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A Ten-Year Retrospective: How Children Shaped Advocacy with Terre des Hommes Netherlands

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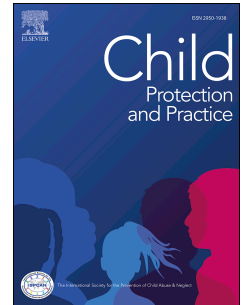
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**A Ten-Year Retrospective: How Children Shaped Advocacy with Terre des Hommes
Netherlands**

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Abstract

This article presents an in-depth analysis of children and young people's engagement in Terre des Hommes Netherlands (TdH NL) influencing work over the past 10 years. The Lundy framework is used to examine child participation across its four components: space, voice, audience and influence. Data were gathered through a comprehensive desk review, 32 semi-structured interviews with young people and 5 interviews with adult facilitators who participated in influencing activities. The findings indicate that while child and youth participation in influencing at local and subnational levels provided opportunities for meaningful participation, opportunities for engagement of children at national and international levels remained limited. The article provides evidence-based recommendations to enhance the inclusivity, safety and impact of future advocacy initiatives, and to promote meaningful child participation. Ultimately, it underscores the importance of integrating children's voices into decision-making processes to ensure systemic change and the sustainable protection of children's rights.

Introduction

Background

Terre des Hommes Netherlands (TdH NL) is a child rights organisation dedicated to stopping child exploitation. TdH NL defines child exploitation as ‘an individual, group or organisation taking advantage of an imbalance of power to get a child to engage in activities that are detrimental to the child’s wellbeing and development, and from which the alleged perpetrator(s) and/or third party(ies) gain some advantage¹.’ In our organisational Strategy and Theory of Change (2023-2030), entitled Listen Up!, ‘influencing’ is a critical component for eradicating all forms of child exploitation. Influencing encompasses various interventions aimed at putting child exploitation on the agenda of those with the power to drive systemic change, including policy makers, governments at all levels, decision-makers and other key actors. These efforts include organising targeted campaigns, building advocacy movements, partnering with like-minded actors, engaging media, lobbying, and, when necessary, litigation.

TdH NL has engaged in influencing work at local, national, regional and global levels for many years. However, aside from some key updates concerning legal and policy frameworks, as well as law enforcement practices and private sector engagement, influencing work by TdH NL has not been driven by a global or regional influencing strategic framework. Instead, advocacy initiatives have been mostly project-based, country-specific and rarely connected and aligned at national, regional or other higher levels.

To enhance the impact, coherence and sustainability of advocacy efforts, TdH NL has developed a robust global influencing agenda aligned with its Listen Up! Strategy. To inform this agenda, a review was conducted of the organisations’ and partners’ past and present influencing work. This report presents the findings of this review and lessons learned and outlines recommendations on how to engage children meaningfully in future programming, as well as offering a potential framework for other organisations endeavouring to put children at the centre of their work. It also builds on the field’s movement towards documenting knowledge generated from the ground up.

Why Child Participation Matters

Children have a right to express their views in all matters affecting them and a right to have those views given due weight, compared to other adult stakeholders, including parents, who design policies and programmes for them. Nonetheless, child participation often remains tokenistic and is not conducted meaningfully. Children’s rights to participation are universal and apply to all domains, including at the policy level. Therefore, governments must ensure that children and young people are given the space and capacity to meaningfully participate in the design, review and monitoring of laws, policies and other regulatory frameworks on matters affecting them. Their informed engagement is instrumental in holding duty bearers accountable for their obligations and commitments in relation to children’s rights.

This analysis draws on the Lundy Model of child participation² as the theoretical framework to organise, analyse and present the findings. The Lundy Model conceptualises the right of

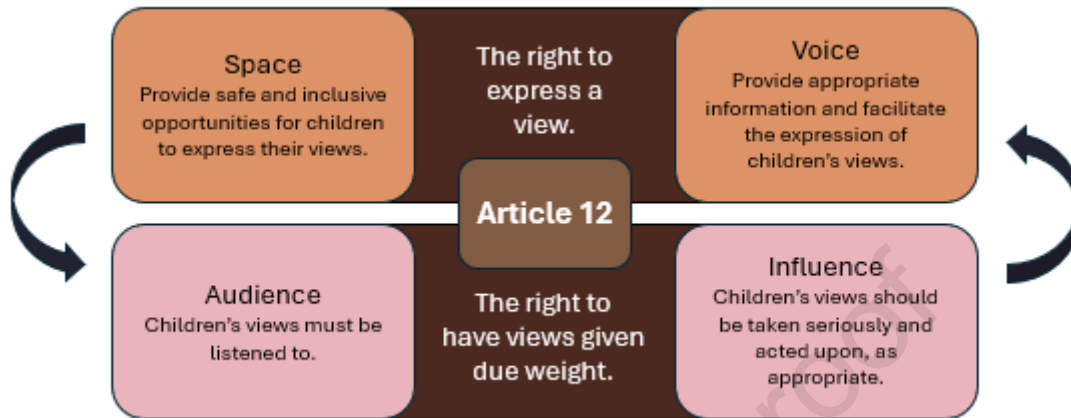
¹ Terre des Hommes Netherlands, Listen Up! Strategy 2023 - 2030 Lifting up children’s voices in an evidence-informed approach to stopping child exploitation through systemic change.

² Lundy, L., “‘Voice’ is not enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child”. British Education Research Journal 2007 (33(6)), 927–42. DOI:10.1080/01411920701657033

children to participate, as stated in Art. 12 of the UN Convention of the Child and relies on four components (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Lundy Model of Child Participation.



Aim of the study

This practice perspective provides 1) an analysis and a reflection on children and young people's experience in engaging with TdH NL and partners' influencing work over the past 10 years and 2) the outcomes of such engagement. It provides recommendations and guidance to inform TdH NL's global influencing strategy and revisit some of its approaches to children and young people's participation in influencing work, as well as contributing a potential framework for other NGOs to learn from our history. It aims to ensure that children's experiences are always safe, enjoyable, inspiring, meaningful, rewarding and impactful, even though advocacy processes are often complex, technical and lengthy, particularly at regional and global levels.

Research Questions

1. What influencing activities were carried out at TdH NL, between June 2013 and June 2023? And what were the experiences among children and youth participating in these activities?
2. What are the key outcomes of TdH NL's influencing work between June 2013 and June 2023?
3. What are the future opportunities for influencing on sexual exploitation of children, child labour, and child exploitation in humanitarian action?

Methodology

Desk review

We conducted an in-depth review of 50 reports from nine different programmes and projects, that were developed, managed and implemented by TdH NL and its partners over the period 2013-2023³.

³ Included programmes: Down to Zero (DtZ) programme 1.0 (2016-2020; 3 reports); Down to Zero (DtZ) Voice for Change programme (2020-2021; 4 reports); Down to Zero (DtZ) Building Back Better (BBB) programme (2021-2022; 6 reports); Girls

Semi-Structured interviews

We supplemented this with 32 semi-structured interviews with young people in India, Kenya, Thailand, and Uganda to gain more insights into the experiences of children and young people who participated in TdH NL and partners' influencing work.

Table 1. Participant demographics

Country	Number of respondents	Gender	Age range	Experience in advocacy work
India	8	Female	above 25	Were involved in GAA project advocacy activities when they were younger
Kenya	8	Female	20 to 30	Were involved in GAA project advocacy activities when they were younger
Thailand	8	1 male, 6 females, 1 transgender person	19 to 32	Were involved in Down to Zero project advocacy activities when they were younger
Uganda	8	Female	19 to 26	Involved in She Leads project advocacy activities when they were younger

Five complementary interviews were conducted with adults who were active as facilitators in the programmes, to gain information from a practitioner perspective.

Ethical approval for the interviews was granted by the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University, Thailand.

Findings

The research findings are presented using the structure of the Lundy Model of child participation. Please see the supplementary material for an overview of activities undertaken as part of each project reviewed in this paper.

Space

Children should be provided with safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their views⁴.

Advocacy Alliance (GAA) programme (2016 – 2020; 20 reports); Initiatives for Married Adolescent Girls' Empowerment (IMAGE) project – India (2018 – 2020; 2 reports); IMAGE Next project – India (2019 – 2024; 1 report); IMAGE Plus project - Bangladesh (2016 – 2020; 2 reports); Mica project India (2016 – 2021; 4 reports); She Leads Programme (2021 – 2025; 8 reports).

⁴ UNICEF, Guidance on Child and Adolescent Participation, p. 9. Available at:

<https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/19426/file/Child%20and%20Adolescent%20Participation%20in%20the%20CG>

Most children and young people indicated in the interviews that they experienced the immediate context in which advocacy activities took place as a safe environment.

Some room for improvement was indicated about the extent to which the gatherings and activities of young participants were safe and sensitive to risk. The reports showed that safeguarding measures and personnel training were in place to guarantee safe spaces for child-led advocacy activities. However, some interviewees indicated that risks for young people and children's safety resulted from the timing or location of the advocacy meetings.

“The schools and hotels are safe and secure. However, the insecurity in our area makes those at community level not to be 100% safe”. (Participant, Uganda)

“The timing for some of the activities also makes it difficult for children to participate. For instance, the fireplace conversation was held in the evening and ended after 23:00hrs, a time that is not safe for the girls and young women.” (Participant, Uganda)

The desk review also highlighted that arrangements were made to ensure the inclusivity of spaces for children and young people of all abilities, sexualities, races and gender identities. However, participants indicated that the spaces they participated in were not necessarily inclusive. For example, programmes aimed at increasing the sustained influence of girls and young women on decision-making helped to bring more attention to issues such as gender-based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM), or sexual abuse and exploitation. That said, some interviewees emphasised that these programmes excluded boys and young men based on their **gender**.

Regarding the inclusion of LGBTQI+ children and young people, country-specific challenges were experienced, leading to a lack of safety and inclusion based on **sexuality**. For instance, in contexts where homosexuality is still criminalised, there was a barrier to the inclusion of LGBTQI+ children as they might fear exposure as a result of their engagement in advocacy activities.

Furthermore, while the reports indicated that specific efforts have been made to include children with **disabilities**, services such as sign language interpretation or barrier-free access to the meeting location were not always available on site. Additionally, attitudinal barriers like cultural stigma around disability were said to hinder the inclusion of children with disabilities as they were not accepted in public life:

“Parents of the children with disabilities still hide them and do not want them to come to the activities. Unless we ask the participants whether there are children with disabilities in their community, no one mentions them. The parents still are not confident enough to say that they have children with disabilities.” (Facilitator, Uganda)

Voice

*Children should be supported in expressing their views*⁵.

Children and young people who engaged in TdH NL and partners' influencing work were generally happy with the information and capacity-building activities that provided them with adequate skills to express their views. However, in some cases, children and young people lacked information about the purpose of an advocacy activity and their role as youth advocates. This, at times, led to frustration because they didn't feel their participation was meaningful.

It appears that a lack of clarity about the purpose of a particular activity could be avoided by involving children already in the design of the influencing activities. As one practitioner expressed:

"We've come to learn that it's important for the girls to have ownership in the programme in a project. So, we've really learned to have them participate right from the planning." (Facilitator, Uganda)

In activities led by TdH NL and partners, young people reported being able to shape the activities and felt they had decision-making power. In contrast, when influential activities were carried out through collaborative partnerships with other networks, especially those organised by adults, children and young people felt that they had very little decision-making authority. It was reported that they perceived these processes as being "adult-led"⁶ and felt they were only informed about plans, budgets and activities "without being consulted or having actual decision-making power"⁷.

Audience

*Children's views should be listened to.*⁸

TdH NL's Theory of Change encourages work to ensure that 'children...have access to and utilise spaces where they feel safe and their voices are heard'. This is envisaged among 'professional bodies, intergovernmental organisations and human rights accountability mechanisms'. The findings concluded that while children and young people described engaging at these levels, they felt less heard or taken seriously at the higher (national, regional and international) levels than at local levels.

The research findings show that children and young people involved in TdH NL and partners' influencing activities had the opportunity to engage with a wide variety of stakeholders including:

- community leaders and mayors,

⁵ UNICEF, Guidance on Child and Adolescent Participation, p. 9. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/19426/file/Child%20and%20Adolescent%20Participation%20in%20the%20CG>

⁶ She Leads Mid-term Review Report, 2023, p. 52

⁷ She Leads Mid-term Review Report, 2023, p. 54

⁸ UNICEF, Guidance on Child and Adolescent Participation, p. 9. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/19426/file/Child%20and%20Adolescent%20Participation%20in%20the%20CG>

- parliamentarians,
- regional representatives of intergovernmental organisations (e.g., the African Union or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and
- United Nations Human Rights Mechanisms and high-level United Nations executives.

While no set of general criteria for the identification of target audiences was specified, stakeholders were generally selected based on their power to initiate change for children and context-specific considerations.

To communicate with their target audiences, youth advocates engaged in activities such as lobbying (e.g., presenting at lobby meetings with politicians or diplomats), media advocacy (e.g., filming documentaries, giving interviews with local media, or posting on social media) and participation in regional and international human rights mechanisms (e.g., by submitting alternative reports or as guest speakers in the United Nations working groups or the Human Rights Council). Advocacy actions such as demonstrations or offering petitions were uncommon due to safeguarding concerns. However, in some instances, children used creative and artistic ways to raise awareness about issues such as child abuse or child exploitation at the local level:

“We have held community dialogues and meetings where we present drama skits, songs and poems on issues affecting girls and young women like child trafficking and unsafe migration, as well as child marriage” (Participant, Uganda)

Targeted audiences actively considered and listened to the views of children and young people, with the experience being widely regarded as rewarding, particularly at the local level. Children felt accepted, respected, trusted, and heard by local leaders who invited them to join and contribute to local decision-making processes.

While these were positive findings, it was also highlighted that some audiences engaged children in an “ad hoc and often tokenistic”⁹ manner. This applied especially to children’s engagement with United Nations Human Rights Mechanisms as well as engagements with other national and regional stakeholders, such as parliamentarians or IGOs which were not described as providing spaces for meaningful and regular child participation.

“it seems the parliamentarians never understood the reason for meeting us, the young people. Therefore, one of them started mentioning that we should be in school instead of having such engagements with them” (Participant, Uganda)

Influence

*The views of children should be acted upon by target audiences.*¹⁰

Most advocacy activities are focused on the local and sub-national levels. It is also here where children and young people felt that they had the most significant impact. Often, they were able to observe positive changes as a direct result of their contributions and actions within

⁹ She Leads Mid-term Review Report, 2023, p. 112

¹⁰ UNICEF, Guidance on Child and Adolescent Participation, p. 9. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/19426/file/Child%20and%20Adolescent%20Participation%20in%20the%20CG>

their communities. One of the reasons identified for such successful engagement was the proximity and continued cycles of feedback that children and young people had with community leaders and local authorities.

“The most interesting part is the question and feedback session where the leaders explain what they have done and their plans on the recommendations provided because here, the leaders are asked many questions and they explain to us what they have done” – (Participant, Uganda)

Yet, the findings indicate that involving children and young people in decision-making at higher levels, such as national, regional, and global levels, has been difficult and not very effective, despite a few successful interventions at the regional and global levels. The challenges faced by children and young people in engaging at these higher levels include a lack of understanding of child participation by some target audiences, as well as the tokenistic nature of some influencing mechanisms, particularly at the global level.

In addition, debates and discussions in those global spaces were often very complex and technical and used a very limited number of language options which many youth advocates were not familiar with. Lack of feedback on decisions taken following children and young people’s interventions was also mentioned several times as a key challenge for children and young people engaging at higher levels, especially at regional and global levels.

Practice-based implications

Space

Influencing and advocacy activities should always take place in safe and inclusive spaces. Next to the continued implementation of strict safeguarding protocols and training, future programmes should also include a risk assessment of the neighbourhood in which the advocacy activities are taking place. Risks that leave participants vulnerable to crime or interpersonal violence might also be mitigated by ensuring that activities start and end during daylight hours and while sufficient means of transport are available.

Concerning gender-specific projects¹¹, it was recommended that programme designers and practitioners thoroughly weigh the benefits against the potential drawback of excluding young men and boys from the activities. In many cases, the inclusion of boys was seen as essential for addressing gender-specific issues such as gender-based violence or sexual abuse, as a young participant from Kenya explained:

“[...] boys need to be included in the programme together with the girls because they were also involved in those vices. The moment the boys become aware of the consequences of their actions; it would deter them from committing the vices.”
(Participant, Kenya)

Finally, influencing activities involving children with disabilities should make reasonable accommodations based on a thorough assessment of their needs and an adequate investment of resources (budget) to ensure appropriate access and inclusion.

¹¹ For example She Leads, Girls Advocacy Alliance programmes.

Voice

It is crucial to provide children and young people with comprehensive information about the purpose of specific influencing activities as well as on the different steps of concerned influencing processes, and the (short- and long-term) results expected from their contributions.

It is important to include children, where safe and possible, in the decision-making processes behind the scenes when planning and designing influencing activities. Especially in programmes where some of the influencing activities are conducted through collaborations with adult-led networks, the terms of the collaborative relationships should be revisited to involve children and young people at an earlier stage during the design of the activities. This could include engaging with children involved in programmes in the planning for a forthcoming round of funding for its continuation; or conducting consultations with children to gather their views on changes to laws or policies. Where there are limitations to this based on the best interests of children, this should be transparent, and discussed with young participants so that they understand the limitations of their meaningful participation.

Audience

We recommend designing and implementing a more extensive list of criteria for identifying suitable target audiences. In addition to occupying a position of power, target audiences should also be selected based on their knowledge and understanding of children's rights, child participation and child exploitation-related issues.

Targeted audiences with the power to create change for children but little knowledge about child participation should receive capacity building on children's rights, child participation and child exploitation issues. This could include policy officials at local, national or global levels; key community leaders; or other key decision-makers. This will ensure they value child participation and support children as advocacy champions.

Influence

Given the successes and achievements highlighted in the research findings about the engagement of children and young people in influencing work at local and sub-national levels, the report recommends that TdH NL builds on past achievements and successes and may invest additional resources to solidify and increase the scope of that engagement, provided it is systematically safe, meaningful, empowering and impactful.

However, to ensure impact at a much larger scale, with the ambition of creating systemic change to stop child exploitation, enshrined in the TdH NL Listen Up! Strategy, the engagement of children and young people at higher levels, such as national, regional and global levels, informed by local and subnational level influencing work, is critical.

Influencing work at national, regional and global levels provides key opportunities to hold duty bearers accountable for their obligations and commitments to protecting children from exploitation, and TdH NL and partners should continue actively engaging with and for children and young people in each of them. Although those processes are complex, lengthy

and often not child-friendly, policy and legislative reform processes are key elements in achieving systemic change to stop child exploitation.

When it comes to involving children and young people at national, regional and global levels, and addressing the challenges highlighted by research, we suggest that TdH NL and partners carefully assess and prioritise the opportunities for children and young people to directly participate in influencing platforms or decision-making processes. This should be done using specific assessment tools to determine when their participation would be most meaningful and impactful.

Next to direct participation, we suggest that children and young people can have their voices heard on a national, regional or global level without having to be physically present. This can be achieved through methods such as creating and sharing video messages, using traditional and social media, displaying posters and exhibitions, and developing advocacy briefs to share with relevant audiences.

Finally, it is also important for TdH NL and partners to ensure that children involved in advocacy work receive regular feedback about the decisions made based on their input and are informed if no action is taken by the responsible parties. Furthermore, it is important to emphasise that advocacy work at national, regional and global levels can be lengthy and complex, and thus it may take some time for their contributions to lead to action.

Limitations

By virtue of undertaking a retrospective study, often the amount of detail accessible about the extent of participation (both in the desk review and interviews) was not there. Furthermore, we were often constrained by the accessibility of data in internal data management systems and archives. Some projects were better recorded than others, and this gives us insight to how we can improve this in future. Lastly, given the interviews were conducted by current TdH NL staff, this could have caused bias as respondents may not have felt comfortable to report bad experiences for example. Independent data collectors could reduce such a bias.

Conclusion

By examining the experiences of children and young people engaged in advocacy across multiple countries, the report highlights both the successes and challenges of TdH NL's and partners' efforts. The findings reveal that local and subnational influencing levels provide the most effective platforms for meaningful child participation, where youth advocates can directly observe the impact of their efforts on community change. However, the report also points out the difficulties in achieving similar influence at national, regional and global levels, where children's participation often appears tokenistic and less impactful.

Measuring influence, especially in a social context or within organisations requires a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, and tracking the impact of individuals or groups on behaviours, opinions, and outcomes; often focusing on changes over time. Influence is often more about shaping mindsets and actions than simply achieving a specific result, making it different from impact, and yet TdH NL has shown that it is possible and is committed to reflecting more often on our impact. The use of other existing tools on measuring the impact of influencing¹² are encouraged to ensure standardised evaluation across

¹² MEL of Influencing, Oxfam, 2020. <https://melofinfluencing.org/>. [Accessed 11-08-2025].

the child protection sector. Terre des Hommes Netherlands also welcomes other NGOs and INGOs working to support children to apply the protocols and approaches developed by our organisation over the last decade.

The positive outcomes of child advocacy work are significant, both for the communities involved and for the youth themselves. Youth advocates not only contribute to long-term, systemic change but also experience personal growth, increased confidence, and a heightened sense of responsibility and trust within their communities. These outcomes are a testament to the potential of well-structured advocacy programs to empower young people, turning them into role models and change agents who inspire others and drive positive transformations in their surroundings.

Our findings show that the inclusivity of spaces for children and young people of all abilities, sexualities, races and gender identities were present - despite some exceptions in Uganda, where engaging children from the LBGTQI+ community may expose them to significant risk given that homosexuality is criminalised in that country. In addition, the GAA and She Leads Programmes, programmes focused primarily on girls and young women, have faced challenges to involve boys and young men in influencing activities.

With regard to children with disabilities, some efforts have been made to ensure their inclusion in several influencing groups and activities. However, there were instances where children with disabilities felt left out of the activities due to a lack of adequate support, like the provision of sign language interpreters for children with hearing impairment. Therefore, the needs of children with disabilities should be more carefully taken into account in the design and budgeting of influencing activities.

In conclusion, while there is still work to be done in enhancing the effectiveness of child participation in influencing work at higher levels, the report highlights the importance of continuing to invest in and improve local advocacy initiatives and increase interactions and feedback loops between those different levels of influencing work.

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Supplementary material

Contribution of authors

Francois-Xavier Souchet coordinated the research project, contributed to data extraction, coding of findings and to the writing of the research report.

Bella Bourgeois contributed to the desk review, conducted all interviews with partner staff (adult facilitators), coded data from the desk review and interview transcripts into the online coding software Atlas.ti, and contributed to the finding analysis, and to the writing of the research report.

Subrat Kumar Panda, Daniel Munaaba, Caroline Parmet, Srida Tantaatipanit, Natcha Walai, Srida Tantaatipanit and Kanyapak Sukyu identified the young people as well as adult respondents who were interviewed and coordinated the interviews of young people with colleagues or local partners, or conducted the interviews themselves (Srida Tantaatipanit, Natcha Walai). They also produced and shared the interview transcripts with the research team.

Eva Notté provided technical support, particularly regarding the use of the Terre des Hommes Netherlands, Netherlands ThaiHotline, Thailand Childline Foundation, Thailand 1 2 3 online coding software, Atlas.ti, and reviewed research reports.

Isabella Lanza Turner prepared the manuscript for publication and coordinated the submission process.

Kimberley Anderson oversaw the project, providing methodological guidance, tools to support the completion of the research project, reviewed earlier drafts and provided manuscript revisions.

Additional methodological details

Two data collection methods were used:

Desk review of internal sources (mainly activity reports and evaluation reports) depicting the influencing work of TdH NL and partners, and the participation of children and young people in such work. The eight programmes and projects were identified and included in the Research Protocol because most of them are signature projects which have been critical for the work of TdH NL and partners to protect children from child exploitation during the past seven years

Semi-structured interviews in four countries (India, Kenya, Thailand and Uganda) with young adults who participated in TdH NL and partners' influencing work when they were under eighteen years old with partners' personnel who have supported children and young people's engagement in influencing work in the four above mentioned countries.

Desk review

Scope of the desk review

Programme and project reports, identified as key sources for this desk review were identified and extracted from:

the TdH NL Program Information Management System (PRIMAS), which is the current online information management system that is being used by the organisation to store and manage all project related documents and information.

the TdH NL Google Drive where all types of documents or information produced or stored by TdH NL is available.

Members of the research team also contacted TdH NL colleagues connected to the concerned programmes and projects (Girls Advocacy Alliance (GAA), She Leads Programme, Mica project (India), the Initiatives for Married Adolescent Girls Empowerment (IMAGE) projects in India and Bangladesh, the Down to Zero (DtZ) programme 1.0, the Down to Zero Building Back Better Programme as well as the Down to Zero Voice for Change Programme)) to confirm that our list of annual narrative reports as well as evaluation reports was comprehensive or identify potential gaps and share additional reports that could not been retrieved either in PRIMAS or on the TdH NL Google Drive.

Inclusion criteria

Each of the programmes and projects purposefully selected had an advocacy component, which represented a key priority for this desk review to assess how TdH NL and partners have been able to engage children and young people in influencing those who have the power to create change towards better preventing and addressing child exploitation.

The documents that were reviewed were programme and project narrative activity reports, learning reviews as well as programme and project evaluation reports, mostly mid-term evaluation reports and end of term evaluation reports. Those reports were identified in the Research Protocol as the sources that would provide the most valuable and relevant information to help us understand and assess the level of participation and engagement of children and young people in TdH NL and partners' influencing work as well as its progress, meaningfulness and its impact.

Exclusion criteria

Most of the programmes and projects mentioned in the previous sections were developed and implemented by Alliances of non-governmental organisations, including TdH NL, and some advocacy interventions and activities were undertaken by organisations other than TdH NL and implementing partners and in regions and countries where TdH NL does not operate, including Latin America (Down to Zero programme).

The purpose of this desk review was to conduct an internal review and analysis of children and young people's engagement in TdH NL and partners' influencing work. This means, the research team has excluded reports and other programme and project documents (or specific

sections in those documents) which reflected activities undertaken by other organisations in regions where TdH NL and partners are not managing and implementing programmes or projects. While reviewing reports of some of those multi-country programmes, including DtZ, GAA or She Leads, we have extracted data solely coming from regions (East Africa and Asia) and countries where TdH NL operates (e.g. Bangladesh, India, Kenya, Philippines, Thailand, Uganda).

All programmes and project documents which were not annual narrative reports and/or programmes and project evaluation reports, including project narrative proposals, training materials, or methodological tools have been excluded from this review. These were not considered as key documents that provide valuable and relevant data with regard to the concrete engagement of children and young people in TdH NL and partners' influencing work.

Desk review coding process

After all documents were identified and selected, they were uploaded into the analysis and coding software - Atlas.ti, where the coding phase took place. This coding phase was conducted manually, with members of the research team reading each of the documents and tagging the most relevant sections. This was done using different codes to classify the different quotations tagged according to information that they would bring with regard to influencing work and the engagement of children and young people in such work.

Some codes were pre-identified on the basis of the research questions and theoretical frameworks/models underpinning the research project, and some of them were added as the coding progressed and new themes were identified (e.g. Advocacy with the Private sector). Thirty-seven codes in total were used for the desk review.

After the initial coding phase was completed, the 37 codes were grouped under five categories to further organise and clarify the analysis. The breakdown of the codes can be seen in Appendix 2.

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in four countries (India, Kenya, Thailand and Uganda) with young adults who participated in TdH NL and partners' influencing work when they were under eighteen years old and also with partners' personnel who have supported children and young people's engagement in influencing work in the four above mentioned countries.

Before conducting the interviews, the research team received a favourable ethical approval from the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University, Thailand.

Scope of the interviews with young adults who have experience engaging in TdH NL and partners' influencing work

In order to get a better understanding of the reality of the participation and engagement of children and young people in TdH NL and partners' influencing work, the desk review was complemented with a series of semi-structured interviews. These were conducted with young adults who have an effective experience engaging in advocacy work under TdH NL and partner's projects when they were under eighteen years old.

TdH NL Country Teams and partners in India, Kenya, Thailand and Uganda identified and selected young adults who have experience participating in TdH NL and partners' influencing work on the basis of the selection criteria defined in the Research Protocol.

Initially, 32 semi-structured interviews with eight identified young adults were expected to take place in each of the four selected countries (India, Kenya, Thailand and Uganda).

30 interviews were conducted with young adults: eight interviews in Uganda, Kenya, and India, as planned, and six interviews were held in Thailand. The Thailand partners also conducted a focus group discussion with four young adults, a format that was more suitable for the selected participants.

The interviewees were categorised by age, location, and experience with TdH NL and partners' projects and influencing work.

In India, the eight respondents were young women above 25 from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana State, who had been involved in GAA project advocacy activities in the age group of 18 to 24. All interviews were conducted in February 2024.

In Kenya, eight young women aged 20 to 30 years old from Kwale County, previously involved in TdH NL and partners' influencing work through the Girls Advocacy Alliance, were interviewed. All interviews were conducted in March 2024.

In Thailand, interviews involved four young people (one male and two female aged from 20 to 32 years old and one transgender person aged 23) from Bangkok and Suphanburi. The online focus group discussion involved four young women aged 19 to 31. All interviewees participated in Down to Zero programmes advocacy activities. The interviews and the focus group discussion were conducted in January and February 2024.

In Uganda, the eight interviewees were young women aged 19 to 26, from Kampala, Bugiri, Napak and Moroto districts, engaged in TdH NL and partners' lobby and advocacy work through the She Leads programme for two to three years. All interviews were conducted in March 2024.

TdH NL employees or partner staff in India, Kenya and Uganda contacted each interviewee by phone. Interviewees were provided with information contained in the Participant Information Factsheet included in the Research Protocol (information about the purpose of the research, their participation in that initiative, data processing and next steps). After this introduction, TdH NL and partners' staff conducted the interviews, using the list of interview questions contained in the Research Protocol.

In Thailand, the implementing partner staff organised a Focus Group Discussion with four selected young adults. The introduction and discussion followed a similar process to the one in the other three countries.

All interviews and the Focus Group Discussion in Thailand were conducted by staff highly skilled and experienced in interviewing children and young people.

Safeguarding measures described in the Research Protocol were strictly implemented before, during and after the interviews and focus group discussion.

The country teams coordinated the anonymised transcription of all interviews and transcripts were sent to the Research Team by TdH NL Country Teams in the four concerned countries. Interview-related materials (consent forms, interview transcripts) were safely stored (both electronic copies and hard copies). Audio records of interviews and the focus group discussion in Thailand were deleted after the interview transcripts were typed. The Focus Group Discussion transcript, which was written in Thai language, was sent to a translator for translation into English language. The translator was requested to delete all interview related materials following their translation into English.

The research team complemented the interview transcripts from the above-mentioned semi-structured interviews with the transcript from a focus group discussion held by Terre des Hommes Netherlands in September 2023 in Uganda with ten girls and young women who participated in the She Leads Programme influencing activities.

Scope of the interviews with adult facilitators

In order to complement data from the desk review and from semi-structured interviews with young adults who have engaged in TdH NL and partners' influencing work in the past, the research team included some interviews with TdH NL and partners' staff who had/have experience in involving children and young people in advocacy work. They are referred to as "adult facilitators" in the report. Interviewing them gave them an opportunity to provide the

research team with additional information about their own perspective, role, methods, materials and tools used in relation to the participation of children and young people in influencing related activities.

In order to conduct the interviews with adult facilitators, members of different TdH NL offices in the countries of interest were contacted and asked if they could refer us to some relevant adults who have experience facilitating the projects and working with youth advocates. After email addresses were passed on, the individuals were contacted regarding the possibility of an interview, explaining what it would entail and if they were interested in participating. Positively, every individual who was emailed sent a response stating that they were willing to participate.

Five interviews were conducted; two interviews with adult facilitators of the She Leads project in Uganda. In India, two adult facilitators of the Girls Advocacy Alliance program were interviewed. Finally, there was a last interview with one adult facilitator from the Down to Zero project in Thailand.

In all three countries, interviewed adult facilitators were implementing partners' staff identified and referred to the research team by TdH NL Country Teams.

All interviews were kept confidential and anonymous, by removing all personal identifiable information from the moment of note taking. The interviews were semi-structured, meaning that a few questions were written down in order to guide the interview, but the conversation could flow freely, giving space for follow up questions to be asked on the spot. There was no need for a translator except for one interviewee in India, who had a colleague there just in case she was unable to explain herself as fluently in English as needed, however she mainly expressed herself very well on her own.

Interviews coding process

After all interviews were completed and the transcripts were gathered, the coding process began using the Atlas.ti software (the same online platform used to code data from the desk review). Inductively, the interviews were read line by line and coded for themes that related to the research questions.

Programmes included

Down to Zero (DtZ) programmes :

- Down to Zero (DtZ) programme 1.0 (2016-2020)
- Down to Zero (DtZ) Voice for Change programme (2020-2021)
- Down to Zero (DtZ) Building Back Better (BBB) programme (2021-2022)

Girls Advocacy Alliance (GAA) programme (2016 - 2020)

Initiatives for Married Adolescent Girls' Empowerment (IMAGE) projects :

- IMAGE project - India (2018 - 2020)
- IMAGE Next project - India (2019 - 2024)
- IMAGE Plus project - Bangladesh (2016 - 2020)

Mica project India (2016 - 2021)

She Leads Programme (2021 - 2025)

Programme activities

<i>Selected projects</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>Countries</i>	<i>Advocacy activities</i>
<i>Girls Advocacy Alliance (GAA)</i>	<i>2016-2020</i>	<i>Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Philippines, India, Bangladesh</i>	<i>At the local level, findings from reviewed programmes highlighted the engagement with community leaders, religious leaders, opinion shapers with support from teachers, parents, local civil society organisations and media who were involved as allies. The aim of the engagement was to influence local regulations (by-laws/customary law) and practices related to child protection. At subnational level, influencing activities have mainly engaged with mayors and local government representatives to influence local regulations (e.g. district, province) regarding child protection. At regional level engagement with key regional intergovernmental organisations in both Africa and in Asia to develop regional policy frameworks to better protect children against abuse and exploitation (statements presented by children and young people during regional events) In Africa: the African Union, the the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) were the main target audiences In Asia:</i>
<i>She Leads Programme</i>	<i>2021 - 2025</i>	<i>Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda</i>	<i>In Southeast Asia: representatives from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), In South Asia: representatives of the South Asia South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) through its South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC). At global level with relevant international human rights mechanisms including the Universal Periodic Review, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child UN Commission on the Status of Women) as well as with senior UN officials, including Executive Director of UN Women to monitor duty bearer's efforts and achievements with</i>

			<i>regard to their obligations and commitments in relation to child protection, and to hold them accountable (She Leads Project)</i>
<i>Mica project (India)</i>	<i>2016 - 2021</i>	<i>India</i>	<i>No significant advocacy initiatives led by or involving children and young people identified in project documentation.</i>
<i>Initiatives for Married Adolescent Girls Empowerment (IMAGE) India</i>	<i>2018-2020</i>	<i>India</i>	
<i>Initiatives for Married Adolescent Girls Empowerment (IMAGE) NEXT India</i>	<i>2019-2024</i>	<i>India</i>	
<i>Initiatives for Married Adolescent Girls Empowerment (IMAGE) PLUS Bangladesh</i>	<i>2016 - 2020</i>	<i>Bangladesh</i>	
<i>Down to Zero (DtZ) programme 1.0</i>	<i>2016-2020</i>	<i>India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand</i>	<i>At local level: awareness raising activities among vulnerable communities to inform about child sexual exploitation, including online, risks and encourage the use of reporting mechanisms by community members, influenced by community leaders. At subnational level, influencing activities have mainly engaged with mayors and local government representatives to influence local regulations (e.g. district, province) regarding child protection against sexual exploitation. At national level : lobbying activities with parliamentarians, government officials, towards influencing laws and policies as well as with public and private sector stakeholders to influence their policy frameworks (Philippines, Thailand were very active)</i>
<i>Down to Zero Voices for Change Programme</i>	<i>2020-2021</i>		
<i>Down to Zero Building Back Better Programme</i>	<i>2021-2022</i>		

Highlights

A Ten-Year Retrospective: How Children Shaped Advocacy with Terre des Hommes Netherlands

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- This 10 year retrospective reviews how advocacy for and by children has shaped an international NGO's outcomes
- Children face challenges in meaningful participation at national and global advocacy levels, whereas local-level advocacy can yield tangible results for youth-driven change.
- Safe and inclusive spaces are key to effective child engagement in advocacy.
- Youth advocates express a need for clearly defined roles and increased decision-making responsibilities
- Recommendations focus on enhancing safety, inclusivity, and feedback for future advocacy work.

Declaration of interests

☒ The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

☐ The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests: