

Call for input for the 2024 reports by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to development

2. The right to development of children and future generations

Felm wishes to express its gratitude to engage in dialogue with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to development concerning the 2024 report *the right to development of children and future generation*. Felm has submitted a separate, joint input together with ACT alliance and Christian Aid concerning the thematic report on *Climate Justice: Loss and damage*.

In this paper Felm focuses on highlighting some of the key issues related to the right to development of children on the basis of the questionnaire. Felm uses examples stemming from its work particularly in Tanzania and Cambodia.

The right to development of children and future generations

1. What does the right to development mean for children in line with the relevant normative instruments? What about the right to development of future generations?

Africa's population is projected to grow to 2.5 billion by 2050. While the growing trend offers many opportunities, potential risks also occur, one of the biggest being the increase in youth unemployment in urban and rural areas that may trigger political instability. To harness the growing potential of the youth, investments in young people need to be developed and strengthened. Governments need to adopt policies, strategies and laws that strengthen the access to quality education and vocational training, promote entrepreneurial skills and competencies, facilitate youth access to financial services, promote decent and equitable jobs especially in rural areas, and promote youth participation in political and economic decision-making processes. Investments in young people need to be determined and decided upon by young people themselves.

Furthermore, access to sexual and reproductive health services and education is a key investment and should be secured by legislative measures. The fulfillment of sexual and reproductive rights prevents teenage pregnancy and child marriages as well as helps to ensure that girls can continue in education. Comprehensive sexuality education should be offered as part of the formal curriculum.

Supportive child-friendly laws are fundamental. In Tanzania, the Law of Marriage Act (LMA) 1971 sets the minimum age for boys to marry as 18 years, but for girls, the minimum age is 15, and as low as 14 for both girls and boys with the consent of the court. After a successful court case by Rebeca Gyumi on the unconstitutionality of the LMA, Msichana Initiative vs. Tanzania in 2019, Tanzania was ruled to revise the law within 12 months. The Parliament received the ruling and took it back to the communities for discussion instead of reviewing the law. In 2021/2022 Tanzania received numerous recommendations as part of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process on child marriage and to accelerate the revision of the LMA. Most were only noted, instead of being accepted. Civil society, including interfaith actors, has an instrumental role in lobbying for revision of the Law of Marriage Act (LMA) and to transform harmful norms and values to

ensure an end to child marriage in Tanzania. Felm together with Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and other partners are advocating for the revision, to support the fulfilment of a child's right to development.

2. How are the human rights of children and future generations impacted by development-related decisions made by the present adult generation?

As global average temperatures continue to rise, the world's most marginalized communities remain disproportionately affected, in both developing and developed countries. Children are amongst the most climate-vulnerable and they are among those who face the highest burdens and are often left out of climate change policy- and decision-making. Felm has witnessed firsthand in its countries of operations, how climate change has already serious implications on the full enjoyment of human rights, including the right to life, food, health, water and sanitation, to adequate housing and to education, and self-determination of children. Climate change is fundamentally an intergenerational issue, as its consequences will be felt most profoundly by future generations, including today's children. By ensuring that children's rights are protected and their voices are heard in climate policy decisions, intergenerational equity and justice should be also promoted.

For example, Cambodia, one of the [most disaster-prone countries](#) in the world, has suffered significant loss of life and economic loss due to floods and droughts during several decades. The natural hazards have been recognized as one of the main drivers of poverty. The current Cambodian Government's climate change plans concentrate on infrastructure that is needed to implement country-wide actions. However, emphasis should also be put to build the resilience of Cambodian families to safeguard the protection, safety, and wellbeing of their children as well as protect children from being separated from their families. Flooding, drought and altered rainfall have a direct effect on the rice harvests, the quantity and quality of fish stocks, and food security. This increases the health risks to vulnerable children and families and increases rates of malnutrition. Climate change drives inequality, creating and prolonging poverty traps, impacting women and children disproportionately, and magnifying patterns of gender inequality. Many health risks due to climate change show gender differentials, with the life expectancy of women and girls being lower in disasters, and in places where women have a low socio-economic status. This also leads to children becoming separated from their families. Family separation in Cambodia leads to many children and young people being placed in Residential Care Institutions as the priority option for their care, rather than being cared for in a family.

3. How to ensure a meaningful participation of children and future generations in development-related decisions at all levels?

Different types of international organizations can play a fundamental role in supporting the participation of youth and children, particularly in international arenas by offering them the platforms to speak themselves. Furthermore, special efforts should be made to secure the meaningful participation of the most vulnerable groups, such as children with disabilities, that often face significant obstacles in participation at all levels. States particularly must ensure meaningful participation of marginalized groups and make sure their needs will be met in decision-making processes as well as during implementation.

To ensure the meaningful participation of children, one of Felm's partner organization in Cambodia, implements and promotes a model of community mobilization. It uses participatory facilitation tools to support community people, including vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, to assess the potential resources, opportunities, threats and risks they see in their community, and to identify the issues affecting their community's infrastructure, social protection systems, family welfare and child protection in

the face of climate change. Children and other groups are supported to assess their community's vulnerability to the effects of climate change, including the increased risk of child exploitation and family separation, and to consider actions that will build their community's capacity to adapt to these effects and mitigate the risks. They develop plans for actions to address the issues they have identified, gather appropriate resources, and implement the plans, as well as take immediate steps to intervene in cases of child abuse and family breakdown. This process empowers communities, enhances sustainability, and supports climate change resilience, reduces child protection risks and child rights violations, as well as builds up the resilience of vulnerable families, so that fewer children will be separated from their families in the future.

4. How to integrate an intersectional approach to the participation of children to ensure that differentiated impacts on children due to various discriminations, exclusions or vulnerabilities are considered?

Felm's ongoing program (2023-2028) *Towards inclusive and sustainable societies* is guided by the principles of equal and diverse partnerships, adaptability, and inclusion. These principles are reflected in the rights-based approach applied in the 6-year program, that covers all the work Felm does. The program aims at strengthening inclusion and recognizing agency of vulnerable groups such as children and youth, as these groups are being widely in risk of remaining marginalized and unheard in decision-making processes within societies. Resilience and inclusion of these vulnerable groups as well as their rights are also promoted. The emphasis on inclusion links the Felm Programme closely to the Agenda 2030 and its global commitment to leave no-one behind.

One of the cross-cutting themes of Felm's program is gender justice, aiming to increase inclusion throughout the program. Gender justice in Felm's program work means equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for women and men and all other genders. Felm strives for gender transformative, intersectional approach, that recognizes and addresses underlying structural causes of inequality, such as norms and power relations. Intersectionality is used as a lens to understand how different identity factors – such as age, disability, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, location, and education – interact with gender. The multiplicative effect of these factors to individuals or communities are considered in the design and implementation of program activities. The primary aim of the targeted gender justice work is to address root causes of gender inequalities e.g. by promoting inclusion of women and girls in the processes and supporting the empowerment of women and girls with disabilities. In the mainstreaming of gender justice specific attention is paid to strengthening the awareness and capacities of Felm and its partners in gender analysis.

There are numerous of good practices at a local level how to enhance the full participation of children and youth with disabilities and these practices should be scaled up. For example, in Ethiopia 500 public schools are now inclusive due to the support provided by Felm together with the Ministry of Education. The interventions have included a thorough mainstreaming of sign language abilities in all structures. Deaf children have received special education and a new dictionary, and the Deaf Education Support Project organized in-service training for teachers, which increases the opportunities for deaf children to receive quality education in rural Ethiopia.

5. What measures should be taken to protect and empower child human rights defenders?

Child human rights defenders are often in particularly vulnerable position and require protection, support and empowerment to act as human rights defenders. Children face different types of age-related barriers and risks: some are underrated and judged, some face threats and attacks. Online/cyber bullying and other

Felm¹⁸⁵⁹

forms of violence introduce additional set of problems, which are very concrete to young people including child human rights defenders that spend more and more time online.

Whether offline or online, the protection and empowerment starts by recognizing when a child acts as a human rights defender or wants to do so. A child needs protection by adults and states but in a way that does not hinder child's opportunities to advocate in a secure and safe manner. Special attention should be provided for children that belong to the most marginalized groups, such as children with disabilities, and to their wishes and equal opportunities to become a child human rights defender if they wish to do so.

Through its work, Felm is seeks opportunities to enhance children's right to participate meaningfully, including creating child human rights defenders possibilities to advocate their issues. Children's and youth's meaningful, safe, and appropriate participation is highly important for ensuring sustained child well-being and creating inclusive and just societies with informed and engaged citizens. Participation empowers children and improves their self-esteem, fosters their ownership, and gives them concrete opportunities to affect matters that influence their lives.

Felm is an internationally active organization established in 1859 and one of the largest Finnish civil society organizations working in global development. Felm's work aims to promote human dignity and justice around the world. Felm currently works in 24 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America with nearly 100 local and international partner organizations. The majority of Felm's actions take place in the least developed countries. Felm's programme applies the human rights-based approach, including the principles of inclusion, participation, non-discrimination, equality, transparency, and accountability. Felm promotes human rights together with its partners.

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