

# The Nature of Ethical Tensions

## Participation of working children

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## **Over-arching issues**

Lives of working children and their families/communities are inextricably linked.

This is true even of children who may be/appear to live alone

# Over-arching issues

Not just working children, but also their adults:

- Have their agency systematically thwarted
- Struggle with challenges related to surviving each day
- Lack structures to exercise their Right to Self Determination.

# Over-arching issues

- Lack mechanisms to hold various actors, including the State, accountable at all levels
- Experience hierarchies within their own groups, most often men being powerful than women and children
- Are forced to depend on self-appointed advocates from the civil societies

# Over arching issues: Children

Are distanced from decision making processes because of 'generational' discrimination

Even more so those who are additionally vulnerable because of their gender, race, ethnicity, ability, geographical origins, language, location etc

# Over arching issues: Children

- They rarely have opportunities or inputs to examine the ideological frame surrounding their participation and the values that define it.
- They lack role models of ‘agency’ – not only of children but also of adults. The few models they see are likely to reinforce existing hierarchies or violence as a response

# **From working children's point of view..**

They have no say in the nature, form and scope of the protection or provision they require/aspire for.

In the name of protection – all their other rights are treated as dispensable – sometimes this is even supported as 'collateral damage'.

# From working children's point of view..

- They witness negative repercussions of expressions of agency
- They cope with and sometimes even master inter-generational violent responses to situations of unrest – so most often ‘reactive’ and ‘defensive’ rather than ‘proactive’ and ‘constructive’

# From working children's point of view..

- Asserting their rights sometimes may mean they have to place individual interests above those of their families and communities – which they most often do not find 'right'
- 'Protection' is most often provided to them at the cost of all other rights.

# Several organisations working with children

- Lack conceptual clarity on the ‘Right to Self determination’ and of children’s own agency and potential of collective bargaining
- Lack understanding of ‘ideological frames’ of participation and what they entail

- Do not recognize:
  - personhood of children
  - multiple realities of children
  - heterogeneity of children
  - citizenship of children: being accountable to them
  - the difference between ‘representation’ and ‘nomination’

- Fail to provide adequate support for children's participation - as individuals or as members of led organisations
- Fail to see the 'big picture of vulnerability' - interconnectedness between global, national and local trends of development frameworks
- In their own programmes exclude the most marginalised children

- Often driven by external agenda setting by donor agencies, political parties or governmental dictates – and not by realities of children
- Do not make the connections between larger socio-economic-political trends and children's rights
- Lack appropriate indicators to measure ethical and meaningful participation of children

- Children/child led groups are rendered highly dependent on financial and other inputs of the agency. This compromises their autonomy
- Lay emphasis on quantity: Quality, integrity of processes and values of democracy sidelined
- Lack attitudes, knowledge and skills to identify indicators for monitoring and evaluating children's participation

- In many countries CSOs are facilitating governments to set up child led organisations, claiming that as the strategy to sustain them
- Again, government control compromises the autonomy of child led organisations.

And yet, children repeatedly show us..



In a gentle way, you can shake the  
world.

*Gandhi*