

Report on the predicaments faced by children and youth in public engagement  
(can be disclosed)

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a. Self-governance in school

(a) Low voter turnout in school

Thanks to the efforts of many people over the years, students now have an opportunity to partake in public affairs on campus. However, we have discovered that students are somewhat reluctant to partake in public affairs, and therefore the voter turnout for the president and vice president of student self-governing organizations in most schools is still far below expectations. Voting is one of the easiest and most direct methods for students to engage in public affairs. A low voter turnout suggests that the student participation in public affairs is limited and the election results will not be sufficiently representative.

1. Strengthen publicity

Students today are given more opportunities to participate in public affairs, but most students are unaware of their rights and their engagement in public affairs is less than expected. Consequently, we hope that students can be endowed with better understanding of children and youth's rights through lectures or other publicity approaches in order to increase their willingness in public participation.

(b) Power imbalance between teachers and students - Students' propositions are not taken seriously

According to current regulations, school meetings must be attended by student representatives. We have discovered, however, that even though student representatives can partake in school meetings directly, there exist numerous hidden problems. The inclusion of student representatives in school meetings allows students' voices to be heard, but schools do not necessarily notify the student representatives and the students' self-governing organizations of the meeting and proposal submission time in advance, hence student self-governing organizations will not be able to discuss whether school regulations need to be amended ahead of time. As a result, school meetings are reduced to meetings of teachers, and there is zero input from students.

1. Increase the ratio of student representatives in school meetings

Although the ratio of student representatives in school meetings has been raised to 8%, at least 50% of the votes must be in favor of a proposal for it to be approved. Based on the current student representative ratio, students' proposals will still encounter some level of resistance at school meetings. We thus hope to facilitate and materialize students' right to public participation by increasing the ratio of student representatives.

2. Strengthen publicity to schools and teachers

Although teachers' training on children's rights is already in place, it is limited to teachers who have expressed interest in this field, and not all teachers are required to receive such training. Therefore, some teachers are still unfamiliar with the regulations on children's rights protection as stipulated by the CRC. In light of this, we hope to have at least half of the teachers as well as the level 1 and level 2 executives of schools receive training on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Moreover, relevant seminars should be organized to bolster the teachers' awareness of children's rights.

- (c) Inadequate grievance channels

Although some grievance channels are available including the Director General's email, Mayor's email, and the Control Yuan's grievance channel, etc., the student union is not involved in the grievance process, meaning that the student union is unaware of the grievances, and it is impossible to know the government's response, in turn losing some of its function as the students' advocate.

1. Improve existing grievance channels

We hope that the government will improve the existing grievance channels by providing the student union with the relevant documents when responding to grievances so that the student union will be able to offer subsequent assistance. If necessary, proposals could be made during school meetings to give full play to the spirit of student self-governance.

- b. Difficulties faced by children and youth representatives

- (a) Include children and youth representatives in the external meetings of "committees"

We support the inclusion of children and youth committee members in "decision-making" meetings, but we also realize that such meetings mostly make "general" decisions without discussing execution details. As a result, discrepancies can occur when

implementing the opinions of children and youth. We expect children and youth committee members or children and youth to be invited to attend practical meetings such as children's right-related "consultation meetings" or "work meetings". For example, the Ministry of Health and Welfare's children and youth anti-sexual exploitation advisory committee has already appointed children and youth committee members.

- (b) More attention should be paid to children and youth representatives and their development levels in some of the areas

We discovered that although children and youth representative-related mechanisms have been appointed by local governments, the level of resources they apply to children and youth development in different areas is inconsistent, hence we propose the following key expectations.

1. Empowerment

The empowerment units act as the bridge between the city government and children and youth, and it is also an important component for empowering children and youth representatives. The empowerment units will host various lectures and seminars to enhance the capabilities of children and youth representatives. We have observed that the lecturers invited by cities and counties are limited and fail to consider the aspirations of children and youth. So, we hope to include the voices of children and youth when inviting lecturers or planning courses, so that empowerment courses will not only be what adults "think" children and youth need, but also something that children and youth look forward to.

2. Budget

The empowerment budget is what we believe to be a direct and key component in development discrepancies. Although the central government has allocated dedicated subsidies to various cities and counties for children and youth empowerment, some local governments allocate very little budget to empowerment projects. Some local children and youth representatives can receive diverse empowerment courses, while others are given limited resources. We hope it is possible to stipulate various counties and cities to allocate a fixed proportion of the budget to endow children and youth representative development with more flexibility through adequate funding.

### 3. Meeting facilities and environment

In some county and city government meetings, differential treatments exist between children and youth and adults, so we stress the importance of creating a communication-friendly environment. This includes: non-member children and youth should enjoy the same hardware and facilities as adult committee members (such as a microphones, seats), and they should be seated close to the chairperson. In addition, they should be given benefits such as refreshments, boxed meals, desserts, etc.

#### (c) Difficulties faced by children and youth representatives in performance

##### 1. Proposal writing

When writing a proposal, the use of official document language can be daunting for children and youth. We hope local governments will allow children and youth representatives to write proposals with fewer restrictions as proposed by the Executive Yuan's Children and Youth Welfare and Rights Promotion Team (as illustrated).

研 處 意 見	
決 議	

備註：依據本小組109年12月22日「有關友善兒少代表參與中央兒童及少年福利與權益事務相關小組之表意機制」決議，兒少提案之用字遣詞以可溝通為原則，格式儘量給予彈性，毋須受限於本提案單格式。

Resolution	

Note: According to the resolution of the team's "mechanism for children and youth-friendly representatives to attend central children and youth welfare and rights affairs-related groups" on December 22, 2020, children and youth proposals should emphasize communicability in terms of wording, hence the format should be flexible and should not be confined to this proposal format.

2. Introduce “children and youth representatives” to school campuses

Children and youth representatives are obliged to facilitate the promotion of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, usually through government-hosted activities such as fairs and carnivals. However, these events can only reach a limited number of children and youth, so we hope the government can facilitate children and youth representatives to promote, interpret, and share their children’s rights-related experiences in everyday environments (such as school campuses). Furthermore, current textbooks only make a brief mention of the Convention without going into the details. We also look forward to including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly the children and youth representative mechanism, into textbooks.

3. Encourage or create cross-region exchange opportunities for children and youth representatives

By engaging in exchanges with different municipalities, local governments, the central government, or representatives from around the world, they can share diverse perspectives and exchange practical experiences. In some cities and counties, due to factors such as venue limitations, budget difficulties, and fear of hassle, enthusiastic children and youth have no choice but to disengage. We hope civil society groups or the government can proactively organize exchange activities and even include children and youth during the planning process.

4. Resource consolidation (student self-governance)

Local children and youth representatives can generate proposals in conjunction with various schools’ student self-governing bodies or provide student rights-related consultations to create a horizontal connection. Moreover, they can connect vertically with local governments to facilitate mutual help among children and youth through proposals and grievance channels. We expect the children and youth representative mechanism to be integrated with other communication channels for voicing the opinions of children and youth, to ensure the greatest effectiveness of the right to be heard. For instance: Tainan City will soon be planning a tea party to exchange ideas with student self-governing bodies.

5. Realize the possibilities of field studies

We have discovered that the current children and youth representative mechanism is confined to conference room or

classroom discussions. We hope that it can break away from convention by combining diverse venues to conduct field studies and cultivate children and youth's diverse thinking about agendas and proposals. For instance: visiting children and youth placement organizations.

(d) Continuing or passing on the torch after the end of children and youth representatives' terms

Through diverse participation, some of the representatives now possess comprehensive children's rights-related concepts or practical experiences. However, most representatives tend to go on a "hiatus" after their term ends due to problems such as having no way to pass on their skills and interruptions in the progress of old proposals caused by improper handover between new and old representatives.

1. Companion mechanism, creating a children and youth representative network

Taking Taichung City's first and second-term children and youth representatives as an example, first-term representatives delved into placement organizations and transportation, but the second-term children and youth representatives had no experience in this matter. As a result, the children's rights committee was delisted for failing to submit a proposal. According to our observations, children and youth representatives from the central government and some counties and cities act as "companions" for "6 months" after the end of their term, where the former children and youth representatives still attend relevant meetings as consultants to provide suitable opinions. We hope to use this as an example to strengthen the vertical information network of children and youth representatives throughout the country to build a sound children and youth support system.

2. Empowerment specialist

Some cities and counties do not outsource children and youth representative empowerment services to contractors (perhaps because there aren't many groups promoting children's rights services or because they are inundated with work and the tender process is difficult). Instead, services are carried out by the Social Affairs Bureau (Department), where children and youth representatives from different terms are appointed as empowerment specialists working alongside a senior social worker from the Social Affairs Bureau (Department) to achieve the linking of information. We also agree with and appreciate the suitability and approachability of the program development

process such as curriculum arrangement and proposal recommendation, etc. We hope the country will be able to take this under advisement when planning empowerment programs in the future.

c. Off-campus participation

(a) Children and youth age restrictions

For children and youth who have met the standards for forming a civil association under the “Civil Associations Act”, except for those underage, there should be at least 30 persons with no criminal record, bankruptcy, or subject to the order of the commencement of guardianship, and who comply with the law. Legal persons unable to become student organizations or student media outside school due to age restrictions have violated the children and youth’s right of expression and Article 15 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which states that “States Parties recognize the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly”, as long as this does not stop other people from enjoying their rights. Presently, autonomous off-campus children and youth organizations mostly focus on the promotion of student rights, discussions on current affairs, and generating discussions and participation in public affairs, hence they do not violate the regulations of the “Civil Associations Act” as mentioned above. However, they are subject to age restrictions and therefore cannot form organizations freely. As a result, children and youth are unable to apply for government funding, obtain the necessary resources, or rent venues to organize activities under the organization’s name. Instead, they have to resort to others with disposing capacity. Faced with additional constraints in these regards, the government’s actions or inactions are devastating for organizations formed by the children and youth.

(b) Prioritizing children and youth’s rights

The government should abide by CRC regulations and prioritize the children and youth’s right to freedom of association. We hope to lower the limitations of the “Civil Associations Act” by amending the law or formulating a dedicated law. In particular, we have seen the draft of the “Social Group Act”, which has loosened restrictions on the forming of organizations by children and youth. However, we’ve noticed the extremely slow progress of developing the “Social Group Act”, and hope that the government will expedite the inclusion of the act into the agenda without further procrastination so that the spirit of the “Social Group Act” can be valued and approved.

(c) Difficulties in applying for funding

Currently, off-campus student organizations cannot be registered as legal civil associations due to legal constraints, hence it is difficult for them to apply for funding from government agencies such as the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture. With students' limited financial resources coupled with the fact that their organizations cannot apply for subsidies from the government to organize various lectures or activities, many student organizations find themselves in a predicament where they are unable to advance their cause due to a lack of funds. As a result, the government, which should be vigorously promoting the development of off-campus student organizations, has become a hindrance to such development.

(d) Enhanced freedom

It is advised that the administrators invite relevant civil society groups, children and youth representatives, and representatives of autonomous off-campus organizations to discuss the feasibility of formulating a dedicated law to provide funding to off-campus organizations and student we media. Furthermore, it should also bring together lecturers and lectures besides offering subsidies. Although the pandemic has affected NPOs and NGOs, the government's relief packages have not addressed the plight of these NPOs and NGOs, thus we urge the government to lower the application threshold or allocate a budget to subsidize frontline service organizations directly.