

Lessons Learned from a Child Participation Project with the Colombian Red Cross

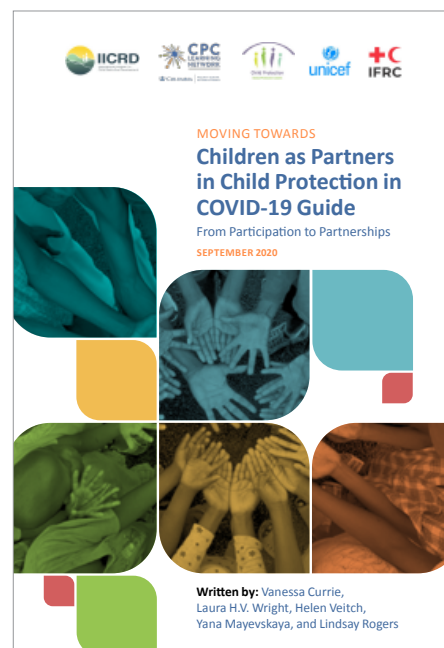
Piloting tools from the *Children as Partners
in Child Protection in COVID-19 Guide*

MAY 2021



► BACKGROUND

Despite the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, children and youth around the world have pioneered innovative and often tech-savvy ways of protecting and supporting their peers, families, and communities. Inspired by their resilience and creativity, the [Moving Towards Children as Partners in Child Protection in COVID-19 Guide: From Participation to Partnerships](#) (“Children as Partners Guide”, hereafter) was created for child rights and child protection actors seeking to engage children and youth in meaningful participation and partnership in child protection during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Children as Partners Guide includes quick tips and tools to start engaging with children and youth immediately, as well as longer tools to foster deeper reflection and action about how humanitarian actors can practically center children and youth’s voices in their work.



After a set of orientation sessions, personal and organizational reflections, and online trainings with the [Care and Protection of Children Learning Network](#), [IICRD](#), and the [CP AoR](#) in May of 2021, the [Colombian Red Cross](#) piloted two rapid tools, one long tool, and an adapted tool from the Children as Partners Guide with five groups of children and youth in four communities. One team used [Module 1 Tip Sheet 1.2: Adapting Existing Participatory Tools for the COVID-19 Context](#) to adapt their own tool, where children were asked to draw their daily lives before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The following table presents the details of these pilot projects.

PROGRAM (LOCATION)	PILOTED TOOLS	PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICSS
Psychosocial Support (Olya Herrera, Cartagena)	Agree or Disagree Head, Heart, and Hands	15 boys and girls, 7-13 y/o, informal settlement
Psychosocial Support (San Sebastián de los Lagos en Leticia, Amazonas)	Agree or Disagree Head, Heart, and Hands	30 boys and girls, 7-11 y/o and 12-17 y/o, indigenous community
Child Friendly Space (La Hormiga, Putumayo)	Child Protection Community Mapping	6 boys and girls, 8-12 y/o, migratory population
Child Friendly Space (Puerto Carreño, Vichada)	Tool adapted based on Module 1 Tip Sheet 1.2	9 boys and girls, 8-10 y/o, migratory population

► OVERALL REFLECTIONS

Members of the Colombian Red Cross (CRC) described the pilot project as gratifying, fruitful, and enlightening. They reported that the tools were more effective in eliciting the thoughts, emotions, and opinions of youth than the tools that they had utilized up until that point. Participating children and youth expressed gratitude, acknowledging that they were in need of these sorts of tools and spaces where their input is welcome, where they are considered experts in their own lives.

In reflecting on the implementation of the child participation tools, members of the CRC were deeply impressed with youth's cognitive and emotional engagement in the activities. The children and youth exceeded their expectations in terms of their ability to understand their context, and form and articulate opinions about the COVID-19 pandemic, their community's safety, and their own priorities in the face of adversity. This demonstrated the tools' role in both fostering space for youth to articulate their opinions and shifting adults' perception of young people's abilities.



Word cloud of Colombian Red Cross members' feedback describing the process of piloting tools from the Children as Partners Guide in a few words (left to right): expectation, inclusion, resilience, gratifying, satisfaction, commitment.

► ADAPTATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

CRC members noted that adapting the tools was a fundamental piece of the pilot process. Staff identified two separate phases of adaptation: one when drafting prompts and ensuring COVID-19 safety protocols are abided by during the planning stage, and a second phase during implementation, when facilitators had to tailor their approach in real-time to ensure children and youth were truly understanding and engaging with the discussion topics. Offering a variety of mediums for expression proved to be a key ingredient for meaningful participation. Inviting youth to engage with discussion prompts through drawing, writing, or speaking facilitated a more inclusive dialogue and open exchange of experiences and ideas.

Anticipating Biosecurity Protocol

CRC members recognized that extra planning was needed to ensure that local COVID-19 biosecurity protocol was being followed. This meant booking an open space in advance and bringing extra materials such as masks. [Module 1 Tip Sheet 1.2](#) of the Children as Partners Guide provides specific guidance on how to adapt participatory tools to ensure safety in the COVID-19 context.



Building Trust with Children and Youth

In some cases, children and youth were not immediately ready to dive into the activities. Having volunteers participate alongside children and youth fostered trust between the young people and program staff, and facilitated buy-in from children and youth. Icebreaker or energizer activities were also useful in cultivating a safe space where child and youth participation is actively encouraged.



Culturally Adapting Activities

As [Module 1 Tip Sheet 1.3](#) outlines, activities are not one-size-fits-all and should be tailored to children and youth's diverse characteristics, including age, gender, and ability. CRC members who piloted tools in indigenous communities reported that indigenous young people in the Amazonas community were more comfortable expressing their opinions through gestures, rather than words. Facilitators tailored activities to this communication style by incorporating balls, toys, and prizes, making the activities play-based rather than verbal.

Additionally, children and youth were split into two age groups: 7 to 11 and 12 to 17 years old. Questions were shortened and simplified for the younger group and marionettes were used to teach children about COVID safety. The adolescent group was more engaged to begin with, and offered a longer, more dynamic discussion throughout the activity. This reflected some of the expected challenges and potential adaptations that can be made to facilitate meaningful participation among different age groups.



Contextualizing Activities within Current Events

The implementation of these activities took place during a period of mass protests and clashes with law enforcement throughout Colombia. Children and youth used discussion prompts as an opportunity to ask questions and express opinions on the current state of civil unrest. Rather than forcing the originally planned conversation, facilitators allowed children and youth to redirect the discussion toward those topics that were most pressing to them. This illustrated the importance of 1) taking current events into account when planning these activities, and 2) letting children and youth drive the conversations. Children and youth often have questions and opinions regarding the social, economic, and political situations impacting their communities, and it is important that space is made for them to share these insights.



► CONCLUSION

CRC members shared that the information collected with the tools was both rich and novel, and that they planned to incorporate meaningful child participation as a fundamental pillar of their work moving forward. This pilot project indicated the feasibility and acceptability of these child participation tools in the COVID-19 context, while highlighting some potential challenges and promising adaptations.

► RESOURCES

Video 1 Introduction

This video provides a brief overview of the Children as Partners Guide: its objectives, components, and key considerations around adaptation.

Video 2 Self-Reflection

This video offers a guided self-reflection on meaningful child and youth participation.

Video 3 Tool Training

This video aims to support colleagues to facilitate and adapt tools, and dives into several examples of rapid and longer tools that are described in the Children as Partners Guide.

9:25 – Agree or Disagree: Where do you Stand? (page 22)

13:03 – Head, Heart and Hands (page 24)

15:57 – Vision Collages (page 53)

19:59 – River Journey: Most Significant Change Story (page 57)

Activity Documentation Form

This form can be used during or after each activity to support staff members to take notes and reflect on the process and lessons learned.

To access these resources in English, [click here](#).

To access these resources in Spanish, [click here](#).