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**CREATING SPACE FOR CHILDREN'S  
PARTICIPATION:**

**PARTICIPATORY PLANNING WITH STREET  
CHILDREN IN YANGON, MYANMAR**

**BY**

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**ABSTRACT**

The *Lan Paw Kale* Program in Yangon, Myanmar commenced in 1997. From its inception, the program's specific objective was to increase the quality of life for street and working children in Yangon. This paper reports on the process of, and learning arising from, a participatory evaluation of this street-children program. A range of stakeholders were involved in designing and implementing the research, most unusually and notably the street children who were – and are – the primary users of the program.

The evaluation aimed not only to identify progress against stated goals but also to greatly increase the participation of children in the program. This made for many fascinating moments, a lot of fun and occasionally some tears. The process was, for all involved, an exhausting yet exhilarating experience. The adults that took part were particularly privileged. We left understanding that children are important, not only to the future and what they will become, but for what they are now. We were challenged by the need to reconstruct our understanding of childhood and children's current capacities and skills. Project staff were amazed at the children demonstrating previously 'hidden' abilities. We were challenged, with the children themselves, to seek avenues that would allow their

voices to be heard and the space and the security to become appreciated social actors in their own right.

## ACRONYMS

DSW	Department of Social Welfare
FGI	Focus group interview
L.P.K.	<i>Lan Paw Kale</i> ('street children' in Burmese)
PSS	Project Subsidy Scheme
SWC	Street and Working Children
SWOC	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, constraints
WVA	World Vision Australia
WVM	World Vision Myanmar

## 1. PROJECT BACKGROUND

World Vision has been operating its Street and Working Children (SWC) Program in Yangon and Mandalay since April 1997. The Lan Paw Kale (LPK) is an integral part of this umbrella program and focuses on street children in Yangon. It has been funded from its inception through the Program Subsidy Scheme (PSS) of World Vision Australia (WVA) and the Australian Government's overseas-aid agency, AusAID. Under this scheme, AusAID contributes 75% of program funds and accredited non-government organisations like WVA are required to contribute the remaining 25%. WVA receives the AusAID contribution in an annual block grant (currently just under eight million Australian dollars). AusAID delegates the authority to select projects to WVA. The PSS-funded project had a three-year budget of AUD 200,000.

The SWC Program has two main components. The first is "curative" and aims to improve the quality of life and status of street and working children in these two cities, and when possible, to reintegrate them into mainstream society. The second is "preventive" and aims to keep children at risk of becoming street children at home with their families and communities.

### 1.1 Curative

#### *"Lan Paw Kale" (Street Children) Centres*

In order to meet the needs of these children, all of whom are at risk of physical and sexual abuse and general exploitation, WVM operates drop-in centres and conducts street education for children in both downtown Yangon and Mandalay. The centres are called "Lan Paw Kale" (LPK), or "Street Children" Centres.

The LPK Centre in Yangon, the subject of this evaluation report, was WVM's first direct intervention for street children, and opened in June 1997. By October 1, 1999, this centre had provided 494 children, mostly boys, with a caring, safe place to seek shelter from the street. An average of 70 to 80 children enjoy the centre's services each day, and 17 children enrolled in formal school during the most recent year. Based on the success of the Yangon LPK Centre, a sister centre opened in Mandalay in May 1999, and by October 1, 1999 had provided services to 158 different children, with an average of 70 to 80 children sleeping in the centre each night.

The LPK Centres provide any street and working child between the ages of 4 and 16 who comes through their doors the opportunity to benefit from or participate in any or all of the following services:

- Basic nutrition - three meals a day
- Basic healthcare and emergency intervention if required
- Clothing, bathing facilities and shelter
- Non-formal education and skill training
- School support
- Recreation, including field trips and sports competitions
- Counselling
- Family reconciliation and family support, including income generation opportunities

In addition, the project has established the following:

- Hostel – for longer term support to children who have no prospect of family reunification
- Market Sub-Centre in Mandalay providing an outreach site beyond the main drop-in centre.

## 1.2 Preventive

In order to prevent children from becoming street and working children in the first place, WVM operates community-based programs in Hlaing Thayar Township on the outskirts of Yangon, and Chan May Tharzi Township on the outskirts of Mandalay. These two communities are poor slum areas that serve as feeder communities for the children living on the street in these two cities. A number of different interventions are operated out of these centres with the help of community volunteers, including the following:

- ❖ Non-formal education provided for working children unable to attend school
- ❖ Non-formal education provided for illiterate adults
- ❖ Small loans provided to parents of street and working children
- ❖ Formal school support provided to children at risk
- ❖ Basic health training and health care
- ❖ Skill training for children, particularly teenage girls at risk of trafficking
- ❖ Training of community members – children and adults – and local authorities in the
- ❖ Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- ❖ Formation of steering committees and other local community groups that direct their own development process

The Yangon drop-in centre and hostel are funded by AusAID/WVA, the Mandalay centre and other street children activities are funded by the British Government's overseas-aid agency Department for International Development (DFID). The total budget for this program is approximately AUD \$200,000 per year of which 25% goes towards the LPK project in Yangon.

## 2. PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

This was in many ways an unusual evaluation. Whilst eager to find whether or not the project was achieving its stated goals, more important was the emphasis on increasing the participation of children in the process with the intention that this participation would then continue on throughout the life of the project. There is a rationale for such an aim! The benefits of the past decades of Development Aid are increasingly coming under scrutiny as Escobar (1995: 4) summarises:

*For instead of the kingdom of abundance promised by theorists and politicians in the 1950s, the discourse and strategy of development produced its opposite: massive underdevelopment and impoverishment, untold exploitation and oppression.*

Prominent authors (Korten, 1994, Campfens 1997) have suggested that the 'failure' of development has been a direct result of neglecting people's empowerment through increased participation in their own development. This notion of empowerment is not particularly new however. Even as early as the 1930s, projects existed that stressed empowerment and collective local action (Eyben and Ladbury in Guijt and Shah 1998). The recent global interest in participation and empowerment within development projects has been traced to the 1970s (Guijt and Shah 1998) when the failure of many projects led

to a need to understand the perspective of local communities and brought into question the hegemony of the 'external expert'. This realisation combined with some earlier methodologies of social transformation (Freire, 1972) helped to provide basic principles to guide people's empowerment over their own development process.

Gujit and Shah note that a 'participation boom' took place in the 1980s which saw an explosion of grassroots activists and local non-government organisations (NGOs) whose focus was on understanding and respecting insider knowledge. The early 1990s saw, "frenzied levels of global interest in participation" (Maguire, 1987: p4) with participation becoming a prerequisite for funding. We now find participation in today's development discourse being characterised by two growing paradoxes. The first is the trend to standardisation of approaches, which, in a sense completely contradicts the notion of participation whereby direction is moulded by the participants and, therefore, impossible to standardise. The second paradox relates to the growth of a technical body of knowledge that takes the empowerment aspect of the participatory process out of the hands of communities and places it in the hands of the 'experts' once again. The notion of participation is complex and often ambiguous. It can mean anything from consultation to full empowerment and has even been likened to a Trojan Horse that can hide coercion and manipulation, as its basic motivation (Slocum and Thomas-Slayter, 1995). Despite this, however, it is generally recognised that participation must be part of development processes and a number of authors and development practitioners have developed typologies to try and capture the types and degrees of participation (for example, Biggs, 1989; Cornwall, 1995; Gujit, 1991, Hart 1992).

Recently, participation of children has begun to feature in the development discourse. Initiated partly by the Convention of the Rights of the Child – CRC- (the most widely ratified human rights convention in the world), in which participation of children in all matters that affect them is one of the underlying principals. More recently a "New Global Agenda for Children" has been developed by the United Nations and lead by UNICEF. As part of this a draft report has already been prepared entitled, "A World Fit for Children". The aim of this document is to both reinforce and extend the CRC and it's implementation around the globe. A key outcome of the document is:

*For adolescents, the opportunity to develop fully their individual capacities in safe and enabling environments that empower them to participate in, and contribute to, their societies. (UNICEF, 2000:14)*

Similar themes also appear in discourse on monitoring and evaluating overseas-aid programs. For example, Marsden, Oakley and Pratt (1994, p. 31) note calls for an alternative, participatory approach 'not only to evaluation but also to the dominant modernisation paradigm'. They note that the call for such an alternative participatory approach 'finds its roots in the failure of the development efforts to significantly improve the standard of living of all but a few in the so called 'Third World', and to circumvent the many barriers that prevent the effective and efficient disbursement of resources to those most in need'. They add that 'the result has been a call for people to define and take greater responsibility for their own development, on their own terms, and pursue it in their own way. "Participatory evaluation" becomes not only the means by which to create the dialogue necessary for such a process to develop but an integral part of the process itself (ibid.). Space precludes elaboration of debates on development and research/evaluation

paradigms and their interrelationship, but those interested may wish to consult Hettne, 1995 and Carmen, 1996.

Partly fuelled by the failures of the dominant approach and by the calls for an alternative participatory practice described above, 'The past two decades have seen an increased recognition of the importance of participation by beneficiaries (and a wide range of other stakeholders) in decision-making' ('eldis' development-information website: <http://ids.ac.uk/eldis/hot/pm1.htm>).

Participatory evaluations have been undertaken and described in a variety of ways, including Participatory Action Research and Empowerment Evaluation. The latter approach was explicitly mentioned in the Terms of Reference (TOR) for this evaluation and is commonly mentioned in TORs of WVA-auspiced evaluations. Empowerment Evaluation is designed to assist program participants to develop their capacity to evaluate and improve their own programs (Fetterman et al., 1996).

It was with these thoughts in mind, therefore, that in April of this year, with the assistance of Dr Tim O'Shaughnessy from WVA, WVM conducted a two-week 'empowerment' evaluation process at the Drop-in Centre. Consistent with the main aim of Empowerment Evaluation, the key objective of the evaluation was to improve the capacity of project participants (especially the 'users' or 'beneficiaries', the children) to evaluate and improve the project.

This two-week period was an amazing process, during which children from the centre became evaluators themselves. Children came up with the questions they wanted to answer, and designed methods and systems for answering them. Over the course of this two-week period, WVM staff and children at the centre determined that, rather than begin and complete the evaluation process in two weeks, they would lay the ground work for a much more thorough evaluation process, which would continue for another four months.

This process allowed the children themselves to be the primary evaluators. They spent time interviewing various stakeholders in the programme and analysed the information gathered. Staff members reported being extremely surprised and impressed by the ability of the children to participate in this process, and moved by what they were able to learn. In fact, the evaluation was so successful that project management decided to expand the process to cover the mid-term evaluation for the entire SWC project (the remainder of which is being funded through the British Government Department of International Development – DFID).

### **3. EVALUATION PROCESS**

The evaluation was divided into two main phases: Preparation and Implementation.

#### **3.1 Phase 1- Preparation**

Tim O'Shaughnessy and Karl Dorning facilitating the following:

- ❖ Preliminary meetings with stakeholders to develop evaluation themes and questions:
  - Staff

- Children
  - Steering committee members
  - Parents of the children
  - Street families
  - Other NGOs
  - Department of Social Welfare (DSW)
- 
- ❖ Election of children (by their peers) to evaluation team
  - ❖ Development of lists (see table 1 below for an illustration of type of questions that stakeholders wished to have answered during the evaluation)
  - ❖ Refinement of questions
  - ❖ Identification of informant groups
  - ❖ Development of question guides
  - ❖ Training of interviewers and note takers

**Table 1: Stakeholders' Evaluation Questions**

*Hostel Children*

How long will the centre be open  
 Why have we opened the LPK centre  
 What do you want to have happen to the children through the LPK Centre  
 What is the children's understanding/feeling/perceived harm of the program  
 What are the differences between street and LPK life  
 Do we have a plan to open more centres and hostels  
 What more can we do? How far can the project go

*U Htike Aung (CARE Myanmar)*

Is the project cost effective  
 Do the staff feel well-equipped  
 How can we help other children like us  
 How can we help parents of SWC

*Steering Committee*

What is the goal, has it been reached  
 What will we do for teenage girls (12 and above)  
 Is the centre promoting unsustainable life styles for the children  
 If we are to start again, how can the project work better with the community to bring about a better result for the children and the community

*Children using LPK Drop-in Centre*

What is our progress over three years  
 Why do you give this kind of opportunity to street children  
 Why did we open the school for many children  
 What is the purpose of the centre  
 Why do staff do such unpleasant work  
 How does the comity perceive street children  
 How long will the centre be open

Why doesn't the government open a centre like this one  
 What will happen to us when the centre closes  
 Do you have any idea to extend this centre

*First meeting with Project Management*

If the drop in centre never existed, what would you do?  
 If you had the time again, what would you do?  
 Is there any impact of the program on children who have come to the LPK Centre  
 What should happen in Insein?  
 What should the program be doing with other street children?

*LPK Staff*

What is the qualitative and quantitative progress off the program  
 What happens when the program finishes  
 What do we do about problems beyond our control  
 Is what we are providing meeting the children's needs  
 Strengths and weaknesses?

Though the children's evaluation team had not been elected at this stage, a number of meetings were also held with children in the hostel and the drop in centre to discuss the evaluation – what it was, why it was being conducted etc. Children were then asked to spend time in groups compiling their own questions. The result of this entire process was a list of well over 200 questions.

### **3.1.1 Election Of Children to Evaluation Team**

The next stage was to elect a team of children who would become full time members of the evaluation team. This was done over a couple of days and involved all children from the centre in defining an election method and then choosing their representatives. Only two guidelines were given for this. Firstly, that there needed to be a proportionate representation of both boys and girls and secondly that all elected members would need to be able to read and write if possible. In addition to the children a number of staff were asked to be part of the evaluation team. Altogether 15 children and 4 staff formed the team along with the evaluation facilitators (Tim O'Shaughnessy and Karl Doring and the project management, Hepattica Nuynt, Tory Clawson and Joy – see Appendix XX for full list of evaluation team).

### **3.1.2 Refinement Of Questions**

The next major step was refining the question list. Initially, for reasons of time, the staff and facilitators did this. The process of refinement took the questions and classified them into particular groupings. In the end, eight major questions were defined:

- ❖ How long will we keep the centre and hostel open?
- ❖ Why did we open the LPK Centre?
- ❖ What do we want to have happen to the children through the LPK centre?
- ❖ What are the differences between street and LPK children?
- ❖ How can we help other children like us?
- ❖ How far can we go?
- ❖ What will happen to us if the centre closes?
- ❖ Do you have a plan to open more centres and hostels?

### **3.1.3 Identification of Informant Groups**

The whole evaluation team then decided upon the types of informant appropriate to answer their questions:

- ❖ Children in the centre and the hostel
- ❖ Parents of children
- ❖ Children who do not come to the centre
- ❖ Children who do not come to the centre any more
- ❖ Department of Social Welfare
- ❖ Donors
- ❖ Shop owners in the market
- ❖ World Vision Staff

The evaluation team then worked out detailed plans concerning who would be interviewed from which category, who would do the interviews, how the informants would be located and when the interviews would be done.

<b>Table 2: Types of Informants and Samples</b>	
Type of Informant	Type of Sample
Children in the centre and the hostel	Census of current users
Parents of children	Convenience sample of parents who had had some involvement with project
Children who never came to the centre	Convenience sample
Children who do not come to the centre any more	Convenience sample
Department of Social Welfare	Refused to participate
Donors	Convenience sample
Shop owners in the market	Convenience sample
World Vision Staff	Census of project staff and World Vision Myanmar staff involved with project or with fundraising
School teachers	Convenience sample
Project Steering Committee	Convenience sample

### **3.1.4 Development of Question Guides**

The process of developing questions guides was a little arduous but it was necessary to ensure that all the major focal questions would be addressed with all the informant groups. Below is an example of the question guide developed for the interviews with children at the LPK centre. Similar guides were developed for all of the informant groups.

### Textbox 1: Guide for L.P.K Children's Interviews

3.1.5 Place :  
Date :  
Time :  
Participants :  
Facilitator: :  
Note taker :

The questions should be asked to the children are as follows:

1. What do you like about living on the street?
2. What do you dislike about living on the street?
3. What do you like about living in the L.P.K?
4. What do you dislike about living in the L.P.K?
5. Where were you happier, in L.P.K or on the street?
6. Do you think that your situation is getting better since you have been in L.P.K?
7. What can the children do to have a better programme?
8. What can the staffs do to have a better programme?
9. What else does L.P.K scheme help you out anything?
10. What other programmes are L.P.K doing apart from the centre and hostel?
11. How can you help other children, facing the same as that of your situation?
12. What the children from the centre want to do when they grow up?

### Training Of Interviewers And Note Takers

This process took a number of days. Some children volunteered to become interviewers, other opted to become note takers. A series of practice exercises were developed to give them the opportunity to develop the necessary skills. This was initially traumatic for some of the note takers as many of the children had either had a very rudimentary education or none at all. However, some interviewers gained confidence and expertise in notetaking through practice, others crossed over to become interviewers.

At first, children were reluctant to ask follow-up questions to clarify respondent's answers to initial questions outlined in the question guide. However, over time and with practice, the interviewers began to 'get the hang' of doing semi-structured interviews with appropriate use of follow-up questions.

The first 'practice' FGI conducted was with 'donors' represented by Tim O'Shaughnessy from WVA and Karl Dorning from WVM. This was not entirely practice as street children had the opportunity to ask donors questions that had been on their minds but that they never had the opportunity or invitation to ask before.

By the end of the second week, the evaluation team had achieved the following:

- ❖ Children had been elected;

- ❖ Evaluation focus questions, detailed FGI guidelines and informant groups had all been finalised;
- ❖ Children had been trained in interviewing and note taking techniques;
- ❖ A plan of action had been drawn up for the completion of the evaluation;
- ❖ It had been decided to duplicate this process with the other areas in which the SWC project was operating and that the children from the LPK Centre would help to facilitate this.

Over the next two months the evaluation process began to scale down and to become incorporated as one of many activities for both project staff and children (for whom the project was only one part of their busy complex lives). During this time the following 'Phase II' activities were undertaken:

### **3.1.6 Forming Interview Teams**

The children broke into groups of three or four. A staff member joined each of the teams. At first we tried to mix girls and boys this was not successful.

### **3.1.7 Drawing Up Interview Schedules**

Following this, Question Guides were finalised in these small groups and an interview schedule was drawn up outlining which teams would interview which informants and when. This was completed in line with the sampling Part of the schedule was weekly meetings with Mai Ni Ni Aung (who had been employed temporarily to coordinate the process following the first two week period) and Karl Dorning who jointly facilitated the process. The interview schedule was busy and aimed to finish all the FGIs within a two-month period.

## **4 Gathering Information**

### **4.1 Children Conducted FGIs With All Informant Groups**

Children then set about interviewing the different informant groups. The only group that proved problematic was the Department of Social Welfare who declined the invitation to participate. This two-month period was completely directed by the children who took themselves into the community to interview other children, parents, authority figures and people in the markets. The quantity of information collected was astonishing and this summary report will not do justice to the amount of work that was involved.

### **4.2 Staff Compiled Quantitative Data**

At the same time as the children were collecting this data, staff in the evaluation team set about collecting data that already existed in the project records to address the same eight primary questions.

### **4.3 Three Day Evaluation Workshop**

The culmination of the FGI schedule and the staff data collection was a three-day workshop in which findings and recommendations were presented back to the group. This also coincided with the beginning of the DFID evaluation of the parts of the program funded by DFID.

The workshop was conducted in a highly participatory manner with 15 boys, 3 girls (the initial evaluation team), 18 staff and 6 parents participants including two staff members from WV (UK, programme officer and communication officer).

See Textbox 2 for a staff member's view of the childrens' reactions to the workshop process.

**Textbox 2: Children's Reaction to Workshop:  
Excerpt from diary of staff member on evaluation team**

The children (boys) were shouting and scrambling in answering the questions whereas the girls were initially shy and scared, hesitant and sitting quietly among the staff members. The boys overreacted. The girls were older than the boys and they only participated when the staff called out their name and asked. The parents remained silent during the data presentation. This time it was not necessary to motivate the children as much as in the preliminary workshop for planning the evaluation. They have developed their sense of understanding through weekly meeting and focus group discussion.

The method used included lectures, group discussions and interactive presentations. These conventional methods didn't always hold the children's interest, so instead arranged a dancing, singing, role plays. The idea of singing grabs their attention and releases their creative energies.

After the welcome and introduction of the participants, the first day started with a data presentation. It was observed that the children were not finding the presentation at all interesting and some of them kept talking. At the outset of the data presentation, the children got bored as the staff presented in English. Then, when staff members presented in Burmese and more to the children than to themselves with visual charts, the children seemed to be more interested and answered the questions without hesitation.

As the meeting progressed, the interest amongst the children grew and they participated actively and presented their views more freely. The boys talked more than girls. However, when the girls were encouraged closely by their teachers, they answered the questions very openly. After the SWOC analysis (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Constraints) of FGI data was presented, we realised why girls were reluctant to be involved. Because the girls thought that the teacher was biased against girls. They felt that they are not favoured by the teachers as much as the boys. Though the whole process was dominated by the boys, the effect was wonderful, invigorating and exhausting.

The children wanted more frequent breaks to relieve the pressure of the work. However, the workshop's designers found it difficult to allow these because of the extra time needed to finish the evaluation meeting.

Recreational events such as dancing and singing were organised every two hours during the meeting.

It was observed that the problems raised by the children were far removed from the thinking of the adults. They identified issues that affected negatively their daily lives.

## 5. EVALUATION CONSTRAINTS

The main constraints faced by the evaluation team included:

- ❖ This was WVM's first participatory evaluation. It took staff and children time to become accustomed to interacting and relating in collegial ways.
- ❖ Department of Social Welfare officials refused to be interviewed.
- ❖ Very few street or working children who do *not* come to the centre were interviewed, as they were afraid of the interviewers at first. Working children were underrepresented, as most come just for meals, and few participate in most other L.P.K activities. This was a more difficult group to involve in the evaluation as either team members or informants.
- ❖ There were technical difficulties with recording equipment, leaving us with only a written record of the focus group discussions.

## 6. PROCESS FINDINGS AND LESSONS

The key findings and lessons learned from the participatory process can be summarised as follows:

- ❖ Participatory empowerment evaluations take time.
- ❖ It is useful to have a full-time documenter/translator.
- ❖ When working with children, it is essential to mix work with games.
- ❖ Children of different age groups can work together, with older children leading younger ones.
- ❖ Explanations to the children about the goals, design and funding source of the program instilled in them a greater sense of responsibility.
- ❖ Working with the children means more can be done." Many hands make light work."
- ❖ Relationships between staff and children and among children themselves improve as a result of the process.
- ❖ Special attention needs to be paid to girls (if they are outnumbered by boys) to ensure that their voices are heard. (You may need to separate boys and girls for some activities, but bring them together to share their perspectives).
- ❖ Children should be involved in the on-going monitoring of project activities.
- ❖ We found that the children were able to design their own methods if they are given opportunity and motivated to do so.
- ❖ Presentation with visual aids is more effective than just verbal presentation in stimulating children to be involved.
- ❖ It was often difficult to talk with the girls because they are frightened and shy.
- ❖ The use of pictures as a medium enhances participation. Children enjoy writing and drawing.
- ❖ Staff needs to monitor children's SWOC and pictures, to see if they have understood the method and are doing the correct activity.
- ❖ Giving enough time can produce very valuable results.
- ❖ Games, energisers and singing are necessary to motivate participation and keep interest.
- ❖ Group work is always productive if monitored carefully.
- ❖ A new concept of childhood in which children are regarded as social actors.
- ❖ Evaluation facilitators and staff are trying to make them feel more comfortable and confident about their own ideas and more free to do things in their own way. To a certain extent, this was successful.
- ❖ One of the most important issues diminishing children's participation is poverty. Poverty disempowers everyone, especially children.

- ❖ We have to be careful to remember that true participation depends on provision for children, and protection of children and childhood.
- ❖ The provision of material and social resources is crucial, so that children are healthy and well educated enough to participate.
- ❖ ‘Smarter’ kids are always called on by staff to answer – it is important to give all children the chance to be active participants.
- ❖ Often, the children who have been to the school dominated the discussions. But there were three children from skills training who most eagerly answered all the critical questions in one discussion. Once again, special efforts should be made to promote active and equal participation of all types of children, for example, through sensitive facilitation of group discussion and through dividing children into groups in which the less confident children feel comfortable.

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS RELATING TO CHILDREN’S ROLE**

The evaluation team’s recommendations covered a range of topics. Here, we describe the key recommendations relating to the role of children in the project.

The evaluation team recommended that:

- ❖ The project move from its current service-delivery approach (expressed in the design and practice of the project) where children are beneficiaries of “adult-dominated” services to a children’s-empowerment approach where the aim is to help the children develop their capacity to become the central actors in shaping their own futures and those of other street and working children.
- ❖ Children be involved to a greater degree as active participants in project planning, implementation, management, monitoring and evaluation. We would encourage the project to promote the principle that children should be allowed the opportunity to speak for themselves rather than having others (adults) always speaking on their behalf. Any future funding proposal could reflect this “children’s empowerment philosophy” as a central theme. Possible steps in this direction could include:
- ❖ Creation of a children’s committee (of between 6 and 10) elected by the children themselves to suggest initiatives, seek feedback from other children about the program and ways to improve it. This committee should sit on the Steering Committee of the Project and take part in regular staff meetings.
- ❖ Continued involvement of the 18 elected children evaluators in the monitoring of the Yangon LPK Centre and in M&E training of other project participants (in Hlaingtharyar and Mandalay).
- ❖ Children’s participation in all forums that focus on children’s issues such as the recently formed International NGO Theme Group on the Convention of the Rights of the Child that meets regularly in Yangon;
- ❖ Children trained to become project implementers eg outreach street-life-skills educators; street-children advocates; literacy trainers of other street children.
- ❖ Forming a “pen pal” relationship with PSS/DFID representatives and other potential future donors and stakeholders, such as UNICEF.

## 8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This key aim of this Empowerment Evaluation was to improve the capacity of program participants, especially children, to evaluate and improve the program. This made for many fascinating moments, a lot of fun and occasionally some tears. The process was, for all involved, an exhausting yet exhilarating experience. The adults that took part were particularly privileged. Project staff were surprised, even amazed at what the children were capable of saying and doing. We were all challenged by the need to reconstruct our understanding of childhood and, with the children themselves, to seek avenues that would not only allow their voices to be heard but that would allow them the space and the security to become even more capable social actors in their own right. We all took the first steps on a longer journey. We will keep you informed of progress.

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