulthood and protected from aspects of society that adults feel they are not yet ready for. Societies with more sophisticated legal systems reflect this in complex law and policy. One result has been the rising paranoia over child protection issues, as outlined by Judyth Sachs and Lise Mellor (2005), and the potential to further separate children from interaction with adults for fear of abuse. The Convention on the Rights of the Child seeks to overcome the dichotomy between protection and participation, through its underlying principle of the 'best interests of the child'. However, the best interest principle rests ultimate power in the hands of adults.

Thirdly, children's participation in development programs is not something that can be done 'to', 'for' or even 'with' children. It cannot simply be 'programmed', as might be the digging of a well or the establishment of a loan fund. Participation requires a fundamental shift in relationship, as was shown in the staff and the children in the World Vision Myanmar LPK program. While such 'relational shift' is arguably the spirit of rights-based approaches, often the very use of the word 'rights' provokes defensiveness and confrontation. In Burma it was found that there could be other ways to build upon more culturally accepted notions, particularly those espoused in Buddhist teaching, to promote the rights and

responsibilities of children. U Nayaka's description of 'free thought' is illustrative of this. Buddhist approaches to rights have received some attention through the work of scholars such as Vo Van Ai (2000) which open up new avenues for exploring cultural aspects of children's participation.

Children are, in a social theoretical sense, part of a 'meta-narrative' or, 'an attempt to make sense of the totality of human history' (Callinicos, 2000, p2). Adults 'project' their ideals of childhood onto society, not in the negative sense of the word[51], but in a positive way; in the hope of a better future for their children. This enables children to participate at a subliminal level, within the collective psyche of the family, the community and the nation, even, of late, in a global sense. Children participate by the fact that they are there as a collective entity and through what they embody. This varies from culture to culture but usually centres on some aspect of their being 'the future'. By virtue of this, society constructs itself in different ways (given economic, social and political realities), to enable children to become what it hopes that they might be. Although the concept of rights, at its most fundamental level, is an attempt to alter that meta-narrative (i.e. children seen for what they are rather than what they will become), child rights-based approaches are predominantly focussed at a micro-level in which children 'learn' to participate by being involved in a project rather than seeing how they participate in every day life. This ignores the fact that children make important decisions for themselves and their families (and communities) every day.

[51] A psychoanalytical concept 'whereby emotions, vices and qualities which an individual either rejects or refuses to recognise in himself are expelled from the self and relocated in another person or persons DAVENPORT-HINES, R. (1990) Sex *Death and Punishment Attitudes to Sex and Sexuality in Britain since the Renaissance,* London, William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd.

Rights-based frameworks espouse the notion of individual rights and responsibilities and, in that way, are reflective of values of Western liberal democracy, which are not wholly applicable for many parts of the world. They are based on historical processes that continue to develop and change. Simply extracting a part (rights to participation or child rights more generally), ignores the fact that all societies have their own frameworks into which new ideas must be processed and developed. Increasingly authors are stressing the euro-centric bias of participatory approaches (Adefila, 2006). The development of the present system of Western democracy took hundreds of years and while developing countries might learn from the mistakes of the West, participation, if we are to be true to its underlying ethos, demands that societies are given the opportunity to develop indigenous solutions to such complex ideas. Children's participation is presently being advanced through a rights-based framework and this, at times, makes it more difficult for communities or individuals within them (children, youth and adults) to develop culturally specific and appropriate analysis and understanding. For example, the Ubuntu ethic in sub-Saharan Africa ('I am because we are'), or the notion of responsibilities enshrined in Buddhist teachings, are both culturally significant traditions with which rights-based models have synergy and through which more Western notions of participation can be examined.

The framework presented in the previous chapter is an attempt to address the shortcomings of our understandings of children's participation, as portrayed in current rights-based approaches. It does not refute the efficacy of rights, but allows for the understanding of the different realms that influence perceptions of childhood to be taken into account. Participation cannot simply be seen as an

element of a project, nor in isolation from the broad range of factors that influence the way in which children perceive and are perceived by the world around them. A project implemented by an NGO aimed at increasing children's participation must, therefore, look at the complete environment in which children live, not simply at the limited reach of the project's goal and objectives.

Implications for international and local child-focussed organisations in Burma

It is very difficult to speculate about the future of Burma. If there is one lesson to be learned from recent history, it is that there is a sense of unpredictability about the country. Conditions in Burma have continued to deteriorate since the collection of data for this research. I have watched the continuing downward momentum of the country with sadness and with a sense of diminished hope that things might change. As I write this, Aung San Suu Kyi remains locked in her home which has become her prison, unable to make contact with the outside world. She remains an icon of hope for many but her political influence is becoming increasingly uncertain, even irrelevant:

> *Since the purge of Khin Nyunt in late 2004, however, the military leadership has taken a more uncompromising, nationalistic line. There are today no meaningful contacts with the opposition, whose leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, remains under house arrest. (International Crisis Group, 2006 p5).*

Children continue to suffer as a result of the limited educational opportunities and general poverty in the country. UNICEF recently conducted a survey on vulnerable children with the Department of Social Welfare but, according to personal sources in Rangoon, the report was not released, due to government sensitivity, indicating that children's issues are still easy to ignore. In addition, local organisations are

coming under increasing scrutiny from the authorities. Recently a law (Union of Myanmar, 2006) was enacted requiring all organisations to be registered officially with the Ministry of Home Affairs and the respective sectoral ministry (health or social welfare for example). Agencies see this as a tightening of controls and early signs bear out this concern, as many local agencies have been forced to stop their activities.

Despite these more recent events, the findings of this research have some significant implications for the NGOs studied and for other child-focussed organisations more broadly. Firstly, there is an urgency to invest in children. The health and education systems are severely lacking and the 'lost generation' that respondents referred to is soon to gain another generation. To influence structural reform is no easy task. A number of key donor governments now acknowledge the need to engage with the regime but only at a local level. This is reflected in recent guidelines for the so called Three Diseases Fund'[52] and more recently in a tender for HIV programming by AusAID, as part of their regional HIV initiative. Working with government at a local level will not affect policy change, however, as this takes place within the leadership of the regime, and local decision makers rarely allow significant deviance from the status quo. As much as foreign governments would like to see change in Burma, the present regime does not appear to be losing its grip on power. If anything they are managing to consolidate it, relying on cash from the sale of natural resources, and through reliance on the generosity and political agendas of their two largest neighbours, India and China. True and lasting change

[52] The Three Diseases Fund is a joint donor mechanism that includes the UK, Australia and a number of European Governments. It was established after the withdrawal of the Global Fund to fight TB, Malaria and HIV.

can only come from within. I recall hearing the words of Aung San Suu Kyi[53], 'democracy will only come to the Burmese people when they want it', and in the end, if sustainable development practice has taught us any lesson it is that those affected by a problem must be part of its solution. Hence, investing in local organisations and individuals that see themselves as part of the solution is imperative. Phaung Daw Oo and the Child Focussed Network are two examples. They have great potential to lay the ground work for new ideas that will, in the long run, lead to change. PDO, in particular, has a long term vision for change that has proved its value already, providing free education to thousands of children and encouraging its philosophy of free thought. There is potential for PDO to influence other monastic schools, to spread its philosophy and its belief in the power of education. Likewise the CFN has potential to continue to expand the influence of its network, continuing to educate others about child rights and seeking to draw children into opportunities for their voices to become more prominent. In part, the development of local organisations requires financial resources but of equal importance, they require technical assistance and support for institutional capacity development. Strengthening the capacity of such organisations to respond to education and health needs will also contribute to the development of good governance, transparency, participation and accountability, all vital for civil society growth. The CFN in particular has potential to encourage the growth of civil society, as its primary purpose is to bring together groups and individuals with the shared agenda of improving the quality of life for children. As such groups become more established, they have the potential to increase the participation of children.

[53] Reported to me by one of my Burmese friends after he attended one of the rallies outside of Aung San Suu Kyi's home early in 1996.

From a programmatic point of view, participation must be well planned and facilitated. Planning must include a detailed analysis of the factors that affect the way in which children are embodied within society and assess the socio-political, economic, cultural and narrative influences upon childhood and children. This will require time to understand the way in which communities operate and the specific factors that might enhance or inhibit participation, as they will not always be the same in each community or in each organisation.

The work of the CFN shows that good facilitation can lead very quickly to empowered children, capable of voicing their opinions, even in forums with government. Having structured children's participation from the beginning, the challenge for the CFN now is to maintain their involvement. Children become adults, they lose their interest and they move on to other places. Organisations must, therefore, ensure that a culture of participation is encouraged and not simply pay lip service to the idea, so that new generations will be able to continue where their predecessors left off. This is not particularly difficult. It involves asking children their opinion and developing ways in which to institutionalise children's input in a way that is respectful to children and adults alike. Like any good development process, this should involve clearly articulated goals and objectives that are monitored and evaluated accordingly. Organisational structures, policies, and management mechanisms must reflect a belief in children's participation if lasting change is to be maintained. This may include children becoming part of management teams or advisory boards. This is not to suggest that children should become full-time employees of organisations, simply that organisations should seek culturally appropriate mechanisms to genuinely involve children in decision-

making capacities, at the same time being respectful to the other demands that are placed on children's lives.

UNICEF has a valuable role to play in Burma in promoting the rights of children and particularly the right of children to participate in matters that affect them. As a UN agency, UNICEF has a greater potential than INGOs or NGOs to engage government on matters of policy and advocacy. The government's recent move to *Nay Pyi Daw* and the new guidelines for international organisations will no doubt make their ability to operate more difficult. However, they must show a greater commitment to the growth of local capacity, both government and non-government, to respond to the needs of children. Myanmar is a signatory to the CRC and took part in the last Special Session for Children. At a township level, there are CRC committees that, although largely inactive, could become local level mechanisms for the inclusion of children's perspectives. A strategy such as this would have numerous problems, including the risk of 'GONGOs', such as the USDA, subverting any such initiative to meet their own ends, but would not be impossible. A focus on children's participation could see a number of townships selected (those that are more advanced and where success would be more likely) to pilot participatory processes. Recently UNICEF has placed field staff in selected townships to assist in the roll out of their programs in health, education and child protection. These field staff could be given responsibility for developing processes for children's participation, in a similar way to the strategy used in the initial stages of developing the CFN; inclusive of child focussed organisations, such as schools, orphanages, monasteries in identifying priorities for children and putting in place programs to address them. In a similar way, UNICEF's involvement with the

Department of Social Welfare's institutional programs could include advocating for child participation within the welfare system. On a national level UNICEF could advocate for children's representative participation in the development of the National Plans for Action which the government has agreed to develop, following the UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on children in May 2002. In addition, UNICEF can also play a valuable role in advocating on behalf of local organisations such as the CFN, to ensure that appropriate and well-run local organisations are growing and playing their part in the development of civil society. Civil society growth must be seen as a key strategy for the long term future of the country, no matter what political events overtake it. If the present government retains power, civil society must grow to counter it. If they step down or lose power (as unlikely as that looks at the present time) civil society must be ready to play its part in the country's reconstruction. In the more likely event that the present National Convention process results in some kind of elections, civil society must be ready to slowly chip away at the legacy that years of military rule has left on the people of Burma.

Programs such as the World Vision Myanmar Street Children's Program, Phaung Daw Oo and those organisations associated with the CFN that I have had dealings with, are giving a voice to children. They have begun a movement for change but are in continual need of financial and technical support. Yet there are small signs of the efficacy of the participation of children, both at an organisational level, and, more widely, within a few specific government sponsored events, such as the participative research that was conducted to inform the Committee on the

Convention on the Rights of the Child following the questions raised by the committee over the Myanmar report.

Principles of engagement

The final section of Chapter Five raises a number of implications regarding the participation of children at an organisational level. In addition, a number of other issues have surfaced in relation to children and the organisations that work with them. The situation facing children in Burma today is dire. From a child rights point of view, all the primary rights afforded to children are being abused. Health and education services are grossly inadequate, threatening the most basic rights of survival and to universal primary education. The right of many children to a national identity is undermined through poor birth and family registration. Thousands of children serve in armies around the country and many more are lured or trafficked into prostitution, contravening international labour laws on the worst forms of child labour. Those children fortunate enough to be touched by an organisation such as the ones discussed in this thesis are few, in comparison to the total population in need.

How then can such programs be scaled up for greater coverage and, at a policy level, what can be done to address the structural impediments to children's well being? Experience would suggest that senior levels of government will not be drawn into substantial dialogue over the situation facing children either within the country, through interaction with the UN, or externally through (for example) regional dialogue with ASEAN. A pragmatic approach to dealing with issues would, therefore, not rely on substantial policy change at any time in the near future. Of course, there is always the possibility of change within the regime, and

media observers are already predicting Senior General Than Shwe's worsening health will result in a change of leadership, sooner rather than later. However, it is not yet clear who will take his place and what impact that might have on internal politics. Designing a specific set of activities to address the situation of children in Burma is, therefore, extremely challenging. However, from the findings of this thesis four broad principles have emerged that might contribute to the increased well being of children on a more substantive scale.

The first of these principles is to **increase support to local child focussed networks and organisations.** It is difficult to estimate the total number of orphanages, monasteries, religious programs that focus on children around the country however, it would appear to be substantial. Most of these organisations struggle to find funding and most do not adhere to any set of standards for care or child protection. The long term goal of the CFN, to become a peak child rights body, has increasing merit as the number of these organisations, if anything, appears to be increasing. The CFN itself could begin to reassess its role and build its own capacity to provide technical support for its constituents in a range of areas including education, child participation and child health. Funding could also be channelled through the CFN to provide for its members, contingent on reaching certain standards. Presently the CFN has offices in Yangon and Mandalay however, establishing a presence in other regional centres would not require too much work. Supporting the development of a national body has merit for a number of reasons. Firstly, it increases the chances of long term sustainability. Secondly, it adds to the growth of civil society that is a nascent but vital means through which long term political change might be achieved in the country.

The second broad principle is the need for **greater inter-agency coordination.** At the present time, organisations are acting according to their own mandates and based on their own donor priorities, with little opportunity or inclination to explore ways in which to work more effectively together. The relatively small number of international child focussed agencies means that, despite the almost overwhelming need, there are fewer barriers to joint needs identification, planning and implementation. UNICEF, as the lead UN agency for children, is best placed to bring international and local implementing partners together and to include relevant government departments in formulating national plans of action for children. A process such as this would take vision and commitment but it would not be impossible. The national response to HIV and the recent development of a National Strategic Plan that involved local NGOs, government and the international community has set a precedent in this regard.

The national response to HIV echoes the third broad principle: to **put child well-being on the agenda,** as was the case with HIV in the 1990s. A number of factors coincided to increase the prominence of HIV, including donor priorities, the actions of the Ministry of Health and the driving force of the then Secretary Number One, General Khin Nyunt. On the surface, the situation of children would seem a far less sensitive issue than HIV and the regime has already publicly stated its commitment to the well-being of children through the UNGASS process. However, there does not seem to be a 'champion' for children's rights within the regime hierarchy, at least not one with any significant influence. UNICEF, once again, is

the best placed of the international organisations, to identify such a personality, just as UNAIDS did in their advocacy with Khin Nyunt some years ago.

The final principle is to **engage with children.** If this research has revealed anything, it is that children in a variety of different circumstance in Burma have shown an ability to identify their own needs and to articulate creative solutions to their own problems. Children are present in many areas of Burmese society and active contributors, both economically and in an ontological sense. Despite the apparent cultural impediments of deference to age and authority, Burmese adults from a variety of backgrounds, who were interviewed as part of this thesis, illustrate that they are willing to see children in a different light, if given the right stimulus, as was the case with the staff from the LPK centre. This and the previous principle suggest a number of implications for development organisations, whether or not they are child-focussed.

Firstly, children should not be excluded from the social and economic analysis of community processes. In many instances recorded in this research, children played an active, if not prominent, economic role within the family, through formal employment or by supporting the family through chores and caring for siblings and the elderly. This needs to be acknowledged as a formal contribution to the economic and social well being of the family and community.

Secondly, all development organisations should seek out ways in which to listen more to children. Children's forums could be included in start up and needs analysis activities. Children can be consulted as a key constituency in the course

of reviews and evaluations. Children could even be given membership to community development committees, such as those established by World Vision Myanmar in its ADPs.

Thirdly, many donors require a battery of analysis tools to be applied to project designs, including gender analysis and environmental impact statements. A similar requirement could be made regarding the impact of development programs on children, whether they are large scale infrastructure development or small scale community development activities. The participation framework could form a part of any such analysis.

Areas for further research and exploration

This study complements a growing body of knowledge relating to children and their participation in community development programs in developing countries. It also adds significantly to the limited academic writing concerning children and childhood in Burma. In pursuing this study, other research needs have become apparent that would continue to add to the body of knowledge in each of these domains. They include:

Children's Participation and Social Capital. Chapter Two introduced the notion of social capital and children and noted that there had been very little research concerning this. Chapter Five observed a number of examples of how social capital and social networks of which children are a part, assist in increasing opportunities for their meaningful participation. Research is necessary to further explore these complex notions and their correlation. In addition, research into

ways of measuring social capital and children would assist in a better understanding of the role children can and do play in social networks and illustrate the 'social value' they have, as they participate in the world around them. A further area of 'Burma specific' research could seek to further understand the impact of aspects of social capital and the monastic system, as illustrated by the support given to many of the novices in Thoun Htat Kyaung .

Buddhism and Children's Participation. Chapters Four and Five in particular suggested that there were alternative and, arguably, more culturally attuned ways of developing 'rights-based approaches', than through the use of the CRC. Buddhism has the potential in Burma and in other Buddhist countries to provide such a vehicle. Further research is necessary, however, to see whether or not this is a truly feasible premise; identifying how Buddhist philosophy might become more 'child-focussed' in its practice and application.

The ongoing political situation and the impact on children in Burma. The political situation in Burma shows no sign of abating. What will be both the short and long-term impact of this situation on children? The limited statistical evidence suggests that in areas of health and education Burmese children are being severely deprived. There is a need for research to assist NGOs and UN organisations to develop programs that might address this situation more comprehensively. More importantly, however, there is the question of how such research could be conducted and the results conferred in such a manner that the Burmese authorities might sincerely respond to the situation. Specific research tasks into the situation of children in Burma, apart from those relating to health and education, could

include: a greater analysis of the reasons for and type of work children do and the role of their economic contribution to the family and the informal economy, as well as a more personal reflection on the role that work plays in the child's social and emotional development; the situation of child soldiers and children who have been trafficked and how they might be better reintegrated into society.

Involving children in the research process might be a positive way in which to address specific problems, for example, as Hart (1997) suggested a decade ago, children can play a vital role in responding to environmental problems. In Burma there is an increasing awareness of environmental difficulties and it would be possible to encourage children's research into this area without raising too much sensitivity or concern by the authorities. Such research could also become a catalyst for sensitising those in authority to the value of listening to the voices of children.

Applicability of the discourse of the sociology of children to non-Eurocentric cultures and situations. Chapter Two indicated the growing prominence of the discourse on the social construction of childhood (James and Prout, 1997). However, there has been little research into the applicability on this discourse to non-Eurocentric settings. Bissell (2003) is one example of where this has happened but there are few others. There is a need for further research to explore the efficacy of social construction models in different cultural settings.

Institutionalising participation. A number of models of participation were studied in their respective settings in Burma. The three were quite different and had both

advantages and disadvantages. The question arises as to how participatory models can best be institutionalised within a given organisational setting. This would imply the need for better understanding about the impact of participation on children, the impact of children's participation on the organisation and beyond, and further exploration around issues of representation. Research is needed to look in greater detail into these issues within different organisational settings, both in developing and developed countries.

Child participation vs. child protection. Observations were made in the course of this thesis about the existing and potential conflict between two of the underlying principles of the CRC; participation and protection. A number of commentators (Thomas and Hocking, 2003, Sachs and Mellor, 2005) have observed that the over-emphasis on children's protection is leading to their isolation from the rest of society and has the potential to create severe social problems. Further research into this conflict would help in the development of policies that assure the protection of children but that do not simultaneously cut them off from interaction with the adult world. Such research would lend itself to cross-cultural comparisons.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown that children's participation is a complex yet valuable concept. There is no single way to encourage children's participation, though a number of principles have been suggested that are applicable to all situations in which children might participate. Perhaps the most important of these is to listen to children. In order to do that, however, children need to feel valued and respected and in a situation in which they know they are safe and that talking will not bring

negative or harmful repercussions. Adults also need the space to interact with children, their own and other peoples, so that children do not become further isolated from a sense of community.

Children are a part of our everyday lives but it is timely that we are reminded of their importance, not only to the future and what they will become, but to what they are now. In the western world particularly, childhood has become an ideal of innocence. But in our zeal to protect children from some of the harsher realities of life, we may also have disempowered them. In non-industrialised countries, is the situation of children and 'childhood' any better? Child soldiers, child sex slaves, child labourers, these are the images that we are faced with each day in the media. But solutions to the situation of children both in the developed and the developing world are not simple. We are challenged by the need to reconstruct our understanding of childhood and, with children themselves, to seek avenues that will not only allow their voices to be heard but that will allow them the space and the security to become social actors in their own right.

Epilogue

The situation in Burma continues to deteriorate. The military government maintains its tight hold on the reigns of power. More than a year ago, the regime relocated to a new capital, some 400 kilometres northwest of Rangoon. Despite knowledge that the regime was planning this, the move took everyone by surprise. Friends working in Rangoon at the time related to me that government servants were told one morning that they would be relocating that night. They had no time to pack, inform relatives or attend to business matters at all. Public servants were bussed from their homes in Rangoon, in their thousands, to take up residence in the new capital city that had been carved out of the forest and still lacking in some of the most basic infrastructure. A contact within the British Embassy related to me how embassies were called to a meeting and the move was simply announced without any opportunity for question. She told me that the ASEAN members were furious, as not even they had been given prior warning. For them, it was a great loss of face. There was much speculation as to why the move was made so suddenly. Some said it was due to an astrologer, others out of fear of invasion from the United States. No matter what, the result has been a sense of increasing isolation by the regime from external influences. For the UN, INGO and growing civil society, this has meant increasing suspicion about their motives and increasing governmental surveillance on their activities.

Nay Pyi Daw ('place of the king'), the new capital, has been built rapidly and at great expense. The International Monetary Fund was recently reported to have produced an internal report, estimating that between 1 and 2 % of GDP had been spent on the building of the new capital over the past few years (AFP, 2007). At

the same time, friends and colleagues living in Rangoon, the previous capital, report increasing power shortages, rising prices and escalating poverty. In the press recently there have been a number of reports of protests over the economic situation of the country and the lack of access to basic health services. The latest of these resulted in the arrest of an HIV positive man, protesting his right to receive antiretroviral treatment (Democratic Voice of Burma, 2007).

The organisations that were part of this study continue, but not without difficulty. With Khin Nyunt's fall from grace, arrest, and imprisonment on 19th October 2004, the Phaung Daw Oo School, along with most business, industry and community initiatives connected with him, quickly became a target of the 'new' regime. This is the nature of change under authoritarian rule in Burma. U Nayaka had relied on the patronage of Khin Nyunt to offer protection for him and his plans. However Phaung Daw Oo has been able to survive and despite initial pressure from senior members of the regime and the education department (long jealous of the school's success) it has remained open, even grown. Largely, this has been possible as the abbot has ensured that he has created political networks on all sides. Some might criticize this strategy but it has yet to compromise the fundamental goal and vision of the school.

World Vision Myanmar remains one of the largest NGOs in the country, expanding each year with ADP programs. The LPK centre remains open in Yangon. Two years ago, however, the Mandalay Centre was closed down. According to staff from the centre, they were accused by the divisional commander of 'breeding terrorists'. The real reason, as far as the World Vision Myanmar director could

surmise, was that he had received a more prominent profile in a media report than the wife of the divisional commander who, by chance, on the same day gave donations to local Mandalay communities for educational support to school children. There had been a long standing dispute between World Vision's Mandalay program and the commander's wife over members of the Maternal and Child Welfare Association[54], many of whom preferred to volunteer their services to World Vision, as they were better treated. The report in the media was apparently the last straw and the commander's wife went to her husband demanding action. The LPK centre, long a concern for the authorities was an easy target. Only in the past two months, has permission been given for the centre to open again. However, revised Department of Social Welfare regulations that prohibit NGOs opening long term care services for children raise a new challenge for the network of hostels that they have developed for children who have no home.

The CFN continues, as an unregistered organisation, to provide limited support to its partners. This includes workshops focussing on child rights and child protection. Members of the CFN undertake to adhere to the principles of the CRC. The structure envisaged for the organisation by the founding adult and child members remains illusive, not for want of trying but due to a lack of resources, management difficulties and a waning interest on the part of the international organisations that provided initial support.

[54] The regime's woman's organisation.

I no longer live in Rangoon but travel there frequently, being employed by another NGO with a focus on public health and HIV. I am in Rangoon now, completing this chapter in my hotel room looking down over the railway line that runs through the centre of town. Last night when I arrived, I ventured out into the streets to buy a few things. The market next door had closed and there just a few money changers still wandering around, looking for business. I spoke to them briefly then turned my attention to three children who had appeared, wanting to sell me postcards. They were initially surprised that I spoke with them in Burmese but then continued as though it were normal. Children often have a way of accepting something unusual without too many questions. They told me that they were Muslim, that they had poor families and spent a lot of time on the streets. One, the eldest, told me he had no parents and that he lived with one of the others or slept in the market across the road. They told me that they could not afford to go to school, that they were watchful of the police each day, that they could be beaten if they did not bring home enough money, that they were constantly hungry. I knew that they were, in part, exaggerating, hoping that I might feel sorry enough for them to buy them a meal. Theirs were common stories that I had heard so many times before. Suddenly a strong wind sprung up, blowing dust and debris around the street. We stood there watching the storm approach. ‘It’s going to rain’, said one of the boys and we all agreed. The clouds rumbled and lightening cracked the sky. The boys flinched, ‘it’s bad to swear at your mother’, said one, ‘if you swear at your mother the lightening will strike you’. The gentle thud of rain drops hitting the concrete sidewalk began and, within seconds, built to a deafening crescendo as the skies opened up. We ran for shelter under the eave of a nearby shop. One of the boys stayed out in the downpour. Revelling in the delight of the moment he looked

skyward, the rain drops falling into his open mouth. For a single moment in time he was free, and he danced; transported far from the drudgery and pain of each day, lost in the cool wetness of the rain.

Appendices

Appendix 1 -Cited Articles in Sections from Human Rights Treaties

A. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Article 1

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 19

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 25, section 2

Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection

Article 26, section 1:

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

Section 2:

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

Section 3:

Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

B. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Article 14

.....but any judgement rendered in a criminal case or in a suit at law shall be made public except where the interest of juvenile persons otherwise requires or the proceedings concern matrimonial disputes or the guardianship of children

Article 18

....The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions

Article 23

.... In the case of dissolution, provision shall be made for the necessary protection of any children

Article 24

1. Every child shall have, without any discrimination as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, national or social origin, property or birth, the right to such measures of protection as are required by his status as a minor, on the part of his family, society and the State.

2. Every child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have a name.

3. Every child has the right to acquire a nationality.

C. The Convention of the Rights of the Child

Article 12:

State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Article 13

The child shall have the right to freedom of expression, this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, wither orally in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice

Article 14

States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Article 15

States Parties recognise the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly

Article 23

States Parties recognise that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community.

Article 29

States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to....the preparation of the child for responsible life ...

Article 31

States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

Appendix 2 - The 12 Objectives of the State

FOUR POLITICAL OBJECTIVES

1. ***Stability of the State, community peace and tranquillity, prevalence of law and order***
2. ***National reconsolidation***
3. ***Emergence of a new enduring State Constitution***
4. ***Building of a new modern developed nation in accord with the new State Constitution***

FOUR ECONOMIC OBJECTIVES

1. ***Development of agriculture as the base and all-round development of other sectors of the economy as well***
2. ***Proper evolution of the market-oriented economic system***
3. ***Development of the economy inviting participation in terms of technical know-how and investments from sources inside the country and abroad***
4. ***The initiative to shape the national economy must be kept in the hands of the State and the national peoples***

FOUR SOCIAL OBJECTIVES

1. ***Uplift of the morale and morality of the entire nation***
2. ***Uplift of national prestige and integrity and preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage and national character***
3. ***Uplift of dynamism of patriotic spirit***
4. ***Uplift of health, fitness and education standards of the entire nation***

Appendix 3 - Myanmar Child Law

ပြည်ထောင်စုမြန်မာနိုင်ငံတော်
နိုင်ငံတော်ငြိမ်ဝပ်ပိပြားမှုတည်စောက်ရေးအဖွဲ့

THE UNION OF MYANMAR
THE STATE LAW AND ORDER RESTORATION COUNCIL

ကလေးသူငယ် ဥပဒေ
THE CHILD LAW

၁၃၅၅ ခုနှစ်၊ ပထမဝါဆိုလပြည့်ကျော် ၁၁ ရက်
(14th July, 1993)

The State Law and Order Restoration Council
The Child Law
(The State Law and Order Restoration Council Law No. 9/93)
The IIth Waning Day of 1st Waso, 1355 ME
(14 July, 1993)
The State law and Order Restoration council hereby enacts the following Law: -

Chapter I
Title and Definition

1. This Law shall be called the Child Law.

2, The following expressions contained in this Law shall have the meanings given hereunder: -

(a) **Child** means a person who has not attained the age of 16 years;

(b) **Youth** means a person who has attained the age of 16 years but has not attained the age of 18 years;

(c) **Committee** means the National Committee on the Rights of the Child formed under this Law;

(d) **Child in need of Protection and Care** means a child mentioned in section 32;

(e) Juvenile offence means an offence under any existing law, for which a child is sent up for prosecution to a juvenile court;

(f) **Juvenile Court** means a court where the sittings of a judge on whom power to try juvenile offences is conferred, are held;

(g) **Guardian** means a person who takes custody of a child under a law or social obligation;

(h) **Custodian** means a person undertaking responsibility for the custody and care of a child in need of protection and care in accordance with this law;

(i) **Training School** means a training school established by the Social Welfare Department, to which a child in need of protection and care or a child who has committed an offence is sent for custody and care under this Law. This expression also includes a home recognized as a training school by the Social Welfare Department;

(j) Home means premises, school, centre or department established by a voluntary social Worker or non-governmental organization with the objective of taking custody and care of a child in need of protection and care;

(k) **Temporary Care Station** means a temporary care station established by the Social Welfare Department for temporary custody and care of a child accused of having committed a crime, during the trial of the case. This expression also includes a home recognized by the Social Welfare Department as a temporary care station;

(1) **Probation Officer** means a person assigned responsibility under this Law as a Probation Officer;

(m) **Ministry** means the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and RE-settlement;

(n) **Director-General** means the Director-General of the Social Welfare Department;

(p) **Social Welfare Officer** means an officer of the Social Welfare Department who has been assigned duties of a Social Welfare Officer under this Law or a person who has been assigned duties under section 60.

Chapter II
Aims

3. The Aims of this Law are as follows: -

(a) to implement the rights of the child recognized in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;

(b) to protect the rights of the child;

(c) to protect in order that children may enjoy fully their rights in accordance with Law;

(d) to carry out measures for the best interests of the child depending upon the financial resources of the State;

(e) to enable custody and care of children in need of protection and care by the State or voluntary social workers or non-govemmental organizations;

(f) to enable a separate trial of a juvenile offence and to carry out measures with the objective of reforming the character of the child who has committed an offence.

Chapter III
Formation of the Committee

4. The Government: -

(a) shall form the National committee on the Rights of the Child consisting of the following persons, in order to implement effectively and successfully the provisions of this Law: -

(i)	Minister, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Re-settlement.	**Chairman**
(ii)	Heads of relevant Government departments and organizations.	**Members**
(iii)	Representatives from non-governmental organizations who are carrying out work in the interests of children.	**Members**
(iv)	Voluntary social workers who are interested in the affairs of children.	**Members**
(v)	A person assigned responsibility by the Chairman.	**Secretary**

(b) may determine the Deputy Chairman and Joint Secretary as may be necessary in forming the Committee;

(c) may determine the tenure of the Committee.

Chapter IV
Duties and **powers of the Committee**

5. The duties and powers of the Committee are as follows: -

(a) protecting and safeguarding the rights of the child;
(b) giving guidance as may be necessary in order that the relevant Government departments and organizations may implement effectively and successfully tile provisions of this Law;
(c) co-operating and co-ordinating as may be necessary activities of government departments and organizations, voluntary social workers and non-governmental organizations relating to a child; reviewing from time to time the progress made;
(d) obtaining assistance and co-operation of the United Nations Organizations, international organizations, voluntary social workers or non-governmental organizations for the interests of the child;

(e) giving guidance and supervision in obtaining donations and property from local and foreign voluntary donors and to enable effective utilization of such donations and property in the interests of children;
(f) laying down and carrying out work programmes in order to take preventive measures against occurrence of juvenile crimes;
(g) collecting from relevant government departments and organizations and compiling the required reports and statistics;
(h) reporting to the government from time to time Oil the activities of the Committee;
(i) carrying out functions and duties in respect of the child, as are assigned by the Government.

6. The Committee may: -
(a) form the State, Divisional, District or Township committees on the Rights of the child and determine the functions and duties thereof;

(b) supervise, guide and assist in the activities of the committees on the Rights of the Child formed under sub-section (a).

7. (a) The office work of the Committee shall be undertaken by the Social Welfare Department;
(b) The expenditures of the Committee shall be borne out of the budget of the Social Welfare Department.

Chapter V
Rights of the Child

8. The State recognizes that every child has the right to survival, development, protection and care and to achieve active participation within the community.

9. (a) Every child has the inherent right to life;
(b) The parents or guardian shall register the birth of the child in accordance with law.

10. Every child shall have the right to citizenship in accordance with the provisions of the existing law.

11. (a) Maintenance, custody and care of children, cultivating and promoting the all-round physical, intellectual and moral development of the child shall be the primary responsibility of parents of guardian;

12. Every child: -
(a) shall have the rights to live with and be brought up by both parents or any one parent if they are alive;
(b) shall not be separated forcibly from his or her parents, except in a case where in accordance with law, separation is necessary for the best interests of the child;

(c) shall have the right to maintain contact on a regular basis with parents lawfully separated, if it is not prejudicial to the interests of child;
(d) has the right to guardianship in accordance with law, in respect of his person or property.

13. (a) Every child who is capable of expressing his or her own views in accordance with liis age and maturity has the right to express his own views in matters concerning chi Idren;

(b) The views of the child shall be given due weight in accordance with his age and maturity, by those concerned;

(c) The child shall be given the opportunity of making a complaint, being heard and defended in the relevant Government department, organization or court either personally or through a representative in accordance with law, in respect of his rights.

14. Every child shall, irrespective of race, religion, status, culture, birth or sex: -

(a) be equal before the law;
(b) be given equal opportunities.

15. Every child: -

(a) has the right to freedom of speech and expression in accordance with law;
(b) has the right to freedom of thought and conscience and to feely profess any religion;
(c) has the right of participate in organizations relating to the child, social organizations or religious organizations permitted under the law.

16. (a) In order that every child shall not be subjected to arbitrary infringement of his honour, personal freedom and security, relevant Government departments and organizations shall provide protection and care in accordance with law;

(b) Security of the property of every child shall be protected by law.

17. (a) Every child shall have the right'to be adopted in accordance with law,

(b) The adoption shall be in the interests of the child;

(c) The adoptive parents shill be responsible for the care and custody of the child to ensure that there is no abduction to a foreign country, sale or trafficking, unlawful exploitation, unlawful exploitation, unlawful employment, maltreatment, pernicious deeds and illegal acts.

18. (a) A mentally or physically disabled child: -

(i) has the right to acquire basic education (primary level) or vocational education at the special schools established by the Social Welfare Department or by a voluntary social worker or by a non-governmental organization;

(ii) has the right to obtain special care and assistance from the State.

(b) The Social Welfare Department shall lay down and carry cut measures as may be necessary in order that mentally or physically disabled children may participate with dignity in the community, stand or their own feet and promote self-reliance.

19. (a) Every child has the right to enjoy health facilities provided by the State;

(b) The Ministry of Health shall: -

(i) law down and carry out measures for the survival of the child, immunization of child, breast-feeding of the child, family planning, adequate nutrition for the child, elimination of iodine deficiency disease, school health and family health;

(ii) Lay down and carry out appropriate measures for the gradual abolition of traditional practices prejudicial to the health of the child;

(Hi) cany out measures to minimize the child mortality rate and to maximize the population of healthy children.

20. (a) Every child shall: -

(i) have opportunities of acquiring education;
(ii) have the right to acquire free basic education (primary level) at schools opened by the State;

(b)The Ministry of Education shall: -

(i) have an objective of implementing the system of free and compulsory primary education;
(ii) lay down and carry out measures as may be necessary for regular attendance at schools and the reduction of untimely drop-out rates;
(iii) make arrangements for literacy of children who are unable for various reasons to attend schools opened by State.

21. Every child shall have the right to maintain his or her own cherished language, literature and culture, to profess his or her own religion and to follow his or her own traditions and customs.

22. (a) Every child shall have the right of access to literature contributory to his or her all-round development and to acquire knowledge;

(b) The Ministry of Information shall: -

(i) produce and disseminate children's books which are of cultural benefit to children, which promote and keep alive patriotism and which are aimed at the promotion of the children's moral well- being; encourage the production and dissemination of children's books by non-governmental organizations and private publishers; collect and maintain by special arrangement children's books at the libraries established by the information and public Relations Department;

(ii) education and disseminate by mass media to ensure that children and their parents or guardians are made familiar with the rights and ethics of the child and that children have access to national and international news and information concerning them.

23. Every child has the right to: -

(a) rest and leisure and to engage in play;
(b) participate in sported activities appropriate to his age;
(c) participate in cultural and artistic activities.

24. (a) Every child has: -

(i) the right to engage in work in accordance with law and of his own volition;

(ii) the right to hours of employment, rest and leisure and other reliefs prescribed by law;

(b) The Ministry of Labour shall protect and safeguard in accordance with law to ensure safety of children employees at the place of work and prevention of infringement and loss of their rights.

25. Every child has, in accordance with law: -
(a) the right of inheritance;
(b) the right of possession and holding property;
(c) the right to sue and be sued.

26. In order that every child may enjoy fully the rights mentioned in this law: -
(a) the Government departments and organizations shall perform their respective functions as far as possible;
(b) voluntary social workers or non-governmental organizations also may carry out measures as for as possible, in accordance with law.

27. Persons having responsibility in respect of the affairs of children shall have as their objective the best interests of children under the principle "First Call for Children" regarding protection and care of every child by the community.

Chapter VI
Exemption from Penal Action

28. (a) Nothing is an offence which is done by a child under 7 years of age;
(b) Nothing is an offence which is done by a child above 7 years of age and under 12 who has not attained sufficient maturity of understanding to judge of the nature and consequences of his conduct on that occasion.

29. No action shall be taken under any Criminal Law against any child who ahs escaped from a training school, temporary care station or a custodian.

Chapter VII
Ethics and Discipline of a Child

30. Every child shall abide by the following ethics and discipline, according to his age: -

(a) upholding and abiding by the law;
(b) obeying the advice and instruction of parents or guardian;
(c) obeying the instruction of teachers and pursuing education peacefully;
(d) abiding by the school discipline, work discipline and community discipline;
(e) cherishing and preserving the race, language, religion, culture, customs and traditions concerned with him;
(f) abstaining from taking alcohol, smoking, using narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances, gambling and other acts which tend to affect the moral character.

31. Parents, teachers and guardians shall give guidance to ensure that the practice of abiding by the ethics and discipline mentioned in section 30 is infused into the children

Chapter VIII
Child in need of Protection and Care

32. The following child is a child in need of protection and care: -

(a) one who has no parents or guardian;
(b) one who earns his living by begging;
(c) one who is of so depraved a character that he is uncontrollable by his parents or guardian;
(d) one who is in the custody of a cruel or wicked parents or guardian;
(e) one who is of unsound mind;
(f) one who is afflicted with a contagious disease;
(g) one who uses a narcotic drug or a psychotropic substance;

(h) one who is determined as such from time to time by the Social Welfare Department.

33. (a) Whoever is of the opinion that any child mentioned in section 32 should be protected and cared by the State may intimate the relevant Social Welfare Officer stating the facts of the case;
(b) The social Welfare Officer shall, on receipt of the intimation under sub-section (a) or if he has personally received information in any manner make investigations in the manner prescribed to determine whether of not the child needs the protection and care of the State and submit his findings together with his opinion to the Director General;
(c) The Social Welfare Officer has the following powers in respect of the investigation under sub-section (b): -

(i) informing the parents, guardian or police officer and causing the child to be brought before him;
(ii) entrusting the child to the parents or guardian on execution of a bond or sending the child to a temporary care station, before receiving the decision of the Director General;
(iii) calling and examining necessary witnesses;
(iv) hearing the explanation of the parents, guardian or the child, if necessary.

34. The Director General shall lay down and carry out any of the following arrangements if he finds, on scrutiny that the child needs the protection and care of the State according to the report submitted by the Social Welfare Officer: -

(a) in the case of a child whose character needs to be reformed, sending the child to any training school till he attains the age of 18 years as a maximum period;
(b) in the case of a child in need of custody and care, entrusting the child to a home or to a custodian till he attains the age of 18 years as a maximum period;
(c) in the case of a child needing supervision, causing the child to be supervised by a probation Officer for a period not exceeding 3 years;
(d) in the case of a child of unsound mind, sending the child to the Mental Hospital and making arrangements for medical treatment;
(e) in the case of a child who is afflicted with a contagious disease, sending the child to the relevant hospital and making arrangements for medical treatment.

35. The Director General may direct the relevant Social Welfare Officer: -
(a) to implement the arrangement laid down under section 34 in the manner prescribed;
(b) to entrust the child to the care of the parents or guardian on execution of a bond to the effect that they will take good care of a child who has parents or guardian and who is found, on scrutiny-to need only the custody and care of such parents or guardian;

(c) to entrust the child to the care of the parents or guardian, with or without execution of a bond, in the case of a child who is found, on scrutiny to have complied with the arrangement laid down under section 34, sub-section (a) or sub-section (c) for at least one year and whose moral character has improved.

36. The Director General may: -

(a) exercise the power mentioned in section 35 sub-section (c) at his discretion or on the sub-mission of the Principal of the relevant training school or Probation Officer or the parents or guardian;

(b) alter as may be necessary any arrangement laid down under section 34 sub-section 9b0, sub-section (d) or sub-section (e), if there is sufficient reason to do so;

(c) transfer a child committed to one training school to another training school, if there is sufficient reason to do so;

(d) grant the following rights in the manner prescribed to a child committed to a training school: -

(i) right to leave a training school as a temporary airangement to be placed under the management and supervision of a home or a custodian;

(ii) right to travel on an emergency parole licence for the period required to visit his parents, guardian or near relative who is seriously ill;

(iii) right to live out on a parole licence;

(iv) right to live outside the training school with any suitable person, under the management and supervision of the training school.

(e) delegate the powers conferred on him under this section to a Social Welfare Officer or Principal of a training school.

Chapter IX

Taking Action against a Child for an Offence

37. A Police Officer or a person authorized to take cognizance shall abide by the following when arresting a child accused of having committed an offence: -

(a) shall not handcuff the child or tie with a rope;

(b) shall not keep the child together with adult prisoners; if it is a girl, keep her with a woman guard;

(c) shall not maltreat or threaten the child;

(d) shall not send the child together with adult prisoners from one place to another, if it is a girl, shall send her with a woman guard;

(e) shall inform the parents or guardian concerned as soon as possible;

(f) shall send up the arrested child to the relevant juvenile court as soon as possible;

(g) shall release the child on execution of a bond, if the child cannot be sent up as soon as possible to he juvenile court under sub-section (f);

(h) shall send the child to a temporary care station or to another appropriate place, if the child is not released on a bond under sub-section (g).

38. A Police Officer or a person authorized to take cognizance: -

(a) shall send up the juvenile case for prosecution to the relevant juvenile court;

(b) in a case of joint commission of offence by a child and an adult, shall send up the child for prosecution to the relevant juvenile court and the adult to the relevant court;

(c) in sending up a child for prosecution, supporting evidence in respect of his age shall be sent together.

39. A Police Officer or a person who is authorized to take cognizance, in respect of a child who has escaped from a training school, home, temporary care station or a custodian: -

(a) may arrest him without a warrant;

(b) shall, after arrest, commit him back to the custody of the training school, home, temporary care station or custodian;

(c) may commit him to the custody of any other appropriate place, before being able to commit the child back to the custody of a training school, home, temporary care station or a custodian under sub-section (b).

Chapter X
T**rial** of **Juvenile Cases**

40. The Supreme Court may: -

(a) establish juvenile courts in appropriate local areas and appoint juvenile judges;

(b) in local where juvenile courts under sub-section (a) have not been established confer powers of a juvenile judge on a Township Judge.

41. The Juvenile Court: -

(a) on receiving a juvenile case, first and foremost scrutinize the supporting evidence in respect of the age of the child, contained in the proceedings. It shall determine whether the offender is a child or not from the birth certificate, citizenship scrutiny card, foreigner's registration certificate, true copy of an extract of school admission register, doctor's medical certificate or other valid supporting evidence contained in the proceedings;

(b) have jurisdiction only in respect of a child who has not attained the age of 16 years at the time of committing the offence. It shall place on record the decision that the offender is a child, before proceeding with the trial of a juvenile case;

(c) during trial release the child sent up for prosecution, on the execution of a bond, entrust to the care of parents or guardian subject to conditions, Commit to the custody of a temporary care station or other appropriate place subject to conditions. Under no circumstances shall an order for detention be passed;

(d) notwithstanding that a child has attained the age of 16 years during trial, continue to try the case, as if the accused were a child and pass a sentence in accordance with this law;

(e) try juvenile offences punishable with death, transportation for life or imprisonment for a term exceeding 3 years, in the manner in which a warrant case is tried;

(f) try all juvenile offences other than the type of offences mentioned in sub-section (e), in the manner in which a summons case is tried.

42. The juvenile court shall abide by the following in trying juvenile cases: -
(a) shall try the case in a separate court or a separate building or if there is no separate court or building, in a building or room other than that in which the ordinary sittings of the court are held;
(b) no person other than the parents, guardians staff of the court, Law Officers, members of the People's Police Force on duty and not in uniform, persons who have been granted permission by the juvenile court shall be present at the place of trial;
(c) if the child of his parents or guardian cannot or do not wish to engage a lawyer and makes and application to be defended with the assistance of any appropriate person, shall grant permission to do so;
(d) shall arrange to make available and interpreter, if necessary;
(e) shall dispose of the case speedily.

43. The Juvenile Court has the following powers in respect of the trial of juvenile cases: -
(a) may direct anyone who is present at the place of trial, including the child to leave the court at any time during the trial of the case, if it is considered to be necessary in the interests of the child. If necessary, it may cause force to be used in so directing to leave the court;
(b) may continue to try the case in the absence of the child, notwithstanding the stage of inquiry or trial of the case, if it is considered that the presence in the court of the accused child is not necessary;
(c) may direct the parents or guardian in whose custody and care the child is at present, to attend every day on which the sittings of the court are held;
(d) may allow inserting and announcing of information revealing the identity of a child who is accused of having committed an offence or a child who is participating as a witness in any case, in the radia, television, newspapers, magazines, journals and publications and displaying and making use of the photograph of the child, if it is believed to be of benefit to the child;
(e) may direct the relevant Probation Officer to make inquires and to submit a report of the personal history, character, conduct, behaviour and environmental circumstances of the child and his parents or guardian;
(f) may, if it is considered appropriate inform the child or his parents or guardian of a gist of the report submitted by the Probation Officer under sub-section (e) and allow the submission of evidence to the contrary.

44. The juvenile Court shall, before passing an order on a child who is found guilty, take into consideration the following and pass an order which is reformative and which will be beneficial to the child: -
(a) the age and character of the child;
(b) the environmental circumstance of the child;
(c) the cause of committing the offence;

(d) the report submitted by the probation Officer;
(e) other circumstances which are required to be taken into consideration in the interests of the child.

45. Notwithstanding anything contained in any existing law, a death sentence, transportation for life or a sentence of whipping shall not be passed on any child.

46. A child shall not ordinarily be sentenced to imprisonment. Only if the Juvenile Court is satisfied that the child has committed and offence which is punishable with death or transportation for life under any existing law or that the child is of so unruly or depraved a character or absolutely uncontrollable, he shall be sentenced to imprisonment. Such sentence of imprisonment shall not exceed a term of 7 years.

47. The Juvenile Court may pass any of the following orders is respect of a child who should not be sentenced to imprisonment: -
(a) if the offence committed is not serious and the character of the child is not yet perverted; -
(i) may release him after due admonition;
(ii) may impose a fine, if he has attained the age of 14 years and has an income, a fine may be imposed on the parents or guardian;
(b) whether the offence committed is serious or not, if the character of the child is not yet perverted and in order to deter further commission of offence, such child shall be entrusted to the custody of his parents or guardian on execution of a bond for good behaviour according to the conditions of the bond for a period not exceeding 3 years;
(c) may cause the child to submit to the supervision and management of the Probation Officer during a period not exceeding 3 years;
(d) whether the offence is serious or not, if the child is of a perverted character or if the child is not yet perverted but has parents or guardian or if the child has parents or guardian but cannot be admonished and is in no circumstances for custody and care, may commit such child to the custody of any training school for a minimum term of 2 years or till he attains the age of 18 years as a maximum term.

48. The Juvenile court may: -
(a) in addition to the sentence of imprisonment passed under section 46 or any order passed under section 47 also pass an order directing the parents or guardian to pay compensation for injury, loss or damage caused to any person by the act of the child;
(b) if in conformity with the following conditions, pass an amending order to entrust a child who has complied with the order passed under section 47 sub-section (c) or sub-section (d) for at least one year, to the custody of the parents or guardian concerned, with or without abond: -
(i) improvement in the moral character of the child;
(ii) being a child who has parents or guardian;

(iii) not being an offence of violation of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law;

(c) exercise the powers mentioned in sub-section (b) on the application of the Principal of the relevant training school, Probation Officer or parents or guardian.

49. (a) There shall be right of appeal or right of revision in accordance with the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure against the order of decision passed under this Law by the Juvenile Court;

(b) If a sentence of imprisonment is passed on the child by a Juvenile Court, or Appellate Court or Court of Revision, a copy of the sentence shall be sent to the Ministry.

Chapter XI
Safeguarding Children Against Dangers

50. The Police Officer: -

(a) shall, in order to safeguard a child who is likely to be exposed to danger send up such child as soon as possible to the relevant Juvenile Court;

(b) may commit the child to the custody of a temporary care station or other appropriate place before being able to send up the child under sub-section (a).

51. The Juvenile Court: -

(a) may, if it believes on information or on personal knowledge that a child is in danger or that if immediate action is not taken, there is likelihood of danger befalling the child direct the Police Officer to search for the child and send him up before it and to commit the child to the custody of a temporary care station before being able to send him up;

(b) shall protect a child sent up under sub-section 9a) or under section 50 sub-section (a) in any of the following manner: -

(i) committing the child to the custody of parents of guardian or custodian who agrees to accept and take custody and care of the child.

(ii) sending the child to a temporary care station to be taken care of until he is free from danger;

(c) may, if reliable information in received that a child is abducted for any unlawful purpose or that the child is being unlawfully detained direct the relevant Police Officer to take necessary action for restoration of liberty to such child or for entrusting the child as soon as possible to the custody of his parents or guardian.

Chapter XII
Custody and Care of Children and Youths in Prisons

52. The Officer in charge of a prison shall, in respect of a child or youth who has been sentenced to imprisonment: -

(a) not keep him together with adult prisoners until he attains the age of 18 years;
(b) keep him m a separate ward or room to which adult prisoners cannot have access;
(c) grant him the right to meet parents, guardians, relatives and friends concerned and the right to be sent food and prescribed articles in a accordance with the existing regulations and bye-laws;
(d) not employ him in rigorous labour;
(e) provide medical check-up regularly for him;
(f) train and give him education which will reform his character and vocational education;
(g) grant him the right to enjoy remission period in accordance with thè existing regulations and bye-laws.

53. The Officer in charge of a prison: -

(a) shall allow the child of a female prisoner to stay together with his mother in prison till he attains the age of 4 years if there is no one outside to take custody and care of him or if his mother so desires;
(b) may allow the child mentioned in sub-section (a) to continue to stay together with is mother in prison till he attains the age of 6 years if his mother so desires;
(c) shall be responsible for providing food, clothing and shelter and health care of the child who stays together with his mother in prison;
(d) shall inform the Director general of the social Welfare Department as soon as possible, in order to make arrangements for the care and custody of any child left after a female prisoner dies in prison or if the child staying together with the female prisoner attains the age of 6 years.

54. The Director General of the Social Welfare Department may commit a child mentioned in section 53 sub-section (d) to the custody of relatives who will take custody and care of him or if there are no such relatives he may be entrusted to an appropriate training school or to a custodian.

Chapter XIII

Training school, Temporary care station, Home, Residential Nursery

55. The Director General shall establish the following with the approval of the Minister: -

(a) training schools required for the custody and care of a child in need of protection and care or a child who has committed and offence, who is entrusted under this Law;
(b) temporary care stations required for the temporary custody and care during the period of trial of a child who is accused of having committed an offence.

56. If the Director General believes that a home established by a voluntary social worker or a non-governmental organization with the intention of taking custody and care of a child in need of protection and care: -

(a) is appropriate for the custody and care of children sent under this law, such home may be recognized as being a training school for the purpose of this Law;

(b) is appropriate for the temporary custody and care during the trial of a child who is accused of having committed and offence, such home may be recognized as being a temporary care station for the purpose of this Law,

57. The Director General may establish local residentiail nurseries required for nursing and care of children who have not attained the age of 5 years.

58. Hie Director General may exercise the following powers: -

(a) supervising, inspecting, giving guidance, rendering expertise and giving support as may be necessary to day nurseries and pre-primary schools established on self-help system;

(b) supervising, inspecting, giving guidance, rendering expertise and giving support as may be necessary to homes established by a voluntary social worker or by a non-governmental organization;

(c) supervising, inspecting, giving guidance and rendering expertise tp private day nurseries and per-primary schools established on payment of fees;

(d) inspecting or causing to be inspected by a suitable person or any committee training schools and temporary care stations established or recognized under this Law.

Chapter XIV
Power of the Minister

59. The Minister: -

(a) may , at anytime pass an order to release either absolutely or subject to conditions a child committed to the custody of a training school or a custodian under this Law;

(b) may pass in order to transfer a child undergoing imprisonment ot a training school or to a custodian till the day he attains the age of 1§ years, if it is considered beneficial for the child;

(c) may pass an order so that the remainder of the term of imprisonment of a child who has been transferred under sub-section (b) and who is behaving well shall not haVe effect;

(d) may cause to have effect the remainder of the term of imprisonment of a child who has been transferred under sub-section (b) and who does not behave well. In so causing to have effect, the period of stay of the child at the training school or with the custodian shall be reckoned as the term of imprisonment undergone.

60. The Minister: -

(a) may assign responsibility to a Government employee or to a suitable citizen who is not a Government employee as a Social Welfare Officer, in order to carry out the functions and duties of the Social Welfare Officer under this Law in local areas where an office of the Social Welfare Dep artment has not been opened as yet;

(b) shall make prior consultation with the relevant Government department or organization for assigning responsibility to a Government employee as a Social Welfare Officer.

Chapter XV

Probation Officer

61. The Director General may assign responsibility as Probation Officer to an employee of the Social Welfare Department or to a suitable citizen who is not a Government employee.

62. The duties and powers of a probation Officer are as follows: -

(a) making necessary investigations and submitting a report, when assigned responsibility in respect of the child by the Juvenile Court;

(b) managing and supervising a child who is ordered to submit to his management ad supervision, in the manner prescribed;

(c) reporting to the relevant Social Welfare Officer, if it is found that a child is in need of protection and care under this Law;

(d) informing the relevant police officer or the Juvenile Court, if it is found that there is likelihood of danger befalling any child or that a child is in danger;

(e) arresting the child without a warrant and hading him over to a police officer, if a child who has escaped from a training school, home, temporary care station or a custodian is found;

(f) co-ordinating and co-operating with the parents or guardians concerned local elders and persons from social organization for the benefit of children;

(g) carrying out duties relating to the child, which are assigned by the Social Welfare Department.

Chapter **XVI**

Homes Established by a Voluntary Social Worker or a Non-Governmental Organization

63. (a) A voluntary social worker or a non-govemmental organization may establish homes for custody and care of children in need of protection and care, on their own arrangements;

(b) A Home established under sub-section (a) shall be registered with the Social Welfare Department, as may be prescribed;

(c) A Home which has been granted registration: -

(i) shall operate only in the interests of children;

(ii) shall submit to the supervision, inspection and guidance of the Social Welfare Department;
(iii) may obtain the support and expertise of the Social Welfare Department.

64. If a home established under section 63 is recognized by the Social Welfare Department as a training School under section 56 sub-section (a) or as a temporary care station under section 56 sub-section (b), such home shall also accept and take custody and care of children sent under this Law.

Chapter XVII
Offence and Penalties

65. Whoever commits any of the following acts shall, on conviction be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 6 months or with fine which may extend to kyats 1000 or with both: -

(a) employing a permitting a child to perform work which is hazardous to the life of the child or which may cause disease to the child or which is harmful to the child's moral character,
(b) taking a child to or allowing him to enter a place where only alcohol is sold; sending the child to buy alcohol, selling school to the child, permitting the child to take alcohol, employing or permitting the child to work in the business which trades in alcohol;
(c) urging, inducing or abetting the child to gamble;
(d) accepting as pledge any property from the child or abetting the child in any manner to pledge property;
(e) purchasing any property sold by a child, with the exception of purchasing property from a child who earns a livelihood by selling;
(f) inducing a child to escape from a training school, home, temporary care station or custodian; abetting the run away; harbouring, concealing or preventing the child from going back to the original place, knowing that the child has escaped. -

66. Whoever commits any of the following acts shall, on conviction be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 2 years or with fine which may extend to kyats 10,000 or with both: -

(a) neglecting knowingly that a girl under his guardianship, who has not attained the age of 16 is earning a livelihood by prostitution;
(b) permitting a child under his guardianship to live together or to consort with a person who earns a livelihood by prostitution;
(c) employing a child to beg for his personal benefic; falling to prevent a child under his guardianship from begging; making use of the child in any manner in his livelihood of begging,

(d) wilfully maltreating a child, with the exception of the type of admonition by a parent, teacher or a person having the right to control the child, which is for the benefit of the child;
(e) inserting and announcing information revealing the identity of a child who is accused of having committed an offence or who is participating as a witness in any case, in the radio, cinema, television, newspapers, magazines, journals or publications and displaying or making use of the photograph of he Child without the prior consent of the relevant juvenile court;
(f) using the child in pornographic cinema, video, television or photography.

Chapter XVIII

Youth who has committed an offence

67. A youth, who at the time of committing the offence has attained the age of 16 years, but has not attained the age of 18 years shall be sent up for prosecution to the Court which has jurisdiction, in respect of the offence. In sending up for prosecution such case of the youth, it shall be accompanied by supporting evidence in respect or the age of the youth.

68. The relevant Court shall, before commencement of the trial of the offence with which a youth is charged decide whether or not the accused is a youth from the birth certificate, Citizenship Scrutiny Card, Foreigner's Registration Certificate, true copy of an extract of the school admission register, Doctors' medical certificate of other valid supporting evidence included in the proceedings and record such decision.

69. Notwithstanding that the youth has attained the age of 18 years on the day of passing of the sentence, the Court shall deem as if such person were a youth and pass order accordingly.

70. The Court shall take into consideration the following before passing an order on the youth who is found guilty of the offence:-

(a) the age and character of the youth;
(b) the environmental circumstance of the youth's residence;
(c) the physical and mental condition of the youth;
(d) the cause of committing the offen ce

71. Notwithstanding anything contained in any exiting law:-

(a) a sentence of death or transportation for life shall not be passed on the youth;
(b) if a sentence of imprisonment is passed on the youth, the maximum term of imprisonment shall not exceed ten years.

Chapter XIX
Miscellaneous

72. If there are no specific provisions in this Law, the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure shall be complied with.

73. Under Children Act, 1955:-

(a) the Training Schools established by the Social Welfare Department shall be deemed to be training schools established by the Social Welfare Department under this Law;
(b) the Homes recognized by the Social Welfare Department as a Training School or a Remand Home shall apply for registration during the period and in the manner prescribed by the Social Welfare Department;
(c) the notifications and directives issued may be applied in so far as they are not inconsistent with the provision of this Law.

74. For the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this Law:-
(a) the Ministry may, with the approval of the Government issue such rules and procedures as may be necessary;
(b) the National Committee relating to the Rights of the Child, the Supreme Court, relevant Ministry, Government department, Government organizations may issue such orders and directives as may be necessary.

75. The following laws are hereby repealed:-
(a) The Young Offenders Act, 1930;
(b) The Children Act, 1955.

(Sd) Than Shwe
Senior General
Chairman
The State Law and Order Restoration Council

Appendix 4- Question Guide Example from World Vision Myanmar Street Children Participatory Evaluations

These Questions, based on the 8 overarching questions on pXX were developed

for data collection for children at the drop-in-centre:

1. What do you like about living on the street?
2. What do you dislike about living on the street?
3. What do you like about living in the LPK?
4. What do you dislike about living in the LPK?
5. Where are you happier, in LPK or on the street?
6. Do you think that your situation is getting better since you have been in LPK?
7. What can the children do to have a better programme?
8. What can the staff do to have a better programme?
9. Is there anything else the LPK scheme can do to help you?
10. What other programmes are LPK doing apart from the centre and hostel?
11. How can you help other children facing the same situation as yours?
12. What do the children from the centre want to do when they grow up?
13. What will happen to the children when the centre is closed?
14. What is the purpose of opening this centre?
15. Do you have home?
16. What do you dislike at your home?
17. What do you like at your home?

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