



CHILDREN  
AS ACTORS FOR  
TRANSFORMING  
SOCIETY

## Strategic Plan Executive Summary

Photo credits: CAUX-Initiatives of Change

## Executive Summary

This executive summary sets out the strategy for Children as Actors Transforming Society (CATS), an international conference series and programme on children's participation co-hosted by the Child-to-Child Trust, Initiatives of Change and Universal Education Foundation<sup>1</sup>. The strategy was developed between September 2013 and January 2014 through a collaborative process between children<sup>[2]</sup>, young people and adults.

### Why CATS?

Globally we are at a critical juncture, with growing environmental, economic and political challenges. Working in partnership with children and young people is essential if we are to find solutions to these challenges and create more just, sustainable, inclusive and equitable societies.

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<sup>1</sup> CATS is organised by these three organisations in partnership with Funky Dragon - the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales. They are also working with a range of other agencies including: Eurochild, Lumos, Korczak International Association, ELIANT, Intermèdes Robinson, various Initiative of Change national offices as well as individuals – including young people - whose work has contributed substantially to improving children's participation globally and in their countries (e.g. Gerison Lansdown, Sir Al Aynsley Green and Claire O'Kane).

*CATS is very important, it can serve as a wake-up call to youth and society in general. A lot of people, especially kids and teenagers don't know their rights, their abilities, and most importantly (in my opinion), how other people live, in other countries and different parts of the world.*

Feedback from a representative in the Cyprus Youth Parliament

## Participation matters!

**Participation empowers** children<sup>2</sup> in their diverse situations to make decisions about the primary issues that affect their lives (growing, learning, loving) and the lives of others and the environment. It is essential for children and young people to develop their own capacities and skills to participate fully in their communities and society.

**Participation is a fundamental human right** enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been signed by virtually every country.

**Participation is the building block of democracy.** Globally, it is the means to create active citizens & thriving civil societies - the foundations for dynamic communities and economies; hold governments to account, and where necessary challenge corruption and undemocratic practices.

**Participation delivers better outcomes.** If children are listened to, then the services designed to meet their needs will be more effective (and thus more efficient).

### Much to be done.

However, for most children, being heard and respected and having the opportunity to play a meaningful role in issues which affect them is not an option. There is much to be done to mainstream children's participation to ensure that all children are able to realize their right to be heard and have their viewpoints respected. **Implementing this right involves a profound and radical change in the status of children in most societies and the nature of relationships between adults and children.**

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<sup>2</sup> Children refers to all those who are under 18. For the purposes of this plan we will refer to both children and young people

## CATS Vision and Mission

**A world where children, young people and adults are working together in mutual respect towards a more just, inclusive and sustainable society where all can realize their fundamental human rights and potential.**

The **mission** of CATS is to enable children, young people and adults who are advocates for the rights and well-being of children to work together as agents of change and co-creators of a more just, sustainable, inclusive and equitable society.

## The CATS Experience

CATS is hosted by Initiatives of Change at their conference centre, Caux Palace, which is situated in the mountains overlooking Montreux and Lake Geneva, Switzerland.

It takes place over one week, providing a unique space that enables adults and children from diverse communities and contexts to live and work together to deepen their understanding of participation; share practical experiences, resources and tools; create networks and partnerships; and identify opportunities for future collaboration.

CATS offers:

- A programme *co-designed and co-led by children and adults*
- A unique space for adults and children to come together and live in *mutual respect*
- An opportunity for participants to deepen their knowledge of children's participation
- *Cutting edge insights* into the theories and practices of children's participation
- *A global space*, with all continents represented
- Ethical and meaningful participation of children and young people in planning, implementing and monitoring CATS.

CATS brings together a range of people and organisations committed to realizing children's fundamental right to participate in all matters that affect them, offering a space for shared agendas and platforms for initiatives to emerge.

CATS is promoting and supporting meaningful participation of children and young people of different ages, including children in the early years.

*CATS offered the children with intellectual disabilities who we work with the perfect opportunity to communicate and participate with children without disabilities. This was a very suitable challenge and next step for them to learn new skills and become more confident. The words of parents are the best illustration about the impact of the profound impact that the CATS experience had on their children: 'My son, he was shining, he was happy. He met so many people there. During his stay in the castle he became the same as the other kids, free, without barriers. He felt he was important. He decided to share his own opinion and to stand behind it. I came back to Bulgaria with a new person, who wanted to speak up. I hope here, in Bulgaria, nobody will break my son's wings.'*

Feedback from Lumos, which brought a delegation of children with intellectual disabilities and their carers

## Objectives and Outcomes

CATS is the only international conference series on children's participation guaranteed to run annually until at least 2017. It has the following objectives:

### a. Develop and support a community of practice

**CATS will enhance participants' understanding about children's participation**, exposing them to activities taking place globally from which they can learn. They will share good practices and develop additional skills and techniques to facilitate participation.

**Participants will leave better equipped with a 'toolbox' and competences** – based on shared knowledge and experience – that support children and young people in realizing their fundamental right to participate, to develop their capacities to become agents of change, to feel valued and to better understand their purpose.

**Participants will develop the skills to effectively monitor and evaluate children's participation.**

### b. Foster cross-sector partnerships

**CATS will break down barriers between sectors and disciplines** and will ensure a diversity of sectors (youth-led organisations, education, health, justice, social sector, etc.) is represented in each conference, including from the business and private sector.

**It will provide a bridge between different perspectives on child participation** through a mutual learning process and moving away from a fragmented image of the child and uncoordinated approaches.

*CATS provides a space that allows children's organisations from around the world to share their diverse experiences (working, living, knowledge, contexts, networking) to articulate and be part of a worldwide mobilization to promote the exercise of their rights. We have been able to establish networking relationships with other institutions working in the field of childhood, with whom we maintain contact and share information about the work we have been doing.*

Feedback from adults, INFANT, Peru

*Attending the CATS Conference with young people and children is a really good experience to recognise the benefits of intergenerational activities which can strongly benefit 'adults' as well as younger people. It also an educational tool to learn about different issues effecting people from around the world and how people are overcoming them. Linking, liaising and networking with diverse organisations is also a huge benefit.*

Feedback from the Tutu Foundation UK

### c. Advocate to mainstream children's participation

**Participants increase their understanding about what their organisation must do in order to mainstream participation.** They will learn techniques for advocating the importance of participation to key stakeholders and equip them with the evidence to make a convincing case.

**Participants become ambassadors** of the notion that the fulfilment of children's rights (including the development of their physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects) is the fundamental building block for them to fully exercise their responsibilities as dignified human beings.

**Participants actively advocate for meaningful engagement with marginalized groups and communities of children** (including those with disabilities, those living in poverty, those from minority ethnic and/or indigenous backgrounds, those living in conflict situations and so on) in order to ensure more just, inclusive and equitable societies.

### d. CATS is recognized as an exemplar of good practice on children's participation globally

**CATS is a model of genuine and inclusive partnership between adults and children.** It will cultivate the capacities of children, young people and adults to work together in partnership for the transformation of society. In enabling children to realize their fundamental right to participate, it will also develop their capacities to become agents of change. The space provided by CATS will enable all to feel valued and to better understand their purpose and potential.

**Key stakeholders will see CATS as a force for child participation, and an opportunity to set up collective action.** They use CATS as a means to create a new impetus for child participation.

**Participants of different age groups, abilities, and backgrounds better understand each other and learn to live and work together.**

*Caux made me feel more confident in myself and my ability to help other people, be it children, adolescents, or even adults. (...) I learned compassion, acceptance, how to listen, to be heard, and to be proud of who you are and what you have to offer the world, at Caux. If children and young adults could learn these things- that sometimes the society that we live in doesn't teach us- then I think the world could truly grow into a better place. That's why I think it is worth investing in CATS!*

Feedback from a young participant from the United States,.



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