CHOICE FOR YOUTH & SEXUALITY

Input to the Report of the High Commissioner

"Civil society space in multilateral institutions"

September 2017

Contact details:

Alexandra Bekker, Advocacy Officer
CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality
Keizersgracht 177
1016 DR Amsterdam, the Netherlands
Tel: +31 (0) 20 737 01 79
Email: alexandra@choiceforyouth.org

1. About CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality

CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality is a youth-led organization (16-29 years) based in the Netherlands. We advocate for the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of young people worldwide and support them to meaningfully participate in national and international decision-making processes. Our work is based on the core assumption that Meaningful Youth Participation (MYP) in SRHR decision-making, organizations and in all phases of programs and policies at all geographical levels can empower young people and improve their SRHR reality.

In order to support young people to advocate for their sexual rights we execute two main programs: 1) our Youth Leadership Program, in which we support youth-led organizations around the world (with a focus on Africa and Asia) both financially and with technical assistance to do their own advocacy work and 2) our Advocacy Program, in which we advocate together with young people at the national, regional and international level.

2. Meaningful Youth Participation in Multilateral Institutions

This submission responds to the call by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for specific, concrete illustrations of good practice on supporting civil society space in multilateral institutions, specifically the United Nations. It seeks to inform the Office of the High Commissioner on how multilateral institutions can improve and operationalize the meaningful participation of young people and youth-led organizations in their work. This submission provides Member States, UN agencies and civil society organizations with two concrete tools to create and maintain a safe, enabling and empowering environment for young people to participate within the UN system and other multilateral platforms.

Meaningful Youth Participation means that young people can participate on equal terms with adults, or work independently, at all levels of decision- and policy-making, and across all phases of programs and services: design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It requires institutions to systematically place young people at the centre of

their interventions and policies and invest in concrete mechanisms that allow them to have an active role, and value their work and input. If participation of young people is truly meaningful, it benefits the young people, the programs and services, the policies or institution, and society as a whole.

For Meaningful Youth Participation to be possible within multilateral institutions, certain basic preconditions that apply to all civil society participation need to be met, including notably the protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the right to freedom of assembly and association, the right to freedom of movement and non-discrimination. However, to overcome the current underrepresentation and marginalization of youth voices, we need to simultaneously also make an additional investment in specific practical tools and mechanisms that promote and systematically integrate youth participation.

3. Practical Tools for Meaningful Youth Participation

In August 2017, CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality developed a practical manual for civil society organizations, government institutions and other interested stakeholders on structurally incorporating Meaningful Youth Participation in their organizational structures, programs, policies and activities. This manual was developed as part of the Get Up Speak Out; For Youth Rights program, which is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and implemented in partnership with Rutgers, dance4life, Simavi, Aidsfonds, IPPF and 30 partner organizations from Africa and Asia. The manual has since been piloted in 6 countries (Zambia, Malawi, Kenia, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Indonesia).

The manual explores the core elements and preconditions of Meaningful Youth Participation and provides tools to guide the practical integration. It addresses not only the aspect of how to empower young people and facilitate their participation, but also how to stimulate positive youth-adult partnerships. While CHOICE's organizational expertise lies primarily with youth participation in SRHR decision-making, this manual was designed to be adaptable to all organizational structures, geographic contexts and thematic issues.
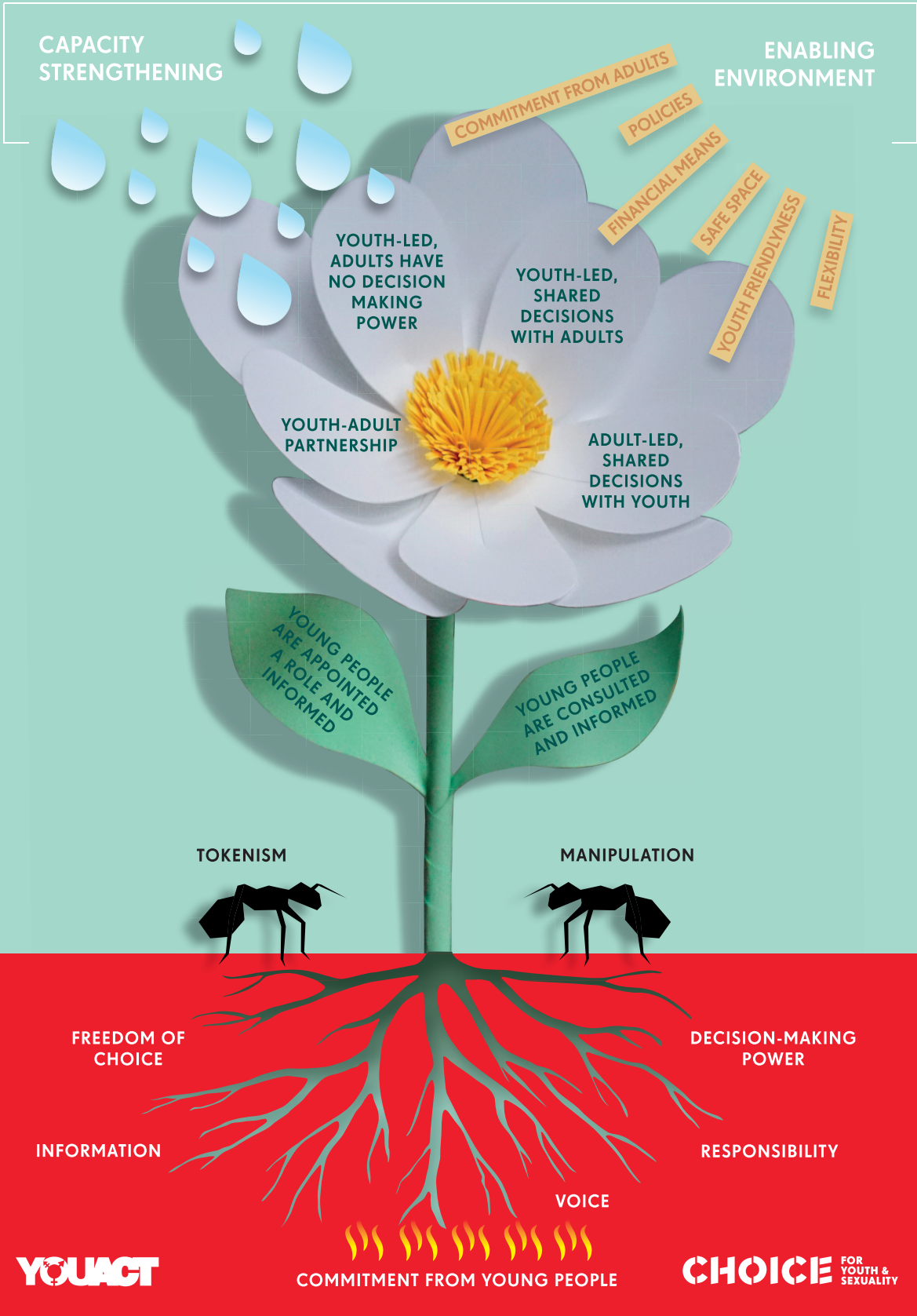
A. Flower of Participation

The Flower of Participation is a tool that can be used to explain the concept of Meaningful Youth Participation, to reflect on the current status of youth participation in an organization and on the organization's ambitions regarding the inclusion of young people. It can also be used by young people themselves to understand and critically reflect on their position within an organization and advocate for the right to (more) meaningfully participate.

The Flower of Participation is a tool that uses the metaphor of a blooming flower to describe how Meaningful Youth Participation can grow and flourish. It can be used to distinguish between different forms of youth participation and to explore whether they meet the criteria of being meaningful or not. The tool describes the core elements of Meaningful Youth Participation (the roots), the different forms (the leaves and petals of the flower), non-meaningful forms (the insects) and the preconditions for Meaningful Youth Participation (the water and the sun). All these different aspects are discussed below.

INCLUSIVITY

CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

COMMITMENT FROM ADULTS

POLICIES

FINANCIAL MEANS

SAFE SPACE

YOUTH FRIENDLYNESS

FLEXIBILITY

YOUTH-LED, ADULTS HAVE NO DECISION MAKING POWER

YOUTH-LED, SHARED DECISIONS WITH ADULTS

YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIP

ADULT-LED, SHARED DECISIONS WITH YOUTH

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE APPOINTED A ROLE AND INFORMED

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE CONSULTED AND INFORMED

TOKENISM

MANIPULATION

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

DECISION-MAKING POWER

INFORMATION

RESPONSIBILITY

VOICE

COMMITMENT FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

YOUACT

CHOICE FOR YOUTH & SEXUALITY

<u>Core-elements</u>

The roots of a flower are essential in allowing a flower to survive and flourish; they enable the flower to retrieve water and nutrients from the soil and to keep itself upright. The more roots the flower has, the stronger its foundations. This metaphor also applies to Meaningful Youth Participation. For young people to have an active voice and role in decision-making, five core elements need to be present. The stronger and more developed these preconditions are, the more Meaningful Youth Participation can flourish.

Freedom of choice: the extent to which a young person can decide if they participate in a program/activity/organization.

Information: extent to which young people get and/or have access to comprehensive information about the goals, objectives and timeline of the program/activity/ organization, and their role within it.

Decision-making power: extent to which a young person can make decisions about (parts of) the program or activity or within the organization.

Voice: extent to which a young person can voice their views and opinions, and the extent to which other people listen to and respect these views and opinions and integrate them into the program/activity/organization.

Responsibility: extent to which young people have the opportunity to act independently within a program/activity/organization that they participate in.

The UN system is making significant progress in meeting some of these core elements. For instance, the Office of the UN Youth Envoy is an important platform for young people to voice their needs and opinions. However, formal decision-making power for young people within different UN mechanisms (e.g. Universal Periodic Review, Human Rights Council, Treaty Monitoring Bodies) and agencies (e.g. through a Youth Advisory Board) is lacking. Additionally, the absence of accessible, understandable information remains a significant barrier to Meaningful Youth Participation. While the Office of the High Commissioner regularly develops resources for civil society engagement, these resources are rarely used by young people due to the overuse of technical language, lack of concrete recommendations on possibilities for participation, insufficient outreach to youth-led organizations, etc.

<u>Capacity-strengthening</u>

A flower can only grow and flourish if certain preconditions are met. For example, plants need water and sun to grow and bloom. This similarly applies to investing in Meaningful Youth Participation; it cannot be established without guaranteeing certain preconditions. The Flower of Participation distinguishes between two types of preconditions, capacity strengthening (the water) and an enabling environment (the sun).

In order for a flower to flourish, it needs continuous watering. To be able to play an informed and effective role in programs, activities and organizations, young people similarly should have the opportunity to develop their capacities and knowledge. The kind of capacity needed for Meaningful Youth Participation within multilateral institutions can vary significantly, but certainly includes making young people more aware of their rights and providing them with knowledge of the different UN processes and strategic opportunities for engagement. While much of this capacity-strengthening is already

undertaken by civil society organizations, the Office of the High Commissioner could also play a vital role by developing youth-friendly factsheets, supporting youth-led or youth-focused human rights trainings, organizing regular webinars, providing more internship opportunities and/or offering mentorship for UN engagement.

Important to note is that in addition to strengthening the capacity of young people, the capacity of adults should also be strengthened. Adults should be aware of what working with young people entails, what the benefits are, and how they can create a supportive environment for Meaningful Youth Participation.

<u>Enabling environment</u>

Flowers need the sun to create an enabling environment for them to grow. This also applies to Meaningful Youth Participation. The enabling environment comprises the following elements:

Commitment from adults: young people should be supported by adults to be able to meaningfully participate. Adults should respect young people as equals and allow them to take meaningful positions in their programs, organizations and activities. In order to create this commitment, it is important to strengthen the capacity of adults in meaningful youth participations as well, and to work with participatory methods that support young people and adults in working together.

Financial means: because many young people still attend school, or may earn lower wages, it is important to support young people with the financial means to allow them to meaningfully participate. This could take the form of compensation for travel expenses, meals, etc. In addition, young people are often used as volunteers; while volunteering is a good way to contribute, learn and build skills, when young people do equal work to adults, with equal responsibilities, they should also get equal compensation.

Youth-friendliness: to be able to meaningfully participate, young people should fully understand what is discussed and feel comfortable being involved. It is therefore important to use youth-friendly communication by avoiding excessive jargon and employing learning and outreach tools that are accessible for and used by young people.

Safe space: safe spaces are necessary for young people and adult staff to feel free to share their opinions and thoughts, even when these are critical. A learning environment gives people the space to make mistakes – and judges them on their efforts rather than on (lack of/negative) results. Young people and adults should feel valued, respected, safe, encouraged and supported.

Flexibility: young people may have a different daily schedule to that of adults. They may still go to school, have a (part-time) job, or need to take care of family members. This needs to be considered in planning of programs and activities if young people are to participate meaningfully. Furthermore, this flexibility implies the need for an open attitude by adults and young people towards each other's opinions and needs.

Policies: To integrate meaningful youth participation in a program or organization, concrete policies on involving young people should be in place. An example of this could be the commitment of an organization to having young people make up 30% of its board, or including a youth speaker on each panel discussion.

Within the UN system it will be important to critically reflect and improve on a number of these enabling factors. Firstly, while international commitments have been made on youth inclusion (most notably the Baku Commitment to Youth Policies and the World Program of Action for Youth), young people continue to lack access to and decision-making power in major UN processes as a result of a lack of commitment from both UN institutions and Member States. The establishment of a core group of Member States invested in Meaningful Youth Participation, supported by the Office of the High Commissioner, that on a biannual or quarterly basis discusses best ways of strategic cooperation, sharing of best practices, and (thematic) youth priorities, could be an effective way of pushing the agenda forward (similar to the LGBT Core Group). Secondly, recent limitations imposed on civil society participation with the UN system – such as the denial of access of non-governmental organizations to the UN premises in New York during the UN General Assembly because of security reasons – need to be urgently addressed as they are disproportionally affecting youth-led organizations, given that few have been accredited ECOSOC status, have permanent representation in New York or Geneva, or are able to rely on support from a strong network. Finally, further reflection will also be needed on the absence of financial means for young people and youth-led organizations to fund their attendance and participation in (international) decision-making processes.

B. Graph of Participation

The Graph of Participation is a tool to help assess the extent to which Meaningful Youth Participation is integrated into an activity, program and/or organization. The tool is based on the "Climbing Wall of Participation" by Nigel Thomas.[1] The original model has been adjusted to create a tool that fits CHOICE's and her partners' experiences and that links to the different forms of Meaningful Youth Participation that are explained in the Flower of Participation. The Graph of Participation consists of two parts. The first part is a questionnaire that measures the extent to which the five core elements are present, whereas the second part measures the extent to which the seven preconditions are present (see Annex 1). After completing these questionnaires, the evaluating individual, organization or institution will be able to draw up two graphs, which can form the basis for a detailed action plan on how to improve the integration of Meaningful Youth Participation.

---

[1] Thomas, N., Children, Family and the State. Decision-making and child participation. 2000, Hampshire: Macmillan Press LTD.

Annex 1 – Graph of Participation

The Graph of Participation

Core elements of Meaningful Youth Participation

STEP 1: Please answer the following questions.

NAME OF ORGANIZATION:

....

YOUNG PERSON OR ADULT, OR MIX?:

....

1. Freedom of choice

The core element Freedom of choice is about the extent to which young people can decide to participate in a program, activity or organization or not.

Q **To what extent do young people experience freedom of choice in deciding if they want to participate in your program, activity or organization?**

a.   Not at all

b.   To a low extent

c.   Somewhat

d.   To a high extent

e.   To a very high extent

2. Information

The core element Information equals the extent to which young people get comprehensive information about the goals, different elements and timeline of the program, activity or organization, and their role within it. It also links to information about young people's rights within the program, activity or organizations and the different possibilities that they have.

Q **To what extent do young people get information about the program, activity or organization that they participate in and how their role contributes to the program/activity/ organization?**
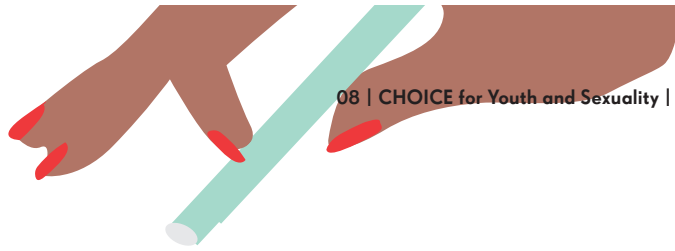
a.   Not at all

b.   To a low extent

c.   Somewhat

d.   To a high extent

e.   To a very high extent

3.   Voice

The core element Voice represents the extent to which a young person can voice his or her views and opinions, and the extent to which other people listen to these views and opinions and integrate them into the program, activity or organization.

Q **To what extent can young people express their views and opinions, and do adults take these views and opinions into account in the program, activity or organization that they participate in?**

a.   Not at all

b.   To a low extent

c.   Somewhat

d.   To a high extent

e.   To a very high extent

4. Responsibility

The core element Responsibility represents the extent to which young people have the opportunity to act independently within a program, activity or organization that they participate in.

Q **To what extent do young people enjoy responsibility in the program, activity or organization that they participate in?**

a.   **Not at all**

b.   **To a low extent**

c.   **Somewhat**

d.   **To a high extent**

e.   **To a very high extent**

5. Decision-making power

The core element Decision-making power is about the extent to which a young person can make decisions about (parts of) the program or activity or within the organization.

Q **To what extent do young people have decision-making power within the program, activity or organization that they participate in?**

a.   **Not at all**

b.   **To a low extent**

c.   **Somewhat**

d.   **To a high extent**

e.   **To a very high extent**

The Graph of Participation

Preconditions of Meaningful Youth Participation

NAME OF ORGANIZATION:

....

YOUNG PERSON OR ADULT, OR MIX?:

....

1. Capacity strengthening

In order to sustain MYP, young people's capacity should be strengthened. This could be done by means of training. The kind of capacity needed for MYP can vary, but can include knowledge, skills (for example budgeting, management, planning), critical self-reflection, and many others. Strengthening capacity can be done in various ways, for example by means of training, workshops, internships or coaching. Another essential element of young people's capacity strengthening is providing mentorship for young people, so that they can grow.

Q **To what extent do young people get supported in strengthening their capacity to be able to participate in your program, activity or organization?**

a.   Not at all

b.   To a low extent

c.   Somewhat

d.   To a high extent

e.   To a very high extent

2. Commitment from adults

Young people should be supported by adults to be able to meaningfully participate. Adults should respect young people as equals and allow them to take meaningful positions in their programs, organizations and activities. This should be underpinned by democratic values, free from discrimination and equality. Adults need to understand what youth can bring in to the partnership

Q **To what extent do you feel that adults are committed to implement meaningful youth participation in your program, activity or organization?**

a.   Not at all

b.   To a low extent

c.   Somewhat

d.   To a high extent

e.   To a very high extent

3. Youth-friendliness

To be able to meaningfully participate, young people should fully understand what is discussed. Therefore, it is important to use youth-friendly language, and not jargon.

QUESTION: To what extent do you think the language, materials and other things that young people work with in your program, activity or organization is youth friendly?

a.   Not at all

b.   To a low extent

c.   Somewhat

d.   To a high extent

e.   To a very high extent

4. Flexibility

Young people may have a different daily schedule than adults, because many of them still go to school, have a job, or social activities they are committed to. In order to allow young people to meaningfully participate, this should be taken into account. It may therefore be necessary to flexible when it comes to planning meetings outside of office hours, in order for young people to attend.

Q **To what extent do adults take young people's time schedule into account when planning meetings and events for your program, activity or organization?**

a.   Not at all

b.   To a low extent

c.   Somewhat

d.   To a high extent

e.   To a very high extent

5. Financial means

Since young people often still go to school, or may not earn as much money as adults, it is important to support young people with financial means in order to allow them to meaningfully participate. This can link to compensate for traveling expenses, to compensate for meals, etc. If financial means are there, young people should also be provided with a reasonable stipend or salary.

Q **To what extent do young people get financially supported to participate meaningfully in your program, activity or organization?**

a.   Not at all

b.   To a low extent

c.   Somewhat

d.   To a high extent

e.   To a very high extent

6. Safe space

Safe spaces are necessary for young people and adult staff to feel free to share their opinions and thoughts, also when these are more critical. A learning environment allows people to try and make mistakes – and judges them on their efforts rather than on (lack of / negative) results. Young people and adults should feel valued, respected, safe, encouraged and supported

Q **To what extent is a safe space created and sustained for young people to participate in your program, activity or organization?**

a.   Not at all

b.   To a low extent

c.   Somewhat

d.   To a high extent

e.   To a very high extent

7. Policies

To integrate MYP in a program or organization, policies on involving young people should be in place. For example, an organization can commit itself to have 30% young people involved in its board

Q **To what extent does your organization, program or activity have policies in place that ensure MYP?**

a.   Not at all

b.   To a low extent

c.   Somewhat

d.   To a high extent

e.   To a very high extent

STEP 2: Draw the scores into the graph

There are empty tables below, both for core elements and for preconditions (so 2 empty tables). Please draw the bars of the graphs according to your answers to the questions in STEP 1. If you can't print this document you can also make a drawing of the table on paper.

Part 1: Core elements

For example, if you have the following scores, your graph will look like the graph that is displayed below:

- Freedom of choice: Present to a high extent (e)

- Information: Somewhat present (c)

- Voice: Present to a high extent (d)

- Responsibility: Present to a low extent (b)

- Decision-making power: Not at all present (a)

	Freedom of Choice	Information	Voice	Responsibility	Decision-making power
Present to a very high extent	■				
Present to a high extent			■		
Somewhat present		■			
Precent to a low extent				■	
Not at all precent					■
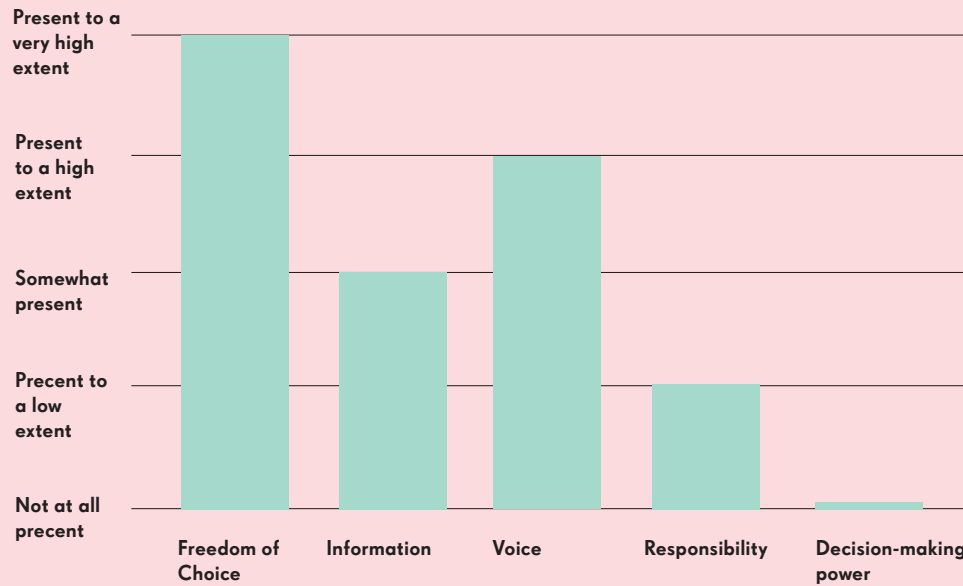
Part 2: Preconditions

For example, if you have the following scores, your graph will look like the graph that is displayed below:

- Capacity strengthening: Present to a high extent (b)

- Commitment from adults: Somewhat present (c)

- Youth-friendliness: Somewhat present (c)

- Flexibility: Present to a high extent (d)

- Financial means: Not at all present (a)

- Safe space: Present to a high extent (d)

- Policies: Present to a low extent (b)