

**GLOBAL CONSULTATION ON CHILDREN'S
RIGHT TO PLAY**

**GLOBAL CONSULTATION SYMPOSIUM-CARDIFF
TUESDAY JULY 5, 2011**

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Introduction

As this conference also coincides with IPA's Golden Jubilee may I start by adding my voice to the many congratulatory messages in honour of this historical milestone in the history of IPA.

May I also take this opportunity to thank the organizers of this unique international conference for their good work and above all for giving me the opportunity to participate in the symposium and share the experience of the Global Consultation on the Children's Right to Play held in Nairobi – Kenya.

It was a tremendous honour and privilege for Nairobi to be included among the 8 Global Consultation Sites and us in Kenya viewed this with great pride and excitement.

I would also like, on behalf of our Nairobi based IPA interim Committee to commend IPA Council for their efforts to lobby the United Nations Committee on the Right of the Child to grant a Day of Discussion on Article 31 which led to the Global Consultation Project initiative.

In Kenya, and vast parts of the African continent, the prevailing conditions of poverty, famine, malnutrition, social and armed conflicts which have been exacerbated by the advent of HIV and AIDS pandemic make it realistically difficult to isolate play as a deserving item on the list of critical priorities in Child Development and Survival Agenda. This perception, I dare say, forms the main obstacle in realizing the objectives and the role of play in child development and the concern of IPA to promote, preserve and protect the Children's Right to Play.

THE NAIROBI CONSULTATION

The Nairobi Consultation was planned and organized by an interim committee which was hosted by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development which also availed their representatives to participate in all the planning sessions.

The formal Consultation activities took place in two different days and venues. The first high level Consultation Launch was held in a hotel conference hall and was officiated by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development together with the Secretary of Children's Affairs.

The proceedings were based on the Consultation Guide Kit.

The atmosphere at the conference hall was euphoric. There was an interesting display of many different playing materials both modern and traditional, pictures drawn by children, photos, newspaper and magazine cuttings focusing on play. The participants did not only view but played. The chief guests also tried their hands at playing and handling various play materials which they said reminded them of their childhood.

The keynote address was given by the chief guest who acknowledged play as a significant component in the holistic development of the child and urged the conference to come up with recommendations to be incorporated in the policy proposals for consideration in the ongoing review of Children's Act and Education Curriculum Review.

Participants numbering over 60 represented teachers, parents, social workers, government ministries, non-governmental organizations, private sector, researchers, university professors, professionals working with the disabled, children in prison, refugees and the internally displaced, designers/planners/architects, curriculum developers, children, child - minder, youth and media.

They engaged in lively, enriching plenary and group discussions and several inhibiting factors or barriers to play emerged from the proceedings. They are contained in our full report which include, but not limited to the ones I have chosen to talk about.

Time
Space
Insecurity/Safety
Environment

TIME

Children are denied time to play both at home and school largely through pressure from overcrowded, academic, examination – driven curriculum.

In addition to pressure from homework and tuition, children are burdened with domestic chores including fetching water, firewood, house - work and tending animals.

In some cases the advent of HIV and AIDS has compounded the situation by forcing orphaned children to play the role of child parents thereby limiting their time and scope for playing.

SPACE

In the urban areas, a large majority of children live in the slums and informal settlements which are hazardous and overcrowded with neither space nor conducive atmosphere for any form of play.

Many open spaces once meant for public parks now have unauthorized structures used for petty commercial activities such as open air markets.

In the more affluent areas homes which had large compounds have been replaced with crowded blocks of apartments and flats designed and constructed in such a way that no space is left for children to play.

Schools have also been licensed with little or no provision for playing space.

INSECURITY/SAFETY

The emergence of rampant child abuse, child trafficking and kidnapping have brought general fear and despondence thereby causing near total restriction by parents to let their children go out to play. Overcrowded informal settlements, open drainage, sewer, narrow passages and in disciplined motor traffic make it risky and unsafe for any outdoor play for children.

In rural areas, open fields often harbour snakes and in rivers crocodiles are detrimental to play. Even attacks by wild animals on children who take time to play while grazing their animals are known.

ENVIRONMENT

Where space is available, many times the environment may not be conducive and safe for children to play. Open spaces have attracted people who dispose garbage rendering them unsafe. This calls for precaution which must be taken to ensure maintenance with standard safety requirements.

Recently, in Kenya, a sad example is an incident where 5 children lost their lives while innocently playing in an open field with a metal object which blew them up into small pieces. The object turned out to be an ordinance abandoned bomb left behind after practice by the military.

Here the children lost their lives while exercising their desire to play in an environment which was hazardous and not inspected or maintained.

CHILD PARTICIPATION

I would like to make a few remarks on the second activity of the Nairobi Consultation which focused on the children. It was a more informal, participatory and activity driven occasion. The occasion was also officiated by the Minister for Gender, Children and Social Development and attracted over 200 children between 6 – 15 years old from schools and children's institutions accompanied by teachers, parents and chaperons.

They converged in a centre in an open playground and just played. They danced, sung climbed trees, swung, jumped with ropes, played with balloons and played traditional games and just had fun.

Some volunteers had offered to conduct an assessment of what play means to the children and asked them questions at random.

The children expressed themselves freely and what they said basically concurred with what the adults identified during the launch of the Consultation.

EXPRESSION

The Consultation created awareness and highlighted the importance of play as an important component in the holistic development of the child. There was keen interest shown by parents, children, teachers and the government. We witnessed this even during the more recent activities on May 28, 2011 when for the first time we celebrated the World Play Day. Over 2,000 children and adults experienced fun and free play.

During the Consultation we came up with many recommendations which we also forwarded to the Government, some of which I would like to share with you as a way of concluding my presentation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure that there is a policy on the Right of Children to Play
- Ensure that any national policy on children include the Right to Play.
- Include the Children's Right to Play in the review of the Children's Act and the Education Curriculum
- Create a national awareness of the Right of Children to Play.
- The Ministry of Education to discourage tuition after classes, on weekends and holidays.
- Emphasize the need to play in schools and the reintroduction of physical education.
- The Ministry of Education to introduce courses for child play in training colleges and universities.

- Advocate and lobby for funds to support like-minded organizations to implement the Right of Children to play
- Carry out research on Play.
- Establish a play centres in every county with local and traditional Play materials as well as modern ones.
- Include children with disability in all play activities.
- Create playing fields for children living in the slums.
- Provide and enforce playgrounds for children in all existing and future estates.
- Encourage the children to learn local games and the use of local play materials.
- Encourage integration of the able and children with disabilities to Play together.
- Adults be made aware of the importance of children to Play.
- Children to be represented in all discussions on the Right of Children to Play

**AWORLD WITHOUT PLAY IS NOT A
WORLD FIT FOR CHILDREN**

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