Participatory tools for evaluating psychosocial work with children in areas of armed conflict: a pilot in eastern Sri Lanka

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This article is based on the experiences of a recent pilot project to develop a participatory approach to the monitoring and evaluating of psychosocial interventions with children affected by armed conflict. It presents the conceptual framework and the principles that underpinned the testing of tools within programmes in eastern Sri Lanka. Some of the main challenges encountered while utilizing these tools are discussed, along with the value of the data generated and the implications of using participatory methodologies for planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Keywords: after-school play centre, evaluation, monitoring, participatory

Why use participatory tools?

This article is based on a study conducted in eastern Sri Lanka between April 2003 and January 2004.[1] The purpose of the study was to pilot a range of participatory tools and methods with children affected by conflict and displacement. The aim was to establish their utility for monitoring and evaluating psychosocial programmes.

Although the research took place in a particular locality, it was also intended to address a more general need for the enhancement of monitoring and evaluation methods of psychosocial interventions with children. The particular objective was to explore the potential of participatory methods for achieving three main aims. The first of these was to increase accountability and effectiveness in interventions. The second was to enable agencies to demonstrate the impact and outcome of programmes and thereby empower them in their relationship(s) with donors. The final goal was to enhance the profile of psychosocial programming through the introduction of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

The conflict

This pilot was undertaken in the Batticaloa district of eastern Sri Lanka, within the project activities of Koinonia, a local non-governmental organization (NGO) whose work formed part of a programme run by Terre des hommes, Lausanne. Batticaloa is one of the regions of Sri Lanka that has been most profoundly affected by the ethnic conflict between Tamil separatists and the Sinhala-dominated state. The conflict in this part of the island dates back to the early 1980s, and was sparked by inter-community violence. It has led to the death and injury of countless civilians, and to numerous human rights abuses including: disappearances, arbitrary arrests, rape and torture. The population of Batticaloa District is composed mostly of Tamils and Muslims. Concurrent with the larger Tamil−Sinhala conflict, the past two decades have also

witnessed episodes of violence between Tamils and Muslims. These have occurred at regular intervals, most notably in the early 1990s when a number of inter-communal attacks and massacres took place.

Over the course of the conflict the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) has become an increasingly powerful military and social force within Tamil communities. At the time of this study, Batticaloa was a patchwork of government and LTTE-controlled enclaves. Civilians residing in the LTTE areas had particularly suffered from the lack of infrastructure, scarcity of economic opportunities and difficulties of mobility. Furthermore, they had been put under pressure to support the military efforts of the LTTE. At times this reportedly included the widespread recruitment of children, often by force.

A ceasefire between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE in February 2002 led to a significant reduction in military activity and in tension among the local population. Nevertheless, a secure peace settlement has remained elusive. At the time of our work in the Batticaloa district, reports of the continued conscription of children by the LTTE were commonplace and inter-communal relations, particularly between the local Tamil and Muslim populations, still fragile.

Koinonia, the local partner for this project, runs an extensive network of after-school play centres where children's psychosocial wellbeing is addressed through games, sports, nutritional supplements, and informal education. Following the ceasefire agreement, the organization decided to take advantage of the increased access to areas in Batticaloa controlled by the LTTE, to establish seven new play centres. These centres, run by animators from the villages in which they are located, were the principal sites for the research.

The problems of children

There has been a common tendency for agencies working with conflict affected children to assume that the greatest causes of suffering and risk relate to past experiences of extreme violence.[2] Therefore, this project was developed within a framework to avoid such assumptions. Instead, the emphasis was to identify the biggest problems for children in their lives as a whole. In other words, a holistic approach was taken that sought to see children's lives beyond the conflict. There were also concerns about avoiding privileging the past, seeing it in discrete and static terms. Instead, the base used was that the past and present interact dynamically; past experiences (both negative and positive) are subject to a constant reworking in light of the ongoing experience of life in the present. This process takes place not only at the level of the individual child, but also within his or her family, community and wider society. The meaning of particular events and experiences, and their consequences for children, cannot be ascertained in advance based on standardized notions about 'stressors' and 'sequelae'.

A broad notion of 'psychosocial wellbeing' was chosen deliberately as an alternative to narrow conceptualizations related to psychopathology and trauma. It was not that the existence of trauma was denied, but there was a recognition that employing this concept, and the possible psycho-medical approach that goes with it, would give rise to conceptual, ethical and practical challenges that were beyond our scope to address satisfactorily.

In particular, we were concerned to avoid cross-cultural applications of the diagnostic category of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), about which a growing number of psychologists, psychiatrists and anthropologists have expressed serious reservations

(Dawes, 1992; Young, 1995; Bracken, Giller & Sommerfield, 1995; Boyden & Gibbs, 1996; Bracken, 1998). It was our intention to focus upon the elements that constitute and determine wellbeing, as well as the factors that threaten and enhance it. The term 'psychosocial' was useful since it brought into view the wider social influences on wellbeing, thereby taking us beyond the location of problems (and healing) solely within the mind or emotions of individual children. Furthermore, as explained below, our understanding of 'social' embraces also the material realm of children's lives.

Our contention is that psychosocial wellbeing must be understood as far as possible within the social and cultural context where the intervention is taking place. This implies drawing on children's views of what they consider to be positive and negative psychological and social states, and which personal and environmental factors they regard as contributing to these states. The conceptual framework that we used, adapted from that proposed by the Psychosocial Working Group (PWG, 2003; Strang & Ager, 2001) comprises three distinct domains: human capacity; social ecology; and material environment.

Human capacity refers to children's individual resources, their cognitive capacity, social competence, personal identity and valuation, emotional wellbeing, skills and knowledge – as are necessary for good functioning and interaction.

The circumstances of children's social worlds are the focus of *social ecology*. This includes their relationships (both the extent and quality) with peers, kin, neighbours and others, the degree and nature of social support, care, mentoring and services available to them, and the implications of social identity (gender, class, location, ethnicity, religion, etc.) for life experiences and events.

Finally, *material environment* refers to the material conditions of children's lives, including those pertaining to physical environment and infrastructure, nutritional status, livelihood, and degree of physical safety and comfort.

Resources and risks

All of our activities were designed with a view to identifying not only factors that impact negatively upon children but also resources that might be drawn upon to positive effect. Within the domain of 'human capacity', for example, this concern led us to consider personal strength, as well as suffering. The identification of resources alongside risks was important, not only in terms of our understanding of psychosocial wellbeing, but it may also provide a basis to work with children and supporting agencies in the development of interventions.

The interest in resources and risks derives from our understanding of the relationship between experiences and circumstances on one hand, and psychosocial wellbeing on the other. Experiences may be positive, or negative, and this applies both to actual and anticipated incidents. For example, the *fear* of forced recruitment may be an extremely negative experience (and therefore a risk), distinct from the actual recruitment itself. Similarly, the *anticipation* of support or salvation by a deity may be an important source of strength and hope. From this perspective, it is clear that an outsider cannot pre-determine what will constitute positive and negative experiences in the lives of any particular group of children. The purpose of participatory research is to learn from and with children about those experiences that are important for them and why.

We do not intend in any way to ignore or underplay the devastating impact of conflict

upon children. At the same time, we maintain that children are and should be seen not only as victims but also as social actors with important insights into their lives and an important role to play in the enhancement of their own wellbeing and that of their peers. This viewpoint necessitates a participatory approach to monitoring and evaluation.

Evaluation methods

Aside from appropriateness for research with children and efficacy in producing information covering all the domains, a number of other practical and ethical criteria were important in guiding the selection of methods. It was vital that all methods employed should be:

- productive of data that could be analysed conceptually and/or statistically;
- child participatory;
- easy to implement and, therefore suitable for local agency staff with limited training in psychosocial work;
- in accordance with ethical standards.

The choice of methods for participatory monitoring and evaluation in the pilot was determined by their effectiveness in capturing children's perspectives in three broad areas: personal functioning (emotional states, feelings, aspirations, actions, social and cognitive competencies etc.); the role of the project and its impact; and the environmental opportunities or constraints (especially risks and resources related to family, community, institutions and material environment). The methods used during this pilot can be divided into three groups. One group is made up of mapping exercises and diagrams such as risk/resource maps, body maps, spider diagrams and problem trees (see Boxes 1, 2, 3 and 4). These involve the production of visual images that depict actual objects and people as well as more abstract, metaphorical

representation. A second group of methods entails the listing of issues and categories, identifying the characteristics of these categories and sorting and ranking them to arrive at distributions, or priorities, within a population. The wellbeing exercise (described below, see Box 5) exemplifies this type of tool. The third group involves exploration of fictional situations or events which can be taken to be a proxy, or typical, of the real experiences and lives of children. Role-play, or in our case, Image Theatre exercises (see Box 6), achieves this aim.[3]

Risk/resource maps

This is an adaptation of one of the methods typically used in *Participatory Rural Appraisals* (Jones, 1997). Essentially, it involves children drawing a map of their immediate surroundings, their home, community and other areas they frequently visit. Aside from depicting the natural and man-made environment as children view it, this method can be employed to identify the things, people and institutions that children find threatening, and those that they recognize as sources of support and protection in their daily lives, or during a crisis. Importantly, children were able to use this method to highlight how some things (for example: lakes or the sea) constitute both a hazard and a resource for them. The method is not intended to yield information solely with regard to a particular domain, but in practice it tends to provide more insight about children's material environment than the other two domains.[4]

The risk/resource map was the first tool to be piloted and generally makes a good starting point for any baseline inquiry. It was tested initially through role-play with adults and then administered with children in six villages. The method allowed the identification of both the cross-cutting issues

Box 1: Risk and resource maps

Aim: To provide information on the risks children face, their problems and anxieties and the resources available to them. Also to provide information regarding the material environment in which children live.

Participants: This activity can be used effectively with children aged 10 years or over. With a diverse population, it may be advisable to group similar individuals together (dividing the group according to sex, age, socio-cultural background, etc.) and run the activity in parallel for each group. Each group ideally should not be larger than eight participants. Literacy is not essential.

Facilitators: One facilitator can work with up to two small groups, although ideally there should be one facilitator per group, with an observer/recorder for each group who takes notes on the children's discussions and other aspects of the process.

Materials: One large sheet of paper for each group; three colours of marker pens for each group (red, green, black).

Instructions:

1. Form the children into groups of around five to six each. Try to keep children of the same age together and to form groups of boys and girls separately. Ask the children if they would like to do an activity about their own village. If they say 'yes' then continue with the activity. Introduce the activity to the participants. Explain that to help the organization/animators plan their work; you need to understand the community/village where they are working. Explain that it is very important to understand what resources and things of use are available in the community/village – as well as what dangers or difficulties exist in the community/village. Explain that this activity will attempt to encourage a discussion of these issues through the drawing of a map. It is important to confirm that children know what a map is.

2. Give each group a large sheet of paper and three marker pens. Explain that the green pens are for things, places or people who are resources, that red pens are for the things, places or people who are dangers or risks, and that the black pen is for anything else that is neither a resource nor a risk. Instruct the participants to draw a map of the community/village as they see it, incorporating the views of all the group members.

3. If the participants have not grasped the exercise or are unsure of how to begin, the facilitators may stimulate a little brainstorming within the small groups about ideas for 'useful things/places' and 'risky things/places' that are found in their village. Questions that can help the children start include; 'There are some things that are useful to you in your village, can you tell me one of those things?' and 'There are some things that a dangerous or scary in you village, can you tell me one of those things?' Facilitators should not make suggestions, but can mingle with the participants, monitoring the conversation and processes of each group. Once maps are relatively well elaborated, facilitators may ask probing questions about the items that have been marked in green and red.

4. Encourage all the children to share the responsibility of drawing. Don't interfere too much in the process, but do ask; 'What have you drawn there? How is it useful?' or, 'How does it create difficulties in for you? What else is there in your village that is useful or causes problems or danger?' and other similar questions.

Box 1: *(Continued)*

5. Once all the maps have been completed, invite each group to present their map to the entire gathering and explain what they have drawn. The facilitators should ask questions about each map to find out 'why', 'when' and 'how' particular items are 'useful' or 'dangerous'. Asking questions relating to whether 'girls and boys' or 'men and women' experience these items differently, or not, will help develop an understanding of the differential experiences of different social categories. Also ask questions about specific instances that demonstrate the nature of the items – or whether participants have personally experienced this, or how they came to know about this. During the presentations of maps, notes should be taken on the discussion, the layout of the maps, conversation and group dynamics. This is the most important part of the activity, so allow adequate time for it.

6. Ideally the facilitators should keep a visual record of the maps that have been generated. This may be done through photographs on-site or off-site with the consent of the participants. There should be a discussion with the participants about what they would like to do with the maps, and some elaboration of a clear outcome (i.e. who would take care of each map, and what they might do with it).

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that affect all children in the region as well as those that are village specific. For example, snakebites featured as a major source of fear in all of the villages, whereas traffic accidents were only mentioned in one. In this way, the maps indicate the extent of an issue, problem or resource, although not necessarily its severity. For information on the latter, other tools are needed in which children can rank their problems and concerns in order of priority.

This method was easily understood by the great majority of the children, including the younger ones, and generated a lot of very useful information and discussion. Most groups began drawing fairly quickly once the activity had been explained. Some were able to draw a map of their community or area, whereas others produced drawings that depicted the risks and resources randomly as items that had no particular spatial relation to each other or to a defined territory. Both forms of reproduction are appropriate since the main objective is to yield information about children's worlds and life experiences rather than produce 'perfect' maps. Some groups worked co-operatively

and generated a complete map through discussion and agreement, whereas in others, some of the children tended to work more individually.

The method provided information on a range of issues that the children were worried about, as well as on a series of resources that they value. Table 1 outlines the key risks and resources illustrated by children in one village and gives some of their explanations as to why these particular items were included.

In this village a group of girls represented trees, chillies, flowers and a tortoise as resources. They told us that the trees are useful because they provide coconuts and wood. The chillies can be eaten or sold, while flowers are used as temple offerings. They cited dogs, snakes and *pey* (ghosts/spirits) as risks. Dogs, they explained, sometimes bite people, although they are not a major worry. Snakes, on the other hand, were a source of serious anxiety because they also bite children quite frequently and are highly dangerous. They told us that snakebite makes them faint and that they have to go to the local hospital for

Table 1. Risks and resources identified by children in one village

Risks	Resources
Tank [man-made irrigation lake] (drowning)	Coconut/mango trees (food and firewood)
Snakes (bites)	Flowers (to take to the temple/put in front of religious pictures)
Dogs (attacks) [possibly rabid]	School (for studying)
Liquor (drunk in excess by adults)	Post office (to receive letters of support from far away)
Forest (which may contain lions and elephants)	Road (to travel to get medicine and see relatives)
Ghosts/spirits (present near/in graveyards, cause fear especially when walking home from school)	Houses (for protection from the elements)
	Sunlight
	Pre-school
Bulls (attack people)	Well (for water, this can sometimes be a risk as children can fall inside the well)
Rain (leading to flooding)	
Army (shooting/stopping people at checkpoints)	Cows (for milk)
Thieves (burglary and theft of livestock)	Buses and bikes (for mobility)
Sea (drowning)	Kovil (Hindu temple)
Traffic (accidents)	Church (for hiding in during the war)
Planes (dropping bombs)	Paddy fields (staple)
Policemen with guns (both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan army)	Market (for selling and buying goods)
	Korlum (white powder used for religious ceremonies)
	Karate classes

treatment. They are very scared of *pey,* which live in a nearby cemetery and come out in the afternoons. Even though few children have seen a ghost, they are still very frightened of them. Protection against ghosts, we were told, entails frying seeds and scattering them around the house. Other children suggested that travelling in a group could help. Another group (boys and girls) in this village drew a fairly accurate map. A well was described as both useful and potentially dangerous. The school was considered useful as it enables children to study. The church was an asset, particularly during the war because people would seek refuge in it. The group commented, however, that no one goes there anymore. There was also a picture of a bus stand and a bird. The local lake was cited as a risk because people might drown in it, but it was also regarded as a resource for bathing. Foxes were noted as a problem since they catch fowl and goats and eat them. Elephants are sometimes useful as they can carry heavy goods like logs, but they can also be very destructive. There were also pictures of several checkpoints that are located in the vicinity, one belonging to the LTTE, and the rest to the Sri Lankan army. The children drew a soldier with a gun and explained that armed military personnel make people get down from their vehicles and check their papers. This was the first time that children in this village had identified both the LTTE and the army as a risk.

Box 2: Body maps
Aim: To generate data about children's ideas about physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing.
Participants: This activity can be used with children aged 8 years and over. The younger children enjoy participating, but it is the older children (12 − 14) that contribute the most. The groups can be large, 10 − 15 children, although around 8 − 10 is a more effective number. The groups can be mixed by age and sex.
Facilitator: One facilitator and one recorder are needed for a maximum of two working groups.
Materials: Large sheets of paper and pens.
Instructions:
1. Gather the children into suitable sized groups. Ask them to lay three large sheets of paper on the floor. If mats or newspapers are available, these should be laid under the paper to protect it from damage. Ask for one, preferably small-medium sized, child from the group to volunteer and ask this child to lie down on the paper. Make sure that the person is lying down on his/her back with arms and legs spread. Ask for two more volunteers to draw around the body of the child.
2. Ask the children to think about what makes them feel bad or sick. Then ask them to think about the place in or on the body or the body part that feels bad. Then ask them to draw within the outline of the body the affected area or organ and its location.
3. When all the diseases and conditions have been identified and the affected parts drawn on the body, ask the children to list the causes of these conditions.
4. Finally, ask the children what can be done to cure these conditions and, if there is time, who in their community is available to treat them.

Limitations. While the method proved very effective in many ways, one limitation emerged, which was of particular relevance from a planning point of view: the resources children identify tend not to have a particular bearing on the risks they highlight. This could be due to the fact that the children were not able to make an analytical connection between the particular risks and the resources they have to hand in their communities. Alternatively, it could be that the resources that they have access to are not appropriate or sufficient for the particular risks and threats they confront. It may also be that they have no real practice in mobilizing resources to serve their needs because, as children, they have little authority within their families and communities and are generally ignored in planning and decision-making. Clearly it is easier to reduce risks if the resources children utilize can be harnessed to address those specific risks. Although there was no opportunity to do this during the piloting, it might be helpful to hold a focus group discussion following this exercise in which the efficacy of particular resources are analysed and possible links between risks and resources explored with the children.

A second challenge relates to the fact that mapping can yield information about problems that are not amenable to change through intervention. This may be especially likely in situations of armed conflict where violations are commonplace, many normal civic processes are suspended and military

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Box 3: Spider diagrams

Aim: To generate data about children's social networks and the people that they may turn to for help with different situations/problems.

Participants: This activity is suitable for children aged 10–14. The work is carried out individually at first and can work with a group of up to 10. It is helpful to split the groups up, and have boys and girls working separately.

Facilitators: One facilitator is needed for each group of 10 children. It is not possible to run two groups in parallel with only one facilitator.

Materials: A4 paper and pens.

Instructions:

1. Ask the children to sit on the floor and give everybody a piece of paper and a pen. Introduce the activity by saying something like: 'this is a nice activity because we are going to draw people who are helpful to us in different ways'. Explain that we will do this by drawing a spider.

2. Ask the children to draw a circle in the middle of the paper and write their name or draw a picture to represent themselves. This is the body of the spider. The legs of the spider are the problems that they face and the feet are the people they go to for help. Drawing bigger feet can show people who help a lot.

3. Encourage the children by drawing a spider yourself, but do not write down anything on the legs or feet. If the children are still finding this activity difficult, it may help to go round to children individually and ask them about a problem they face and then whom they may go to for help. Remind them that there are no right or wrong answers.

4. When everyone has finished drawing, and you have had time to talk to each child individually, call everyone back together for a focus group discussion. This is intended to aid reflection on problems and people who can provide assistance. Explain that they only have to share the problems that they noted if they want to. Then ask those that are willing to share their problems, and who they go to for help, with the rest of the group.

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interests dominate local governance. For example, during the pilot children identified the checkpoints as a major source of concern. Obviously it may be possible to work with the children, local leaders and the armed forces themselves to find ways of reducing contact between children and armed personnel, or putting a stop to violations by these forces. However, removal of a checkpoint, the ideal solution, is unlikely to be a feasible option within the scope of a humanitarian intervention.

A third consideration relates to how children may have to negotiate politically sensitive issues. While the Sri Lanka army was often identified as a risk through images of a soldier with a gun, children were more circumspect about representing the LTTE on their maps. Although in discussion, children mentioned the LTTE in relation to both risks (e.g., forced recruitment) and resources (e.g., resolving disputes in the village), they seemed reluctant to identify it in visual form. It is necessary to be attuned to children's judgement of the political climate and respect this, while at the same time seeking to provide them with safe ways of articulating important, but sensitive issues.

Box 4: Problem trees

Aim: To learn about the situations and issues that children perceive as being a problem, or source of anxiety to them, and their views of causes and solutions.

Participants: Children aged 10 and over.

Facilitators: At least one facilitator and one recorder for each group.

Materials: Cards of three different colours, several large sheets of paper and pens.

Instructions:

1. Explain to the children that you are trying to find out about the things that are problems for, or worry, them and that you would like them to note these down on cards. Lay the sheets of paper out on the ground and distribute pens and cards of one colour to everyone. Ask the children to list the things that are a problem for them on the cards, allowing one card per problem. The children should be encouraged to discuss and agree each problem before it is indicated on a card.

2. Once this is done, ask the children to start trying to work out whether there is a link between the different problems they have identified. The links between problems can be made apparent by clustering the cards with related problems together on the paper. Having identified and grouped the problems, ask the children what the causes of these problems might be and instruct them to note each cause on a separate card (using cards of a different colour). If the children lay the 'cause' cards (forming the ends of the roots of the tree) out below the 'problem' cards (the trunk), they can then draw lines between the two sets of cards, indicating their precise connections.

3. Once this is done, the children should be encouraged to discuss consequences of the different problems they have identified. These should be marked down on the third set of coloured cards and placed above the problems, as if they were the leaves of the tree. Again, links between problems and consequences/solutions can be made explicit by drawing lines between them, in this case representing the branches. If this exercise is being used for planning rather than monitoring programmes progress or impact, once the drawing and discussion about causes, problems and consequences is completed, a discussion of possible solutions can take place as a basis for helping the children work out how they can act on a situation to change it.

Wellbeing exercise

This exercise was adapted from one developed by Jon Hubbard of the Centre for Victims of Torture in Minneapolis. Its aim is to identify the criteria by which wellbeing is understood in a particular community. Participants are asked to think of a child they know who, in their view, is doing well in life. They should then think of the things about this child that indicate to them that he or she is doing well. The characteristics that emerge from this process can then be used as indicators of wellbeing. By combining the indicators provided by all the children and clustering together those that are the same or very similar, it becomes possible to obtain a view of normative ideas about wellbeing, or lack of it, for the community in question.

The exercise was implemented with relative ease amongst groups of both parents and children in five villages. The concept of 'wellbeing' was found to resonate with the Tamil phrase '*nallam irukka*' that is meaningful for both children and adults, locally. It was

Box 5: Wellbeing exercise (adapted from Jon Hubbard's functioning exercise)

Aim: To elicit the characteristics (and conceptual categories) that children or adults associate with wellbeing for children of different ages and genders.

Participants: This activity was used effectively with children (and adults) over 8–9 years of age. With a diverse group of participants, it may be advisable to group similar individuals together (gender, age, socio-cultural background) and run the activity in parallel for each group. Each group ideally should not be larger than eight persons.

Facilitators: At least one facilitator for each working group.

Materials: Four to six cardboard file covers for each group; two colours of marker pens for each group; A4 sheet for each participant; pen or pencil for each participant.

Instructions:

1. Introduce the activity to the participating children. Explain that you want the partici-pants to think of a female or male child/young person/middle-aged person/elderly per-son that they know about whom they could say, 'yes, s/he is basically doing well – *om, oralavu nallam irrukka*' if asked the question 'are they doing well – *nallam irrukka*?' Specify the age range you want the participants to choose their person from (i.e. between 5 and 10, between 11 and 15, etc.). It may help to draw stick figures on a sheet of paper to denote the particular age group and gender (remember that you will have to use stereotypical representations for gender, although you can jokingly question these).

2. Ask participants if they have got the person in their mind. When you have confirmed that they have, ask them to draw a stick figure of that person quickly on their personal sheet of A4 paper. Ask them to mark the person's actual age (in years) or a good guess under the stick figure.

3. Ask the participants to keep their person in mind, and to write down four things about the person that lets them know that they are doing well or that allows them to say; 'Yes, s/he is basically doing well'. Do not give examples. Avoid asking for 'reasons' that they are doing well. Ask the participants if they have such a person in mind, and whether they can think of different things about the person that tell them that they're doing well (maximum of four and minimum of one). Ask the participants to write this down on their piece of paper next to the stick figure that they have drawn.

4. Once everyone has completed this task, ask them to think of a new person of the same age group but different gender. Repeat steps 2 and 3 for this person, and also for the other ages/genders that you are interested in.

5. Mark each cardboard file cover with a stick figure and age range that corresponds to each category that the participants have thought of. Give each group one set of file covers. Ask the participants to briefly explain their 'four things' in spoken language, using their notes to aid memory. A designated note-taker (perhaps the facilitator) must write down each participant's 'four things' in turn, trying hard to capture the spoken language and phrases. Complete this activity for the entire set of file covers.

6. During the exercise, the facilitators can identify commonly occurring or interesting characteristics, or markers, emerging from the activities. Upon completion of the entire

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Box 5: *(Continued)*

set of file covers, encourage participants to review the file covers and reflect on the characteristics or markers identified by the facilitators. It may be useful to ask questions about 'what' these mean in different situations or 'how' a person with a particular characteristic would behave in a significant situation (i.e. at home, with neighbours, while working, etc.). It may be interesting also to explore 'what' and 'how' questions about a person who does NOT have a particular characteristic/marker. This may be the most important part of the entire exercise so spend some time on this.

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important that the activity be implemented to elicit both written and verbal responses, to determine whether there were significant differences in the form or content of written and vernacular communication in that language/culture. In this case, none were found. For work with persons who are illiterate, or uncomfortable with reading and writing, it may be necessary to have a person to inscribe the individuals' responses directly onto the group's sheet. The disadvantage with this method is that individuals in the same group may influence one another – an effect noticed during field-testing.

The fact that the activity related directly to real children who are known to the participants meant that the characteristics/concepts of wellbeing accessed through the activity were attainable and realistic, rather than being abstract ideals.

This exercise always generated a good amount of detailed data that were thematically consistent throughout the many villages in which it was piloted. Criteria of wellbeing related to key themes, such as socially valued behaviour (studying well, helping with housework, etc.), good interpersonal qualities ('moving well' [i.e. getting on] with others, being loving, etc.), cognitive competencies (achieving good grades, doing well at school, etc.,) and health, hygiene and fitness (keeping clean, washing often, playing games, etc.). Overall, considerable attention was given to accomplishments in relation to school, socia-

bility and kindness towards others, and paying attention to manners and personal care. There was some contrast between children and parents' responses. While parents appeared to focus on sociability in terms of 'getting along with others', children themselves placed far greater emphasis on being loving or kind in relationships (*anbu*). Small group discussions with children revealed, for example, that a child who demonstrated *anbu* in school might share pencils with others who do not have them, or might share her/his lunch. Interestingly, obedience was much more important to adults than to children, who tended to focus instead on 'good habits'.

Table 2 shows a selection of responses from children in four villages. The age and gender distinctions indicated refer to the ideals of wellbeing that the participants expressed, for example, 5–10-year-old girls or 10–15-year-old boys. This table contains only those responses that were repeated more than 10 times. Many other responses were offered between one and nine times (Table 2).

The data generated by this exercise proved useful in various respects. First, they are very amenable to quantification. Second, they allow monitoring of groups or individual children against age and gender-appropriate indicators of wellbeing (and by default indicators for lack of wellbeing as well) that are highly responsive to cultural norms and values and hence have very direct and significant meaning for the population concerned.

Table 2. Responses of children in four villages

	Girls 5 – 10	Boys 5 – 10	Girls 10 – 15	Boys 10 – 15	Total
Kind/loving (*anbu*)	18	14	17	19	68
Studies well	8	14	17	18	57
Plays well	7	11	11	10	39
Goes to school regularly	8	8	10	8	34
Healthy	10	4	7	11	32
Good habits	5	5	9	11	30
Clean	7	6	8	8	29
Affectionate	7	3	10	8	28
Gets along well with others	6	1	5	6	18
Gets good nourishment	5	4	5	4	18
Clever in studies	8	3	4	1	16
Good friends/meets regularly	3	6	3	3	15
Is very good	4	3	2	6	15
Plays with me	2	3	5	1	11
Active/does exercises	2	3	2	3	10
Drinks boiled/clean water	4	2	1	3	10

It should be highlighted that the pilot did not carry this exercise through to completion as originally intended and provided for by the Centre for Victims of Torture. In other words, while we generated children's indicators for wellbeing and clustered these into broad areas of competence (cognitive, social etc.), we did not attempt to assess the performance of the children we met in relation to these indicators and competencies. This was for ethical reasons, on the grounds that the project was unable to adequately respond to individual children identified through the exercise as having problems and would need further capacity building in order to cater properly to groups of children highlighted as being in difficulty.

In general this was a very productive exercise that seemed to capture the interest of both adult and child participants. With one group of parents, however, it proved difficult to move the discussion away from the consideration of causes for why some children appear to be doing better than others. A good deal of frustration was expressed by mothers in the group at the obstacles to providing the care and support necessary to ensure that children in the village would enjoy wellbeing. In any event, by seeking to draw out participants' ideas of a child who is doing well, the reality of their own lives or that of their children may seem highly inadequate. From this point of view, the exercise may prove discouraging to some people.

On the positive side, the method provides an immediate picture of ideals of behaviour, attitude and competency that has direct relevance for programme development. For example, within the context of the play centres, animators and participants could develop a code of behaviour to guide all interactions using information yielded by this method that would be aimed at promoting a more co-operative and harmonious atmosphere in activities.

Practical issues

Duration of sessions. We decided in advance that sessions with the children should be restricted

Box 6: Image Theatre exercise (Adapted from Augusto Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, 1992)

Aim: To generate information on problems faced by children in the community and on the repertoire of responses they may make to these.

Participants: This activity was used effectively with children over 8–9 years of age. During the activity, if the participants are diverse, it is advisable to group similar individuals (i.e. gender and age) together within the small group activities. The total group ideally should be comprised of between 12 and 24 persons, each small group should not exceed six persons in size.

Facilitators: At least one facilitator for the activity, as well as an additional note-taker.

Materials: None required.

Instructions:

1. Preliminary activity to explain ground rules and method. Arrange participants in a circle, standing facing inwards. Ask for two volunteers. Without speaking, arrange the two volunteers in the centre of the circle to be motionless figures standing facing one another and shaking hands. Step back into the circle and ask the participants what story they see in the image before them. When participants volunteer a story, elicit more details from them and others in the group (i.e.'If these are siblings saying goodbye, why are they separating? How do they each feel about each other? What challenges might lie before each of them? What do they say to one another?').

2. Once a single story has been elaborated, then ask for a different story that may be read within the same image. Elaborate this story in a similar fashion. Then remove one of the volunteers from the still image and substitute a new volunteer in a different (non-shaking hands) pose. Ask the participants to read the new image. Continue to change volunteers, poses and images three or four more times, until the ingredients required for the main exercise have been adequately demonstrated. These are as follows: (a) the method of 'reading' (projecting onto) an image; (b) the principle that multiple perspectives may be valid; (c) the method of using bodies (respectfully and carefully) to construct still images that convey a situation; (d) the idea that the stories and characters elaborated by the viewers are independent and not connected to the volunteers who are embodying characters in the images.

3. Divide participants into groups of between four and six persons. Ask each group to create a 'still' image that shows a child who is facing some kind of problem, as well as people around her/him. Give each group about 15 minutes to develop and rehearse a story and an image.

4. Bring the participants together in a semi-circle. Have each group, in turn, present their silent image for their peer audience to read. Inform the group that the unknown child in the image lives in their village and facilitate the reading of each image, asking the audience to map out the characters in the story, the circumstances of the child, the background to the child's problems, and her/his thoughts and feelings. Explore alternative readings of each image, whilst the note-taker records the themes and ideas associated with each problem. The facilitator can also ask about the relevance of issues in the story to past experiences of the children in the village. The story elaborated

Box 6: *(Continued)*

by the group presenting each image is not privileged here, and will only be presented at the end of the readings IF the group requests an opportunity to do so.

5. At the end of the multiple readings of each image, the facilitator can ask the participants which suggested story they thought was the most realistic and that they would like to see more of. Then a discussion should be facilitated on how each problem might be resolved, with an emphasis on the most realistic solutions and the potential (social) resources that might be utilized in each case. Again, the note-taker should record themes and ideas produced during the discussion.

6. To conclude the exercise, each group should be instructed to create two further images, depicting (a) one effective action to resolve the problem and (b) an improved situation that results from this action. The groups should each be given 10 minutes to produce and rehearse the two new images.

7. Bring the participants together in a semi-circle to see the presentation of the series of all three images (problem, action, improved situation) and applaud each of the groups.

in length to about two hours, so as not to tire them, with plenty of time for games. Drinks and biscuits were provided when possible. Extensive use was made of drawing and group discussion, both of these often being more attractive to children than interviews and writing. We sought to use methods that reduce power imbalances between adult monitors and child project participants, encourage children to feel comfortable with the process and, as far as possible, contribute their own views and perspectives.

Constraints of group methods. The employment of methods involving groups of children collaborating, rather than individuals working on their own, entails both opportunities and constraints. While children in groups may feel constrained in what they can discuss publicly, they may on the other hand, find solace in sharing their experiences and concerns with peers. Similarly, whereas collective methods enable wider coverage of respondents in a shorter period of time, individual methods may better facilitate the building of trust between the adult researcher and the child respondent. Possibly the greatest advantage of collective methods is their potential as a vehicle for building

interactive, problem solving, planning and other competencies, in children. All of these are critical processes in children's social development. Therefore, collective participatory methods can, in themselves, contribute to psychosocial wellbeing.

The information obtained from these methods can generally be enhanced through a semi-structured focus group discussion held immediately afterwards while the subject is still fresh in children's minds. This can be extremely helpful in crosschecking information and probing key issues. Above all, however, it provides an opportunity to work through issues children raise during the main session that may still be causing them concern.

Appropriate grouping. With methods based on collective knowledge and experience, it is important to pay careful attention to gathering child respondents into appropriate groupings. In some cases the methods involve both initial and follow-up stages and often children can remain together in one large group for the first stage. However, it is seldom possible to work effectively with large groups of children during the more detailed information gathering stage. In order to minimize

possible unease among the children and consolidate knowledge built upon common experience and understanding, it is normally desirable to group individuals with similar social and personal characteristics together. In other words, the aim should be to group the children as far as possible by those factors (e.g., gender, age, socio-cultural or religious background) that are pertinent locally. Of course, care should be taken to ensure that such grouping does not emphasize or contribute to divisions between sections of the wider community. It is important to stress that familiarity among group members is not always an advantage, especially in areas of armed conflict where neighbours can spy on, or betray, each other. It is essential that the recorder identifies and the facilitator works to address, reduce or resolve such tensions and disputes as far as possible.

Working with children under 10. The original aim was to work with children aged between approximately 5 and 16. However, it soon became apparent that younger children (those under age 10) were not responding well to the exercises. There were several problems. Sometimes the younger children were unable to understand what the task entailed. Sometimes they were able to provide very little information that could be used or were simply too shy to engage in an activity. Often, they preferred to play independently. In the end, given the limited time available to us, rather than developing methods more suited to younger children we were forced to abandon working with this age group. That said, we would not wish to imply that these methods are inherently unsuitable for young children. It may have been that the younger children in this particular area were unable to respond to these exercises due to years of impaired health and nutritional intake, limited opportunity to express their views and extremely restricted access to and very poor quality of education. Given more time and the possibility to work in small groups, it is quite possible that at least some of our tools could have proved effective. In summary, it appears that cognitive capacity and prior experiences of participation and articulation of personal viewpoints may function as key factors in determining the efficacy of these methods in work with young children.

Facilitation and recording. Use of collective methods implies careful facilitation and recording, and therefore requires a minimum of two people, each with a distinct and clearly defined role. Ideally, the facilitator should be someone known and trusted by the children. In this respect, the pilot team was seriously disadvantaged since we were not only strangers to the children but three of us were foreigners unfamiliar with the Tamil language. Although we were lucky enough to work with excellent interpreters, given the numbers of children involved and the fact that often several conversations were being conducted concurrently, we only managed to capture a fraction of the total information that was conveyed to us.

Ideally, the recorder should not be involved in the process but remain apart, observing and taking detailed notes on all that happens, how the children respond to the exercise and what is said. Together with the actual products of the tools and methods (e.g., maps, drawings, etc.) these notes provide a vital record of the exercise and should be used in the analysis of findings. It is extremely important that these records are exact, rather than summaries, and that children's actual words be recorded, using the children's own terms and concepts. In this way, planning and reflecting on programmatic initiatives with them will maintain congruence with their perspectives and aid mutual understanding. The children need to agree

both to being recorded and to the subsequent use of their materials.

In terms of facilitation, one of the main difficulties was the size of some of the groups of children, and the fact that the age range was so broad that at times it was impossible to direct and control the process. Sometimes upward of 30 to 50 children aged between 5 and 15 would be present, all wanting to be involved. Another challenge was how to avoid different groups of children copying from each other, since this is particularly likely when using collective methods, and given the informality of the process. Some methods were more prone to this problem than others.

Maintaining concentration. Given that the Koinonia programme focused on play activities, it was hardly surprising to find that the children expected our sessions with them would be fun. We tried to select methods that the children would enjoy and to intersperse use of these with lively games. However, most of the methods do involve an element of concentration and, because of the use of pencils, paper and so on, do resemble school-work to some extent. Therefore, it was often quite difficult to settle everyone down at the start. That said, we noticed a marked change in the children over time as they became more familiar with us and with the nature of the activities.

Reflections on the piloting process

Our work was undertaken in a context where very little data about children's lives had been accumulated. Therefore, the findings provided a baseline against which subsequent impacts of the programme might be monitored and evaluated. To explain how this would happen in practice, we offer two examples. Firstly, through the repeated use of the risk and resources map it may be possible to explore how phenomena identified previously as risks may have been overcome in the children's view, or even turned into resources. For instance, irrigation ponds that were commonly considered by children as places of danger might, through the activities of the project, become places that are safe and considered beneficial and pleasurable to visit. Secondly, through several of the methods exploring social ecology it may be possible to monitor the development of children's social networks, in terms of both quantity of different categories of people identified as resources, as well as quality of relationships.

Many of the methods piloted offer opportunities for the quantification of data. The rich qualitative data generated through open-ended activities can form the basis for additional exercises to rank and rate specific factors by importance, severity or frequency. The challenge with quantification using this approach is first and foremost an ethical one. Asking children to evaluate themselves or their peers might prove very disempowering or distressing, especially in the context of the fledgling psychosocial support services being provided locally. We would also be careful of using large-scale data gathering methods in a politically unstable setting where the acquisition of information in this manner may appear authoritarian and trigger a negative reaction.

The participatory nature of these methods makes it possible for children to identify their own concerns, the things that they find troubling or frightening, and the people and things they turn to when they need help. This is very different from researcher-led approaches in which threats to children are predetermined by adult monitors.

The potential of these methods to yield information of immediate relevance became

apparent during the pilot testing. Indeed, Koinonia staff acted directly on some of the findings. For example, in one village where drowning was identified as a major risk, the 'animators' (young women from the locality employed by Koinonia to run activities) approached people who live nearby and fish in the lake to find out about the factors affecting level of risk. They discovered that the most dangerous time of year is just after the rains when the lakes are full and that the mud is also hazardous as children may become stuck in it and drown. The animators explained the risks to the children and talked about appropriate protection strategies. With this new knowledge, the children began to inform others.

Monitoring and evaluation is not a neutral process. Inevitably, there are important issues of power. It is not just about who gets to ask and who gets to speak, but also who is monitoring whom and for what purpose and who makes decisions based on the outcomes of processes. In fact, effective monitoring and evaluation – with the potential to lead to changes in the programme – are likely to draw into competition the various interest groups that may exist in communities and agencies. We have advocated the use of participatory methods that are sensitive to children's views and perspectives, as well as to local values in the belief that such an approach helps to reduce power imbalances and the associated abuses. However, this does not remove the obligation of monitors to manage the dynamics of monitoring processes so as to ensure that they do not detrimentally affect relations among colleagues, and between children and programme staff. Based on the experience of the pilot, it seems that the process of coming together to discuss and reflect on everyday life in an ordered and focused manner can, in itself, be valuable for children. If such activities continue, as

an embedded part of a project, they would likely lead to the enhancement of children's capacity to make a connection between the risks and problems they encounter in everyday life and the resources that may be available to them. This capacity is vital for the creation of children's own strategies to address issues of concern.

Limitations and concerns
As with any other approach, the manner in which we worked had its own inherent limitations, of which the following seem particularly important to note. First, the collective nature of our methods made it extremely difficult to elicit detailed information about the suffering of individuals. Also, it was often harder to learn about the threats experienced by children within the private space of the home than more public settings. As a consequence, these methods do not lend themselves particularly well to identification of appropriate responses to individual children. Second, our status as outsiders seems likely to have contributed to the difficulty of eliciting information of a more personal nature. In addition, as outsiders we were not in a position to take forward the focus and energy generated by our sessions with children. It should also be noted that, together with the translators, we were a mixed group in terms of age, gender and social class. It was our impression that particular constraints may have existed for those of us who were male and for the older members of the team in terms of establishing an easy rapport with children, especially girls. With parents, conversely, the older members had a possible advantage.

Third, we focused broadly on the psychosocial status of children and the factors that impact this, rather than on programme performance in relation to explicitly stated objectives. This was partly because the work in the centres was very new and therefore it

would have been premature to try and assess outcomes and impact. In this sense, as noted, the data yielded from the pilot served mostly as a baseline against which changes observed through future monitoring can be highlighted. Naturally, such a baseline is an important first step in the establishment of a monitoring and evaluation system. Having highlighted this limitation within the piloting process, these tools are clearly amenable to use in ongoing monitoring. In the case of programmes with well elaborated objectives, they will reveal the extent to which an intervention's objectives are being met.

Fourth, we encountered particular difficulties in attempting to pilot the methods with younger children. A good deal of further work specifically focused on the piloting of methods for this younger age group would appear to be necessary.

Fifth, we recognize that the methods piloted would not identify children suffering mental health problems. We agree that it can be feasible and appropriate to attempt to assess the mental health of individuals who appear to be confronting particular difficulties, so long as the programme has the intention and capacity to respond to these children. Such monitoring would require different methods but can be conducted alongside and as a complement to the methods discussed here. However, we would recommend use of local concepts and understandings of mental health and distress as far as possible, rather than importing categories and notions from outside the cultural context.

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[2] The research conducted by Jo de Berry and colleagues in Kabul offers a different picture. As the authors note '. . . a child is much more likely to be preoccupied with the difficulties of crossing a mine field to fetch water today, than remembering an experience of fighting which happened several years ago.' (2003:55)

[3] There is a discernible connection between individual methods and the types of information they tend to provide, although few of the tools focus exclusively or exhaustively on a particular domain ('human capacity', 'material environment' and 'social ecology'). The two methods that focused most closely on 'human capacity' were body maps and the wellbeing exercise. Information on 'social ecology' was obtained largely through social maps, problem trees, spider diagrams and others, while the 'material environment' was addressed mainly through the risk/resources maps and timeline exercises. However, it was apparent that information generated in relation to one domain would often be linked to issues in another domain. For example, a cut on a foot drawn by mothers during a body map exercise was described by them as linked to being preoccupied with or 'thinking too much' ['human capacity'] about their situation of financial insecurity ['material environment'] whilst clearing the forest as laborers − a form of work now necessary since the loss of the support from spouses ['social ecology'] who have been murdered or disappeared.

[4] It can be used very effectively in conjunction with a time line exercise to explore change.

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