

Accountability in practice: a new child-friendly consultative methodology in Burkina Faso

Case study | March 2025

Context

This case study describes a one-year participatory project conducted with 94 children across three regions in Burkina Faso. The objective was to co-create a methodology to better consult children on humanitarian assistance.

For organisations seeking to enhance children's participation in humanitarian projects, and to better understand their perceptions and expectations, the methodology is now ready to use. Organisations can adapt the methodology to their needs and contexts.

The methodology is made up of two toolkits:

- A simplified toolkit containing the consultative tool in the form of a board game: a set of cards, game rules, and a guide for workshop facilitators.
- A comprehensive toolkit including resources to facilitate two sessions on participation and accountability with children, as well as the consultative tool in the form of a board game.

To download the methodology (available in French only), please visit [the Terre des hommes website](#).

Both toolkits include an ethics protocol outlining commitments to which organisations must adhere when implementing the methodology, and an informed consent form.

This case study reviews the main challenges encountered during the methodology's co-creation process with the children, as well as the solutions developed to establish genuine collaboration.

Overview of the children who participated in this project and co-created the methodology:

24 children in Ouagadougou

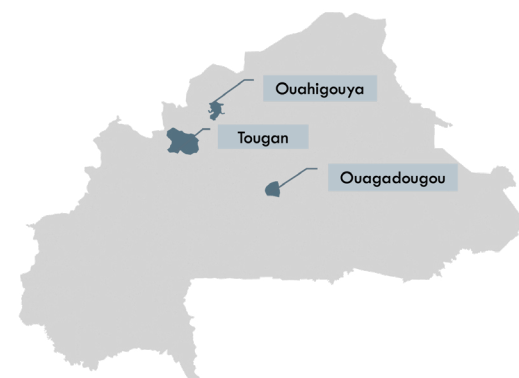
- 14–17 years old
- 9 girls
- 15 boys

18 children in Tougan

- 12–18 years old
- 8 girls
- 10 boys

52 children in Ouahigouya

- 12–17 years old
- 31 girls
- 21 boys



Amplifying children's voices for more responsive humanitarian action

Children often represent over 40% of people affected by humanitarian crises around the world. In 2024, 3.5 million children in Burkina Faso were directly impacted, making up 55% of affected people.¹ Despite the long-lasting and often devastating effects of crises on their daily lives and futures, and despite their specific needs and capabilities, children are systematically excluded from key humanitarian processes like needs assessments, project design, implementation, and evaluation.

Children have unique perspectives, which can make aid more effective if they are considered. In 2023, Ground Truth Solutions (GTS), the Terre des Hommes Foundation (Tdh), and their partners² consulted over 300 children aged 10 to 17 in Burkina Faso to better understand their expectations of humanitarian aid.³ This study revealed that, when consulted appropriately, children can identify their own needs and aspirations. Moreover, some concerns only emerge when they receive direct and attentive listening.

Despite their rich contributions, children consistently felt that they lacked the right to share their opinion on the aid they receive. Many efforts have been undertaken by organisations specialising in child protection to address this issue. Building on this foundation, Tdh and GTS launched in 2024 the Humanitarian and Accountable Assistance for Children (HARPE) project, supported by the Tdh Foundation Innovation Fund, to complement and strengthen these initiatives. The purpose of HARPE is to promote greater child participation in humanitarian projects by developing accessible tools that enable organisations to integrate children's voices and value their ideas.



Girls take part in an ice-breaker activity in Ouahigouya during the first study. Image : Terre des hommes Lausanne (2022).

Our project is part of a global movement to enhance child participation in humanitarian aid by applying the principle of the “centrality of child protection”.⁴ Strengthening child-related accountability requires expertise from child protection specialists, but it is a responsibility shared by all humanitarian actors. By incorporating children's perspectives, humanitarian actors can make their responses more inclusive and also more effective.



Thanks to this project, children were able to explain their problems, challenges, and lives to each other.

*– Parental representative,
Ouagadougou*

- ¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. March 2024. [“Humanitarian needs overview, Burkina Faso.”](#)
- ² Humanity and Inclusion, ECPAT France, the National Coordination of Associations of Children and Young Workers in Burkina Faso, and Plan International.
- ³ Ground Truth Solutions and Terre des hommes Lausanne. June 2023. [“Burkina Faso’s youth speak up: Boys and girls share their needs and expectations of the humanitarian response.”](#)
- ⁴ The centrality of child protection principle establishes that every humanitarian actor, regardless of sector, is responsible for protecting children from abuse, violence, and exploitation, while prioritising genuine accountability to them. Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. November 2023. [“The Central Role of Children and Their Protection in Humanitarian Action.”](#); Core Humanitarian Standard. 2024 [“Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability.”](#)

Consulting children remains challenging for many organisations. While donors increasingly encourage participatory approaches, organisations face significant constraints: tight deadlines; strict administrative and budgetary compliance requirements; rigid hierarchical structures; and limited access to conflict zones.⁵ A real risk of superficiality thus ensues – child participation can become a mere façade and lose sight of its essential purpose: empowering children to express themselves, take action, and defend their rights.

To address these challenges, we aimed to develop a methodology with children that meets their needs and desires, supporting organisations to better consider their perspectives. As a result, we now offer organisations a consultative tool, immediately usable. Designed as a board game, it allows organisations to quickly and effectively gather children’s perceptions in a fun way, even in challenging contexts. It is simple, cost-effective, and includes a streamlined version to reduce barriers for organisations with limited time and resources.

The case study recounts the co-creation journey of the tools by testing and adjusting it with three different groups of children. Organisations wishing to trial this methodology have access to [the definitive version](#).

Project overview

The project began with consultations involving eight local organisations working with children, aimed at better understanding organisational needs and barriers to incorporating children’s feedback.⁶ These discussions revealed two major challenges: a lack of appropriate tools for consulting children and the difficulty making them feel that expressing their ideas is legitimate. Our response was to design a participatory methodology in close collaboration with children, to create a space for expression tailored to children’s needs and preferences. But how can one develop a methodology that is child-friendly, ethical, and accessible to organisations not specialised in child protection, all while operating in a humanitarian crisis context?

We started by defining the level of participation we wanted to utilise and we adopted a collaborative approach. This approach went beyond simple consultation. Although it was adult-initiated, we involved children as true partners in developing the methodology as they influenced, co-created, and challenged the processes, methods, and outcomes. This process also enabled children to formulate concrete recommendations based on their diverse experiences of humanitarian aid and to articulate advocacy messages for aid actors.

For six weeks in Ouagadougou, a group of 24 children participated in multiple sessions exploring the concepts of participation, humanitarian aid and its principles, and, in particular, accountability. The goal was to equip them to contribute to the development of a consultative tool for their peers. Following these preparatory sessions, the children took part in a week-long “game jam” workshop, during which they designed a game to express their views on humanitarian aid.⁷ This game was presented to two other groups: 18 children in Tougan and 52 children in Ouahigouya.⁸ These children assessed the tool and provided feedback that contributed to its finalisation.

Through creating and testing the tool, the children also formulated their own recommendations for humanitarian actors, expressing their needs, priorities, and perspectives on the humanitarian response. This innovative approach not only strengthened their understanding and capacity to participate but also amplified their priorities. The Tdh teams have committed to following up on their recommendations.

⁵ IRC. August 2023. « [Empowering frontline staff to enable the participation of crisis-affected people](#) ».

⁶ Justice et dignité pour les femmes du Sahel, Association formation développement ruralité, Association Dignus, Asmae, Association pour la paix et la solidarité, Association pour la promotion et l'intégration de la jeunesse du Centre Nord, Association pour le développement des communautés villageoises.

⁷ “Game jams” are an innovative methodology enabling people to test various board games, understand game mechanics, and ultimately design their own games, tailored to their objectives. Fabio Balli has supported the development of this methodology.

Project timeline - 2024

January–February	Project framing based on lessons learned from 2023 perception study with children
March	Consultations with eight local organisations working with children
April–May	Development of the collaborative approach with the GTS–Tdh project team
June	Training for facilitators in the collaborative approach Information sessions for participating parents and children
July	Sessions with children to strengthen their agency: 1) Explanation of participation 2) Introduction to humanitarian principles and accountability 3) Research conducted by the children 4) Analysis of collected information and formulation of recommendations
August	Co-creation of the consultative tool with 30 children in Ouagadougou, using the innovative participatory method of “game jams”
September	Testing of the consultative tool and methodological sessions with 18 children in Tougan
October	Adaptation of the tool and sessions based on children’s feedback
November	Testing of the consultative tool and methodological sessions with 52 children in Ouahigouya
December	Dialogue between a professional illustrator and the children about the visual creation of the consultative tool. The children’s drawings serve as the creative foundation and children provide feedback regarding the illustrator’s sketches. Finalisation of the consultative tool and methodological sessions for dissemination to other organisations

Collaborating with children: dismantling “adult expert” positionality

Engaging in meaningful collaboration with children requires awareness of the inherent power dynamics in the traditional adult–child authority model, in which the adult holds knowledge and the child listens and learns. This imbalance can hinder children’s participation, leaving them neither free nor validated in expressing their ideas. For this project, the first step was to question the role of the adults involved in order to create an environment conducive to genuine collaboration.

To achieve this, facilitators underwent training on the impact of their attitude and posture towards children’s behaviour. An introspective exercise prompted them to recall their own childhood experiences when their desire to participate was hindered by an adult’s attitude. These reflections helped them identify specific behaviours to avoid, such as constant interruptions, judgement, or devaluing children’s ideas. One key tool employed was “body mapping”, which raised awareness about the often-unconscious impact of adult body language – a closed posture, diverted gaze, or intimidating gestures – that can discourage children from participating.

During initial sessions, children were also invited to describe conditions under which they feel most comfortable participating. This led to the development of a code of conduct, applicable to both children and adults throughout the project. The code emphasised essential principles like active listening, mutual respect, confidentiality, and actionable steps to uphold these values.

These exercises were critical to our co-creation and engagement process with children. Organisations interested in implementing the full methodology may choose to integrate these exercises into their practices. To gather insights reflecting the true experiences and perceptions of children, organisations must first examine the power dynamics between humanitarian staff and children.

Accountability in practice: children question humanitarian actors

One of the primary objectives of this project was for children to understand the concept of accountability through hands-on practice and direct experience. The children had opportunities to question humanitarian actors and members of their community directly, raise concerns specific to their lived experiences, and express recommendations for change.

The children from Ouagadougou and Tougan experienced the process of knowledge production by spending several hours within the role of researchers. Together, they identified problems in their environments, prioritised the most critical issues, and selected the humanitarian actors and community members who could answer their questions. The children chose topics such as access to water and food, free healthcare, education, and shelter management. Some issues specific to their experiences as children also emerged. For instance, a group of girls chose to address the issue of forced marriage, as they were directly affected by the recent experience of one of their peers. Instead of approaching humanitarian staff, this group decided to meet with the village chief to better understand his role in regulating these practices and to explore potential solutions.

After selecting their topic, the children created a questionnaire to guide their interviews. They raised questions that relate to their daily lives and expressed a desire to understand certain decisions or actions they perceived as unjust:

- Why are some girls forced into marriage? What are the consequences of forced marriage?
- Why is access to water so expensive? Why doesn't the water agency provide free water?
- What measures are taken against people who turn tents for internally displaced people into enclosures for their animals?
- Why do some humanitarian staff give food to internally displaced people but not to host communities?
- Why do we often see people who are not vulnerable taking food during distributions?

In Ouagadougou, during an interview with a representative from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the children gained a better understanding of the challenges of food aid distribution, the steps involved, and the rationale behind specific targeting: "The state has allocated 20–30% of food aid for host communities. Internally displaced persons are in greater need, which is why they are prioritised."

Based on the information they gathered, the children from Ouagadougou and Tougan formulated concrete recommendations for humanitarian staff:

- Engage more with parents and adolescent girls about the consequences of forced marriage and early pregnancies.
- Raise awareness within communities about the proper use and maintenance of tents, to prevent them being repurposed for animals while people remain in need.
- Install water points near residential areas to reduce the risk of violence against children, youth and women who are responsible for fetching water.



What I liked about the project was that we were regularly asked what we liked, what we wanted, what we didn't want. And I think that's great.

– Young participant in
Ouagadougou

- For educational humanitarian organisations, stop selecting children for school access based on their status (member of the host community or internally displaced children).
- Strengthen awareness campaigns about healthcare services in health centres to encourage more people to use them.

In response to these recommendations, Tdh teams committed to supporting the children in continuing their advocacy efforts towards the humanitarian actors and community members they had met. While this process will take time, the children’s participation in the project has already enabled them to better understand how humanitarian aid functions. They have learned that they can question practices and humanitarian actors, obtain answers, and play an active role in proposing solutions.

Children create their own consultative tool

Experiencing the research process in a first-hand and accessible way enabled children to take an active and creative role during key stages of the project. This approach was strengthened when the children designed a consultative tool in the form of a game. Through a series of “game jams”, the children from Ouagadougou and Tougan developed an interactive tool to bring children together in a shared space to exchange their perceptions of humanitarian aid. They designed game mechanics that facilitated discussions by incorporating questions at various points in the game. These questions address key themes such as the quality of assistance, the behaviour of humanitarian actors towards children, and the understanding of targeting processes.

By placing children at the heart of the reflection and innovation process, this project enabled them to assume roles as creators and leaders. Children were recognised as co-authors of the consultative tool, highlighting their ability to influence and shape the aid they receive. This approach shows that when provided with the right tools, children can transform practices and tools to make them more relevant and more connected to their realities.



What I like about the project is that I was able to research [the differences in aid between displaced and host community children], something I had never seen or heard about before.

– Young participant in Ouagadougou

Schedule for the “game jam” week

Objective: understanding how to create a game

- Day 1 and 2
- The children test different games to explore the elements, dynamics, and mechanics they enjoy.
 - They create simple game prototypes, experimenting with various formats (card games, pieces, boards).

Objective: refocusing the game on accountability and enhancing consultation

- Day 3 and 4
- The children identify key questions in order to gather perceptions from other children about humanitarian aid.
 - They adapt the rules of their prototype game to ensure the questions can be asked smoothly and encourage players to share their opinions.

Objective: harmonising the consultative game

- Day 5
- The children collectively choose the prototype they wish to refine and finalise.
 - In small groups, children work on the visual board design and illustrations of the game; the questions, ensuring they are relevant and clear; the final rules, structuring the gameplay to be both coherent and engaging.



Game board designed by children to discuss humanitarian aid issues they have identified as important. Image: Terre des hommes Lausanne (2024).



Game board created by Blandine Leroy, a professional illustrator, on the basis of the children's creations and feedback on the sketches.

Transformed relationships: children at the heart of decision-making

Deconstructing the “expert” position of adults also involved reconsidering the very structure of the project and its expected outcomes. Trusting in children’s capacity and believing in a creative, iterative process meant having the courage to question current project management methods, which are often characterised by predetermined deliverables and rigid timelines.⁸ This meant moving forwards with children, at their own pace, accepting risks and not always achieving expected results.

One facilitator acknowledged, **“At first, we were a bit sceptical because we didn’t really understand the methodology. But once immersed in the process, we realised it’s actually much easier for children to create than for adults.”** Throughout the project, in a safe environment that fostered trust, children provided

⁸ In this project, both the methodology and consultative tool underwent an iterative process, initially developed in Ouagadougou, then tested again in Tougan, and finalised in Ouahigouya.

evidence that they want to contribute – and they can – to the goal and quality of a project in their own ways and according to their real needs.

In Tougan, for example, children questioned the methodology of the consultative activity designed as a game. They felt that the game could bias responses because children enter a competitive dynamic, wanting to win and not taking the questions seriously. Following their suggestions, the activity was modified to reduce competition, strengthen the collaborative dynamic, and an introduction was added to the game to help children better grasp the context.

Some perceptions shared by children during the consultative activity in Ouahigouya:

What did you not like about a humanitarian activity ?

“The slowness. For example, a distribution of flour was scheduled for 8:00 AM, but did not start until 10:00 AM without any explanation, making people wait too long. The delay meant our mothers couldn’t cook lunch that day, and it was very frustrating.”

Are there children who face particular difficulties? How do you think humanitarians could help them better?

“Orphaned children are victims of neglect, struggling to get enough food and clothing, they don’t receive care and are often out of school or never enrolled. Disabled children face mockery, insults, and they have limited mobility.”

What is the behavior of humanitarians towards children?

“Many behave well. Others insult and reject based on appearance, accuse children of theft, or even hit them.”

Do humanitarians come to talk to the children about their work?

“No, because a child cannot approach an adult directly for fear of being scolded.”

What should be done to make children feel more comfortable speaking up if there is an issue with a humanitarian?

“Earn children’s trust and help them overcome their fears.”



We may experiment with this game with other children in our locality. Maybe over time, we can integrate the methodology into a long-term project, allowing us to come together in high-risk security areas.

– Facilitator in Ouagadougou

When trust strengthens collective agency

All the children who participated in the project were also engaged in other activities with Tdh teams. A bond of trust between facilitators and children already existed before the project and continued beyond its conclusion. This relationship was crucial in avoiding an extractive approach towards children and for tracking commitments made to children, as well as ensuring responses to their questions were followed up after the project's end. The trust placed in children's creative capacities and the value of their ideas to project execution helped to strengthen children's confidence. A young participant in Ouagadougou reflected, ***"I learned new things. What was new for me was the games, that I could think, explore games... It's not easy. It taught me to think about things I [previously] wasn't even capable of doing."***

Beyond self-esteem, the project also fostered a spirit of solidarity and cooperation. By working together, children and adults learned to respect each other, regardless of status or origin. ***"It's the solidarity among us, the children, that I love"***, expressed a boy in Ouagadougou, while a girl explained, ***"I loved making the games, talking with my friends. We discuss, we respect each other when playing, we laugh. It feels good."***

The collective process not only allows children to develop new skills but also to unite around shared values and common goals. As a representative of the children's parents, who was present during the activities, stated, ***"I am very happy because the children have become closer. Before, they didn't even know each other. Thanks to this project, they explained their problems, their difficulties, and their lives to each other."***



Game jam session with children in Ouagadougou. Image: Terre des hommes Lausanne (2024).

Key challenges and lessons learned from the co-creation process

The first challenge was the significant human investment required to ensure an ethical participatory process was followed. The success of any co-creation project relies heavily on the skills, charisma, and dedication of the facilitators. Often engaged in multiple projects, they had to balance contrasting work approaches (innovative methods versus more traditional and rigid frameworks), while managing the pressure that arises from this balance. This human investment incurs a cost, but it is crucial for implementing inclusive, effective, and impactful projects for children.

The children participating in this project face complex daily challenges, which facilitators must also navigate with care and empathy. Encouraging meaningful participation among children, who are typically excluded from community decision-making processes, requires specific skills, including mental health and psychosocial expertise. For this reason, we implemented a referral system throughout the project to support children identified as distressed during the process. Active parental involvement was also necessary to ensure understanding and support for the initiative.

There was also significant pressure on the working relationships between project partners. The major challenge was maintaining each organisation's commitment throughout the process despite unforeseen challenges and tensions arising from the lack of clarity around final outcomes. One inherent challenge with participatory approaches is the need to let go of control over the process and expected results, to enable genuine participation.

When children are involved, letting go becomes even more complex, as it requires deconstructing power dynamics between adults and children. Our approach involved giving up some control, accepting that the project could take unexpected directions, while still maintaining a sense of stability. In a humanitarian sector accustomed to rigid logical frameworks and quantitative indicators, ideation and iteration often remain unknown or underappreciated.⁹ The flexibility of Tdh's Innovation Fund supported the experimentation of these approaches, which were critical in creating a methodology tailored to the children's desires, needs, and abilities.



Co-creation session with children in Ouagadougou. Image : Terre des hommes Lausanne (2024).

Meaningful participation requires time to develop projects rooted in people's needs, expectations, and perceptions. Time is necessary to build trust, ensure that young people are neither manipulated nor overburdened, and guarantee that their participation truly enhances their agency.

In this project, "game jams" organised during school holidays with specialist support provided valuable experiences for the children and their families. These sessions enabled children to learn new skills, have fun, and meet in a safe environment while being protected from specific risks such as the potential to drop out of school after the holidays or increased vulnerability due to reduced supervision in this period.

Challenges in implementing the tool for humanitarian organisations

Although the co-created tool is designed to help organisations establish a safe space for children to share their perspectives on humanitarian aid, organisations wishing to implement it will face challenges. Facilitators will need training in the methodology, several hours of dedicated group work with children, and they

⁹ Ideation is a creative process widely used to foster open, collaborative, and often divergent thinking. In this project, the ideation process placed young people at the centre of the reflection on the methodology.

will need to create conditions conducive to meaningful participation. They will also be responsible for gathering children's perceptions and supporting them in formulating key messages about the changes they wish to see.

Listening to children is not enough: their recommendations must be acted upon. Organisations must commit to following up on their calls for change, ensuring accountability goes beyond mere feedback collection. This requires a coordinated effort, since children do not view humanitarian aid through traditional sectoral lenses, and their demands often exceed the mandate of a single organisation. Those consulting children must ensure that their requests are appropriately passed on to coordination bodies to guarantee a collective and coherent response. Given the complexity of contexts and limited humanitarian resources, not all children's expectations and requests can be met. It is crucial to have open conversations with them, helping them understand what is possible, what is not, and the reasons behind it. This transparency fosters trust and encourages active participation, while managing expectations.

Conclusion

The co-creation process with children has resulted in an innovative methodology comprising multiple sessions and a consultative tool. Through this methodology, children have deepened their understanding of participation and accountability in humanitarian aid while building a space of trust, expressing their perceptions of humanitarian aid, and offering recommendations to improve programmes regarding issues they care about.

The challenges of meaningful and participatory engagement with children are numerous: dismantling rigid preconceived roles, rebuilding relationships based on trust and mutual respect, and navigating often limited funding to support such processes. Our methodology offers organisations a clear roadmap for incorporating children's voices, thereby increasing the effectiveness of humanitarian programmes. We invite those interested to train their teams, test the tool, and share their experiences, including any challenges they encounter and solutions they find.



I learned a lot through this project (...). I learned about the language of humanitarian aid, that people should respect each other, and do their work properly.

*– Young participant in
Ouagadougou*

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