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LESSONS FROM RESEARCH AND PRACTICE
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The Importance of Participatory Child-Centred Research for Climate Adaptation

Involving children in research on climate change improves the quality and relevance of knowledge that informs policies and programmes for climate change adaptation. However there is a risk that exposing children to concepts and discussion around life-threatening issues will create feelings of helplessness, denial and disempowerment. Participatory action research (PAR) nurtures two-way relationships between researchers and children that minimises negative effects and builds the capacity of child participants to take action. This briefing reflects lessons and good practice for supporting and delivering child-centred research.

Effective adaptation to climate change must respond to the very different needs of different groups and local contexts. It is therefore essential to carry out research with these groups, including children, ensuring that they are supported to speak for themselves. Participatory action research (PAR) is reflective and inclusive – allowing children to be active co-researchers instead of passive research subjects. Children help to design methods to make them more meaningful. The research process becomes part of a learning cycle for everyone involved.

Making participatory research meaningful

Experiences from the Children in a Changing Climate research programme suggest that a participatory action model for research on climate change and disasters is most effective when underpinned by the following principles:

- **Relevance:** Group engagement must be facilitated in a manner that children can relate to and becomes meaningful for them.
- **Creativity:** Creative methods keep children motivated, supporting them to communicate freely on issues that are important to them.
- **Participation:** Child feedback on knowledge generated, and approaches used, by researchers allows them to influence and shape the research process – important both for their empowerment and ownership of the outputs.
- **Flexibility:** Research processes must remain open and responsive to children's needs and interests.
- **Sustainability:** Research on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction needs to contribute to the long-term development of children's knowledge and capacity to act.

Supporting the learning cycle

PAR allows children to undertake their own analysis of the local situation. They can relate climate change to tangible issues that affect their own lives and communities. Participatory research methods can facilitate child-led situational analyses that increase participants' awareness and understanding – identifying hazards and developing solutions that meet children's needs. Research processes that make room for reflection help children to consolidate new knowledge and understanding within their groups; build confidence in their ability to act; reinforce self-belief; and strengthen their capacity for further action on climate change adaptation.

Through research into participatory video (see text box over page) a cycle of learning, analysis, and reflection is leading to advocacy and action for both the child groups and the wider community.

The Importance of Participatory Child-Centred Research

Not just a video

The Participatory Video process places children at the heart of video production, as researchers, script writers and video directors. The process of producing a video that is a call-to-action from children affected by climate change empowers them to identify and prioritise climate risk, foster adaptive action and to advocate for action within and beyond their communities.

The videos themselves are the beginning of a broader dialogue with those within and beyond their communities with whom children need to engage. Video screenings open the door for a longer process of dialogue between legislators and the children that is a first step towards policy and programmes that recognise and respond to children's unique needs. This requires the support of community-based partners working alongside the children to facilitate the ongoing advocacy process, and sensitise decision and policymakers beyond the immediate community.

Sustainable spaces

Research is too often a one-way, short-term and extractive process that fails to integrate into broader programmes for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. Instead, it should help to build an enabling environment that delivers equitable adaptation policy and programming by connecting with local, national and global decision makers.

In order to achieve this it is important to work alongside organisations with strong, long-term community ties and experience. Community partners can help to minimise the risk of psychological distress – particularly for child groups – and provide space for continued discussion and support for action after researchers have left.

To maximise the benefits of this approach, community-based partners need to integrate participatory action research processes into their programmes and continue working alongside the children to facilitate action on climate change informed by the research.

Policy Implications

- Policymakers should use child-centred research into child needs and capacities from children's own perspectives to inform policies and open up spaces for child participation in designing climate change responses.
- Research funders should prioritise approaches such as participatory action research to enhance children's voices in policy and programme design.
- Researchers must recognise the differences between children and identify methods that empower child participants and allow children to refine and improve their methods.
- Community-level practitioners need to act on new knowledge and capacities generated within child groups, with communities and within partner organisations by integrating learning into their programming.

Children have their own way of understanding, perceiving and articulating climate risk and therefore have different adaptation priorities and capacities to respond. Meaningful engagement with children for climate adaptation requires all parties to support children to take control of the process, let children talk about what's important to them and to act on their own priorities.

Further reading

For other briefs in this series see: www.ids.ac.uk/go/infocus13

Molina et al. (2009), *Child-friendly participatory research techniques for community-based adaptation and disaster risk reduction*, Participatory Learning and Action, 60 www.planotes.org

Luneta, M. D. (2007) *Child Oriented Participatory Risk Assessment and Planning (COPRAP): A Toolkit*, Center for Positive Future, Center for Disaster Preparedness: Philippines <http://proventionconsortium.org/?pageid=43>

Benson, L. and Bugge, J (2007) *Child-led Disaster Risk Reduction: A practical guide*. Save the Children Alliance www.savethechildren.org/publications/emergencies/Child-led-Disaster-Risk-Reduction.pdf

Further information about working with children on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, including an annotated bibliography, can be found at www.childreninachangingclimate.org

Credits

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