

Under the Same Sky: Children's Rights and the Environment

International Play Association, Children's Parliament (Scotland), Children and Young People's Commissioner (Scotland), and Terre des Hommes (2016)

59 Pages

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Under the Same Sky: Children's Rights and the Environment is an easy-to-read toolkit containing information about children's rights and the environment. It was developed by a group of organizations who came together around the common goal of supporting children from Australia, Brazil, Mozambique, Palestine, Scotland and Zimbabwe to describe environmental issues they face, in their respective countries, to contribute to the UNCRC Day of General Discussion 2016. The toolkit goes on to describe three projects undertaken by children in Scotland that adults may find useful to enable other children to share their views on what life is like for them in their communities. Further details about these projects are included in a newspaper-style supplement.

Example projects contained in the toolkit are well-structured and comprehensively described. Each project description takes the reader on a journey from the aim, objectives and processes, through to outputs with accompanying pictures that make all activities easy to follow and replicate. The projects are: 1) building a 3D city model to inform town planning strategists and architects; 2) a collectively designed mural to highlight issues affecting communities that leave children feeling unhealthy, unhappy and unsafe; and 3) a mixed-media project about cultural identity and children's sense of community belonging. The projects described are a great way to inform adults about how to engage children aged 8-12 years to think meaningfully about their rights in relation to the environments in which they live. The clear, lay language used in the *Under the Same Sky* toolkit is easy to follow and will enable adults, regardless of their knowledge of rights, to open up conversations with children. In this way, children can explore what works and what does not work in their communities and make suggestions on what they think could improve outcomes for children.

As well as providing children with opportunities to think critically about their own environment, the activities in *Under the Same Sky* can also be applied in a broader context to help raise children's awareness about environmental issues globally and the impact of these on specific groups of children, such as indigenous children, working children, and those living in conflict. The toolkit also includes tips about how to take good photographs and record projects, and provides external links to additional child-friendly materials and resources.

The toolkit includes interactive strategies to use during consultations with children. For example, moving around the room to align oneself with whether you agree or disagree with statement, or constructing a model or map of your community, are excellent ways to assist children to visualize and verbalize what is happening in

their lives. The “did you know” fact box on page 15, is an efficient means to introduce quantifiable information about environmental issues and their effects. However, more of these peppered throughout the toolkit might have been useful to offer information on a wider range of environmental issues, such as health and illness, and natural disasters (flood, earthquake, hurricane, and food crises) that cause great damage or loss of life.

One of the key aims of carrying out these participatory projects is to have adults hear directly from children about their views and have these taken into account by duty bearers. The toolkit describes organizing Celebration and Stakeholders events as a way to share children's accomplishments with adults and key decision makers from their communities. However, we have no information as to whether these engagement activities informed actual change or directly influenced policy and practice. Additional dissemination strategies described—blogs, vlogs, filming, and photography—assume access to various resources. Children and supporting organizations in some countries or regions may lack resources such as money, equipment, and internet access, so one wonders if adult policy makers in those contexts would be open to, or have access to, their children's opinions. Unfortunately, we cannot guarantee that children's efforts will influence community-wide change but *Under the Same Sky* can certainly encourage adults and children to work together to try.

Review by Michelle Templeton

Dr. Michelle Templeton works at Queen's University Belfast in Northern Ireland. Her background is in psychology and counselling and she works as a researcher within the Centre for Children's rights, which has pioneered an innovative methodology for conducting rights-based participatory research with children and youth. She has extensive practical experience of applying this methodology with children and youth in diverse social and geographical contexts, with a particular interest in facilitating the co-production of contextually relevant health and education interventions, and developing innovative public dissemination and engagement strategies. A further practical application of this methodology is the production of youth-friendly versions of human rights legal texts, research documents and reports, etc., to make information accessible so children and youth can assert their right to good health and wellbeing. Her work is interdisciplinary and she also works out of the School of Nursing and Midwifery at Queen's, focusing on relationships, sexual health, gender and parenting in adolescents' lives, particularly in relation to prisoner health.