



# **'Children are agents of change':**

Participation of children in Ghana

Þóra Björnsdóttir

**Lokaverkefni til MA-gráðu í þróunarfræðum**

**Félagsvísindasvið**



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**

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Félags- og mannvísindadeild  
Félagsvísindasvið Háskóla Íslands  
Júní 2011

Ritgerð þessi er lokaverkefni til MA-gráðu í þróunarfræðum og er óheimilt að afrita ritgerðina á nokkurn hátt nema með leyfi rétthafa.

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Reykjavík, Ísland 2011

## **Abstract**

Development aid agencies are increasingly implementing approaches which focus on human rights in policy and program making. One such approach is the rights-based approach to development which allows local people, including children, to participate in projects which aim to strengthen the society's infrastructure. The objective of this study is to seek understanding of children's participation in Ghana where fieldwork was conducted from September to December 2010. The study was based on qualitative methodology including participant observation, interviews, focus group discussions and creative methods, both among adults and children related to the subject.

The results of this study show that Ghana is quite preeminent when it comes to child rights, where many agreements have been ratified and legislated. Children are very active in the country and a number of organisations and agencies, both local and international work to enhance their participation and rights. Few factors were identified as obstacles to participation, mostly related to cultural hierarchy and lack of implementation by governmental institutions. With a cultural hierarchy that places children at the bottom of the ladder, below seniors and government that seems to be better in signing than implementing agreements, there are surprisingly many active participation projects in the country. Although there is still more work to be done in Ghana so children's participation can be defined really child-friendly, all the potentials exist, if that is the promoter's aims. However, the question is how children, organisations, the government and other stakeholders will perform in balance with cultural and public requirements.

Key words: Development Studies, children, participation, child rights, Ghana, culture, rights-based approach, human rights, development aid

## Útdráttur

Stofnanir og samtök innan þróunargeirans hafa í auknum mæli beint sjónum að mannréttindum þegar kemur að stefnumótun og framkvæmd nýrra verkefna. Ein nálgun sem stuðst hefur verið við er réttindamiðuð nálgun í þróunarsamvinnu. Með henni eru heimamenn, þar með talin börn, hvattir til að taka þátt í ýmsum verkefnum sem stuðla að uppbyggingu samfélagsins. Rannsókn þessi var framkvæmd í Ghana frá september til desember 2010 og er markmið hennar að varpa ljósi á þátttöku barna þar í landi. Rannsóknin byggir á eiginlegri aðferðafræði sem felst í vettvangsathugun, viðtölum, rýnihópum og sjónrænni gagnasöfnun á meðal barna og fullorðinna þátttakenda í rannsókninni.

Niðurstöður rannsóknarinnar sýna að Ghana er mjög framarlega þegar kemur að réttindamálum barna en þar hafa margir sáttmálar verið samþykktir og festir í lög. Börnin sjálf eru einnig mjög virk og fjölmargar stofnanir og samtök, bæði alþjóðleg og innlend, vinna að því að auka réttindi og þátttöku ungs fólks í landinu. Nokkrir þættir voru álitnir sem hindrun á þátttöku en þeir tengjast aðallega menningarlegu stigveldi og skorti á innleiðingu sáttmálanna sem stjórnvöld hafa undirritað. Með samfélag þar sem börn eru gjarnan talin neðar þeim sem eldri eru og með stjórnvöld sem virðast vera færari um að skrifa undir samninga en að innleiða þá, er samt sem áður furðu mikil og virk þátttaka í landinu. Þótt það sé mikið verk fyrir höndum til að verkefnin geti talist sem raunverulega barnvæn, eru allir möguleikar til staðar, sé það markmið viðeigandi aðila. Hins vegar er spurningin hvernig börnin, stofnanir, samtök, stjórnvöld og aðrir sem málið snerta ætla sér að framkvæma það í samræmi við menningu landsins og kröfur almennings.

Lykilorð: Þróunarfræði, börn, þátttaka, réttindi barna, Ghana, menning, réttindamiðuð nálgun, mannréttindi, þróunarsamvinna

## **Forewords**

This thesis marks the completion of my MA programme in Development Studies at the University of Iceland, and comprises of 60 ECTS units. My research has been supervised by Jónína Einarsdóttir, Professor of Anthropology at the Faculty of Social and Human Science, University of Iceland. I am very grateful for her guidance, comments and inspiration throughout this study.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who contributed to the research. Employees at Unicef in Ghana helped me enormously by linking me up with the right organisations and people and by providing me a place at the office to write up my data and prepare for interviews and events. I particularly want to thank the Child Protection team, Sheema Sen Gupta for accepting my supplication of doing the research at Unicef, and Ruby Anang for giving me all this patience and time by contacting people and organising trips and meetings for me to be able to finish this research.

I am also indebted to the following list of partners: Child's Rights International, especially Jennifer who introduced me to majority of the Child Rights Clubs. The Department of Children, Ananse Reach Concept, Tuma Kavi Development Association, Christian Children's Fund of Canada and the Curious Minds, especially Kingsley for discussing with the group and accepting me into the programme.

My deepest gratitude however goes to all the children and young people which were part of this study. I would especially like to thank my friends at Curious Minds who did not only allow me to watch their activities and attend meetings but also included me as part of the team.

Last but not least I want to thank my family for truly supporting me when I needed, particularly my mother for always being there for me. Despite everything, Viktor Ómarsson also deserves my gratefulness, for supporting me throughout my education and very great part of my life.

## **Abbreviations**

ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
AYC	African Youth Charter
CA	Children's Act 560
CCFC	Christian Children's Fund of Canada
CPP	Conventions People's Party
CM	Curious Minds
CRC	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRI	Child's Rights International
DC	Department of Children
DRC	Declaration of the Rights of the Child
DRWAC	Declaration on the Rights and Welfare of the Child African Child
GBC	Ghana Broadcasting Corporation
GDRC	Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child
HDR	Human Development Report
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MOWAC	Ministry of Women and Children's affairs
NDC	National Democratic Congress
NGO	Non governmental organisations
NPP	New Patriotic Party
PNP	People's National Party
PPPHW	Public-Private Partnership for Handwashing with Soap
RBA	Rights-based approach
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
TKDA	Tuma Kavi Development Association
UN	United Nations
UNHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
UGCC	United Gold Coast Convention
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WB	World Bank



**Figure 1: Picture from the Global Handwashing parade, 14<sup>th</sup> October 2010.**



## **Table of contents**

Abstract .....	4
Útdráttur .....	5
Forewords.....	6
Abbreviations .....	7
List of figures .....	10
1. Introduction .....	11
2. Children and child rights.....	14
2.1. What is a child?.....	14
2.2. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child .....	16
2.3. African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child .....	18
2.4. Criticism and challenges .....	19
3. Children and international development .....	21
3.1. Rights-based approach to development .....	21
3.2. Participation and development.....	23
3.3. RBA criticism and challenges .....	26
4. Children's participation.....	29
4.1 What is children's participation? .....	29
4.2. Why should children participate? .....	30
4.3. Why should children not participate? .....	32
4.4. Cooperation.....	33
4.5. Agency .....	34
5. Setting .....	36
5.1. Ghana .....	36
5.2. History.....	37
5.3. Demographic and child indicators .....	40
5.4. Children's Act 560 .....	41
5.5. Ghanaian children .....	42
6. Methodology .....	47
6.1. Choosing the topic and entering the field .....	47
6.2. Methods.....	49
6.3. Data analysis .....	55
6.4. Ethics.....	55
7. Results .....	58

7.1. Organisations .....	58
7.1.1. Unicef .....	58
7.1.2. Department of Children .....	59
7.1.3. Ananse Reach Concept: Children Saving the Future .....	59
7.1.4. Christian Children's Fund of Canada .....	60
7.1.5. Child's Rights International.....	61
7.1.6. Child Rights Clubs.....	62
7.1.7. Curious Minds .....	63
7.2. Events and forums.....	64
7.2.1. The Constitutional Review Commission .....	64
7.2.2. Global Handwashing Day .....	66
7.2.3. Ghana Water Forum .....	67
7.3. Participation of Ghanaian children .....	68
7.3.1. Why should children participate? .....	68
7.3.2. Who should participate? .....	69
7.3.3. How much participation?.....	70
7.3.4. Are children's voices really heard? .....	72
7.4. Benefits of participation.....	74
7.4.1. Children's benefits.....	74
7.4.2. Benefits of society .....	76
7.5. Obstacles to children's participation.....	77
7.5.1. Culture as barrier .....	77
7.5.2. Respect for elders .....	78
7.5.3. Corporal punishment .....	80
7.5.4. Implementation of laws and agreements .....	80
7.6. Strategies of implementation .....	81
8. Discussions.....	85
9. Conclusion .....	93
10. References .....	94

## List of figures

Figure 1: Picture from the Global Handwashing parade, 14<sup>th</sup> October 2010.

## **1. Introduction**

Children and international development are concepts which not everyone believes should belong together. Many scholars, including Alderson (2008) and Lansdown (1997), argue that children have not been seen as responsible, capable of making decisions concerning own lives or participating in activities, which empowers them as individuals. In past years this view has been changing, especially because of two main factors. Firstly, number of international and national agreements which emphasise child rights, and secondly, the increased popularity of centralising human rights into development aid assistance. Many development agencies are increasingly following this example and emphasising human rights by allowing all community members to be involved in the development aid process, including children. One approach, focusing on human, rights is the rights-based approach to development which has according to Ljungman (2004) already been mainstreamed among many organisations into policy and program making. One of the key concepts of the approach is participation which is believed to be a human right everyone should be entitled to. Participation allows people to be actively involved in the development process from planning to implementation of the programs. However, involving children in development aid programs is not always simple or easy. Scholars seem to disagree whether children should in general be allowed to participate or not. There are many advantages and disadvantages to children's participation. Although it can empower them, increase their confidence and personal skills it can also be difficult to know who is mature, responsible or capable enough to be able to participate.

The aim of this study is to examine children's participation in Ghana. I will try to answer few questions related to the subject such as: how do Ghanaian children participate? How much power or role should children have within these projects? What are the main benefits and obstacles to children's participation in Ghana? Are the projects really child friendly where children are allowed to participate freely and fully in the whole process? Are children's voices really

heard by adults, organisations, government or other stakeholders? There are few reasons why I chose this research topic. Firstly, I am very interested in child rights issues, especially participation; because it is fascinating to see what young people are capable of doing. Secondly, I wanted to focus on African children in relation to empowerment and independence instead of vulnerability or sensitivity. Thirdly, it is challenging to conduct a research with children or young people. Finally, children are often excluded or not taken seriously and therefore I wanted to give them voice in my study equally to adults.

Due to the nature of the research topic, this study was built on qualitative methodology. The research was conducted in Ghana from September to December 2010 and consists of few interviews, in structured form with the adults but more like conversations with the younger participants. It is also based on participant observation where I studied events, forums, clubs and a radio program where children and young people participate on different levels and purposes. The research was mainly conducted in Accra, the capital city, with few visits to other parts of the country, both small and large cities and villages.

I will start in chapter two by discussing theories about children and childhood from a historical angle along with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on Rights and Welfare of the Child which have both been ratified in Ghana. In chapter three I will describe how human rights have been involved and included in the development aid process with approaches such as the rights-based approach to development. Further I will discuss how participation is connected to the approach. In the fourth chapter I review children's participation in general, how it is defined, the advantages and disadvantages of it and cooperation with adults. In chapter five I outline the setting of the study in Ghana, its history, demography, and how child rights and children in Ghana are doing on the national and international level both concerning their rights and livelihood. Further, I will discuss some cultural matters related to Ghanaian children. Sixth chapter is about the methodology I used in the research, my experience from the field and some ethical considerations when doing a research with children. In chapter seven I will introduce the results of my study. I will begin by giving a brief overview of the programs, projects and organisations I visited. Next I will discuss how participants of the study believe

children should be involved in the projects and if their voices are really heard by all stakeholders. Thereafter I will cover some of the main benefits and obstacles identified by interviewees along with possible solutions and ideas about the future. Finally, in chapters eight and nine I will discuss my research findings in relation to the theoretical framework and draw some conclusions.

## **2. Children and child rights**

Scholars have long debated definitions of childhood, and international agreements about child rights. Not everyone seems to agree on some key issues like, how to define a child, and the purpose or efficacy of the international and national agreements. The disagreement is mostly about culture, where many scholars believe these concepts are based on Western ideology and do not take cultural relativism into account. In this chapter I will discuss this debate and how these concepts have been covered academically.

### **2.1. What is a child?**

In most conventions, legislations and in general a child refers to an individual between the ages of 0-18. According to Eriksen (2001), this age gap can be divided into different types of life spans, which are especially used among Western societies, for example; childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and senescent. However, Bucholtz (2002) does not believe this division to be universal. Further, she argues that in some communities adolescence does not even exist and instead a child will turn straight into an adult. Liebel (2004) agrees and argues that some societies may define people by certain rituals or physical skills instead of by their biological age. Culturally, the bounds between a child and an adult can therefore be very indefinite which people should be aware of when trying to create one universal rule which fits everyone.

The origin of childhood or this life span division in Western societies has been debated by many scholars. Probably the most known and criticised theory came from the historian Philippe Ariés (1962). He believed childhood, as known today, originated from Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century but formerly children were only seen as small adults. According to James and Prout (1990), Ariés got these results by viewing paintings of children which showed small people dressed and lined up like adults. Hobbs, McKechnie and Lavalette (1999) claim that the methodology used by Ariés was not accepted and harshly criticised by other scholars because he expected the paintings to reflect children's real lives at that time. Many theoretician disagreed with Ariés and believed that the paintings were created with

different purpose and meaning and did therefore not reveal their current ways of living. Further, James and Prout (1990) argue that critics believe that childhood always existed but the idea and image of it has changed in past decades and at the time of the paintings: childhood was simply different from what it is known for today. Despite all the criticism, James and Prout (1990) believe that Ariés influenced the debate about childhood vastly causing some dramatic changes on the subject. The core of his idea was that childhood is based on social and historical background instead of only biological. In Past years more scholars have taken his example by accepting that childhood is more than just physical immaturity, it is also a social construction.

By social construction of childhood, James and Prout (1990) explain that the diversity of the concept has been accepted and the fact that childhood can differ between cultural societies has been acknowledged. According to Hecht (1998) the opposite of social construction is the so called Western idea about childhood which defines the concept universally; as something all children in the world experience in the same way, or should at least be entitled to such experience. Further, Such, Walker and Walker (2005) claim the Western idea is based on the process every child has to go through from birth to prepare for adulthood and the future. According to Stephens (1995), childhood has been defined as opposite to adulthood and children should therefore have limited independence and be under constant guidance from adults. Such, Walker and Walker (2005) argue that the parent's role is thus to make sure the child obtains a happy life, surrounded by love, care and protection. Accordingly, Stephens (1995) claims children should be seen as innocent and protected individuals who are representing future generations. Korbin (2003) adds that children's lives should consist of games, friends and a caring family. Stephens (1995) believes the negative sides of childhood such as abuse or neglect on an adult's behalf, which surely exist everywhere in the world, is not covered or recognised in the Western ideology. Further, she argues that the Western image of perfect, simple and pleasant lives of children is partly romantic but the reality is a lot more complicated.

Korbin (2003) discusses the *International year of the child* in 1979, where the romantic ideas about childhood are challenged. Children suffering from

hunger, poverty, diseases or those living in a war-torn country were exposed internationally and got public attention. These less romantic images of children around the world contradicted Western ideas and made people more aware of the reality and that not everyone is privileged to have the great and perfect childhood. Further, children's lives can differ between their national and cultural background, personality, age and experience. Korbin (2003), along with Christiansen and Prout (2005), claims that people also became more aware that children in Western societies are also exposed to vulnerable or sensitive situations like poverty, abuse or labour. According to Korbin (2003), the debate about the unfavourable sides of childhood led to a meeting in Geneva and special demand on agreements framing child rights issues, following creation of one of the largest agreement heretofore.

## **2.2. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**

The first legislation which covered children's rights was the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child (GDRC) in 1924. An expanded version of the GDRC was adopted in November 1959 by the United Nations (UN) as the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (DRC). It aims were to ensure children's access to protection, shelter and food (Bueren, 1998). Only thirty years later the current convention was adopted at the UN General Assembly; The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which has been regarded by Joseph (1997) as the first real piece of children's legislation. In November 1989, the CRC was opened for signatures and ratification from countries worldwide and entered into force in September 1990 (UNCRC, 1989). Today all countries contracted to the UN, except for the United States of America and Somalia have ratified the Convention, although the USA did sign the two Optional Protocols (Doek, 2009).

According to the CRC (1989) a child is an individual who is below the age of eighteen, with an exception if a child obtains legal age earlier according to the residence country. The main goals of the CRC are to acknowledge children as independent individuals with their own rights and to ensure that children have rights to influence decisions concerning their own lives (UNCRC, 1989). According to Bueren (1998), the Convention also aims to ensure children's protection, survival and development. Skelton (2007) believes the whole discussion about children's rights has changed since the adoption of the CRC.



Doek (2009) claims the Convention had considerable impact on the international agenda, a platform has been created and children's rights are now taken more seriously. Further, Joseph (1997:7) describes the CRC as "the most comprehensive international statement of children's rights, provides a yardstick to measure development on both the international and national levels."

Before the adoption of the CRC in 1989, Skelton (2007) claims the focus, concerning care of children and practical support, especially during crisis, was mainly on two key concepts; *protection* and *provision*. However, the current Convention added into discussion the so called third *P*; *participation*. This means children are accepted, acknowledged and encouraged to participate in decisions concerning their own lives according to the Convention. The right to participate can mainly be found in articles 12 to 15 in the CRC which Franklin (1996) believes are the most important one in the Convention and a premise to fulfil some of the other child rights. Lundy (2007) agrees and states that the right to participate recognises children as fully human beings.

The first article about children's participation (article 12) stipulates that; "States 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" (UNCRC, 1989:12.art). In this article children are acknowledged as individuals although it is a matter of opinion whose part it is to decide when a child is mature enough and when the right age to participate is achieved. Further, in 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, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice." Here the child is given the opportunity to express itself in any way that is suitable. This is given with few restrictions, in case if it can effect others reputation, national security, public order or public health (UNCRC, 1989:13.art). These rights shall be respected, according to the fourteenth article by state parties along with freedom of conscience and religion. And the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly shall be recognized, according to the fifteenth article (UNCRC, 1989: 14., 15.art). Child rights and the right to participate has however not only been recognised in the

CRC. Some countries have formed their own child rights agreements and legislations and on the African continent a special Charter was created, ratified and adopted by many countries where children's participation is acknowledged.

### **2.3. African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child**

The first Declaration on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child (DRWAC) was adopted in Liberia in July 1979, before the United Nations CRC, where the need to promote and protect the African child was recognised. Furthermore, the DRWAC aimed to ensure the welfare of the African child concerning education, medical care and nutrition but at the same time to protect the inheritors and keepers of African heritage (DRWAC, 1979). More than a decade later, in 1990, the current African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) was adopted and entered into force in November 1999 (ACRWC, 1990). According to Sloth-Nielsen (2008), the Charter was an addition to the United Nations CRC with aims to increase the rights of African children due to their special conditions and vulnerability. These conditions are, according to Ehler and Frank (2008), for example armed conflicts, exploitation, cultural and traditional circumstances, hunger and poverty.

In the ACRWC (1990), a child is defined the same way as in the CRC; as an individual under the age of eighteen years. Children's rights to have a voice and participate are also recognised in the ACRWC. Article seven states the freedom of expression where "every child who is capable of communicating his or her own views shall be assured the rights to express his opinions freely in all matters and to disseminate his opinions subject to such restrictions as are prescribed by laws" (ACRWC, 1990: 7.art). Other forms of participation can be found in; article 4, where the child should be allowed to express its view in judicial and administrative proceedings and in article 8 where it is stipulated that "every child shall have the right to free association and freedom of peaceful assembly in conformity with the law." Article 9 states the freedom of thought, conscience and religion and in article 12 a child should be able to participate freely in any cultural life.

What differs between the CRC and the ACRWC can be found in article 31 which covers the child's responsibilities towards his or her family and society.

The article stipulates that “every child shall have responsibilities towards his family and society, the state and other legally recognized communities and the international community.” These responsibilities are for example to respect seniors at all times and help them when needed, to serve the national community, maintain and protect African cultural values and to perform his or her best to promote achievements in African Unity (ACRWC, 1990:31.art). Since the adoption of the ACRWC, Sloth-Nielsen (2008) believes some considerable progress has been made concerning child rights and participation in the continent.

#### **2.4. Criticism and challenges**

Both the UN Convention and the African Charter have its positive sides academically and practically. However, they have also been criticised and the success of implementation doubted. Milne (2008) argued that the UN agencies did not even show much interest in the CRC until it was completed and adopted. Stephens (1995) claims that some scholars, mainly in the South, have criticised the CRC for representing Western ideas about children and childhood. Theis (2001) agrees and believes a universal model of childhood, as represented in the CRC, can not be realistic because of its diversity between cultures. As mentioned, one of these universal ideas is the division of age where individuals under the age of eighteen are defined as children. According to L ndal (2007), it can create a dilemma when international agreements like the CRC only define children by their biological age instead of taking their cultural traditions into account as well because children’s situations are not the same everywhere in the world. Furthermore, Stephens (1995) believes that laws and legislations should be adjusted to each country with focus on the differences between societies instead of being unilaterally from one point of view.

The success of implementation of the CRC has also been doubted and Lansdown (1997) argues that the articles concerning participation are far from achieving any progress. The agreements, both CRC and ACRWC, have probably had least success in the developing countries where Mulinge (2002:1117) believes it is only “a distant dream in most African countries.” and despite all the ideas, policies, laws and legislations improvement of children’s rights have still not been significant. She also claims that children’s rights are still violated, children

continue to suffer, victims of neglect, exploitation, abuse and lack of education and proper healthcare is still a problem; these are only few examples of bad situations of African children. According to Mulinge (2002), the reason it has not been successful is because there is a lack of political will to implement the rights and poverty prevents or makes it more difficult for children to fight for their rights. Because of the poor situation of many children, Corsaro (2005) believes there is still a lot of work that needs to be done to fulfil the rights of children according to the CRC.

Olesen (2004) raises the question, which has been debated by many scholars, whether the focus should be on children's participation in the society or protection from the society. Horton (2004) chooses the latter and argues that there is no point in fighting for children's rights when so many are still dying from preventable diseases. However, Corsaro (2005) does not believe the CRC to be a completely useless document; it has improved some children's participation and given them more chances to express their views and making decisions affecting their own lives. Gordon, Nandy, Pantazis, Pemberton and Townsend (2007) agree and state that if children are aware of their rights, even more success can be reached.

### **3. Children and international development**

There are many different methods, which have been used within the development aid framework, and the term development is heavily debated.<sup>1</sup> Some definitions mainly focus on economic growth in the developing countries<sup>2</sup> while others emphasise social and cultural issues.

In Past years, concepts like human rights, empowerment and participation have obtained increased attention within development aid assistance where the importance of the active involvement of local people in the process is underlined. The so-called (human) rights-based approach (RBA) to development emphasises human rights and to involve everyone, especially vulnerable or excluded groups, in development aid assistance; including children. In this chapter I will focus on the RBA to development and I will view how the approach covers concepts like participation, which is the main subject of this thesis.

#### **3.1. Rights-based approach to development**

Although there is no one universal definition of the RBA to development it is essentially based on the framework of human rights. The approach differs from other developmental approaches mainly because it relies fully on human rights and states that no human being should be deprived from his or her rights regardless of race, age, gender, religion, disability or any other forms of individual identification. Further, the RBA to development acknowledges people as active agents instead of passive beneficiaries, meaning that individuals should not only receive development aid, they should also be actively involved in deciding how it is promoted and implemented (Ljungman, 2004).

The RBA to development has gained great attention within the development discourse in the past decades. Many development aid agencies are

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, Escobar, 2005; Autumn, 1996; Easterly, 2006; Rist, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> The geographical division of the world is debated, whether to be identified as ‘developing countries’, ‘developed countries’, ‘first world’, ‘third world’, ‘South’, ‘North’, ‘West’, or ‘East’ (see for example: Said, 1979; Pletsch, 1981; Mohanty, 1988). I however chose to use the concepts in the thesis due to the academic discussions and literature.

raising awareness of human rights and implementing the RBA into programming. The UN agencies are among these partners and announced, in 1997, a mainstreaming of human rights into its programs and policy making. The aims of the UN are therefore to make all programs and processes, including planning, designing, analysing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating, be guided by human rights. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) (2006:15) describes the RBA to development as

a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. It seeks to analyse inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress. Mere charity is not enough from the human rights perspective. Under a human rights-based approach, the plans, policies and processes of development are anchored in a system of rights and corresponding obligations establishing by international law. This helps to promote the sustainability of development work, empowering people themselves – especially the most marginalized – to participate in policy formulation and hold accountable those who have a duty act.

In short, according to the UNHCHR (2006), the RBA to development focuses on non-discriminative development process where everyone should be allowed to participate in the whole process from policy making to implementing. Furthermore, the RBA emphasises that all duty bearers act in this sense and contribute to accomplish the goals of the approach.

For a successful implementation of the RBA all partners need to be engaged in the process. The approach identifies the *rights holders* whose responsibilities are to claim their rights and the *duty bearers* whose purpose it is to meet the rights holder's obligations (UNHCHR, 2006). According to Theis

(2003a), the duty bearers should ensure that all rights are equally respected, fulfilled and protected. Further it is the states responsibility to make sure the duty bearers will keep appropriate conditions so the rights holders will not be deprived of their rights. Meanwhile, it is the rights holder's responsibility to respect the rights of others and help to ensure that they will not be violated.

The relationship between rights holders and duty bearers is supposed to work towards the universalism of human rights by changing people's attitudes and strengthening willingness of fighting for these rights on behalf of both partners. This can be performed by adjusting policy making and institutions to the idea and by ensuring human rights will be protected, promoted and the importance of it will be realised by all stakeholders (Crawford, 2007). According to UNHCHR (2006), stakeholders therefore need to be involved in the whole planning and implementation process. Additionally, other strategies to reinforce human rights and solve specific issues would be to build a strong relationship between rights holders and duty bearers, to educate people about their rights, promote transparency, support advocacy, encouraging freedom the media and enabling rights holders to demand their rights. All these strategies can make implementation of the RBA to development more successful but there are different methods which can be used to perform it.

### **3.2. Participation and development**

Ljungman (2004) identifies four key principles derived from the rights-based approach to development. Firstly, *universalism* and *indivisibility*, where all groups should be included in the development aid process, whether women, children or poor people. Also that no one should be deprived of his or her rights under any circumstances. Secondly, *equality* and *non-discrimination*, where no group should be excluded or discriminated in relation to development aid process. Moreover everyone is entitled to human rights. Thirdly, *accountability* and *rule of law*, where duty bearers have to ensure human rights are fulfilled by stakeholders and will not be violated by anyone. Finally, *participation* and *inclusion*, where participation is a right which gives all members of the society opportunity to express themselves and be actively involved in the development aid process. Due

to the aims of this thesis I will not discuss each principle in details except for the last one, *participation*, which will be covered in depth.

According to Ljungman (2004), participation in developmental cooperation is a relatively new concept. However it is a very important one because it allows different partners to influence the development strategies and interventions. Rozga (2001) believes that participation is a human right and every human being should be entitled to participate freely in social, political, economical and cultural activities. In addition these activities should realise the freedom and human rights of all people where their influence in decision making is increased and the accountability of duty bearers strengthened. According to the UNHCHR (2006:9), the right to participate is expected to be “active, free and meaningful.” Although the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2006) acknowledges all peoples right to participate, regardless of age, gender, race, religion or other forms of individual identification, it also recognises the violations occurring on human rights, especially among excluded groups. There are still agencies that ignore or disregard human rights and do not allow local people to be involved in the development aid process.

However, the numbers of development agencies which emphasise human rights are increasing although these partners initiate participation differently. It differs between agencies how much people are allowed to participate in the development process and how much their views and opinions are taken into account. Ljungman (2004) identifies seven different stages of participation. In the first two stages, *passive participation* and *participation in information giving*, people have little or no opportunities to affect the decision making; everything in the development process is decided by an outsider who later informs the locals. The third stage, *participation by consultation*, is where policy makers listen to people’s views and opinions but do not have a obligation of following it in the decision making; eventually solutions and problems are defined and solved by the professionals. Fourth and fifth stages, *participation for material incentives* and *functional participation*, gives people opportunity to participate by forming groups or providing resources but they will not continue with the process after the incentives ends. In the two last stages, *interactive participation* and *self-mobilization*, people participate in programs, analyses, monitoring, decision



making, implementation and follow ups; where participation is considered a right of every human being.

According to Ljungman (2004), many agencies in the development aid sector are constantly moving towards the last stages. In Past years participation has become a central concept, along with empowerment and partnership, in development and in many cases been mainstreamed into policy making. Mainstreaming participation in development means

adopting the institutional reforms and innovations necessary to enable full and systematic incorporation of participatory methodologies into the work of the institution so that meaningful primary stakeholder participation becomes a regular part of a project and policy development, implementation and evaluation (Ljungman, 2004:56).

Additionally, Ljungman (2004) identifies three main ways of using participation within agencies. Firstly, as a cosmetic label where participatory approaches are required, relevant partners claim they will and have used it as demanded but the reality is different; the stakeholders have only shown positive sides of participation on the surface but have not really done anything about it. Secondly, locals contribute on the field by working or spending time on the project, which is often good for cost reduction, but they are not part of any planning or decision making; they only participate in projects provided by an outsider. Finally, the locals are empowered and encouraged to take action in the projects. They are also allowed to be part of the planning, analysing and decision making.

Theis (2003b) underlines also enhancement of participation, empowerment and partnership in development. Further, he claims these concepts to be an important part of the RBA to development where it is ensured that people's voices are heard and they encouraged and empowered to demand their rights. Some of the main rights people should be entitled to and fight for are "access to information, freedom of expression, freedom of association and voting in democratic elections" (Theis, 2003a:11). To be able to demand these rights people need to know what they are entitled to. Not everyone is aware of their own rights and therefore it is especially important to reach everyone. Furthermore, it is

important to make sure people will know their rights and they will be empowered to participate. Theis (2003a:11) believes these are crucial factors to ensure effective participation within development aid agencies. He also claims that “fundamental change will only happen if many people demand it” and participation will only be successful when stakeholders raise awareness and educate the public of the importance of human rights. Further, transparency, capacity building will also help to accomplish effective participation along with the activeness of people. It includes people being active within the development framework instead of passive beneficiaries where they only accept aid provided by others. This means all community members need to be involved by choosing what kind of service is needed, what should the service include, how it should be organised and accomplished, and what roles other partners should have in the process; such as the state, organisations or other stakeholders.

### **3.3. RBA criticism and challenges**

The RBA to development has been criticised like most other development approaches and theories. The most common critique is based on a debate of the origin of human rights where many scholars believe it can be traced back to Western societies. Accordingly, the idea about human rights does not fit within the culture and values of non Western societies and its effectiveness outside of Europe has been doubted (Uvin, 2004; Kennedy, 2004). Kennedy (2004:11) claims the RBA has even been criticised as “globalization of policy making” with the use of Western power where development interventions are seen as cultural imperialism. Alston (2005) agrees and believes the RBA to development tends to be a universalised approach. Furthermore, Kennedy (2004) says that that little or no attention is paid to social, political or historical conditions within the approach. For instance, he explains that, the making of international declarations and conventions has been destructing the implementation when the policy becomes an end in itself and does not operate in a culturally sensitive manner.

According to Cornwall and Nyamy-Musembi (2004:1415), human rights in development, or the RBA has also been criticised because it brings nothing new to the development discourse. In fact, it is only the same old methods which have been dressed up in more fashionable manner and luckily become popular among

development aid agencies, or as they phrase it “a rights-based approach is to mean anything more than the latest flurry of cosmetic rhetoric with which to sell the same old development.” Uvin (2002:2-3) agrees and claims the RBA to development is nothing else than “old wine in new bottles.” He even states that the RBA or human rights to development is simply wrong because it “overlooks the tension between the logics of human rights and development.” Further, Donnelly (1999:611) argues that

human rights and sustainable human development are inextricably linked only if development is defined to make this relationship tautological. Sustainable human development simply redefines human rights, along with democracy, peace, and justice, as subsets of development. Aside from the fact that neither most ordinary people nor governments use the term in this way, such a definition fails to address the relationship between economic development and human rights. Tensions between these objectives cannot be evaded by stipulative definitions.

Accordingly, Uvin (2002) doubts the implementation and progress of human rights in development. He claims the approach does not provide sufficient guidance for implementing and changing the development arena. Tsikata (2004) agrees and maintains that the development industry has only used human rights for its own benefits and will therefore not change policies and programs effectively. Additionally, Alston (2005) argues that the approach has focused on reaching the most marginalised groups, which can be criticised in itself for not respecting equally all individuals as some are prioritised or considered more important to reach than others. Despite what Cornwall and Nyamy- Musembi (2004) believe, these groups are often far from being involved because of availability; illiteracy, the legal system and lack of information make it difficult for people to be aware of their rights and especially have financial deficiency to claim their rights. In her MA thesis *The Rights-Based Approach: a New Era for International Development?*, Jóhannsdóttir (2008) found that RBA to development is a lot more complex in practice than it seems. Further, it tends to be nothing

more than a development discourse which does not solve any real issues in the development area. The approach needs to make sure all people are allowed to be involved and that that development processes are not only for highly educated professionals. However, the nature of the concept makes it difficult for stakeholders to really adopt and implement the approach into programming.

## **4. Children's participation**

The word participation is a popular one, for instance within government, community sector, voluntary associations, international aid and among scholars. Within development aid the concept is debated, while some see participation as crucial for success<sup>3</sup> others are concerned with what they call the “tyranny” of participation.<sup>4</sup>

Those who embrace participation are not only focusing on participation within the development aid policies and program making but also involving and encouraging more people of the society to participate. Children are no exception where the awareness of children's right to participate and the importance of listening to their views and opinions is becoming more central in the development aid process. In theory and practice, there are diverse opinions on the meaning of children's participation and in this chapter I will discuss all its implications. The concept participation will be discussed and both its positive and negative sides will be covered.

### **4.1 What is children's participation?**

Alderson (2008) describes children's participation as involvement in activities which all children and youth are part of in some way in their daily lives. This can include learning, playing games acting or caring for others. However, she claims the most crucial definition of participation to be the right to express a view. Lansdown (1997) agrees and maintains that the right to be involved in decision making is a very important definition of participation. By expressing a view and taking part in decision making children are, according to Treseder (1997) and Hart (1992), able to have a voice in their surroundings and have an opportunity to make decisions concerning their own lives. According to Lansdown (1997), children are given recognition as people when they are allowed to participate in activities affecting their own lives. Hart (1992) agrees and claims that

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<sup>3</sup> See for example, Crew & Harrison, 1998; Nelson & Wright, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> See for example, Cooke & Kothari, 2002; Brown, 2004; Baaz, 2005

participation is the right of all citizens and the basis of democracy. Furthermore, Ehler and Frank (2008:38) believe that participation of children and youth will ensure they are “engaged actors rather than passive beneficiaries in the fulfilment of their rights.”

According to Alderson (2008), there are two groups of participation. Firstly, when children are being consulted but they are assisted and guided by adults. Secondly, when children discuss an issue, think about possible solutions and take decisions. These two groups narrow participation from *doing* into *talking, thinking and deciding*. In addition, Hart (1992) identifies four requirements for real participation. Firstly, children should always understand the purpose of the project. Secondly, children should be aware of who decided they should participate and why. Thirdly, children’s role in the participation should always have a meaning. Finally, children should not participate until all these requirements are clear to them.

#### **4.2. Why should children participate?**

There are a number of reasons why children should participate in activities affecting their own lives. According to Lansdown (1997), the main reason is that children are human beings and should therefore be taken seriously and respected as such. He maintains that it is children’s right to participate and be listened to by other members of the society. Liebel (2004) agrees and claims children should be acknowledged as individuals and active agents. Treseder (1997) suggests these factors in favour of children’s participation: their needs for responsibility; respect and recognition can be met; it encourages them to be active; and to respect democracy; it will give them a voice and they can have influence in activities concerning themselves. Liebel (2004) as well as James and Prout (1990) believe it is very important for children and youths to have freedom to express themselves and children’s views should be taken seriously.

Ehler and Frank (2008) suggest three arguments supporting children’s participation: it is in their best interest; it might extend democratic rights of some excluded groups; and it gives others information which can only be gathered from children. O’Kane (2003) argues that by listening to children others will get information and gain a greater understanding of their lives. Nodelman (1992)

thinks that when someone tries to speak on behalf of the children the children's voice will at the same time be shut down. The more we speak for children, the less we will know about their real opinions and in the end we will probably fail to describe their current situation. In Ansell's view (2005) participation can be very positive for the child's self. Children and youths will gain more understanding of concepts like democracy, they will get more sense of competence, and the needs of others and attitudes of the public will become more positive. Driskell (2002) maintains that the relationship between elders and the young can change and lead to a better understanding and it can help to improve other locals life's. It will make it easier for the older people to understand the younger people view of the world which can make the relationship between generations stronger and overcome the mistrust that sometimes occurs between them. Children and youths have different knowledge than their elders and all members of the community should be able to participate, regardless of their age. Ansell (2005) believes that children's participation can also affect organisations in policy making by increasing commitment to their rights. According to Coly and Terenzio (2007:185), children's participation is fundamental in Africa. They argue that

from an African development point of view child participation represents a real opportunity because until now development models that have been adopted have never succeeded in efficiently managing one of the main resources for development: children's energy and creativity.

To achieve an affective participation, Boyden and Ennew (1997) suggest that children need to be well informed about what they are doing, why they are doing it and its consequences. O'Kane (2003) believes the way to a meaningful participation is that children have sustained active involvement in decision-making; they should be given power to shape the process and outcome and be acknowledged for their work. James and Prout (1990) say that children's impact in society has changed considerably and their rights have increased. Children make decisions and talk about their opinion instead of being unilaterally shaped by their communities. Furthermore, Ehler and Frank (2008) claim the concept of

children's participation is promising and has the potential of spreading around the globe and become popular among different partners. .

#### **4.3. Why should children not participate?**

Despite all the positive sides of children's participation it has been much criticised, especially among the public. The criticism has been discussed academically where different scholars demonstrate its implications. Treseder (1997) wonders why everyone seems to like the idea about children's participation, but still it has not made any great success. Treseder thinks the reason is simple: fear. Adults fear the fact that children or young people will become somehow active, independent or confident and that they will gain more control over their own lives than accepted by some adults. According to Lansdown (1997) some adults feel threatened when children do not completely fit into these romanticized images, for example when they are supposed to be active participants and responsible for their actions. Driskell (2002) claims that adults might feel like they are the experts and have knowledge to make the best decision, they were young once so they know what children want and need.

Bourdillion (2006) points out that some people simply believe that not all children are capable of making their own decisions. Their opinions are often shaped by the community instead of being conscious and self-determined. It varies between children how soon they mature and are able to make independent decisions which are not influenced or formed by others. Alderson (2008) argues that children are sometimes seen so unreliable and often too immature to make their own decisions. Some say that children are selfish and therefore incapable of making rational decisions and that they cannot understand the consequences of their actions in advance. Lansdown (1997) says children often are reputed as irresponsible, irrational and incapable to take informed decisions affecting themselves. These are the main reasons reputed against children's participation and their power and responsibilities.

Even though children are active in the community, it can be difficult for them to define themselves as an independent group because their lives are, in most parts, controlled by adults (James & Prout, 1990). There is a concern, on the half of those supporting children's participation, that participation is too formal and



dominated by adults (Alderson, 2008). However it is necessary to consider if real participation of children, where adults do not interfere, does really exist or will children always be controlled by adults or under their guidance.

#### **4.4. Cooperation**

Some scholars believe that a good participation requires a dual commitment. Adults and children should agree to have a better understanding and more respect for each other (Lansdown, 1997). It is important that adults make sure that children can choose to participate or not. Children also need to get information, control, a voice and independence if participation is to be active and successful. These things require adults to share power and obligations with children and youths (Alderson, 2008). By sharing the power the most successful participatory approach will be gained (Ehler & Frank, 2008). Treseder's (1997) definition of sharing power is when everyone interested in the subject share responsibilities with others, including children and youths. By doing this it should, according to Treseder, encourage them in their activities and projects and give them an effective voice. O'Kane (2003) believes that if power is not shared, children and youths will probably have little or no influence. Furthermore, he says that if one is to work towards children's empowerment it is necessary to cooperate with the adults who are part of the child's life.

Lansdown (1997) claims it is also important for adults to accept that participation is a right and not a generous gift to children. O'Kane (2003) maintains that children must be seen as full members of the community and there needs to be a balance of power between adults and children. According to Lansdown (1997), without this balance children will continue to be denied participation. Alderson (2008:87) says that an appropriate guidance and direction involves a balance between "protection and respect for the child autonomy; providing too little or too much adult support; helping children towards independence too early or too slowly; the child's and the parents and other people's rights, interests and welfare." By finding the right balance, everyone will gain something that might affect both children and adults positively.

#### 4.5. Agency

Children's agency is about whether or not a child is capable of participating and making decisions concerning his or her own life. Kjørholt and Lidén (2004) claim it differs between children when they are informed or old enough to participate or affect issues concerning their lives. According to Such, Walker and Walker (2005), children are not always seen as mature individuals and therefore adults sometimes feel the need to have certain control over them. James and Prout (1990) believe this view which doubts children's agency can affect children who want to define themselves as an independent group even though they are already full members of the society. Example can be drawn from a research conducted by Such, Walker and Walker (2005) in Britain on young protesters. The study shows the limited effects and attention children's and young people's opinions get in the media. Mostly parents and the governments view on the protest were revealed in the media and the young people's actions criticised negatively. The youth themselves barely got any attention, even though they were the pioneers of the protest.

Different ideas exist about children's capacity of being active and making decisions. Children's agency in extreme situations has especially been debated among scholars. Howana (2005) identifies two types of agency; *tactical agency* and *strategic agency*. She defines tactical agency as when vulnerable children have to make choices according to their poor situations and have no opportunities or goals for the future. Strategic agency, however, is when the child has a choice and power along with future plans and goals. Utas (2005) has also outlined special agency of child soldiers, the so called *victimacy*, referring to when a child soldier victimizes him or herself to survive the situation. For example: when a female child soldier fraternizes with her officer in hope to get better protection for her and the family. According to Howana (2005), it can be difficult to define the child's situation, whether an innocent victim or guilty agent. The boundaries between those two can even be undefined. She also claims that it is common that a child begins by being under the group of tactical agents but later turns into a strategic agent. Furthermore, she takes for an example a boy who has to run away with his father because of the war but gets caught. The boy is ordered to kill his father, which he does because of fear. The next seven years he spends as a soldier

in the war. In his situation it is not easy to define whether he is a victim or an agent.

The survival strategy of child soldiers is closely related to what has been described as *social navigation*. According to Vigh (2006), the concept of social navigation refers to individuals making decisions according to his or her situation and thereby adjusting to the flexible conditions. Additionally, because each person's environment is different, social navigation enables him or her to make the most suitable decisions according to each situation. Accordingly people, including children, should be capable of making their own decisions and know what is in their best interest.

According to James and Prout (1990), children's impacts on certain issues have increased in the past years. Children themselves are becoming more aware of their rights, fighting for them and participating in decision making. Likewise, child rights have become more central in the debate due to adoption of national and international conventions and legislations which also demonstrates the fact that stakeholders are accepting and taking child rights more seriously. Children's agency and capacity to participate are some of the main concepts in my research which was conducted in Ghana and will be discussed in dept in chapter seven.

## 5. Setting

### 5.1. Ghana

Ghana is located in West-Africa with borders to the Ivory Coast in the west, Togo in the east and Burkina Faso in the north. The country covers 238,537 km<sup>2</sup> and is only a few degrees north of the Equator (Salm & Falola, 2002). The land is generally flat with few low plateaus and mountains (the highest one Mount Afadjato, is



about 886 meters above sea level). Ghana can be divided into two main geographical features; forests in the south and the savannah in the north. It has one of the biggest ‘man-maid’ rivers in the world; Volta River, a result of the construction of Akosombo dam which was completed in 1965. The climate is generally tropical, ranging from 20°C-30°C, where the south is comparatively dry and humid and the north is hot and dry. The so called dry season normally lasts from October to March, following the rainy season with heavy rains lasting from April-July and light rains in August and September (Buah, 1998). The country consist of ten administrative regions; Ashanti, Brong Ahafo, Central, Eastern, Greater Accra, Northern, Upper East, Upper West, Volta and Western region (Salm & Falola, 2002).

The population of Ghana was, in 2008, around 23.4 million inhabitants (Unicef, 2009) which can be divided into about 60 ethnic groups. The five largest groups are, Gonja, Mole-Dagbani, Akan, Ewe, and Ga-Adangbe, comprise 85% of the population (Kuada & Chachah, 1999:11). These main ethnic groups can

largely be distinguished by their language and cultural habits (Buah, 1998). English is the official language of Ghana but about 60 other languages are spoken in the country, which shows the great diversity of the nation (Salm & Falola, 2002). Most of the population are Christians, or about 69%, 15% are Muslims and traditional religions, and 16% of other or non religious (CIA, 2010).

Ghana is very rich in cultural heritage, especially concerning arts, dance and music. The land itself has also great amount of valuable resources, including gold, diamonds, manganese ore, bauxite, timber, electricity and cocoa. Of all these, gold has the highest market value and Ghana remains one of the top gold producers of the world. However, cocoa has provided most foreign earning for Ghana since the year of 1925 (Kuada & Chachah, 1999). In 2007 a new and very valuable resource was discovered in the country, an oilfield which is expected to give a huge boost to the economy, as it was considered “one of the biggest oil finds in Africa in recent times” (BBC, 2007).

## **5.2. History**

The first archaeological evidences of human activities in Ghana can be traced back to 10,000 BC (Naylor, 2000). However, most of the current ethnic groups are considered to have settled in the country around 5000 BC. At that time trading was common among northern and southern parts of West-Africa and movement of people and borders was prevalent (Salm & Falola, 2002).

In the late fifteenth century the Portuguese started their invasion in Africa, with focus on the coastline. They established themselves in a village named Elmina ‘the coast of gold mines’. Elmina is located on the coast of Ghana and was used as a harbour for exporting goods such as gold and ivory to Europe. Because of how rich this area was of gold the country was at that time called *the Gold Coast*. Gradually other European countries started to show interest in the Gold Coast. The Dutch were the first of all to really challenge the Portuguese, others followed such as the Swedes, Danish and finally the British (Buah, 1998).

Britain was dominating in a short time on the *Gold Coast* and soon the emphasis had changed from trading gold to slave trading due to great demand from the North (Salm & Falola, 2002). It is estimated that about 5,000 slaves were transported every year from the Gold Coast during the peak of the trading

(Naylor, 2000). In 1874 the Gold Coast was officially declared a British colony, one of the first countries in Africa to be formally colonized (Salm & Falola, 2002).

After the World War II natives started to insist more rights and in 1947 the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), the first political party, demanded self-government. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah was invited to participate in the UGCC as the Secretary General but was not satisfied with the parties' members. He later formed his own party; the Conventions People's Party (CPP) and insisted self-government immediately. Nkrumah and the CPP became very popular among the public and in 1951 a new constitution was introduced, allowing locals to participate in the Executive Council and the Legislative Council. The same year, Nkrumah became the first African prime minister of the Gold Coast. Finally he led the country to its independence on March the sixth 1957, first of all Sub-Saharan African countries to receive independence from the Europeans. The country's name was formally changed from the Gold Coast to Ghana (Salm & Falola, 2002). The name Ghana refers to a rich and well structured country, praised by others and a "concrete testimony of what the emerging nations of Africa could do" (Kuada & Chachah, 1999:23).

Nkrumah became Ghana's first president in July 1960 (Salm & Falola, 2002). He emphasized agriculture and industrialization along with investments in the health care system, education, roads and the Akosombo dam, which had a promising affect on the development. His plans about the country's economic success however failed due to lack of professionals and productivity with the cause of an economic downturn. In only four years Nkrumah had also changed the newly-independent nation to a one party-state with a constitutional change which enabled him to be a president for life (Naylor, 2000).

In 1966, while Nkrumah was on a visit in Asia, there was a military takeover who promised the public elections as soon as possible. Nkrumah never returned to Ghana and the ban on political parties was lifted in 1968. Kofi A. Busia with the Progress Party won the elections which were held in 1969. Despite the public's hopes for Busia to establish a stable economy and politics in Ghana, his government only lasted for two years leading to an even worse situation and a large amount of foreign debts. Another coup occurred in 1972 when Lieutenant

Colonel Acheampong took office, who was accused of corruption. In reaction his government banned all independent newspapers and journalists were detained (Naylor, 2000). Acheampong's attempt to deal with the economy situation was by printing more and more money which made the annual inflation reach more than 140 percent (Salm & Falola, 2002).

Acheampong was forced to resign and was replaced by Lieutenant General Frederick Akuffo. Public voices demanding elections grew louder and the government decided the next one to be held in July 1979. Within a month before the elections the first violent coup occurred in Ghana. Jerry John Rawlings formed the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and executed three former heads of state. Still the elections were held with the victory of the People's National Party (PNP) led by Hilla Limann. His attempts to improve the economy situation also failed and corruption maintained. In 1981 after Rawlings second coup the eighth government since the fall of Nkrumah was formed, this time with aims at transforming the Ghanaian society. Ghana had to face a population growth and decline in the food production and only two years after Rawlings coup, Ghana was officially in economic crisis (Naylor, 2000).

In 1983, the land was in dry conditions causing bush fires and food shortage and at the same time thousands of Ghanaian workers were sent home from the neighbouring countries. After negotiations with leaders of Libya and Burkina Faso the Ghanaian government started discussions with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) and was advised to follow the structural adjustment program (SAP) (Naylor, 2000). According to Hilson (2004) Ghana was the first of all countries sub-Saharan Africa to undergo SAP. Naylor (2000:24) explains the two implementation stages of SAP in Ghana: The first one aimed to "stabilize the economy through various austerity measures" such as user charges in the social sector. The second stage was characterized by "economic restructuring, changes in the states institutions and practices" such as reducing public ownership by privatization.

In 1992 great changes were in the political field of Ghana. A new improved constitution, which stated that the president could not serve more than two four-year terms of office, was introduced. The first multiparty elections were held the same year, where Rawlings was voted president and his National

Democratic Congress (NDC) received all Parliaments seats. He was accused of corruption but was voted again in the next elections, in 1996, although other parties got 66 out of 230 seats in the parliament. After almost 20 years in office Rawlings gave his office without resistance to John Agyekum Kufuor and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) after free and fair elections in 2001 (Salm & Falola, 2002).

In the Past years the political environment in Ghana has been stable. The most recent elections were held in 2008 with the victory of John Atta Mills, who had lost twice before against Kufuor (BBC, 2009). The elections were considered peaceful and democratic and as stated in the BBC news before the elections 2008; “Ghana is often held up as an example of good government in Africa” (BBC, 2008).

### **5.3. Demographic and child indicators**

According to the UNDP’s Human Development Report (HDR, 2010) Ghana is ranked in the group of low human development, in the 130 place of all countries included. The human development is measured in three different ways, by life expectancy, gross enrolment in education, adult literacy, and purchasing power parity, PPP income. This index is not supposed to give a comprehensive measure of human development but to view the progress and the relationship between human’s income and well being.

Approximately 30% of Ghana’s population are estimated to live below the international poverty line of \$1.23 per day (Unicef, n.d.) and, according to Unicef’s website (n.d.), 18% below the extreme poverty line. Further, the World Bank (2008) states that percentage of people living below the poverty line has reduced in Ghana from 52% in 1992 to 29% in 2006, which makes Ghana one of a few states which is on plan reaching the Millennium Development Goal (MDG), goal one, of poverty reduction by the year of 2015 (see also Unicef (2010a)). According to Unicef (2010b), HIV prevalence is rather low or 1.7%, half of the population is urbanized and life expectancy at birth is about 59 years for males and 60 years for females. On average each woman gives birth to four children. However, child mortality rate is quite high, about 80 out of 1000 children under the age of 5 die every year. Around 26% of children get married before the age of



18, the child labour rate is 34%, and 89% of children are being psychologically or physically abused

Ghanaian children have one of the highest school enrolments in sub-Saharan Africa, with more than 80% attendance and most children complete their primary education (Unicef, 2010a). According to Unicef (2009), this is one of the key factors that makes the child rights issues in Ghana interesting along with the fact that about half of the total population are individuals under the age of 18. In addition Ghana is one of Africa's leading countries concerning children's right. Interest in children and their rights has increased considerably in the country these past years which is reflected in the development agenda and reports of poverty reduction and growth of the country (Unicef, 2010b). Ghana was the first country globally to ratify the CRC (Unicef, 2010a). The ACRWC has also been ratified and recently, the African Youth Charter. According to Ghanaian government's website (2011), members of the Parliament reiterated the need for implementing special agreement on youths, and the AYC aims to empower and encourage Ghanaian youths, aged 15-35, to be active in the society and participate in policy and decision making (AYC, 2005). This Charter will not be discussed further in this thesis because it covers an age group, which was only a small part of my research group. These three agreements have been ratified in Ghana but the government has also legislated a special Children's Act (Act 560), under the national Constitution which covers an age group more relevant to the participants of my study.

#### **5.4. Children's Act 560**

In 1998, Ghana adopted the Children's Act 550 which is a legislation forced into law as subscribe to the national constitution. The Act is supposed to "reform and consolidate the law relating to children, to provide for the rights of the child, maintenance and adoption, regulate child labour and apprenticeship, for ancillary matters concerning children generally and to provide for related matters." Just like in the CRC and ACRWC, the Act states that, a child refers to all individuals under the age of eighteen years. Further the child's best interest should always be at consideration with those who child issues are concerned (Children's Act 560, 1998: 6-8).

The Act is divided into six parts and each of these parts is divided into further sub-parts. Part one focuses on the rights of the child, part II covers a quasi-judicial matter which is called the Child Panel which enables families and communities to resolve problems without going to the main judicial system. Part III deals with parentage, custody, access and maintenance, part IV on fosterage and adoption, part V on employment and children and part VI focuses on institutional care and miscellaneous matters (Children's Act 560, 1998).

Children's participation is covered in article 11 in the Children's Act. A sub-part named Right to opinion, confirms that "no person shall deprive a child capable of forming views the right to express an opinion, to be listened to and to participate in decisions which affect his well-being" (Children's Act 560, 1998: art. 11). According to Twum-Danso (2008: 141), the Ghanaian government has faced problems implementing agreements and legislations on child rights. Further, she claims that the right to participate is "the most problematic of all rights ... to implement in the Ghanaian social and cultural context." However, the Ghanaian government is trying to follow international standards, despite difficulties, by overlooking the resistance the agreements may engender.

### **5.5. Ghanaian children**

Contrary to some scholars,<sup>5</sup> LeVine (2007) believes that many anthropological studies have been conducted among children and young people past decades. Mead (1928) is often considered to be the pioneer for such studies for her research in Samoa. She was criticized for using methodology not suitable for the cultural context, for example using drawings and paintings with children who had never seen a paper and a pen before. Other anthropologists<sup>6</sup> also dedicated some of their work to childhood studies and most of them differed from other social studies because their aims were to represent children's mind from their own point of view. Since then, anthropological researches have been conducted all around the world in different social and cultural context.

Several anthropological studies have been conducted in Africa among children and young people. Gottlieb (2004) studied infants among the Beng in

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<sup>5</sup> See for example, Hirschfeld (2002).

<sup>6</sup> See for example, Malinowski (1929), Evans-Pritchard (1940), and Sapir (1993).

Ivory Coast and found that despite their young age, children were seen as people with their own intentions, memories and desires. Additionally, all children of the community were respected equally, and they were independent and allowed to play outside without special guidance of a parent. Poluha (2004) described interaction among children in Ethiopia as a window of the society, which gives a good example of its structure. She also believes Ethiopian children gain cultural understanding through their experience of daily lives which will later on pass to the next generation. Although these cultural understandings tend to be conservative, the children are also important factors in improving or developing it. However, it can be difficult because of social and cultural traditions and certain values and norms will always affect people of the society in one way or another. Kaime (2009) argues that although children are very valuable within the African context, so is the culture. The aims of many agreements, such as the ACRWC, are to ensure these two will be protected and maintained in the future.

According to Kuada and Chachah (1999), many people in Ghanaian context are attached to their traditional roots and beliefs. The essence of the traditional belief differs between ethnic groups but mostly it refers to the entities on the earth which are considered to possess life and function as god's deputies. Each village, community, household or even individuals can have its own god which consists of a hierarchy function, for example, the community god is superior to the village god and the village god is superior to the lineage god. The human being is believed to be inseparable from the spirits and his or hers destiny determined by it. According to the belief, individuals are born into a place of their destiny whether they are supposed to be obedient, kind or hardworking. What the child inherits from its parents differs between ethnic groups. Among the Akan a child is believed to get its blood from the mother but the spirit from the father, while the breath and the soul comes from the god.

Having a child in Ghana is considered extremely important as children are believed to be the "the greatest treasure" of most Ghanaians and nothing should beat the feeling of bringing a new person into this world (Kuada & Chachah, 1999:50). The importance of giving birth can be traced to the traditional belief where the parent's spirits are believed to be reproduced in their children, and the parent's spirits will live and their lineage maintain as long as the child is alive.

Giving birth to many children is therefore an honor for most parents and even having twins or triplets is considered positive opposite to many African countries where it is believed to bring bad luck. Having a child in Ghana is considered so important that it is believed to be spiritually better to have a child outside of a marriage than no child at all.

Kuada and Chachah (1999) maintain that child birth is not only an honor and to hold up spirits of parents, it also determines when an individual moves from its childhood to adulthood. As discussed in chapter two, not all societies determine an individual's life span by biological age. In Ghana a 15 year old boy or a girl can be defined mature if they have given birth to a child. Others will however remain immature even if they grow old, as far as they don't have a child; these individuals have not yet contributed to the continuity of their lineage. Although the family structure in Ghana differs between ethnic groups, the core values are similar. In many cases extended families live together in a shared compound or in houses close to each other. Ghanaian children are not only raised by their parents but also by other community members. All man and women in the extended family can be called a mother or father by the child (Kuada & Chachah, 1999). The relationship the child has with seniors is very important in the sense that the child has to show respect and be responsible towards the family and the community. Twum-Danso (2009) discusses what she calls the 3Rs: *respect; responsibility; and reciprocity*, in the relationship between parents and children in Ghana. The 3Rs do not only give example of parent-child relationship but it also gives deeper understanding of the lives of Ghanaian children.

*Respect* is considered extremely important in Ghana and especially for young people to respect an elderly person (Twum-Danso, 2009). According to Salm and Falola (2002:138), children are "at the bottom of the social ladder" and should not only show deep respect but also remain low profile in the presence of seniors. Both Salm and Falola (2002) and Kuada and Chachah (1999) claim that young people are not supposed to argue, debate, participate in conversations or even, in some areas, stare directly into the faces of seniors. All this might be considered as impudent behavior unless an adult or senior speaks to the young person beforehand. In addition, a child has to choose words very carefully when speaking, so that the adult will not be insulted. According to Twum-Danso (2009),

a child who is disrespectful runs the risk of being punished or even cursed to suffer illness or death. This can make it quite difficult for children to discuss their issues openly, especially to an adult whether a national or personal issue. Kuada and Chachah (1999) believe respecting elders is important in Ghana because they have experienced more in their lives and have lived in harmony with the spirits and nature; therefore they are wiser about life in general. Salm and Falola (2002) claim that an elderly person's responsibilities in the community are therefore to advice and share knowledge to other family members about the life and the younger generations should listen and learn to become better adults.

*Responsibility* is another important factor in the daily lives of Ghanaian children. Both responsibilities towards the family and the community need to be fulfilled which can particularly be found in two main tasks; domestic work and work outside of the house (Twum-Danso, 2009). Salm and Falola (2002) claim that children are expected to learn the community values, through participation in activities (such as work), watching and listening to older people of the family or community, so they will not be a disgrace to other family members. Everyone has a role within the community or the family which is mostly determined by hierarchy of age, gender or status in the family. The domestic work relies mostly on the girls as they learn from an early age how to cook, clean or take care of younger siblings. Some scholars argue that this reduces the girl's potentials of going to school or her ability to attend classes. The boys however do not have as many domestic tasks; they might be asked to help their sisters or run some errands for the family but they normally have more time than girls to focus on their education.

Twum-Danso (2009) states that children or young people in Ghana do not only have obligations domestically but they also have to help their parents outside the household. In many societies this may be referred to as child labor in a negative sense but it is however in many cases considered normal and important for Ghanaian children and their families. This is for example where boys help their fathers after school in the farm or by fishing while the girls go with the mothers to sell the products at the market. By working, children are taught to be responsible economically and towards the family because many parents need extra earnings to provide better income and at the same time life for the family. As the

children grow older the responsibilities increase and the tasks get more difficult. The responsibilities are considered crucial both for the survival of the family and for the child to grow as a responsible individual.

*Reciprocity* is the last R identified by Twum-Danso (2009) and refers to the obedience and respect that children's relationship to adults should feature. Some Ghanaian parents believe they have given children so much; they have fed them, given them shelter and most importantly, given them life. Therefore it is the children's turn to give the parents back what they have sacrificed and suffered for. Additionally, Twum-Danso noticed in her research that parents in Ghana don't want their children to become western because the western child only requires rights but doesn't give anything back. Ghanaian children are therefore taught to take care of their parents and other seniors from an early age which allows the parents to believe they will get an appropriate funeral and afterlife. According to Salm and Falola (2002) and Kuada and Chachah (1999), Ghanaian culture and the tradition of parent-child relationship is constantly changing and is especially under threat from western culture or trends. Some elements have been affected such as music, clothes, activities, education and the implementation of child rights. Salm and Falola (2002) state that an education has, for example, affected the culture in a way that young people migrate to urban areas for schooling, which gives them less time to take care of their parents. Many adults fear this development and believe the Ghanaian culture could vanish in a short period of time if this continues to evolve.

Although some adults in Ghana may fear the future of the country's cultural traditions, there are considerable number of organizations and stakeholders, including the government, working to enhance child rights in the country. Coly and Terenzio (2007:181), claim that children's participation is "greatly welcomed by Africans." However, according to the above discussion, the culture may seem as a barrier to participation which adults are trying their best to protect. My study in Ghana covers some of these concepts, the obstacles and benefits to children's participation in relation to the cultural heritage.

## **6. Methodology**

The objective of this thesis is to study children's participation in Ghana in consideration with international and national agreements, development aid and local context. In addition, I will discuss how children participate in several organisations, events and activities; how children and other stakeholders believe children's participation should be in the country; and demonstrate the main benefits and obstacles to children's participation in Ghana along with possible solutions and future vision. In this chapter I will however discuss the methodology used during the fieldwork along with preparation and my personal experience on the field.

### **6.1. Choosing the topic and entering the field**

Choosing the subject for the MA thesis was not difficult, my interest was mainly on women or child related issues. I came to the conclusion to study children and child rights with focus on participation. Furthermore, I wanted to examine their role in international development aid and how development aid agencies deal with children's participation. I chose this subject for several reasons. Firstly, I did not want to focus on the typically sensitive issues or vulnerability of African children, instead I wanted to discuss their empowerment and independence. Secondly, children are often excluded; their voices are not taken seriously or even heard at all. Therefore I wanted to listen to what they have to say about issues concerning child rights and participation and examine how they are performing and taking part in activities and decision making. Finally, I choose to study children's participation because it would allow me to learn more about some of the crucial and debated concepts of international development.

After choosing the subject for the thesis I had to decide where the fieldwork should be conducted. Africa had always been on the top of my mind especially after my last visits to Ghana. My first visit to Ghana was in February 2006 for a "typical" volunteer work in an orphanage home. I stayed there for three and a half months and became fascinated by the country, its culture and customs. Because of my impression I did not really want to leave so only eight months later

I came back for a one month vacation. After my second visit I was determined that next time I would have to see more of Africa and other countries. Thus, I started by looking on the internet for projects related to children's participation and found few suitable countries. I decided to exclude all non English speaking countries so I would not need an interpreter to conduct the fieldwork. Ghana was still stuck in my mind as an "easy" option; it would definitely save me some "beginner's" time for adjusting to new environment and getting to know everything from scratch. After more internet investigation I found out that Ghana was not only the easy country for me but it also had many active projects concerning children's participation. I had my subject and preferred field chosen so next step was to find out which organizations I should contact. Unicef was an obvious choice because of the number of interesting projects concerning children's participation they were involved in, according to their website. I was fortunate to be accepted by Unicef and supported greatly by the staff throughout my fieldwork.

I stayed in Ghana from beginning of September to mid December 2010 for data gathering. I decided to go back to Ghana after Christmas and planed to write up my thesis there but after one month I was back in Iceland due to unmanageable circumstances. Upon arrival in Ghana I settled down in Accra and was ready to start the data gathering. I used the first days to collect literature from the Unicef office which could be useful and hard to get back in Iceland. I also found out that my project would probably be more complex than I had imagined. Unicef was not working directly in the field so I had to visit many NGOs and organizations working on children's participation to achieve my goals. Additionally, I had to pick out which of them would suit my research topic and where to set the limit so I would not end up with too much data. Fortunately I had great support from the employees at the Unicef office, who helped me to set up meetings and get me in contact with all partners. At this time I started to get some doubts as a researcher about my project, if it was too much for me to handle, if it was good enough and worth studying, if it was "development" enough, or if I would really gather important information. Despite that, I was lucky enough to be able to visit number of projects within Accra and to travel outside of the capital and to see projects in more remote villages and smaller cities and get some comparison.



When I first formally entered the field with the children I did not really know how to behave. I felt shy and I was definitely different from them and did not in any way blend in. It was a big event and I tried my best to sit in the back so I would not be noticed too much. Later on I found out that even if I did look different I was warmly welcomed wherever I went. I started to see the same faces in different places and in a way, from time to time; I did not feel that much different. People, both older and younger, were open to talk to me at any time.

## **6.2. Methods**

Many different research techniques have been used past years to gain more understanding of children's behaviour. These techniques are constantly changing, developing and improving. The most dramatic change is probably the turn from doing research *on* children, which used to be more common, to doing research *with* children, which is constantly becoming more popular (Lewis, 2004). According to Alderson (2003), this includes accepting children as subjects instead of objects, acknowledging their views, allowing them to speak out and have a voice within the society. Davis (2009) believes that if a researcher follows this guidance it is more likely that the child feels empowered, confident and independent during the research process. Furthermore, it will enrich their skills of listening, debating, planning and negotiating.

There are many eventual implications the researcher needs to consider before conducting a child related research. He has to be aware of issues such as which methods to choose, how to practice them, which ethical problems can occur, and what his own situation is as an adult researcher studying children. This can sometimes be more complicated than it seems, especially when the field is outside of the researcher's cultural context. According to Gallagher (2009a), it is important in a case like that for the researcher to be aware that methods may be accepted in his own society but do not work the same way in the research setting due to cultural difference. Therefore the researcher has to be well prepared for the fieldwork; to be flexible and open to changes in the research techniques and focus during the fieldwork. This same can be transferred to children, where the researcher has to be flexible by choosing and adjusting the research methods to the group, the environment and the situation.

Because of the nature of the research the qualitative approach was chosen. My intention was not to give a representative result in a wide context but to describe children's participation according to the projects I studied. Therefore by using qualitative methods I would get a deeper understanding of the topic, I would be closer to my participants, experience the projects directly, and I would give the children and other participants more chance of expressing their views and experience.

My main concern was to decide which qualitative methods would suit the group I would study, because I was not sure of their age. One of my primary preparations before entering the field was therefore to go through academic texts to get a good knowledge about how others had conducted child related research and from that analyse my options. In the end I decided it would be best to know as many methods as possible but not decide which one to use until I had seen the projects and met some of the participants. It is important to mention that these challenges were mainly related to the children, I did not have problems in choosing methods with the adult participants as no special age-related issues needed to be considered. Among the methods I considered before starting the fieldwork were; participant observation, interviews in different forms; from structured, semi-structured to non-structured conversations and the so called hang out technique, focus groups and creative methods.

### *Participant observation*

One of the main methods within anthropology is the participant observation. The ideology behind the method is often traced back to Malinowski (1984:25) who considered it important to "grasp the native's point of view" or to understand the lives of natives through their own eyes. DeWalt, DeWalt and Wayland (1998) explain the importance of participant observation as to get deeper understanding in the subject which can increase the quality of the data. Additionally they explain the process of the method like becoming an infant again and have to learn and understand everything in a new environment from the beginning. I used this methodology as a guideline during my fieldwork because I wanted to express the subject according to my participants own views. Moreover, I wanted to get involved with not too much intervention and not too much invisibility but just

suitably to be able to learn and understand everything like a beginner. Before arriving in Ghana one of my biggest fears was therefore if I really knew how to do this or to conduct a research correctly. However, when I realized that there is no one way more right than another, I actually found it a very enjoyable idea. Like Bernard (2006:359-360) puts it; as a researcher you are “the instrument for data collection and analysis through your own experience... [and] you have to experience participant observation to get good at it.” Accordingly, I found out that I could not possibly be good at something unless doing it physically and experiencing it by myself.

Because of the nature of the project and the diverse setting I had both the opportunity and options to participate actively in the projects and to be an observer. Sometimes I even had to choose if it would just be better for me to sit and watch instead of participating. For example, some in the Curious Minds asked me to get involved in the radio program, or if I would like to say something while broadcasting about the issue discussed or even explain how the situation is in my country. So how does the researcher choose what to do in a situation like that? In this case I chose not to participate fully; I felt that if I would be part of the radio program I would in some way change the angle of the discussion. However I agreed to participate when asked to be interviewed separately (not live) and the interview would be broadcasted later. I had been accepted to observe Curious Minds programs, to attend meetings, to talk to them, and therefore I could not say no if they wanted to do the same. I was asked some very demanding and difficult questions from the group about children and youths in my own country.

When visiting some of the child rights clubs at times I felt like the olden days anthropologists who sat on their veranda and did not get involved in the participants actions at all.<sup>7</sup> More or less I was sitting there, like a school teacher, and the children were forced to be there to tell the ‘white lady’ how the clubs worked while the teacher or the ‘patron’<sup>8</sup>, as he is called, stood in the corner and watched us, or that was my first feeling about the situation. Nonetheless I gathered really valuable and important data for my research in the clubs and was able to speak privately to some of the club members as well as the patrons. As a

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<sup>7</sup> See for example Malinowski (1984) and Evans-Prichard (1940)

<sup>8</sup> Concept explained further in chapter 7.1.6.

researcher, my participation was variable between projects. I doubted my own ability to conduct participatory observation. However I believe that in the end I gained more experience and collected more data than I could ever imagine.

### *Interviews and conversations*

Interviews are the most common research techniques for qualitative methods. In general they are useful way to gather information although they can be time-consuming (Driskell, 2002). However, Laws, Harper and Marcus (2003) claim that this method is not always convenient when doing a research with children or young people. Sometimes one-to-one interviews may seem frightening and somehow look like a test. Some scholars believe this can be prevented. According to Gallagher (2009b), using eye contacts, smiles and laughter when appropriated can help the children to feel more comfortable during the interviews. It can also be helpful to have the questions phrased in different ways so everyone understands them because it is not granted that all children understand same things in the same way. Likewise the children need to see that the researcher cares for them and is really interested in them for who they really are. Finally, Laws, Harper and Marcus (2003) suggest that the researcher finishes the interview cheerfully so the participant will leave happily.

The interview techniques I chose to use for my research were of two kinds. Firstly, those I used with the adult participants, and secondly, those I used with the children and youth. For the adults the interviews were more structured and most of them were voice-recorded, although in some cases I only took notes, especially when the interviews were more in form of general conversations. With the adults I had also prepared some questionnaire to support myself, just because of the nature of formal one-to-one interview and because I interviewed most of them during their work time so I didn't want to waist too much of their time. With the young people I did not use structured interviews nor did I voice-record any of the discussions. I had a number of conversations and many 'hang out' moments. Most of the time it was after a meeting, a forum or some of the events the children participated in. I also had the chance of talking to some of them while walking back home after the project. The 'hang out' technique can both be defined as participant observation and as one type of interviewing. It is when the researcher

spends some time with the participants and discusses issues related to the research but it can also be when the researcher just spends time with the participants and watches their activities. Whichever, this method can create a more convenient environment for young people because the researcher will spend more time with them. Accordingly, the participants should feel more equal to the researcher and they will stay within their own comfort zone, with their friends, which can also prevent some ethical problems (Driskell, 2002).

### *Focus groups*

Focus group is a technique, a bit similar to the 'hang out' one, which can be used when doing a research with children. A focus group is where group of participants meet to discuss certain topics (Laws, Harper & Marcus, 2003). Originally it was used to present peoples view which might be missed out from an ordinary individual interview. It is crucial that focus groups are used for a small number of individuals who have something in common and is led by someone, most often the researcher, who guides the discussion and gathers the data (Hennessy & Heary, 2005). As with the 'hang out' technique, children and young people may feel safer in a focus group than one to one interview. By this method the participants can possibly be with their friends or someone they know which can be a huge support when discussing certain issues (Gallagher, 2009a).

Focus group interviews can also be helpful in case of uneven power relations between adults and young people because here they are in a majority (Hennessy & Heary, 2005). Focus groups can however also have its disadvantages, especially in the cases when the participants are not friends, they do not trust each other, when some of them dominate the group discussion or when some participants are too shy to express their feelings (Gallagher, 2009a). Using a focus group also requires a lot from the researcher. He has to make the group feel comfortable, be a good listener, keep the discussion focused on the topic, make sure everyone is able to talk and understand all participants (Hennessy & Heary, 2005).

I did not use the focus group technique strictly as described above; nonetheless some of my research methods can probably best be defined under this category. During some of the meetings I attended the children were discussing

some issues concerning their rights in a group monitored by someone else, a child or adult. In this group I asked questions or brought up discussion about certain issues when needed and took notes. I thought it was an excellent place to watch children's participation in action and even better than monitoring it all by myself. In some of the projects I was in a way leading the discussions or choosing the topic but that could just as well be defined as a group interview or participant observation. As noted before, in groups like these some children were more shy than others to talk and therefore it certainly had its disadvantages but at the same time it provided me a lot of information in a relatively short time from many participants.

#### *Creative and visual methods*

The last method I had imagined as an enjoyable and interesting way to view children's participation in Ghana was by the so called creative methods. These include for example, drawings, paintings, photography, drama and stories (James, 1995). Veale (2005) says creative methods are a way of imaginative process which can help the participants to describe their experiences and support their imagination. Driskell (2002: 102) also believes photography to be a valuable documentation and sometimes "a picture says a thousand words." By creative methods, Thomas and O'Kane (1998) say the researcher is more likely to get a deeper understanding of children's lives or at least other angles than by using the traditional research methods.

I used photography and video recording during my stay in Ghana. I gathered a huge amount of pictures in all the events and some of the meetings I attended. Sometimes I used photography as a diary or instead of taking notes during the event, both in form of video with sounds and still photography. Afterwards I could go back home, look at the pictures and easily remember the program and take notes according to that. I did however not ask the children themselves to use some of the creative methods; I did not find the circumstances right for that.

### **6.3. Data analysis**

The fieldwork preparation began one year before I entered the field in forms of literature analysis. I read through enormous amount of books, journals, newspapers, articles, and documents from relevant organisations. Further, I browsed all websites on the internet I could find about the subject including YouTube videos, organisation's websites, and documents and statements about child rights and participation from children around the world. After I arrived in Ghana the literature analysis continued. I gathered documents from partners I visited in forms of video recordings from different events, articles and reports.

When I started the fieldwork I collected enormous amount of hand written notes because I only used the voice recorder in small part of the research. Therefore after each event, discussions or activity I attended, I went home and wrote up the notes, along with all other thoughts and considerations which arose. Further, I saved all the pictures and video recording on my computer which helped me to remember the event in more details. In the case where I used voice recorder, I tried to code the interviews as soon as possible but ended up doing some of it after my arrival to Iceland. As mentioned, I analysed the data after my fieldwork by finding key concepts and trying to have good balance between adult's and children's views and opinions. I found it very important not to give adults more space in this thesis than the children. Firstly, because it is a research on children's participation and secondly, it is believed by some scholars that ethical problems rather arise when children are not given appropriate voice or respected as equals to adults. In a research with children it is crucial to consider all possible ethical problems before conducting the fieldwork.

### **6.4. Ethics**

It is crucial to consider all possible ethical problems before entering the field, especially when doing a child related research. Gallagher (2009b:11) explains ethics in a very simple way as "principles of right and wrong conduct ... it is ties to questions of value, and judgments about which habits and customs are good or bad." According to Thomas and O'Kane (1998) a researcher needs to consider eventual implications before entering the field especially when doing a study with certain age groups. Although there is no one right solution or way to handle these

possible ethical problems, the researcher has to think how he or she would personally deal with. What to do if some data would intimidate the child's welfare? When should the researcher break his confidentiality? When is he protecting the child and when is he doing harm by informing gatekeepers or others? Additionally, according to Gallagher (2009a) the researcher should consider how to react in case of bullying, violence, or problematic behaviour on behalf of participants in the study. These are only few examples that may occur during a study with young people but are extremely important for the researcher to consider. Although I thought about all these implications before my fieldwork, I fortunately did not have to deal with any of it. I had also tried to focus more on how I could possibly prevent something like this beforehand so these situations would not occur.

Some scholars have identified possible ways to prevent ethically sensitive situations to arise. Thomas and O'Kane (1998) argue that ethical problems go hand in hand with effective methodology. Therefore they suggest using participatory approaches when doing child related research. By using the right method, children can have more power in the research process which can increase its reliability and validity. In this process the authors believe few things need to be noticed. One very important factor is trust. Children need to know that they can fully trust the researcher and what they will tell him is completely confidential. It is also important to be aware of the questions asked and whether they are worth asking or not. To increase success in this area Thomas and O'Kane used the following guidelines in their research; firstly, everyone got detailed information on the research and methods, both gatekeepers and the children. Secondly, the children were able to stop participating whenever they chose to, they could get an interview whenever they wanted, they did not have to answer all questions or accept voice recording (which is in fact the principle in all research). Finally, the children's options about how to participate in the research process had to be as many as possible.

An important ethical consideration is how an adult should conduct a research with young people. He has to be conscious about the age difference and all the implications which it can cause. It is not very likely that the researcher will completely understand everything the same way as the children themselves and



likewise. Therefore, Laws, Harper and Marcus (2003:251) point out: “we should be interested in children’s point of view for their own sake, not just to measure them against adult’s perceptions.” As well the children might not want to allow the researcher full access to their activities. In his study, Corsaro (1981) experiences this among nursery school children where the children did not allow him to play with them because he was too old. The researcher tries to adjust to the situation and asks if he may sit down but still he is too old. Later he is allowed to watch and in time the children accept him in the game. This is a good example of how the age can affect the outcome of the research and especially how children can react to the researcher. Lewis (2004) believes the power relations between the adult researcher and young participants must be considered before entering the field.

I had considered eventual implications of my fieldwork carefully before entering the field. My intention was to try to have no affects in the projects, talk to everyone as equals, be positive, try to let the participants lead the research, and emphasise confidentiality and honesty. I succeeded in most ways, although it was sometimes difficult to create equal situations when entering classrooms like the child rights clubs or discussing issues with adults that I disagreed with. However, I did mostly allow others to speak freely, for as long as they wanted. Further, I kept full confidence, honesty and tried to be positive at all times.

Ethics are not only important when it concerns fieldwork, the researcher should also bear in mind how to present the results without harming the participants. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) believe writing up representations can be very complicated and has caused crisis among many anthropologists in past decades. The complexity contains for example choosing what is important and how to present it without harming the study group. They believe the best way for the researcher is to take all aspects into consideration, and weigh the risk of harm to the value of the research findings. From his evaluation, the researcher makes the best judgement possible, according to the situations. Thus, when analysing the data, I considered how I could present the results without revealing the participants identity. I chose to keep full confidentiality to all of them as well as possible. That means I will not talk about in which organisation or event an interview was taken or in which project I gathered certain information.

## **7. Results**

In this chapter the results of the study will be presented. As mentioned, the research was based on a qualitative methodology and was conducted in Ghana among children and adults working to enhance children's participation in the country. I will start by giving a brief overview of all projects I studied and explain my experience and part in it. Following that, I will cover some of the key concepts and the results without further details about the participants or the projects. However I will in some cases distinguish bigger events from the other programs and activities.

### **7.1. Organisations**

In Ghana I visited a number of organisations where I observed projects and interviewed people working on child rights issues. These organisations were of different sizes and operate in various manners. Governmental, non-governmental, Christian and child-led organisations are some of those I studied and will be covered briefly in this sub chapter.

#### **7.1.1. Unicef**

In 1946, after the World War II, the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) was established. The fund was intended to help all the children who suffered because of the war and were seen vulnerable and as victims without food and shelter. Unicef became a permanent part of the United Nations (UN) in 1953 (Ansell, 2005) and since then it has changed from being an emergency fund to a development agency (Unicef, 2006). In the 1960s, Unicef was arguing for children's importance in development policies and started to focus on their education, welfare and family context (Ansell, 2005). The organizations got a reward for its achievement, the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967, for helping victims of armed conflict (Unicef, 2006).

Unicef office in Ghana has been operative since 1982 and the two offices in Accra and Tamale are today employing around 90 staff members. Unicef

focuses on four main areas; health and nutrition, education, child protection and advocacy, communication, monitoring and analysis. In Ghana, Unicef does not directly work in the field but it supports and funds many projects and NGO's working in the grassroots. Moreover, Unicef sponsored and organized the bigger events and forums discussed in this study (Unicef 2010b).

During my stay in Ghana I interviewed a number of employees at the office and I was able to visit three big events sponsored and supported by the organisation. In addition, I travelled outside of the city, to Koforidua, with Unicef and I got great support from the employees during my visit to Tamale as well, who linked me up with other partners related to the subject.

### **7.1.2. Department of Children**

The Department of Children is under the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWAC) and was established in 2001 after recognition for the need to promote activities enhancing women and children's rights and equality in Ghana. According to an interviewee, the Department of Children focuses on three areas related to children; child rights promotion, child protection and early childhood. Additionally, on MOWAC's website it is stated that the Ministries aims:

to enhance its contribution to the development of Ghana  
by achieving equal status between men and women; to  
facilitate enforcement of the rights of women and  
children; to promote the survival, development,  
protection of children; and increase the participation of  
both women and children in the development process  
through skilled and committed staff (MOWAC n.d.).

During the study I formally interviewed three staff members at the Department of Children in Accra. I also travelled to Koforidua where I visited the office in the region, discussed with some of the employees and visited child rights clubs supported by the region's office of the Department of Children.

### **7.1.3. Ananse Reach Concept: Children Saving the Future**

The Ananse Reach Concept: Children Saving the Future is an NGO operating in the northern region of Ghana. It was established in 2006 by an 11 year old girl and

her brother of 9 years. The idea started after a visit to a rural community in the country where they met a young blind boy. The boy was suffering from a curable disease and by operation he could gain his vision back. However because of poverty this was not an easy solution for his family. The 11 year old girl asked her father if she could use her birthday money to save the boy. In short, after an operation, the boy got his vision back and the siblings added some clothes as a gift to him. After all this they thought if this was something they could do so easily for one boy how much else could they do? In a short time the word spread around, more children wanted to do the same by helping others which now comprises of the NGO which is almost only managed by children and young people. Today the Ananse Reach Concept has several projects spreading around the country. The organisation is a child driven and initiated movement which seeks to use children's participation in national development. Moreover, the Ananse Reach Concept

prefers to look within and using resources locally available than seeking external support. Ananse Reach Concept seeks to use children's participation to assist other children who personally require help and seeks also to use community participation to create infrastructural facilities to support child development (Ananse, 2009:3).

At Ananse I got a lecture from the children's father who is also the supervisor of the organisation, and I visited some of the schools they have been supporting. I was also able to talk to some of the children participating in the organisations projects. Unfortunately I did not have much time to study this organisation further or discuss with the founders because I discovered the movement shortly before I left Ghana.

#### **7.1.4. Christian Children's Fund of Canada**

The Christian Children's Fund of Canada (CCFC) is an international development organization addressing the need of children in developing countries. The aims of CCFC are to reach out to children and families in need around the globe. In addition its mission is to "emphasize child and community development starting

with basic assistance and leading to programs stressing self help and eventual independence” (CCFC, n.d.). The CCFC collaborates with the Tuma Kavi Development Association (TKDA) which is an NGO working in northern region of Ghana. The organization mostly works within deprived communities by supporting schools, health care and other important factors with emphasis on improving livelihoods of locals, especially children.

I visited CCFC in Tamale shortly, where I was linked up with an employee at TKDA. I did not get much time with this organization but managed to drop by at their office and see their quarters. Moreover, I was fortunate to be able to visit two schools in remote villages supported by TKDA and CCFC. There I visited child rights clubs and interacted with teachers and the students.

#### **7.1.5. Child’s Rights International**

Child’s Rights International (CRI) is an NGO located worldwide but the Ghanaian office is sponsored by few local partners such as; Unicef, Ghana AIDS Commission, Action Aid International, Plan Ghana and Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment. The organisation was registered in 1997 and uses the CRC as a guideline to its work. The mission of CRI is to create a better world for children and to “promote and protect the inherent dignity of every child drawing attention to fundamental needs of children and the need to provide assistance for the development of the child’s abilities, talents and personality.” Further, the organisation’s “commitment is to provide an ongoing voice for children and to also reaffirm the faith of young people’s hope for a better future” (CRI, n.d.).

The CRI biggest projects are mainly two. Firstly, the organisation is responsible for the Easter School for children, which is held once a year and allows children from all regions of Ghana to participate speak out and educate others. Unfortunately I could not visit this project because it is held in April each year. Secondly, CRI supports the Child Rights Clubs which are active in Ghanaian schools all around the country. The purpose and aims of the clubs will be discussed in more details below. At Child’s Rights International I discussed with employees and I also visited some of the child rights clubs in primary and secondary schools in Ghana.

#### **7.1.6. Child Rights Clubs**

Majority of schools in Ghana have different types of clubs where children are supposed to participate. The Child Rights Clubs, which are located in rural and urban areas, belong to these. The clubs are normally introduced to the schools by organisations or agents whose goals are to enhance children's rights in Ghana. After the introduction it is the schools responsibility to maintain the operation and encourage children to participate. However, a representative from the organisations occasionally contacts or visits the schools to see how the activities have proceeded.

A *Patron*, a member of the school staff who should be loved and respected by the children, is chosen by the teachers and the children to suggest or design programs and activities for the club and direct the clubs meetings. The Patron's don't get extra pay for supervising the clubs; they do it voluntarily and with motivation from their passion. In most clubs there is a committee elected by students from the group. The committee normally consists of a president, vice president, organizer, secretary and executives. The students elected are supposed to attend, organize, record and control the meetings. Others, who are not in the committee, take full part in the discussions and activities of the club. Normally the clubs have meetings twice a week, and sometimes they have certain projects or volunteering work to do as well that will benefit the community or the school. The purpose of the child right's clubs is mainly to educate the children about their rights, empower them to speak out and make their voices heard so that they will be able to educate other members of the community as well.

I visited a total of 11 clubs in Ghana for children of all ages from primary to senior levels in three regions; Greater Accra, the Northern region and Easter region. I was grateful for getting the chance to travel to different regions and being able to visit the child's rights clubs both in rural and urban areas. This helped me to get a good view and see the differences both of children's appearance and activities in such varied cultural and social environments. The topics in focus were quite different between the rural and urban areas, and the children's confidence and appearance varied as well. The more rural, the fewer children were aware of their rights and more afraid to speak out in front of an adult and especially to project their idea or opinions. There may be several

reasons why this difference appeared, but I am aware it may be because of shyness of a stranger or because the children were trying to be extra polite in front of me. Concerning the topics, children in the rural areas seemed to be more concerned about issues like child marriages, heritage in polygamous societies, abuse and child labour. In contrast, the urban clubs discussed issues like corporal punishment, teenage pregnancies, drug abuse and juvenile courts. Domestic violence was also discussed in different ways in both rural and urban areas.

#### **7.1.7. Curious Minds**

Curious Minds, children and youth in broadcasting, is located in few countries around the world. The program in Ghana was established in 1996, and celebrated its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary in April this year. It was founded by Women in Broadcasting, an NGO which aims to implement programs on education for Ghanaian children. The group is in partnership with many agencies around Ghana such as, United Nations, including Unicef, Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), and the Department of Children (Curious Minds, 2011). The Curious Minds is a group of children and young people in theory from the age of 8-18, but in reality it is common that children “grow” with the group and continue to take part even up to 25 years. Curious Minds host a radio program every week and the aims of the group is to raise awareness of child rights in Ghana and issues related to children and young people. Curious Minds are active in a few cities of the country. The Accra group hosts radio programmes two times a week at the GBC; one in English and the other one in Ga; the local language of Greater Accra. Before the broadcasting, there are two meetings, Wednesdays and Fridays, where the upcoming discussions are prepared and topics decided. Most often the group goes live on Saturdays but sometimes they pre-record on Fridays and broadcast it on Saturdays.

Despite the fact that Curious Minds consist of what is more appropriate to call young people instead of children, the group is probably one of the most child-friendly of those I studied. All topics and procedures were decided and organised by the group and in most cases there was not even an adult to watch them. However the group is under the guidance of an adult who sometimes dropped by shortly at meetings to see if everything is all right. He was also around during

broadcasting. Despite him being there, it did not seem to affect the children's or youth's participation in any way; they were still those who did the talking, organising, and decision-making.

I was probably accepted and allowed to be more involved in the Curious Minds project than any other I studied. Although I did not always accept the offer of speaking during broadcasting or being actively involved in the discussions, I was able to attend several meetings and broadcastings and therefore got to know the group's activities quite well.

## **7.2. Events and forums**

The three biggest events during my stay in Ghana that concerned children's and youth's participation were the Constitutional Review Commission, the Global Handwashing Day, and Ghana Water Forum. Each of these programs included children in the process in some way, although with different level and purpose. Children's involvement in the events aims mainly to give them platform, allow them to have a voice, to express their views or opinions, and to educate others.

### **7.2.1. The Constitutional Review Commission**

The Constitutional Review Commission of Ghana organized a panel discussions from 28<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> September 2010, which aim was to “undertake an experimental reflection in the operation of the constitution over the last 16 years and thereby identify aspects of the constitution that need to be; retained and further developed; amended; or repealed.” Further the purpose was to “seek to afford individuals, institutions and stakeholders an opportunity to express their views on different constitutional thematic areas relevant to their respective fields and endeavour” (Constitution review, 2010). Children were included in this particular review by the government because Ghana has in past years shown good example of successful governance in Africa. Furthermore, many international and regional agreements have been adopted relevant to children and it was considered important not to exclude them when changing or improving their rights in the constitution. Additionally, it is expected that the children will identify either the strengths or the weaknesses of the current constitution (Constitution review,



2010). All the ideas mentioned during the review were supposed to be filed in a report by the commission and later shared with the government and president of Ghana.

The children gathered for a preparation at Coconut Grove hotel a day before the formal event, on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2010. During the preparation, the children got the chance of discussing their issues, expressing their views and opinions on it and trying to find some solutions. The heavy schedule was prised with games and songs to make the day more enjoyable for the children. Although children did not have much to do with organising the event, they did choose the topic of the discussions themselves and picked out what they thought should be changed or improved in the constitution. Most children were very active in the discussions and brought up good ideas and interesting views on the subject.

The second day was more formal including speeches from adults and statements from the children. The statements consisted of the earlier discussion at the preparation. The forum was set up as in a court, where the commission played the juries role and the children the witnesses. Each witness (a child) was called in for interrogation, where ideas about changes in the constitution were shared (the statement), the jury asked questions and after the witnesses answers they could go to their seats again.

After the panel discussions, I walked around and talked to participants about the event, how they liked it, if it was participative, if they believed the Commission members would seriously take their advices into account and so forth. Most people seemed to be very happy about the day and some were surprised about how well the children performed and how confident they were. A young girl told me that the Commission members were shocked to see how clever and good the children were and how much they knew about the issues. Furthermore, an adult said he was surprised to see how well prepared and great the children were. Few days after the forum, I also heard that one of the Commission members said he got tears in his eyes when he heard the children talk, because of their confidence and consciousness.

### **7.2.2. Global Handwashing Day**

The Global Handwashing Day is an international event initiated and first celebrated in 2008 which the UN General Assembly designed as the International Year of Sanitation. The event is supported by The Public-Private Partnership for Handwashing with Soap (PPPHW), which is cooperation between several stakeholders. These partners are for example, Unicef, UNAID, WB, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (Unicef, 2010c).

The Global Handwashing Day was celebrated in Ho, the biggest city of Volta region, from 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> October 2010. The purpose of this day is to make people aware of the importance of washing their hands with soap which is one of the most effective and inexpensive ways to prevent diarrheal diseases and pneumonia which together causes majority of child deaths today (Unicef, 2010c). Diarrhoeal diseases are one of the major causes of illness and deaths of Ghanaian children under the age of five. By reaching out to the public and making them more aware of the importance of hand washing with soap can make a significant contribution to meet the MDGs of reducing child mortality by the year of 2015; estimated about two-thirds. Children are especially encouraged to participate in the Global Handwashing day because they are energetic, enthusiastic and open to new ideas. They can also be “powerful agents of behavioural change” and can therefore easily spread the words to other children and adults, at school and at home (Unicef, 2010c).

The children did not participate fully in this event; that is from organising to performance, but still the children were active and visible in the event itself. The first day was quite formal but the children maintained the discussions and most of the day’s program. On the second day, children and adults marched down the streets of the city along with a brass band and other entertainers. They seemed to have fun; they danced, sung, carried big signs and spread posters to the public about the importance of hand washing. The last, and most formal day, chiefs and other local authorities, along with employees at bigger organisations, the media and children gathered to talk about hand washing. Children expressed the topic with speeches, acting, poems, music, and by singing. The adults watched and gave some speeches as well in between.

### **7.2.3. Ghana Water Forum**

The Ghana Water Forum was established by the Ghanaian government in 2009 because of the need to create a platform for the water and sanitation sector and to get more stakeholders involved in the subject. The forum is divided into four main side events; firstly, roundtable for ministerial and development partners; secondly, roundtable for business people; thirdly a special forum for children; and finally, an exhibition.

The Water Forum I attended was held at Ghana College of physicians and surgeons from 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> October 2010. The purpose of the Forum was to raise awareness of water and sanitation issues in Ghana. This year's Water Forum for children had the title of "The role of children and youth in water and sanitation service delivery in Ghana: The sustainability factor." The Ghana water Forum was a kind of a continuation from the Global Handwashing Day where children discussed hygiene and sanitation in their schools and communities along with education of the importance of washing hands with soap.

The program for the Ghana water forum was very heavy. This time it started formally where the children gave a statement or a speech for the adults which they had prepared the evening before. The children had also prepared a play about water and waterholes. When I conversed with some of the children after this event most of them said it was boring and some even fell asleep, even the adults did fell asleep.

After the formal event, the children's Forum formally began. It was mostly educational but the children also had a chance to ask adults questions about the success of last year's event and inform others about sanitation in schools and at home. Some interesting games were played to make the day more enjoyable for children, for example the "world toilet cup" which was supposed to educate the children about hygiene and sanitation. The second part of the day was mixed with panel discussions where children could ask adults questions about water and sanitation in Ghana, and in between they told jokes, played short games or sung songs. The last day was more educational although the children also expressed their views about issues concerning them, like sanitation in their schools. One adult told me during the program that the children's input will be filed and delivered to those who host the event.

The children seemed to enjoy themselves especially when they were allowed to participate more actively. The event was obviously leaving something behind, at least for the children. Those who attended last year were happy to be chosen again and some of them had even formed a school club about sanitation due to last year's discussions.

### **7.3. Participation of Ghanaian children**

As mentioned, Ghanaian children are very active in participative projects all around the country. I have already discussed how children do participate in the projects I studied, but that does not necessarily mean this is how people want it to be. Implementing and raising awareness can be complicated even though the willingness is there among both children and adults. Most participants in this study agreed on the importance of allowing children to participate actively in issues affecting their own lives. However, not everyone seemed to agree on some of the main questions raised; who should participate, at what time, in which projects, how much should children participate, and who should decide which child should participate. In this chapter these questions will be addressed and the views of children and organisation's employees participating in the study will be presented.

#### **7.3.1. Why should children participate?**

The participants in this study identified several reasons why children in Ghana should be allowed to participate. Most of them agreed that children should first and foremost participate because it is their right. Furthermore, children are human beings and should therefore be respected as individuals, citizens and part of the society just like everyone else, or as one adult stated "children should not be lesser human beings."

Children are, according to an adult interviewee, also thinking individuals. They are not only small people who don't have their own opinions or feelings. Rather, they all have their own feelings and because they are human beings it is important for them to be able to share their minds and tell others what they think and how they feel. These expressions will eventually shape who they will become

and what they will be like in the future. Another adult interviewee agrees and claims that children are “expected to be the future but they are also the present.” Therefore by participating in discussions they will gain understanding of national issues and development and they will become broad minded. In the end, participation is something that governments are trying to implement for example in the CRC or in the Constitution. These agreements state that participation is in children’s best interest and there is a reason for that; children are human beings.

Despite this point of view there is still no agreement if all children should be allowed to participate or which child is capable to do so.

### **7.3.2. Who should participate?**

When discussing children’s participation it is common idea that not all children should be allowed to participate freely at all times. In the CRC it is stated that all children should participate according to their age and capacity. However it is questionable who decides when a child is capable or should be allowed to participate. During my study I found out there are different views on which child should be allowed to participate. Further, it was prevalent that when a child was chosen for certain program it was due to his or her capacity or intelligence.

In line with the CRC, my study group, especially adults, were concerned with the ages and capacity of children when considering their participation. A young boy claimed that a baby who has not yet learned how to speak can not participate in any kinds of discussions. Most of the people who heard this statement agreed and found it quite obvious. Accordingly, both age and capacity impacts children’s qualification to participate, in this case the child would neither have the age nor any capacity. An adult interviewee agreed and explained that a child aged zero to five years does not have the same capacity as an eighteen year old. Therefore the younger children can not contribute to the same issues as the older ones. For example, it is not possible to bring complex economic discussions for children of five years old because they have still not reached the necessary level of knowledge. A female interviewee agrees and believes there are some issues that are just too complicated for some children to understand. She maintains that the child might be capable to contribute to some extend but he or she can not be involved in decision making concerning that issue. Therefore,

according to a female interviewee, the development level of each child differs and that is why children have to participate according to their own capacity level.

Choosing a child to participate from his or her capacity level can however be complex, especially in bigger events where children are chosen by an adult, teacher, organisations or other stakeholders. Although most often it is tried to involve children from all levels of society, whether rural, urban, boy, girl, older, younger or differently able, it mostly relies on the event itself or the adults which child is allowed to participate. Sometimes a guideline is set by agencies about which child is suitable to participate. However, according to interviewees, it mostly depended on the child's intelligence or how he or she is doing in school whether the child is chosen to participate or not. This means a child who is a little bit behind in school or those who the teacher or an adult does not consider clever or confident enough would normally not be allowed to participate in any big event.

### **7.3.3. How much participation?**

Although in some cases children are chosen specially to participate, most adults and children who were part of the study agreed that young people should be allowed to participate as much as possible. This means, they should be allowed to be involved from preparation to monitoring, analysing, decision making and implementing programs concerning child related issues. Many adults and children don't believe this is really and truly being performed by all stakeholders. Some interviewees claimed that organisations and agencies should be increasing children's participation and involving them even more in all relevant projects. Furthermore, children should not only be called in for a few days of participation; they should be part of the whole planning and implementing process of the project as well.

Some children in the study complained of not being able to plan the bigger events they attended along with the adults. The reason is because in most cases, if they would have been involved in the planning process, they would organise the current event differently. It is not always easy for adults to organise an event suitable for children. Some of the events were too formal where children would like to stand up, walk around, express their views even more, and ask some

questions, was however not always possible. In addition, some children stated, they would choose to have the events more open and relaxed so everyone will enjoy it fully. Most adults agreed and believed children should be more involved in the planning process. An adult interviewee claimed that otherwise there is no point in children's participation. She argued that children should be part of everything, it is important to start with them, ask them how to begin the project and how to run it. Another adult agreed and wanted to expand it to the governments as well, which should always include children when discussing issues related to them.

Increasing children's involvement and participation can however be more complex than it seems even though the willingness is there. The reasons identified by some adult interviewees were mainly two; it is time consuming and expensive. The organisations don't get enough funds from outside sponsors to finance it as they would like to. Firstly, it is not known beforehand which child will participate and some of them come from smaller cities or rural areas so it is not easy to call them in for the planning process as well. Many events are in the capital and if agencies would choose a capital residence instead of rural children, the rural children would be discriminated against. Further, it can be difficult to involve children fully because it would in most cases mean more work for the organisations employees or even create a need to hire new staff members. It takes time to call in all these children, get their opinions about the project, and find mutual result of how the project or the event would best suit as many children as possible. It is worth mentioning though that sometimes organisations or stakeholders ask for children's feedback after the event which is taken into consideration before the next one. Therefore, children do to some extent participate in the planning process.

Despite the side effects, the complexity of involving children to participate is however preventable or manageable in many ways. Both adults and children in the study however identified some limits to participation, which is when a child should be denied to participate. Mainly my study group agreed that if a child's welfare is at stake, the adult has to interfere and prevent or deny him or her to participate or at least try to direct the child to choose a different path. For example, according to a male interviewee, a child should be able to express

feelings about when to go to sleep or if he or she doesn't like a certain food. However, the child can not decide not to go to school on the terms of the right to participate. In that case the adult has to "put [his] foot down and say no" because it will have some bad consequences for the child. Furthermore, another adult interviewee claimed it is important to explain carefully to the child why a certain decision is made contrary to his or her own opinion. The adults should tell the children why something can or cannot work and the reasons behind that decision. Accordingly, most interviewees agreed, it is always important to listen to what the child has to say about any issue, whether a big or small one. Additionally an interviewee claimed, that what the child has to say, its opinions and views, may even make sense and be an important input in the subject. It is not always that children bring childish or useless ideas; they are cleverer and might bring up a positive view on something an adult has totally different opinion of.

#### **7.3.4. Are children's voices really heard?**

As mentioned, some adults believe it is important to listen to children's views and opinions. That does however not always mean that children's voices are listened to and taken seriously. In this study the views on this issue differed but interestingly it only seemed to vary between individuals but it did not matter whether an adult or a child. Some believed children's voices are taken seriously, some believed they are taken seriously to some extend while others did not believe adults care for children's voices and opinions at all. In most cases where people did not believe adults listened to children's voices it was in relation to higher authorities.

One of the main motivations for encouraging children in Ghana to participate is, as an adult stated "they are the future leaders of our society." Another adult claimed that there is a need to support and implement child rights because "they are the building blocks of our society." Throughout my study I frequently heard this phrase in several versions which in many ways seems right and encouraging. However, many participants in this study disagreed. In fact, some argued it is closely related to another statement which is not so encouraging, that "children should be seen but not heard." It refers to the idea that children should be visible and maybe allowed to give brief statement but that's all. In other



words, it looks good to have their present for the stakeholder's image, but they should not talk too much. The reason is because in the end it is the adult who has the power and makes the decision, the children should just sit, watch, and learn.

In Ghana there are many partners, both adults and children, trying to eradicate the view of being "seen but not heard" from people's minds. Instead they reform the statement by saying "we are not only the future, we are also the present." According to a female adult, the intention with that statement is to make people aware that children are also "part owners today" and most often, the best ones to tell their own stories and to discuss issues related to them. Like one adult stated "listen to children, learn from them and become wise."

It was common among adults and children in this study to have the faith of adults listening to children because of their own positive attitude and experience towards it. For example, an adult interviewee claimed that "some of the children are fantastic you will pay attention. You will pay attention because...sometimes you wonder, did anybody tell the children what to say? So they engage them and when they hear what they have to say it is striking, they pay attention." Furthermore, some interviewees believed that nationally and domestically adults are increasingly listening to children and taking their opinions into account. The views on children's participation and child rights are emerging and adults are becoming more aware of the importance of it. As a female adult claimed

I think they are really listening...I think the government takes these things [children's suggestions] into consideration so in that sense I think the government is listening, the society also, even in my own home, now I listen to my children I mean in those days the parents were not listening.

A male interviewee agreed of the changes and said that "what children are saying today, I could not say when I was a child." However, according to a young boy, these changes are not reaching all children. Those who are lucky enough to be able to participate are getting more active and getting more attention in the society while those who are not privileged to participate are not heard and fall in the shadows of the others. Even a group of young people loudly stated that adults don't listen to children's voices at all. A young girl pointed out though that if

some adults don't listen to children or take children's views seriously, it doesn't really matter; people have different interests and feelings and that is just normal. Not everyone seemed to agree on this view; indeed most interviewees wished that children's voices would become more prominent and their participation would keep on changing and expanding. Some children even claimed they would pray to God and hope that they would be listened to and their opinions and views taken seriously when it comes to decision making. An adult male agreed and was very excited to see what participation would do for children in the future.

#### **7.4. Benefits of participation**

Although it is debated how active children should be, which child is capable of participation and at what time, or if adults in general really listen to what children have to say, my study group identified many benefits of children's participation in Ghana. In this chapter I will discuss the main benefits, which are both for children's themselves and for the society and international development.

##### **7.4.1. Children's benefits**

As discussed in chapter four, scholars have identified many benefits of children's participation which harmonise quite well to the current situation in Ghana. Most of the child participants claimed they really enjoyed participating. They believed by participating they will become more educated about their rights and later on be able to raise awareness of child related issues by educating others as well. According to child interviewees, the education of others both includes fellow children who need to become more aware of their rights and adults who need to be able to listen to children's views and opinions. Accordingly, some children claimed that if adults would pay more attention to children and the importance of participation it will not only enhance their chances of participating, it will also increase some of children's major skills and abilities which will both benefit them in the present and the future.

Some children I conversed with believed that by increasing their participation they may achieve some of their future goals, they will socialize with each other, and they can share their own problems with others and learn critical

thinking. Furthermore, skills of leadership along with confidence can improve by increasing children's participation, which were also the two main benefits identified by the children. Participation interested one girl in the study because of this reason; it will increase her confidence which will at the same time increase her chances and abilities in the future. The reason why she believed it can enrich her future opportunities was because she would develop skills to speak in front of many people and be confident enough to form and express her own opinions without being afraid of what others might think or believe. Moreover, according to both adults and children, by training young people's leadership skills it will be easier for them to find a job in the future. Many of the adult interviewees therefore had similar views on the benefits of participation for children. Some argued that children will feel accepted and acknowledged when they know others respect their opinions and views which will affect their own confidence. Accordingly, they will automatically become part of adult's tasks and programs and slowly be involved in all programs and projects.

Many of the children I spoke with aim to get good jobs in the future and they claim that is why they like to participate in different types of projects. The majority of these children also see the future of educating others about child rights and in one way or another help vulnerable or poor people in the society. Many children believed by participating they would become stronger individuals in the future and therefore more likely to accomplish these goals of helping others. This is another side of the benefits for children being active participants; children can support fellow children by educating and informing them about child rights which will, hopefully, slowly reduce the abuse, neglect or ignorance on their behalf. If children themselves know their rights, it is less likely that someone will violate it or deprive children from it, especially without them knowing about it. Children who raise awareness of this may therefore become, as one child mentioned, "voices for the voiceless." Additionally, an adult interviewee claimed, that children "understand themselves better so that it is the way they benefit from each other. If there should be a change in a certain aspect of their lives it should be done among themselves. Where adults cannot succeed, children can succeed." In other words, when children educate children it is more likely to be successful and have a greater impact because they understand each other. Each of these benefits

are valuable for the children who some believed participation really gave them the chance to gain whatever they expected out of it. Most children believed that after they begun to participate, their goals and aims have started to become reality and the results successful.

#### **7.4.2. Benefits of society**

Children themselves are not the only ones who will benefit from participation. The society and agencies working on international development can benefit as well. Firstly, as mentioned by a female adult, children are honest and sincere. They will in most cases tell you the truth directly. Moreover,

for adults, we don't always tell the truth. We should listen to the children because they will tell the truth ... they are level less; they balance the society by telling the truth ... sometimes we don't see what is happening in the society, but children see it ... they are not corrupted, they haven't been corrupted at all by things around them, by people, so they are sincere, they are very honest in the way they approach things and how they see things.

In other words, organisations, the government or any adult can be corrupted by something affecting them in their life. Children however are young and have normally not been influenced by anything that may affect their opinions. Therefore they will most likely be honest about any subject; they simply see it in a different way. If we don't give children the platform to express themselves we will probably miss out a lot of things, according to the interviewee. Those "things" which the society might miss out are first and foremost children's well being. An adult interviewee claimed that if the children are empowered they will become stronger individuals. However, if we don't do that, we are not doing much to improve the society or make the world better for the next generations. Another adult participant in the study even said that by empowering children "they will learn how to solve various problems, they will learn how to take care of others; help others, and find solutions for the humankind."

As mentioned before, children are assumed to benefit from participation by educating and helping others; the same applies to the society. Many children who participate are eager to help others or raise awareness of child rights in the country. Even some projects I visited have field trips for the children where they volunteer few times a month or where they try to find solutions to eradicate poverty or to support local production.

At the same time the whole society will become more aware of child rights as the children try to educate others about laws and legislations concerning their rights. Even if the child is not actively going around telling people about its rights, it will most likely spread the word to some people around it; friends, family or community members. Later these people might share the words with someone else as well. If the child learns about its rights it will probably teach its own child the same in the future. That is how an easy but affective way can triple down to the next generations.

## **7.5. Obstacles to children's participation**

Although many beneficiaries can be found to children's participation in Ghana there are still many obstacles standing in the way of enhancing it even more. In Ghana, many adults fear that the cultural traditions are threatened by increasing children's rights or participation. Further, not everyone seem to understand the importance or purpose of child rights. In this chapter the main obstacles to children's participation in Ghana will be discussed which are, according to interviewees, mainly related to the cultural tradition of respect for elders and lack of implementation and follow ups by the government.

### **7.5.1. Culture as barrier**

Although many benefits can be found to children's participation in Ghana there are still many obstacles standing in the way of enhancing it even more. The obstacle identified by participants in the study can probably be described by one word; social hierarchy. The hierarchy however shows up in many different manners throughout the country. According to a female interviewee the hierarchy mostly relates to cultural heritage, local authorities, the government, the public,

the school system and other factors, which can prevent children from being allowed to speak out, make decisions or have their own opinions. Further, a male interviewee claimed that because of some traditions and the cultural heritage, children have less opportunities of participating and are sometimes considered below other members of the society; “it is looked down on them.” This may affect the children in many different ways depending on external factors in the environment but according to an interviewee it is in a way implemented in their minds from early age. Further, she described the cultural heritage in this way:

culture can be a barrier because, if you go down, down to those places, there are some places where children, even mothers, women don’t talk. When there are meetings when the leaders are just making suggestions for the community even men do not talk, how much less children ... I mean I don’t even talk in front of elder people ... if you bring them [children] they are not able to talk because ... they have that mindset that they are not supposed to talk.

Accordingly, many adults believe children should not take part in conversations, formal or informal. An interviewee claimed that some adults believe children should “keep quite” just because of their age. Further, the children are not supposed to speak because their ideas or opinions do not qualify as important or sensible to some adults. Interviewee described the culture as “an adult dominated spectrum ... children cannot talk where adults are talking; children are not qualified to.”

### **7.5.2. Respect for elders**

The tradition of respecting your elders, which reflects the social hierarchy in Ghana quite well, was also identified as a cultural obstacle to children’s participation. Although many Ghanaians believe respect for elders to be a very important cultural tradition, which should not be sabotaged, many interviewees believed it can be a barrier when it comes to children’s participation. Some interviewees claimed that not all adults understand the purpose of special rights for children. Adults sometimes believe that child rights are unnecessary and children are “given too much liberty.” During the fieldwork it was common to

hear adults argue that children “can get spoiled” by increasing their rights. Further, an adult interviewee said that even in the churches people are told that those who argue for the importance of child rights are trying to spoil the children. Both adults and children in the study believed this negative aspect of participation engenders because adults feel the tradition of respecting elders is intimidated. Further, they fear that by allowing children to have more to say in the society, their own voices will be valued or respected less.

A young female participant in the study described to me how her parents reacted when she first started to be active in some of her projects. She said that the parents were not happy and believed she would become arrogant and stop respecting the older people. Again this has roots in the hierarchy, in this case in the household. An adult interviewee described the household ‘bureaucracy’ for me. She claimed that it is important to respect the person who dominated the house; the father. When the father comes home from work the mother has to welcome him and allow him to be the first one to speak. When he has finished all what he wants to say the mother is allowed to talk. Next is the oldest child and that’s how it goes until it is the turn of the last born child. In a household structure like this it can be quite challenging for a child to stand up and start talking before everyone else. According to the interviewee, it can be a barrier and a problem to participation, especially in rural areas where the traditions are prevailing. According to a boy, this structure or hierarchy can create a situation where the child is afraid or shy to express its views or even just to talk to adults about certain issues.

A few children said that some adults don’t even like child rights and often they don’t want to respect the rights of the children. They identified lack of education as the primary cause of this attitude; adults who disagree with participation or child rights normally don’t know much about it and therefore they feel intimidated and afraid. This is why most of those who work on increasing the participation of children also try to let people understand that “even if you give children their right that doesn’t give them the right to be disrespectful.” However, many adults feel that “if you put children under the same level...speaking of their minds and telling them about things that concerns them, then you need your control.” This is the same argument as noted in chapter four as one of the reasons

why children shouldn't participate; the adults need to feel they have the children under control. The children are not supposed to control or somehow be above adults, it should always be the other way around.

### **7.5.3. Corporal punishment**

An arena where the cultural hierarchy can be clearly seen is inside some schools. That is, how teachers show their power in the classroom or on the school yard by caning the students. In Ghana, corporal punishment is very widespread and caning is not only accepted by few people but acknowledged as a valid and, in some cases, the only appropriate method of discipline. Corporal punishment can be an obstacle to children's participation because, as a young boy mentioned, the children hold back their feelings and are afraid to express their views, especially on issues like child rights. When a teacher or other adults around them might beat them if they misbehave or even if they don't agree to the adult's views it can be difficult for them to share their opinions or views. Some children in the study had been caned by the school's principal and were therefore left with no idea of what to do in such cases. The caning in schools has even, according to some children, made students drop out because of fear. How can a child be participative, express its views or opinions if it is constantly afraid of being caned or beaten?

In one of the projects I visited, an adult was arguing about the benefits and positive sides of caning. His opinion was that caning is necessary in some cases and even the only way of making the child understand the difference between what is right and what is wrong. Further, he tried to rationalise his view referring to the bible; that caning is approved by the bible. The incident occurred in a setting where children were supposed to express themselves and learn about their rights. However, caning is widely accepted in Ghana and therefore this case was not unique. Furthermore, some of the children in this study believed caning to be acceptable and most often a deserved punishment.

### **7.5.4. Implementation of laws and agreements**

The last obstacle to children's participation which was mentioned during the research is lack of implementation of agreements and laws by competent authorities. Although the parliament is very efficient to ratify or force agreements



into law, and even to create platforms for children to express their views, the follow ups and implementation is not as successful, according to my interviewees. One male adult was very curious to know whether adults would really listen to children's voices and prove it in decision making and implementation. It was because from now on there has not been any concrete and visible evidences of the success of children's participation concerning national decision making on issues related to children. Although some adults believed that some bigger events have fulfilled the CRC on the right to participate, others claim that the respect and participation of Ghanaian children is only beautiful words put on a piece of paper. This paper however turns out to be national and international legislations and agreements which are not being fulfilled or implemented by the government. Both adults and children agreed on this obstacle which was pronounced throughout my study.

According to interviewees, the barrier to further success of children's participation in Ghana therefore lies in the hands of authorities. A young girl claimed that the governmental institutions are good in making laws and legislations but not as good in implementing and maintaining it. However, an adult interviewee explained that the authorities need time to adjust and acknowledge child rights. Furthermore, he claimed that "most of the people in the government are used to being bosses and giving information, there are many who are beginning to appreciate the right of children but there are still many who don't." Many interviewees believed that the group who does appreciate children's right is constantly growing and today adults don't only see implementing child rights as an obligation but as something they really want to augment. As one adult claimed, "we are getting to a level that it is not seen as an obligation but it is respected and listened to as well."

## **7.6. Strategies of implementation**

It is very sensitive to talk about solutions or changes when it comes to culture. Few people like to see their cultural heritage and tradition thrown away just to bring in some new national or international standards. However interviewees indicated few solutions that are possible to develop concerning the obstacles of

children's participation. The most common concepts were through advocacy and education. An interviewee described the solution process as follows:

what you need to do is just to create awareness ... just let them know that...it is their rights, why won't you bring them on board, just let them understand that this is not something that is going to sabotage the family or is going to create any problems. Let them be aware, just let them understand that it's not an issue.

Additionally, according to an adult female interviewee, a way towards a solution is to let people see that it is important to give children a chance to speak out, even if you don't follow their suggestions it is always important to hear them. Furthermore, children should be given opportunities to be involved in projects and discussions. She believed that the results will help the stakeholders in one way or another. Another interviewee claimed that now it is time to work on the other side. Organisations have been working extensively with children to enhance their rights and educate them about it and now it is time to educate the adults. She argued that

we need to work on the other side, we have been working with children, when there is a mismatch between the two groups...if we tell the children they have the right to participate we are building their capacity, we are empowering them, but we have to build the other side that receives them...we have to work a lot more at all levels where it is democracy educating them, mobilizing the social change, the social change is critical if you really want to see the change of children's participation. [This can be performed through] advocacy at various levels, we have to make sure they understand it; we need to set an example.

The responsibility lies thus quite heavily on those who are more educated, or those who have learned and gained understanding of child rights, whether an adult or a child. It is in these people's hands to share their knowledge and educate others about the importance of enhancing child rights and child participation in

the country. It is also their responsibilities to proof to the public that the cultural heritage will be maintained parallel to these implementations.

In chapter three, the responsibilities of duty bearers and rights holders according the RBA was introduced, which mostly includes the duty bearer's responsibilities to fulfil the rights holder's needs. However, as much as proponents of children's rights are trying to teach and implement child rights in Ghana, they also raise awareness of the children's responsibilities. Everywhere I went I heard the phrase "rights come with responsibilities." There are probably several reasons behind this strategy, but one side is that those opposite to child rights will give it more chance if they understand that rights come with responsibilities. Those participating in the study seemed to understand and acknowledge it more when explained to them that rights are not going to sabotage anything, the children still have their obligations and responsibilities. The organisations I studied were focusing on implementing this strategy by telling the children they have responsibilities towards their families and society. An interviewee working for one organisation said that:

I don't want to talk about rights without responsibility  
... it is a right to go to school but I am just paying  
money and they are not doing anything about it ... it has  
to be controlled so people who say that children are to  
be spoiled they have a point because they don't know  
how it can be managed ... as much as it is a children's  
rights, the reason why we are controlling it than I think  
people will understand it better and accept it better.

This awareness however seemed to confuse some children as they tended to mix responsibilities with their rights. For example, some believed it is their right to be disciplined or help with the housework, on the field or in the market place after school. However children emphasised on knowing both their rights and responsibilities which seemed equally important. Some children even claimed one of their main reasons for participating was "to know their responsibilities." Furthermore, adults seemed to accept and understand the purpose of child rights when employees at organisations explained the responsibility side to them during some of my visits.

Concerning children's participation and implementation of child rights, most people involved in the study had an optimistic vision about the subject in the future. According to this vision, children's participation will grow during the next years and people will be more open to listen to children and create a platform for them to express their views. Despite the possible improvements it will not happen by itself, stakeholders need to "step it up" otherwise no drastic changes will occur. The changes need to be introduced step by step; but stakeholders still "have much more to do." There is lack of resources, funds and partners working with children. An interviewee claimed that "we need more stakeholders, we need organisations. It is only few who work on participation...we need more people involved and we need to build up capacity for people to do it well." If the projects will continue to develop and grow the participation will "step up little bit but not incredibly super big." However, participation "needs to be something we all do, it should be a strategy for us, we all need to consult children before we develop the programs...I think it will get out there bit by bit, slowly." If the organisations will continue to enhance participation and children will increase their participation as well in the future "more children will be consulted, and at the end people will really appreciate it."

## 8. Discussions

In this thesis I have discussed children's participation in a practical and academic sense where both the negative and positive sides have been presented. The objective of this research is to review children's participation in Ghana. I visited a number of organisations and NGOs, and examined projects and activities currently operative and discussed with adults and children related to the issue. My study group outlined how they wished participation would be like, and they identified main benefits and obstacles to participation along with possible solutions and future vision.

According to some scholars,<sup>9</sup> not everyone sees or acknowledges children as responsible individuals or active agents of their own lives. In line with the scholar's debate, children should generally not participate in activities or decision making in personal, national or international matters. Instead it is assumed, according to Stephens (1995) that children should enjoy their childhood by playing games, being with friends and going to school. However, she believes this to be a Western idea about childhood which in general does not apply to the whole world. Furthermore, every child experiences his or her childhood differently according to its social and cultural context. In fact, many scholars claim that being involved in activities and decision making can have great impact on children's lives; they may gain independence, confidence and become more aware of social issues.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, children do not necessarily have to choose between participation with unhappy life and no participation with an enjoyable childhood; their lives can just as well include both. Most conventions and legislations about child rights such as the CRC and the ACRWC support that every child under the age of eighteen should be allowed to participate according to their age and capacity.

Development aid agencies are constantly taking the international agreements into consideration in policy and decision making and the popularity of human rights in the development process is increasing (Ljungman, 2004). That means local people are given more attention, they are allowed to be involved in

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<sup>9</sup> See for example, Bourdillion, 2006 and Lansdown, 1997.

<sup>10</sup> See for example, James & Prout, 1990; Ansell, 2005; Liebel, 2004

projects and policy making, and vulnerable groups or those often left out are especially encouraged and empowered; including children. The RBA to development is based on this ideology; to build up better societies by raising awareness of human rights and integrating the rights in policy making (Ljungman, 2004). One of the key principals of the RBA to development is participation, which allows everyone to be involved in the development process, including children (Rozga, 2001). According to the RBA, children are expected to be active in all projects and programs related to development aid procedures (Theis, 2003; White & Choudhury, 2007).

Ghana is preeminent in many ways when it comes to child rights. Since independence the country has been under the pressure of being a forerunner for other African countries as it was the first country sub-Sahara to gain independence and is known for good governance and success in social and infrastructural matters. What makes child right issues in Ghana interesting is also the fact that young people are about half of the total population and that Ghana has ratified and legislated many agreements on child rights issues. It was the first country to ratify the CRC, it has also adopted the ACRWC, the AYC and a special Children's Act (560) has been forced into law ensuring further rights of Ghanaian children. Many active projects that aim to enhance participation and child rights exist in Ghana and children's participation can be found throughout the country, both in rural and urban areas. Likewise, many organisations are starting to focus more on child rights and participation; the authorities and the public are also increasingly acknowledging that children should have a voice in society, especially in issues concerning them. Children are therefore encouraged to participate and a platform is created for them to be involved in national discussions so their voices will be heard.

According to Alderson (2008), there are two groups of child participation. Firstly, when children are guided by adults throughout the process; and secondly, where children are the leaders of the whole process. Both groups were to be found in the projects examined. Many of the projects are really child friendly where the children can participate fully, almost without any intervention from an adult. While in other projects the adults voices are ruling and children are participating 'just to be seen but not heard' or because of the obligation to fulfil

the national law and legislation, although the latter seems to be in minority. In terms of the seven stages of participation outlined by Ljungman's (2004) and presented earlier in the thesis, the projects examined ranged from stage three to seven. Stage three is when policy makers listen to people's views but do not necessarily take it seriously or into account concerning decision making, and in stage seven people are involved in the whole process from planning to implementing and participation is considered a human right. Furthermore, she describes three main ways of including participation in programming. In Ghana two of these were mainly used; firstly where locals contribute to the project but are not involved in any decision making; and secondly, where locals are empowered in the whole process.

Commonly participation was more on the surface and not fully participative in the bigger projects or events presented in the thesis, especially when children were selected specially to attend. There may be varied reasons behind that, others than lack of willingness to involve children to participate which did not seem to be the case in Ghana. In the bigger events the process for example gets more complicated; more partners are involved, and children's participation is time consuming and expensive. It is not as easy as some might think to involve children in the whole process. The smaller projects where children chose for themselves to join and participate were in most cases more participative and free from adult's interference. While in the bigger events and forums, children were for example not involved in the planning process, which was also more or less managed and directed by adults. Children only participated partly where authorities or high commissioners attended. However organisations are trying to make the bigger events more child-friendly by doing special preparation sections or mini discussions especially meant for children.

The Child Right Clubs differed greatly between schools and even between the patrons, their views or opinions on child rights. However most of them were quite participative and only guided by an adult but the children discussed and decided most of the topics and issues. I have to mention here that I only visited each club once which is likely to have affected the appearance and behaviour of everyone. Finally, the Curious Minds was a very participative group from all aspects. The group is guided by an adult but all activities are planned and

organised by the members. The topic is chosen by the group members and prepared at meetings, and the issue is discussed and debated by them during broadcasting and evaluated afterwards.

The benefits attributed to children's participation in Ghana are in harmony with the theories outlined by scholars, who believe that children will become stronger individuals by being active participants. According to the research findings, some participants in my study group claim that children will become confident and feel like citizens who are respected and taken seriously when they are actively involved in projects and programs. The Ghanaian society and organisations will also gain from children's participation. The children bring different view of any topic discussed, they will spread the word rapidly and they will exercise humanitarian thinking and work hard to achieve their goals of helping others. Further, involving children in projects and activities fulfils not only international and national laws and legislations; it also provides and promotes human rights according to the RBA to development.

However, there is still more work to be done to reach to the point where child rights are fully accepted and acknowledged by adults and projects can be defined as really child-friendly. Some obstacles to children's participation have been identified by my study group, which harmonises in many ways with the former discussed literature review. According to Lansdown, (1997) adults sometimes feel that children should not be active or responsible in their own lives. That is however not the case in Ghana, children are encouraged to be responsible and active, especially domestically. Fear is a common theme in the Ghanaian context and the literature on children's participation. Treseder (1997) claims some adults may fear that they will not be respected or valued if child rights are increased. Therefore, Driskell (2002) believes some adults tend to feel threatened by children's participation.

According to my research findings, there are mainly two factors standing in the way of increasing participation further; firstly, lack of implementation and follow ups by authorities, and secondly, cultural hierarchy within the society where age hierarchy acknowledging the superiority of elderly people and children as subordinate, but yet highly valued, as discussed in chapter five of this thesis. The culture of deep respect for seniors occurs in the country and therefore many



adults fear that the tradition will vanish if children get more freedom of expression. The cultural obstacles identified by my study group can be traced back to the traditions and spiritual beliefs that exist in the country. Although having a child in Ghana is considered extremely important, children should always be obedient and respectful towards seniors. Children should therefore not debate or argue with them but listen and learn. As Twum-Danso (2009) discusses in her article, it can be difficult for Ghanaian children to express themselves due to this traditional culture. It can be a barrier when implementing child rights and promoting children's participation. Adults also believe children have an obligation to give back all that the parents or older family members have done or suffered for the child by helping with the housework and even by working outside of the home after school.

In my study, traditions such as respect for elders were identified by children and adults as obstacles to children's participation where the hierarchy could be found in two main areas; within local communities or families and in the school system. Most of my interviewees agreed on the existence of the widespread belief that children will become disrespectful if they have their own rights. Further, children will become arrogant and deny performing their duties within the household. Some adult Ghanaians don't see the purpose of child rights and feel intimidated by the idea that children become more visible in the society and will be allowed to have a voice and participate. In a way I think some adults feel their voices will become less important or less valued at the same time.

Concerning the obstacles, I believe it is necessary to mention corporal punishment for two reasons. Firstly, it is an issue that is important for most of the children and mentioned by them, in different context and purposes, in all projects I visited. Secondly, even if not everyone agrees on its negative sides (both children and adults), it affects children in many ways. Concerning participation, children might be afraid to express their views or opinions because of the risk of being caned. Considering statistics on child abuse, most of the children participating in the research are likely to have been beaten, slapped or caned at least once in their lives and in most cases a lot more often than that. Many children even had an ironic attitude towards corporal punishment, as nothing else was possible or acceptable because most children deserve it at some point in their

lives. This raises the question if children can be really and truly participative in an environment where they have the risk of being caned for any occasion or if the participation is only on the terms of the adults requirements.

Organisations and other actors implementing children's rights are trying to balance between cultural customs and child rights, by stressing that 'rights come with responsibilities' and even if child rights are increased or implemented it doesn't mean children don't have to fulfil their responsibilities or respect others, particularly their elders. According to my research findings, interviewees believed children's participation to be constantly changing and improving. Adults are becoming more aware of child rights and increasingly acknowledging them and encouraging children to participate both in smaller and larger projects. In Ghana, the willingness is definitely there, especially within development aid agencies or organisations based on child rights strategy. Most interviewees wish to involve children in the whole process from planning to implement. According to the RBA it is in the duty bearer's responsibility to meet the rights holder's obligations by creating platform, and raise awareness of the issue by strengthening willingness and changing attitudes through policies and institutions which make sure human rights are promoted and protected (Crawford, 2007). Additionally, it is important to build a strong relationship between these two partners to make the implementation successful (UNHCHR, 2006). In Ghana, organisations and other stakeholders aim to educate the public about the importance of child rights and that it will not sabotage the culture. Furthermore, children's responsibilities are to demonstrate that this will be followed and maintained.

In chapter three I discussed how to promote effective participation in line with the RBA to development. The literature argues that for fully participative projects the participation must be "active, free and meaningful," institutionalised locally and nationally, and all partners; the state, organisations, communities and individuals should be involved (UNHCHR, 2006). Many organisations and other stakeholders are working extensively to promote and implement child rights and participation in Ghana. These partners are creating a platform for children to express their views and at the same time raising awareness of their rights. However, lack of implementation was identified as an obstacle of pushing participation and implementation of child rights to the most successful and child-

friendly stage. Participants in my study believed that the Ghanaian state is doing very well in signing and legalising agreements but when it comes to policy making, implementing and following up with all the events, they are not doing as well. Further, according to my research findings, people believe that the government has to step up if they really want to achieve and implement the goals of all the agreements and legislations they signed for. Likewise, my interviewees believed organisations and those working to enhance child rights and participation need to involve more people, both adults and children and raise awareness of the concept. However, future vision was quite optimistic. People believed children's participation will increase in the country and become really effective and active among development agencies.

I observed children actively participating in Ghana and confirmed that many organisations and agencies are involving children in projects and programs despite all the obstacles or barriers mentioned. The question is whether culture is really a barrier or if it somehow conduce participation among Ghanaian children. Being respectful or having responsibilities does not necessarily mean that children can not participate or have their own rights. It can just as well mean they become stronger and more independent individuals. Apparently, these mentioned obstacles do at least not seem to stop all children from participating. If all these obstacles were real barriers would there be any participation in the country? Why in general is participation so frequent in Ghana?

I believe there are several reasons why children's participation is so widespread in Ghana. Firstly, as mentioned, the country is expected to be a role model for other African states as a good governance country, and therefore needs to show its capacity of doing so. Secondly, the international society requires fulfilment of certain issues and guidelines which the state needs to follow to be defined properly. Thirdly, organisations have raised awareness of child rights which is not only being acknowledged but becoming popular among stakeholders. Moreover, children themselves are becoming more aware of their rights, and don't want to be deprived of them. Finally, people are becoming aware that children's participation will not sabotage the culture and the young people really may have something valuable to contribute.

If the goal in Ghana is to make children's participation grow and become really child-friendly, large and effective for all stakeholders, I believe all the potentials exist. Some changes need to occur in people's minds and actions, especially among adults. However, it is important to consider culture not only as a barrier but also as a tool to support and improve rights of children in Ghana. The question is how authorities, stakeholders and the public are ready to deal with that issue in stakes of the future of children's participation in Ghana.

## 9. Conclusion

Development aid agencies and other stakeholders working on international development are increasingly focusing on human rights in projects and policy making and allowing all people to be involved in the process. One of these approaches is the rights-based approach to development which emphasises on human rights and encourages the public to participate, especially vulnerable groups or those normally left out, including children. Children are however not always acknowledged or respected as agents of their own lives, many believe they should constantly be under adult's guidance or control and that they are not capable or responsible enough to make decisions or participate in discussions or issues concerning their own lives.

In Ghanaian context, children are very actively participating in different types of programs and the government is efficient when it comes to signing or ratifying national or international agreements on child rights. However there is still a lot of work to be done to fulfil really child-friendly policy in some of the projects. Few obstacles have been identified by children and promoters to children's participation in Ghana. Firstly, there is cultural hierarchy where children are sometimes considered below others in the society which can make it difficult for them to express their feelings and opinions. Secondly, there is lack of implementation on behalf of governmental institutions.

It is very interesting, despite these obstacles, to see how active participation is in the country. Whether it is because of pressure from the international society or local motivation for being forerunner as an African state of good governance and democracy is questionable. The work has however, already been partly successful. If Ghanaian stakeholders want to be able to define the projects as really child-friendly, they need to work harder to implement all the laws and legislations they have signed for. All that the children, organisations, government and other stakeholders have to do is to find out how to keep on improving rights of children in Ghana in harmony with cultural traditions and people's needs and requirements.

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