

Learning to Listen and Respond!

Findings from consultations with children
and young people to inform the
Ombudsperson approach



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May 2022



SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES



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1. Introduction and Methodology

SOS Children's Villages International is designing and piloting an Ombuds approach to increase safeguarding and effective resolution of concerns and complaints raised by children and young people. In collaboration with [Proteknôn Foundation](#), the Ombuds approach is being developed, piloted, and tested at the national level by three member associations in Benin, Sierra Leone, and Uruguay, and at the regional and global level. Lessons learned from the pilots will be used to inform the adaptation and scale-up of an Ombudsperson approach.

Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) enshrines the fundamental rights of children and young people to express their views and be heard in decisions that affect them. Furthermore, the UN [Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children](#), (Principle 13) states that *"Children must be treated with dignity and respect at all times and must benefit from effective protection from abuse, neglect, and all forms of exploitation, whether on the part of care providers, peers, or third parties, in whatever care setting they may find themselves."* Putting children and young people at the centre, and listening to and learning from their experiences, views, and suggestions helps to design an SOS Ombudsperson approach that is more accessible, relevant, and responsive to the needs and concerns of children and young people.

This report shares findings from consultations with children and young people about the Ombuds approach. Over 300 children and young people aged 10–24 years from across the three pilot countries, as well as members of the IYC shared their insights about:

- Risks, rights, and safeguarding
- Factors that hinder and enable safe expression about concerns experienced within SOS Children's Village Programmes
- Qualities of an ideal child/youth friendly Ombudsperson
- Preferred ways to communicate with and reach out to an Ombudsperson if they have concerns
- Ways to inform children and young people about the Ombudsperson

The Global Ombuds team developed [guidelines](#) for organising, facilitating, and documenting consultations with children and young people. In each pilot country, National Advisory Groups supported the formation of Consultation Teams, including a youth coordinator, safeguarding focal point, an independent facilitator, and a documenter. The Consultation Teams and relevant regional advisers received online training and mentoring from Proteknôn participation mentors to prepare for meaningful participation of children and young people. Each Consultation Team then adapted and implemented the consultation guidelines to best suit their context(s). The country teams documented the findings and sent them back to the Global Ombudsperson participation team.

In each of the pilot countries, information sharing and trust-building sessions (2 hours) followed by half-day face-to-face consultations were organised with participants of different ages (10–13 years, 14–17 years, 18–24 years), genders, and backgrounds, including children and young people living in SOS Children's Villages alternative care service, and those who are part of Family Strengthening Programmes (FSP). In addition, the guidance and consultation activities were adapted for online information sharing and consultation meetings with members of SOS Children's Villages' IYC.

325 children and young people (170 male, 155 female) were involved in the initial information sharing sessions, and the majority, 315 children and young people (167 male, 148 female), volunteered to participate in the consultation workshops. Those involved included: children and young people from a wide range of ethnic groups; children and young people with disabilities and mental health challenges; school-going and out of school children and young people, including those in training apprentices (*see Appendix A for more details*).

Overview of children and young people involved in consultation workshops:

Geographic Location	Consultation Sessions					
	10-13 years		14-17 years		18-24 years	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Benin						
Nattingou	11	10	15	9		
Abomey-Calvi			7	7	10	3
Dassa-Zoume	14	8			13	7
Sierra Leone						
Makeni			15	15	12	15
Bo			10	14	14	8
Freetown			14	15	7	11
Uruguay						
Florida	7	14				
Payasandu			15	10		
IYC Global Online					3	2
<i>Subtotals</i>	32	32	76	70	59	46
<i>Overall Total</i>	64		146		105	

A member of the Global Ombuds participation team undertook initial thematic analysis of the consultation findings using NVivo to ensure systematic coding and analysis, identifying similar as well as different findings across the different contexts. Visual summaries of the emerging findings were developed as child/youth friendly [posters](#) for presentation and discussion with children and youth. The emerging findings were discussed, validated, and refined through an online workshop with members of the IYC. Guidance for [validation workshops](#) with children and young people, and posters of the visual findings (in English, French and Spanish) were also shared with pilot country National Advisory Groups.

In late January/early February 2022, validation workshops were organised with children and young people in Benin to discuss the overall consultation findings as well as the draft SOS Ombuds Model. The workshops involved 86 children and young people, including many CYP who were a part of the Ombuds consultation workshops, and those who are also representatives of the Child and Youth Executive Councils (9 male and 5 female, aged 14-24 years in Abomey-Calvi; 19 male and 14 female, aged 10-13 year and 18-24 years in Dassa-Zoume; and 18 male and 21 female in Nattingou). Findings from these validation workshops are integrated into this report.¹

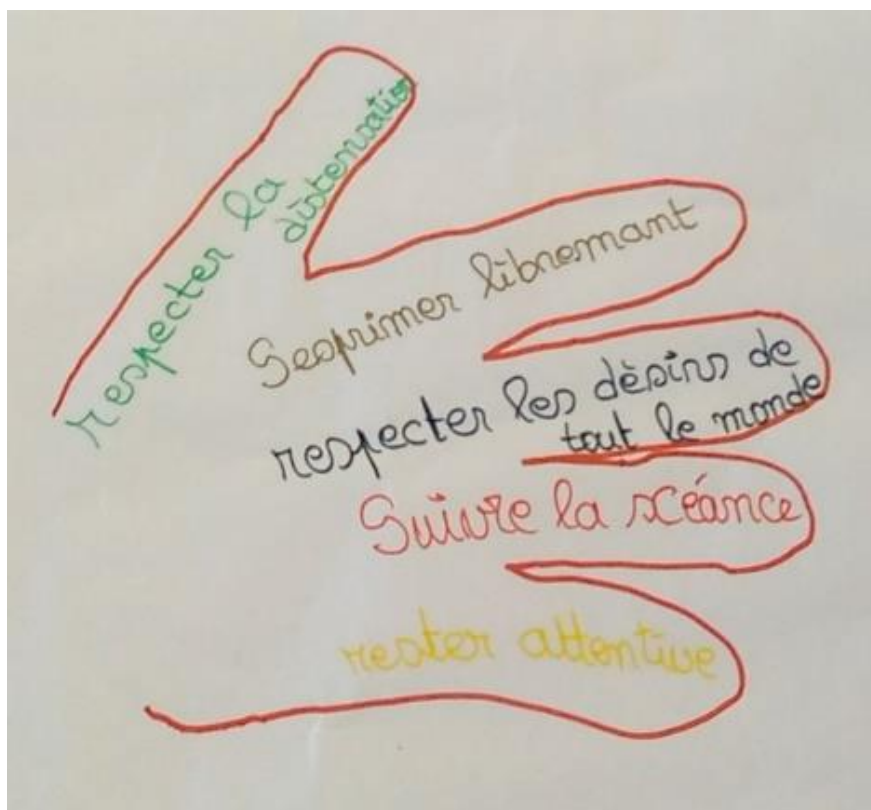


Figure 1: Example of positive agreements (Benin)

¹ An earlier version of this report was shared with SOS and Proteknôn team members in December 2021, to enable children and young people's views to inform and influence the design of the SOS Ombuds Model.

2. Findings

Key findings from the information sharing sessions and the consultations with children and young people, as well as the follow-up validation workshops, are presented in eight sub-sections, to share children and young people's perspectives on:

- Risks, rights, and safeguarding
- Factors that hinder safe expression about concerns experienced with SOS Children's Villages Programmes
- Factors that enable safe expression about concerns experienced with SOS Children's Villages Programmes
- Whether or not it is a good idea to have an Ombudsperson and why
- Qualities of an ideal child/youth friendly Ombudsperson
- Preferred ways to communicate with an Ombudsperson
- Ways to inform children and young people about the Ombudsperson
- The SOS Ombuds Model

2.1 Risks, rights, and safeguarding

During the information sharing session, the "Crocodiles and Lions" game was used to introduce safeguarding. Children shared their views on risks that they need protection from as well as their views on what safeguarding means. [Posters](#) and/or animated [videos](#) on children's rights were also shared with participants to ensure awareness on their right to be protected, heard, and cared for within SOS Children's Villages Programmes, and SOS's commitment to safeguarding was emphasised.

Crocodiles and Lions game to introduce safeguarding:

A large rectangle was created, and participants stood around the edge of the rectangle without touching. Participants were told that the inside of the rectangle represents a pond and there are crocodiles in the pond. However, outside of the pond there are lions. Fortunately, the lions and crocodiles never attack at the same time. So when the participants hear the word "lion" they have to move quickly into the pond to avoid being eaten by the lion, and when they hear "crocodile" they have to move quickly out of the "pond" onto the land to avoid being eaten by a crocodile. The caller calls lion, crocodile, lion, lion, et cetera in whatever order they want. If a participant does not move fast enough, they are out.

The facilitator explained that the lions symbolise risks that children and young people may face in their communities, schools, and in other public settings, while the crocodiles symbolise risks that children and young people may face when they are part of SOS Children's Villages' programmes. Children and young people shared examples of risks that they face within and outside of SOS Children's Villages Programmes. The facilitators emphasised that SOS Children's Villages is committed to taking practical steps to prevent and to sensitively respond to risks and concerns experienced by children and young people.

Risks emphasised by children and young people

The types of risks and challenges that children and young people thought they may be exposed to in their communities, schools, and public places as well as inside of SOS Children's Villages Programmes include:

- Emotional violence and discrimination—insults, teasing, bullying, denigration, shaming, threats, neglect, insufficient care, and lack of privacy
- Physical violence and abuse, being hit, caned, and other physical violence that leads to injury
- Harsh punishments, including corporal punishment, weeding, and being deprived of food
- Child labour, forced labour and labour exploitation, doing heavy work, and doing low-paying or unpaid work
- Not sending child/young person to school and/or not allowing them to follow their choice of study/vocational training
- Sexual abuse, rape, and sexual harassment—especially of girls
- Child marriage and forced marriage
- Child abduction and/or trafficking
- Stealing and theft
- Drug use/abuse
- Malnutrition
- Loss of inheritance
- Murder

Children's awareness of their rights

Some children and young people in SOS Children's Village programmes are aware of their rights. Children and young people commented on their rights to development, survival, protection, and participation. For example, across the different consultation settings, participants shared examples of their rights to:

- **Survival:** right to life, to health care, to clothing, to a healthy environment, to healthy food, to a home/housing
- **Development:** right to education, to play and leisure, right to family, to a name, identity, and nationality
- **Protection:** right to protection from all forms of abuse, to protection from child labour, safety, protection from neglect and cruel treatment, privacy, right to consent or not to consent
- **Participation:** right to freedom of expression, freedom of association, (older—right to vote), right to religious affairs

"The right to protection, the right to a family, the right to an education."

(14-year-old male, Benin)

A few young people emphasised that rights are accompanied by responsibilities. For example, if you want to live in a healthy environment then individuals also need to make efforts to keep their environment clean.

However, not all children are aware of their rights, and a youth explained that when they were a child they were not informed about their rights. Furthermore, young people mentioned the need for caregivers and children to have a shared understanding of the rights, otherwise it can lead to misunderstandings.



Figure 2: Sharing on children's rights

"When I hear the word "rights" I think about what I am entitled to as a child. What children should have in their childhood... It is not something they should have to fight for, or struggle for, it should come easily to them, like education, health care, shelter, a loving family... In all my childhood years I never heard about these rights. For example if you are owing tuition fees you can be sacked from school, no one tells you have rights to access education." (IYC female, Africa)

What safeguarding means to children and young people

Children and young people described how safeguarding means to watch over, to care and to protect the child, and to make sure that nothing bad happens to them. Some mentioned the importance of people following rules to protect children from harm and taking action to protect the child and ensure fulfilment of their rights. Individuals also highlighted that adults cannot hit children.

"It is to make sure that nothing dangerous happens to the child." (12-year-old girl, Benin)

"It is to maintain; it is to keep; it is the set of rules that must be followed so as not to harm the integrity of the child." (18-year-old male, Benin)

In Uruguay, the term "protection" was used rather than "safeguarding." Furthermore, in addition to adult actions to protect children, children and young people from Uruguay emphasised the importance of children taking care of themselves and asking for help.

Some children and young people had been part of previous awareness sessions on safeguarding. However, in Benin the facilitation team observed that children and young people from the FSP had less awareness of safeguarding. The information sharing sessions organised prior to the consultations provided an important opportunity to share information about safeguarding, to introduce the safeguarding focal point, and to answer children and young people's questions about safeguarding.

The safeguarding focal points described strategies and procedures that had been put in place to ensure that employees, service providers, and the organisation's activities do not put children in danger and prevent different forms of abuse and harm. Children and young people's questions about how to report concerns, and who to report to, were responded to. The "Follow the Leader" game was played to reinforce the message that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, especially staffs' responsibility. Furthermore, the role of children and young people as leaders to promote safeguarding was highlighted.

"I think it is everyone's responsibility, because if you see it is your responsibility to report it, even though there are specific people who have real power to influence decisions about what is done, in the end it is everyone's responsibility." (IYC female, Africa)

To enhance children and young people's confidence to speak up and to raise concerns, young people emphasised the importance of confidentiality and prompt action to ensure safeguarding.

"It is responsibility of staff to protect. It is also the responsibility of children and young people to speak up and raise concerns... When SOS receive reports from children they should take it seriously and they should treat it privately. They should not tell everyone in the office. If a young person reports to the mentor, they should keep it private and take it seriously, not just write a report and keep it in the drawer of the office. Concerns should only be shared with the most relevant person." (IYC male, Middle East)

What an Ombudsperson means to children and young people

The name for an Ombudsperson varies for different languages and different socio-political contexts. In Sierra Leone, the term Ombudsperson was used, whereas in Benin the term "Mediator" was used, and in Uruguay the term "Defender" was used.

While a few children and young people had never heard about an Ombudsperson/Mediator role before, some children and young people had heard of the term. Children and young people described how an Ombudsperson/Mediator/Defender was a person who acted as an intermediary and who took prompt action to mediate and solve problems or complaints.

"Someone who will solve the children's problems." (14-year-old male, Benin)

"It is a natural/moral person who is in charge of settling conflicts. The Mediator acts as an interface between the two parties." (20-year-old male, Benin)

In Sierra Leone, some young people were aware of an existing independent Ombudsperson office that supports citizens to raise complaints about poor administration or injustice.

"The Ombudsperson office is as an independent office of parliament which investigates public authorities and to protect the people against abuse and violence." (17-year-old female, Sierra Leone)

"The Ombudsperson office as an independent office which supports people to get justice." (16-year-old female, Sierra Leone)

Who is an Ombudsperson?



An Ombudsperson is a person of trust that has skills and power to help children and young people to resolve their concerns or complaints.

SOS Children's Villages wants to have this person of trust to improve the safety and wellbeing of everyone in the SOS Children's Villages programmes

As a first step, an Ombudsperson will be established to be an Ombudsperson first in **three countries (Benin, Sierra Leone and Uruguay)** and at the **Global Level** to test the approach

4 Information Packet for the IYC



Figure 1: Example of information shared with IYC members

2.2 Factors that hinder safe expression about concerns experienced within SOS Children's Villages Programmes

Snakes and Ladders:

The "Snakes and Ladders" board game was adapted for use by children and young people in gender-based groups to explore:

- Snakes: Things that make it harder for children and young people to share concerns and complaints within SOS Children's Villages Programmes.
- Ladders: Things that make it easier for children and young people to share concerns and complaints within SOS Children's Villages Programmes.

Children and young people also reflected on the most significant barriers (longest snakes) and the most significant enablers (longest ladders), as well as identifying particular groups of children that face additional barriers to raise concerns.

Factors that hinder safe expression about concerns and complaints

The most significant barriers that hinder safe expression of concerns and complaints by children and young people within SOS Children's Villages Programmes were:

- Fears and worries about the repercussions of reporting
- Threats, deprivation, insults, abuse, and emotional violence
- Lack of respect for confidentiality

- Lack of confidence to speak out

These factors were emphasised by children and young people across each of the pilot countries and by IYC members, and they are intertwined. A lack of respect for confidentiality increases risks of threats, deprivations, and other forms of violence if children share their concerns, thus increasing their fears, worries, and lack of confidence to speak out. Each of these are barriers to the effective implementation of the existing safeguarding mechanisms within SOS Children's Villages and are barriers that need to be overcome to develop an effective Ombudsperson approach.

Additional barriers mentioned by some groups of children and young people across countries included:

- Lack of availability of safeguarding focal points and conflicts of interest
- Lack of trust in the process, especially due to delays
- Interference or limited responses to concerns raised
- Discrimination, injustice, and unfairness
- Shame and stigma

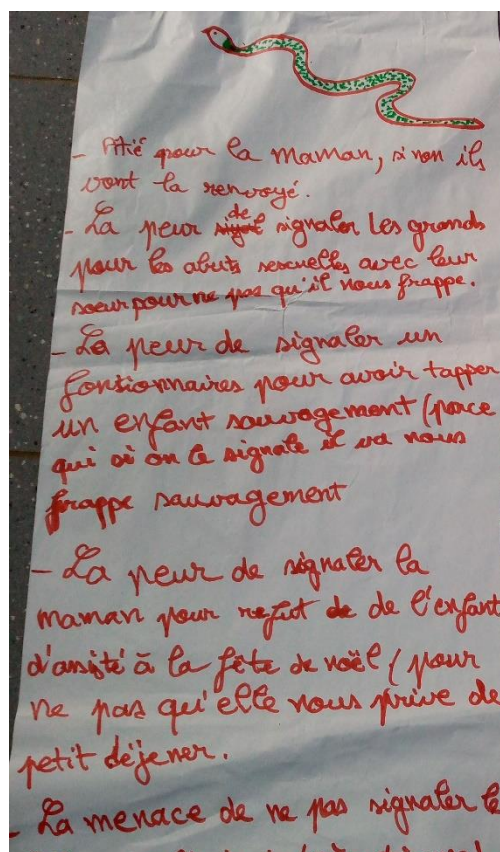


Figure 2: Example of snakes (Benin)

Fears and worries about the repercussions of reporting

Across each location, age, and gender group, children and young people expressed fears and worries about the repercussions of reporting concerns and complaints. Worries included pity for the person you want to report and pity that the caregiver/staff member may be sent away. Fears encompassed being blamed for someone being fired; fear of mistreatment, deprivation, or punishment; fear of being misunderstood or ignored; and fear of SOS Children's Villages having a bad reputation.

"We are afraid of stigmatisation, intimidation, deprivation, and isolation by those against whom concerns are raised." (14- to 17-year-old, Sierra Leone)

"We have an anti-snitching culture. So if you see something that is wrong it is better to keep quiet about this. If you say something you get into really hot water." (IYC female, Africa)

Threats, deprivation, insults, abuse, and emotional violence

Children and young people described a wide range of threats that they may face if they report concerns and complaints encompassing deprivation, and physical and emotional abuse by their caregivers, other staff, and/or by their peers.

"The fear of being beaten up for no reason by the person you have reported." (10- to 13-year-old female, Benin)

"Fear that we may be cursed by perpetrators, which might lead to failure in life or misfortune." (14- to 17-year-old, Sierra Leone)

"Being treated differently. If something happens to you, keep it to yourself."
(10-year-old female, Uruguay)

If an adult they are supposed to tell their concerns to is a person who appears strict and unwelcoming, children and young people are fearful and reluctant to share their concerns. Furthermore, when children and young people have a poor relationship with their mother/main caregiver their fears are enhanced and risks of emotional abuse increase. In one consultation, youths described what they called "false impression/stage management" where some staff in SOS Children's Villages pretend to love and care for the children when they receive external visitors.

"Discriminatory treatment. You will be served raw food to cook before eating while others will be served cooked food after school, just because you have raised concern against someone... [and] the threat of being exited from the SOS care and support if you challenge issues."
(18- to 24-year-old, Sierra Leone)

Lack of respect for confidentiality

Lack of respect for confidentiality is a key barrier to children and young people sharing their concerns and complaints, and it enhances their fears of negative repercussions.

"They will explain our concerns to those against whom we have raised such concerns."
(22-year-old female, Sierra Leone)

In Sierra Leone, youths also described the importance of anonymity in terms of places to report concerns. A youth explained that if a beneficiary is seen entering into the office where concerns are to be raised, and later there is an investigation, the beneficiary will be haunted as the one that raised the concern or even stigmatised and subject to food deprivation, discrimination, and isolation.

Lack of confidence to speak out

Many children and young people lack the confidence to speak out about concerns and complaints due to concerns about confidentiality and the fear of negative repercussions. Existing socio-cultural norms around child-adult relationships also makes it harder for children and young people to raise concerns, as children are not proactively encouraged to express their views and feelings, and children are not meant to question an adult's behaviour even if they know the behaviour is wrong.

"We are not taught to speak up in our cultural context. We are told to keep quiet to respect adults. There is a cultural challenge, you don't get to speak up on a lot of things."
(IYC female, Africa)

Furthermore, children's experiences of insufficient care and protection contribute to poor self-esteem, which undermines children's confidence to express their views and concerns. Some children and young people lack the confidence that their complaints will be listened to and taken seriously.

"I want to talk about courage and willingness to speak up. Many children in SOS village are not used to hear good things about them. Every time they face insults and many bad things. If it is like this then they don't have the courage to speak up. There is a lack of confidence." (IYC female, Africa)

"We think that if we complain we will not be taken seriously." (14- to 17-year-old, Sierra Leone)

In some situations, children may also lack information and awareness about their rights and about different forms of violence, and thus may not report bad behaviour as they do not know it is not allowed.

"Not having enough knowledge on child protection and safeguarding issues make it difficult to share our concerns." (18-year-old female, Sierra Leone)

"Ignorance of children's rights exists among some children in the Family Strengthening Programme." (10- to 17-year-old male, Benin)

Lack of availability of safeguarding focal points and conflicts of interest

Young people described how the safeguarding focal point and other key staff are not always available to listen to them. This may be due to being busy with other professional activities, being on holiday, or due to a perceived conflict of interest. For example, young people from different countries described how their concerns may not be taken seriously by the safeguarding person or by senior management if those individuals have a close relationship with the caregiver or staff they are complaining about.

"Lack of a person to whom one wants to speak out." (14- to 17-year-old male, Sierra Leone)

"It is difficult to be confident with SOS mothers and focal points because you are afraid that they will tell what the focal point says to your mother. It's difficult to build confidence and trust the focal points, because there may be a conflict between the SOS mother and the young person." (IYC female, Africa)

"When children or young people raise concerns against staff, the authority listen and believe in what the staff says more than they would do for the children." (18- to 24-year-old, Sierra Leone)

Lack of trust in the process especially due to delays, interference, or limited responses

When a young person's perspectives are given less weight than an adult's, it underestimates the children's trust in the safeguarding and/or the complaints-handling process.

"It is very common that they don't believe us. Adults are believed." (16-year-old female, Uruguay)

Limited responses, interference, and/or delays also undermine children and young people's trust in the process.

"There is a lack of trust.... When I was living in the village I wanted to report about some official stuff to the director. When I told them about my report they said they would take an action, but there was no punishment for the other side." (IYC male, Middle East)

"I want to focus on delay and limited response. Sometimes the problem may be simple and they (SOS management) may take it lightly. Not giving proper or quick action has been leading to some destruction... A problem may seem simple or not important to an adults, but for that child it very important. It has been very crucial or very difficult for them. Every single thing should be taken seriously, they must think from the point of view of the child and the person." (IYC male, Asia)

Discrimination, injustice, and unfairness

Across the pilot countries, children and young people mentioned examples of discrimination, injustice, and unfairness in relation to peer relationships within SOS Children's Villages, as well as in relation to child-adult relationships and the manner in which some concerns or complaints are processed.

"There is injustice, revenge between children, and unfairness of brothers without reason."
(10- to 13-year-old, Benin)

"Not being understood, not being listened to, discrimination, bullying." (14- to 17-year-old female, Uruguay)

In Uruguay, adolescents discussed factors linked to gender inequality, and adolescent girls mentioned the prevalence of machismo (strong aggressive male pride). Furthermore, a boy in Benin mentioned regionalism, implying discrimination based on ethnicity.

Shame and stigma

Children and young people from different settings described the feelings of shame that are associated with raising and reporting concerns. Shame was especially felt if females or males had experienced sexual harassment or abuse.

"A lot of children who talk about sexual abuse, they are ashamed and feel afraid, they feel that their stories will be shared. I think it is connected to the lack of trust and shame."
(IYC male, Middle East)

Furthermore, children and young people from Sierra Leone described the stigma associated with speaking up about concerns, being cursed, and the stigma associated with being reminded about their past.

"Fear that I might be reminded of my past, no wonder your father and mother was like that you will end up like that." (14- to 17-year-old, Sierra Leone)

"At times they say they will place a curse on us and that makes us afraid to share our concerns." (18- to 24-year-old, Sierra Leone)

"Fear of stigma that the youth is responsible for the staff's dismissal or termination of contract." (18- to 24-year-old, Sierra Leone)

Groups of children and young people that face additional barriers to raise concerns

When consulted asked about which children and young people may find it harder to raise concerns the responses were:

- Children and young people in FSP, as it is harder for them to confidentially raise issues with the safeguarding focal point, especially if their homes are in rural settings and/or far away from the SOS Children's Village where the safeguarding focal point is based
- Younger children, as they can be more easily threatened by their caregivers
- Children with disabilities, especially those who face challenges in expressing their concerns
- Those who experience discrimination due to sexual orientation, skin colour, or physical appearance, such as being overweight

"Children/youth in the Family Strengthening Programme face additional difficulties in sharing their concerns. Their presence in the village implies reporting an incident to the focal point. The risk of suspicion and the problem of confidentiality dissuade them." (10- to 13-year-old, Benin)

2.3 Factors that enable safe expression about concerns experienced within SOS Children's Villages Programmes

Factors that enable safe expression about concerns and complaints

The most frequently mentioned factors that enable safe expression of concerns and complaints by children and young people within SOS Children's Villages Programmes were:

- Trusted persons and trust in the process
- Safeguarding focal points, reporting channels, and a variety of ways to raise concerns
- Courage and willingness of children and young people to raise concerns and complaints
- Adult's ability to listen and resolve complaints effectively and to respect confidentiality

Each of these factors were emphasised by children and young people across each of the pilot countries and by IYC members. These findings indicate the importance of ensuring proper implementation of the existing safeguarding mechanisms within SOS as well as ensuring clear communication with children and young people about the links between the safeguarding system and the Ombudsperson approach.

Additional enablers mentioned by some groups of children and young people across countries, which help improve the design and implementation of effective safeguarding and Ombudsperson mechanisms include:

- Independent mechanisms that are non-discriminatory
- Child and youth participation
- Self-care and support from friends

- Access to education and good character
- Rewards for good behaviour and sanctions for bad behaviour

Trusted persons and trust in the process

Children and young people emphasised the importance of having a trusted person to talk to. It could be a friend, a caregiver, an SOS coordinator, the safeguarding focal point, a social worker, or in some cases the national director. Trust in the safeguarding process is also important, a belief that the person you confide in will take your concerns seriously and act in a prompt manner, while also protecting the rights to privacy and confidentiality.

"If you have a relationship with someone you trust, it makes it easier to talk about your concerns. If there is an SOS mother or an SOS caregiver that you trust then it is really, really easy to share concerns. Also if you feel that something is going to be done about, if I see that it is an organisation that takes things seriously, yes I will speak up." (IYC female)

"Trust helps to be honest." (13-year-old female, Uruguay)

"The ladders are: courage, trust in the person to whom one wants to complain... trustworthy people." (18- to 24-year-old, Benin)

IYC members highlighted the importance of a good trusting relationship between the mother and the child/young person, as well as the need for a shared understanding of children's rights.

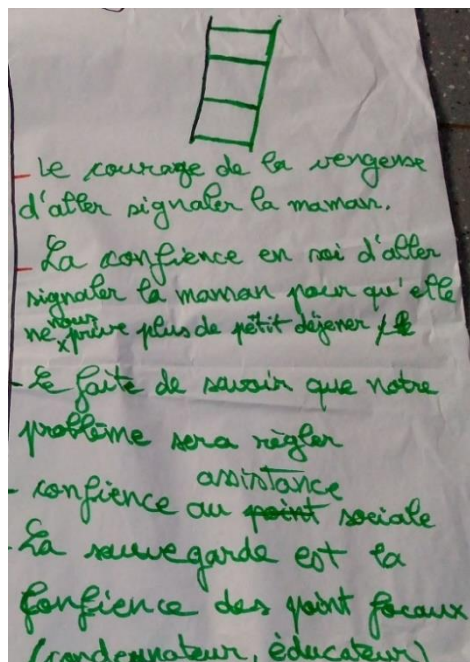


Figure 5: Example of ladders (Benin)

"The relationship between the young person and the mother is very critical and the mother needs to be apologise for any abuse she has done so that they can create a new world where they can build a good relationship between the children and mothers.... The relationship is important so that the interests of young people can be heard... and there should be a common understanding of child rights among caregivers and children so that they can be defended." (IYC male, Africa)

Safeguarding focal points, reporting channels, and a variety of ways to raise concerns

Children and young people described the importance of having clear reporting channels and safeguarding focal points within SOS Children's Villages Programmes. Awareness raising among children and young people on the reporting channels and safeguarding focal points is important so that children and young people are aware of who to tell if they feel unsafe or uncomfortable. The safeguarding focal point should have skills to respectfully listen to and respond to children's concerns and feelings, and they should have power to take action to prevent and protect children from harm. It is critical that children and young people have opportunities to build relationships of trust with the safeguarding focal point.

Wherever possible, children should be offered a variety of ways to report and raise their concerns in confidence with the safeguarding focal point, or with another trusted person. Young people in Sierra Leone also described how the location of the person they report to, or the future Ombudsperson office, is important to ensure anonymity when making a report.

"Safeguarding, the fact that there are focal points, the Child Safeguarding Coordinator, trust in the person you want to talk to." (10- to 13-year-old female, Benin)

"I have seen some stickers around the office to say "if you have concerns, speak to this person—the child protection person"—this helps, to know this person is my point of contact, that is good. But that person also needs to be easy to speak to.... The safeguarding focal point should have power to act—they shouldn't need to first go to director or another manager." (IYC female, Africa)

"The office where we can report our concerns should be located out of SOS Children's Village, but within the community where nobody sees us when we go there to share our concerns... [Also] having a direct contact numbers (hot line) so that the complaint could be channeled without physically going to the office." (18- to 24-year-old, Sierra Leone)

"Reporting channels, computers, focal points, internet, WhatsApp, Child/Youth Executive Council, helpline, the suggestion box." (14- to 17-year-old, Benin)

Courage and willingness of children and young people to raise concerns and complaints

Being courageous and willing to speak up was emphasised by children and young people across each pilot country and among IYC members. Being courageous was linked to being self-confident and knowing who to raise concerns to. Young people in Uruguay concluded that being open with people is a key aspect of sharing concerns.

"Confidence to report the mother so she won't deprive us of breakfast anymore." (10- to 13-year-old male, Benin)

"I need to be self-confident and believe that my fears should not stop me from seeking support from the safeguarding office." (14- to 17-year-old, Sierra Leone)

Due to cultural attitudes that make it harder for children to speak out, IYC members suggested efforts to cultivate freedom of expression, supporting clubs, youth training, public speaking, etc.

"Cultivating the culture of speaking out, I feel that it is something that is needed. I feel it is something that needs to be built from scratch. For example, having public speaking, debates, drama, clubs etc., it should be a continuous thing." (IYC female, Africa)

Adult's ability to listen and resolve complaints effectively and to respect confidentiality

Attentive listening and prompt action is needed by adults to resolve children and young people's concerns and complaints. All children's concerns need to be taken seriously without discrimination or bias based on their gender, age, or any other differences.

"Problem solving, assurance that children have their concerns/complaints resolved."
(10- to 13-year-old female, Benin)

"Immediate action to be taken for all complaint/concerns and justice given in a very transparent manner." (14- to 17-year-old, Sierra Leone)

As already described, confidentiality is key to making it easier for children and young people to share their concerns. Children need to trust that their concerns will not be shared widely with others but will only be shared with those who most need to know, in order to take action.

"Offer the opportunity to young people to speak privately and ensuring confidentiality. Young people views need to be taken seriously and they will need to see an action." (IYC male, Middle East)

"Being listened to after whistleblowing." (10- to 13-year-old, Benin)

One IYC member also emphasised the importance of access to professionals, such as a psychologist who has the training and skills to communicate with children and young people who have experienced difficulties.

Independent mechanisms that are non-discriminatory

Young people highlighted the importance of independent reporting mechanisms, such as the Ombudsperson to enhance transparent, non-discriminatory follow-up and resolution of concerns. The Ombudsperson should not be managed by SOS, or have personal relationships with staff members, in order to avoid conflicts of interest. Furthermore, all cases should be considered without bias or discrimination to ensure fair justice to the children and young people. For example, children and young people's concerns should not be disregarded; each concern should be acknowledged and seriously considered. Children's views should not be treated more lightly than adults due to their age, gender, looks, or other factors. Children and young people should be given clear feedback on how their concerns were considered.

"The Ombudsperson should be a neutral person, not linked to the manager director."
(IYC male, Middle East)

"No personal relationship with other staff to prevent compromise of matters/concerns... Equal justice be given to all no matter the age or gender... taking every concern seriously, no discriminatory treatment." (18- to 24-year-old, Sierra Leone)

IYC members also encouraged that there should be more transparent power sharing among caregivers and senior management, so that caregivers are also unafraid to share concerns. Furthermore, greater efforts are needed to hold perpetrators accountable, to have sanctions for bad behaviour, and to reward the good behaviour of caregivers and other staff.

Child and youth participation and the role of existing child/youth councils/groups

Children and young people mentioned roles that they can play to enhance safeguarding and the resolution of concerns. For example, they can raise awareness among their peers about safeguarding and reporting mechanisms and they can encourage follow-up. Existing child/youth participation structures, such as the Child/Youth Executive Council in Benin, was highlighted as a "ladder."

Children's council representatives can play an important role in ensuring that children's concerns are seriously considered and in enhancing accountability to children.

"Holding sessions between children and authorities allows children to express themselves freely." (18- to 24-year-old female, Benin)

However, an IYC member from the Asia region described the need for SOS Children's Villages to support more inclusive child and youth participation opportunities, rather than selecting the same few youths.

"I am very disappointed in the child and youth participation, I am a bit upset about it as many of the youth or children are not getting the chances to participate.... If there are new events or chances a new child should be chosen so they can also develop their skills and confidence. It is not fair for the same children to be to be given chances, it's unjust."
(IYC male, Asia)

Self-care and support from friends

Self-care and support from friends were highlighted by children and young people in Uruguay. IYC members also described how young people often confide in their peers, and it is important to provide training or support to young people to help support their peers.

"Taking care of themselves (is a ladder)." (10- to 13-year-old male, Uruguay)

"Believing and being believed, encourage each other, advising, empathy, trust, support..."
(14- to 17-year-old female, Uruguay)

Access to education and good character

Opportunities for children and young people to access education and the skill training of their choice was also identified as an enabling factor for children to speak up, as when they are educated or involved in relevant training it increases their self-confidence. Having a good character, being loyal, moral, and helping one another was also mentioned by children in Benin.

"From the beginning each child should be given education where they gain knowledge and build confidence to speak to SOS about their problems. If they are not given the right education they will lose confidence and they will be unable to speak to their representatives." (IYC male, Asia)

2.4 Whether or not it is a good idea to have an Ombudsperson(s) and why

Discussion:

Following the "Snakes and Ladders" group activity to identify things that make it harder and easier for children and young people to share concerns and complaints, the children and young people were asked whether or not it was a good idea to have an Ombudsperson and their reasons why.

The Ombudsperson is a good idea

In each consultation across the age and gender groups in different geographic locations, children and young people expressed that it is a good idea to have an Ombudsperson(s). The main two

reasons shared by children and young people were that the availability of an Ombudsperson(s) would:

- Increase confidentiality, which would increase children's confidence to report concerns
- Be an intermediary to take prompt action to mediate and solve child/youth concerns

Increase confidentiality, which would increase children's confidence to report concerns

Children and young people described how the Ombudsperson was more likely to respect their confidentiality. Thus, this would make it easier for children and young people to raise their concerns and complaints.

"Yes, it is a good idea because I believe that the Ombudsperson, since it is an independent office it will give me confidence to share my concerns and my concerns will be looked into." (17-year-old, Sierra Leone)

"The presence of the mediator will allow them to be more confident and there will be no more intermediary. The confidentiality will be more reinforced." (10- to 13-year-old, Benin)

Be an intermediary to take prompt action to mediate and solve child/youth concerns

The Ombudsperson will enhance effective action to mediate and solve concerns and complaints raised by children/young people who are part of SOS Children's Villages Programmes. The independence of the Ombuds office was seen to enhance transparency and fair resolution of children's concerns.

"Having an Ombudsman is a good idea because it will solve the problem of confidentiality. He/she will be the direct intermediary in contact with the children to protect the children." (14- to 17-year-old, Benin)

"I believe that my concerns will not be compromised anymore." (21-year-old male, Sierra Leone)

Queries about the links between the safeguarding mechanism and the Ombudsperson

Some young people asked whether and how the Ombudsperson linked to the existing safeguarding system, and whether the Ombudspersons would undermine the role of the safeguarding focal points. The facilitators explained that the Ombudsperson approach would be designed to build upon and improve the existing safeguarding system. Children and young people will still be encouraged to raise their concerns with the safeguarding focal point, and the safeguarding team will continue to lead efforts to resolve any safeguarding concerns that children and young people experience with SOS Children's Villages Programmes. The Ombudsperson would play a role in strengthening the existing safeguarding mechanisms, to ensure increased respect for children's privacy and confidentiality in the way cases are resolved. Furthermore, if cases are not effectively resolved, children and young people will be able to raise their concerns with the Ombudsperson, who will then act as a mediator to help ensure effective resolution of the cases.

2.5 Qualities of an ideal child/youth friendly Ombudsperson

Body Map to design an ideal child/youth friendly Ombudsperson:

A Body Map exercise was undertaken in gender-separate groups. Group members designed the body to show the qualities of a child/youth friendly Ombudsperson that is accessible and responsive to their concerns and complaints within SOS Children's Villages Programmes. Body parts provided prompting questions, such as:

1. *Head:* What kind of knowledge does an SOS Children's Villages Ombudsperson need to assist and help children and young people to resolve their concerns or complaints?
2. *Ears:* What sort of ears should they have to listen to children and young people?
3. *Eyes:* What sort of eyes should they have to observe and see how children and young people are being treated?
4. *Mouth:* What sort of mouth should they have to communicate nicely?
5. *Heart:* What qualities and attitudes should an SOS Children's Villages Ombudsperson have?
6. *Shoulders:* What sort of responsibilities should an SOS Children's Villages Ombudsperson have?
7. *Hand:* What practical skills does the SOS Children's Villages Ombudsperson need to resolve children and young people's concerns or complaints in a timely and effective way?
8. *Feet:* Where should the SOS Children's Villages Ombudsperson be able to go in order to resolve children and young people's concerns or complaints?

Children and young people of different age and gender groups across the different countries identified several important qualities for an ideal child/youth friendly Ombudsperson. The qualities that were most frequently mentioned included being:

- An open-hearted, honest, and kind person who respects and understands children
- Intelligent and educated with knowledge of children's rights, safeguarding, and related issues
- An attentive listener with good observational skills and strong communication skills
- Responsible and courageous to defend children and their rights, to offer support, and to advocate for and with children
- A problem solver, adviser, and an influential mediator to resolve children and young people's concerns promptly and effectively
- Committed to respecting confidentiality and to act independently and impartially without bias
- Motivated to visit and spend time with children and young people to build trust
- Calm, peaceful, patient, humble, flexible, and non-violent
- Able to speak national and local languages

Furthermore, it was suggested that both a male and female person should be appointed, so that children and young people could meet with whomever they were more comfortable with. In addition, some children and young people in Benin and Sierra Leone suggested that the Ombudsperson(s) should be under 60 years of age, married, and well-dressed. A suggestion from some that they should be under 40 years of age was challenged by others, as they want the Ombudsperson to have plenty of experience.

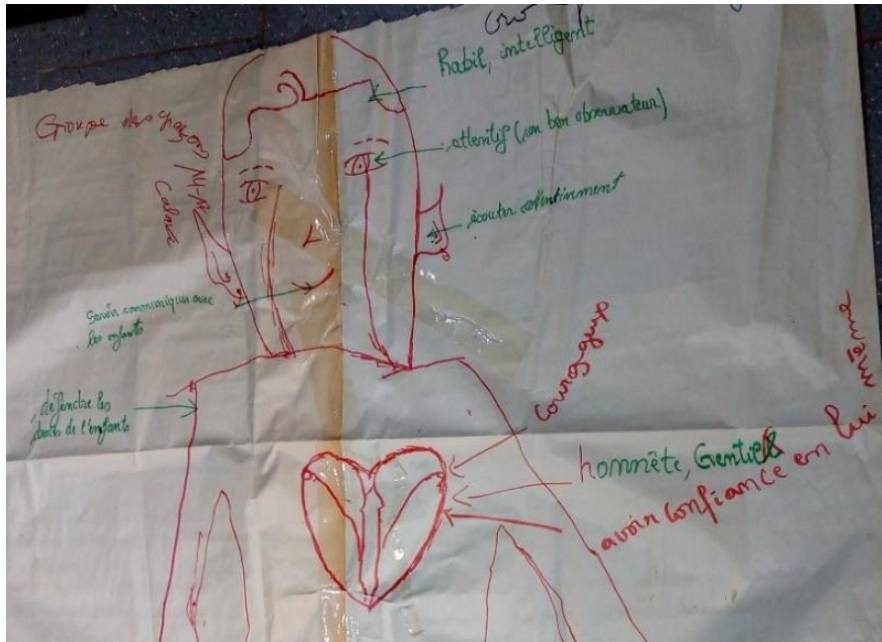


Figure 6: Example of Body Map (Benin)

An open-hearted, honest, and kind person who respects and understands children

Children and young people want an Ombudsperson who is open-hearted, honest, kind, and polite.

"Being a good person, strong, humble, sincere, and kind." (14- to 17-year-old female, Uruguay)

"This person must have a kind heart that is full of love and fun for kids and young people. He should have a soft heart for children and youth but should be strong on law breakers." (20-year-old female, Sierra Leone)

"They must have the right values—honesty, integrity." (IYC female, Africa)

The Ombudsperson should be a person who believes in children and their capacities, who understands and respects children and young people no matter their background.

"Being respectful and friendly with us makes it easier to share our concerns." (18- to 24-year-old, Sierra Leone)

"In terms of communication, this person must sound like a friend, they must sound friendly. They should know how to speak to young people with respect and also with firmness. There should be a cross between respect and friendliness, and when they need to be firm they should be firm as well." (IYC female, Africa)

Intelligent and educated with knowledge of children's rights, safeguarding, and related issues

The Ombudsperson should be intelligent and have a good education, ideally with training in a relevant subject such as law, social work, and child or youth issues. They should have knowledge

about child rights, safeguarding, child development, protection, and care options. They should also understand how SOS works, and to resolve some cases they may need access to children's case files.

"An intelligent head that will think and solve issues systematically." (23-year-old male, Sierra Leone)

"It will be good if they have knowledge about children in care, about youth and teenagers, and about the care options. They may have a bachelor degree or a diploma in children and youth issues." (IYC male, Middle East)

"They must understand the SOS culture, of SOS as a whole, and of the particular village. He/she or they need to know this. They need to understand the power dynamics of the place." (IYC female, Africa)

An attentive listener with good observational skills and strong communication skills

The Ombudsperson needs to be ready to listen attentively to children, taking the time to listen to their concerns and complaints without bias or judgement. In addition, they need good observational skills to notice what children are experiencing and to identify children's fears and worries, even when children are unable to express such fears verbally.

"An ear that can listen attentively to all complaints." (12-year-old female, Sierra Leone)

"They must be listeners and they must listen without bias.... They should be able to detect what is being unsaid. Someone confiding in you may not tell you the whole story, thus the person should have intuition to know when something may be unsaid, and they should have the skill to draw it out... They must have that emotional intelligence to be able to see what others are unable to see." (IYC female, Africa)

"Seeing what happens to us." (13-year-old female, Uruguay)

"The mediator should be able to sense the fear in the children's eyes." (18- to 24-year-old female, Benin)

Respectful, polite communication with children and young people whatever their age, gender, or background is important. A friendly approach and effective communication skills can help the Ombudsperson build trust with the children and young people, so that the children can confide in them and share their feelings. The importance of asking questions to better understand the child and their situation was also emphasised. Strong communication skills are also required to negotiate outcomes based on children's priorities and interests.

"The smile on the boy's faces symbolises the cheerfulness in which the mediator should continually be." (10- to 13-year-old male, Benin)

"Talking about what we feel." (10- to 14-year-old female, Uruguay)

"They must communicate with them calmly to push them to say all they want to say."
(IYC female, Africa)

Responsible and courageous to defend children and their rights, to offer support, to advocate for and with children

The Ombudsperson must be ready to work hard to defend children's rights. They must be responsible and courageous, ready to support children and to advocate for and with children and young people, putting children's interests as a primary consideration.

"A mouth that speaks to defend children." (18-year-old female, Sierra Leone)

"That she can carry the things that are hers to carry. If (s)he is going to defend our rights (s)he has to take responsibility." (16-year-old female, Uruguay)

"The shoulders are able to support the heavy weight." (10- to 13-year-old male, Benin)

"To prioritise the interests of the children is very important for him, it is very important because this sums up his mission." (18-year-old male, Sierra Leone)

The Ombudsperson should share information with children and young people, to enable them to make informed choices.

"He should listen more than they should speak... They should give people choices."
(IYC male, Middle East)

A problem solver, adviser, and an influential mediator to resolve children and young people's concerns promptly and effectively

The Ombudsperson needs strong problem solving and negotiation skills. They need to think about children, be ready to solve their concerns, and to give advice. Children also described how they need to anticipate problems and be ready to act swiftly.

"A head that can think out of the box in terms of protecting children." (24-year-old male, Sierra Leone)

"They must regularly check up on the children and their needs... If they do see a problem they should talk to the young person, or if a young person talks to them they should listen to them. If they need to send it to management they should do that. If young people need additional support, physically, mentally, financially they should facilitate this. They should really be the advocate for the young person throughout the process." (IYC female youth, Africa)

"The feet are used to quickly solve the children's problems." (10- to 13-year-old female, Benin)

The Ombudsperson must be a skilful mediator to resolve children and young people's concerns promptly and effectively. They need to be persuasive and influential to help prioritise children's interests, especially when communicating with senior managers and other staff.

"They must also be persuasive both towards young people and towards management. As they are going to be there to make points for young people at board meetings so

they need to be very persuasive... They should not be afraid to disagree. They should have that courage to speak up if they hear that this is in the best interests of the young people. They should have that courage to speak up to the National Director or to others." (IYC female youth, Africa)

"Children's concerns, no matter how small, should not be overlooked... The mediator should not prioritise his or her interests over those of the children." (10- to 13-year-old female, Benin)

They also need report writing skills to capture children's concerns and to ensure follow-up.

"A hand that can write the correct report of children and young people when concerns are made." (18- to 24-year-old, Sierra Leone)

Committed to respect confidentiality and to act independently and impartially

The Ombudsperson must respect confidentiality and a child's right to privacy. They should not disclose information with those who do not need to know the details.

"The mediator must be able to talk and keep secrets." (14- to 17-year-old female, Benin)

"If the Ombudsperson has a problem or an issue to solve they should not ask a third person, they should keep it private. They should not involve people who are not appropriate, they should not ask other people who do not need to be asked." (IYC male, Middle East)

Young people emphasised that the Ombudsperson needs to be able to act objectively and impartially.

"To act objectively and impartially." (18- to 24-year-old male, Benin)

Motivated to visit and spend time with children and young people to build trust

The Ombudsperson needs to be motivated to regularly visit children and young people—to be present—in order to build their trust. A readiness to spend time with children and young people doing things they enjoy, such as playing games, could help to build children's trust and confidence in them.

"Feet that allow him to move for us, to take him to the Youth Centre." (14- to 17-year-old male, Uruguay)

"First they must be present. Children must know them and they must know the children. They must be there and often.... The most important place they should be is in the children's villages...also the kids in the Family Strengthening Programme should not be forgotten. So they need to know where the children live, if the Ombudsperson is around the youth leaders could get us to meet the Ombudsperson for a dinner or a fun night out." (IYC female, Africa)

"They should know how to play children's games, football, scrabble, chess things that children like to do. They must know how to relate to children, how to talk and play. They must be text savvy, when we say Snapchat, they know what we are talking about.... They must know how to have fun." (IYC female, Africa)

Calm, peaceful, patient, humble, flexible, and non-violent

In order to resolve a variety of concerns raised by children and young people, the Ombudsperson needs to be calm, patient, humble, and flexible. Youth also mentioned that they need to be resilient.

"[The Ombudsperson] is respectful, responsible, non-violent, wise, simple, courageous..."
(14- to 17-year-old, Uruguay)

"Resilience is important. Youth issues are not solved in a day. It is sometimes a long process, so this person must have resilience to see this issue through from the beginning to the end, if there are any problems faced along the way, this person has resilience and compassion to resolve challenges along the way." (IYC female, Africa)

Furthermore, the Ombudsperson must be peaceful and non-violent. They should not use bad language, hit or hurt children in any way—physically, sexually, or emotionally. This includes not shaming or stigmatising children. Children in Benin also suggested that they should not smoke or drink alcohol.

"No paedophile... no degenerate." (14- to 17-year-old female, Uruguay)

"Do not use bad language and does not remind us about our past." (18- to 24-year-old, Sierra Leone)

"Doesn't take alcohol." (10- to 13-year-old, Benin)



Figure 7: Example of Body Map (Uruguay)

Able to speak national and local languages

The Ombudsperson should be able to speak the national and local languages to enhance effective communication with children and young people. In Sierra Leone, there were slightly different perspectives among children and young people consulted in different locations. For instance, the children in one location preferred a Sierra Leonean who can speak the local dialect to overcome communication barriers, while the children in another location suggested that the person only needed to speak the national language, and some suggested the Ombudsperson could also be a white foreigner.

“Spanish-speaking.” (14- to 17-year-old, Uruguay)

“A Sierra Leonean who speaks the local dialect of the location to occupy the office would build our confidence to share our concerns.” (14- to 17-year-old, Sierra Leone)

2.6 Preferred ways to communicate with an Ombudsperson

Suggestion Box:

A suggestion box was used for children and young people to share their views and suggestions individually and anonymously about their preferred ways to communicate with an SOS Ombudsperson if they have a concern or a complaint within SOS Children’s Villages, or if they are worried about one of their peers.

Children and young people suggested a variety of ways to communicate with an Ombudsperson. It is encouraged that there are a number of different ways to reach the Ombudsperson, recognising that individual children and young people may have different preferences. Overall, the topmost frequently mentioned suggestions to communicate with the Ombudsperson were:

- Meeting the Ombudsperson in person—regular opportunities to meet
- WhatsApp
- Through social networks (e.g., Facebook, Instagram)
- Using a toll-free number (like a helpline)
- Telephone

Additional suggestions made by a few children and young people include:

- Letters
- Newsletters
- Sharing messages through focal points or through a third person
- Suggestion box
- Email

“The method of sharing concerns should be through face-to-face, phone calls, or letters.”
(14- to 17-year-old, Sierra Leone)



Figure 8: Example of Suggestion Box (Uruguay)

Children and young people from Uruguay indicated the importance of two-way communication, where the Ombudsperson reaches out to them as well as children and young people being able to directly reach out to the Ombudsperson. They also highlighted the importance of opportunities for children and young people to meet with the Ombudsperson in private, to increase respect for their privacy and confidentiality. Furthermore, youth from Sierra Leone emphasised the need for the protection of whistle-blowers.

"I would ask him to talk alone because it is something private and the networks are untrustworthy." (14- to 17-year-old, Uruguay)

"The confidence or charisma to articulate well, let there be provision for a third-party support." (18- to 24-year-old, Sierra Leone)

Meeting the Ombudsperson in person—regular opportunities to meet

Children and young people from each pilot country as well as IYC members emphasised the importance of having regular opportunities for the Ombudsperson to visit children and young people in SOS CV Programmes, both in the Children's Villages as well as meeting with those who are part of the Family Strengthening Programme. Regular visits between children and the Ombudsperson would enable trust building and greater freedom to express concerns and complaints.

"Regular meetings." (10- to 13-year-old, Benin)

"Let him come and spend time with us." (10- to 13-year-old, Uruguay)

"Personally at the Youth Centre." (14- to 17-year-old, Uruguay)

Mobile phones and WhatsApp

The use of mobile phones and WhatsApp as a means to communicate was suggested by children and young people across all age-groups in Benin, Sierra Leone, and Uruguay as well as by IYC members. Use of WhatsApp allows options to send messages, voice mail, to call, and have video calls.

"WhatsApp is very useful. We are using WhatsApp to share messages or communicate and to educate. WhatsApp is used more than the phone or the email." (IYC male, Africa)

"By text." (18- to 24-year-old, Sierra Leone)

Through social networks (e.g., Facebook, Instagram)

Children and young people in each location mentioned use of social networks to reach and communicate with the Ombudsperson. Facebook was explicitly mentioned by young people in Benin, whereas children and young people in Uruguay talked more about Instagram.

"I would like the advocate to have some social network for when we need to talk." (10- to 13-year-old, Uruguay)

"Have an Instagram message." (10- to 13-year-old, Uruguay)

Using a toll-free number (like a helpline)

Children and young people in each location also highlighted the option of having a toll-free number to reach the Ombudsperson, or a specific phone application to reach them.

"Via text message or special phone." (14- to 17-year-old, Uruguay)

"If we are more technologically advanced I could hit a button for the Ombudsperson."
(IYC female, Africa)

Telephone

Some children and young people across locations also suggested using an ordinary phone to call the Ombudsperson. Plus, the Ombudsperson could also call them.

"I'd like him to phone me." (10- to 13-year-old, Uruguay)

2.7 Ways to inform children and young people about the Ombudsperson

Target game and discussion:

A target game was played to encourage reflection on the importance of adults, young people, and children working together to help establish an effective SOS Children's Villages Ombudsperson. Following the target game (see [Consultation Guidelines](#) p. 23–24), children and young people were encouraged to discuss and share their suggestions on the best ways to inform children and young people about the Ombudsperson.

Children and young people reinforced the importance of systematic and creative information sharing and sensitisation approaches to ensure that key actors are aware of the Ombudsperson(s), their roles, and how to reach them. It is crucial that all children and young people living in alternative care supported by SOS, as well as those who are part of the FSP, are well informed both about existing safeguarding measures and about the Ombudsperson. In addition, caregivers, staff, community members, and other relevant individuals or agencies need to be informed about the SOS Ombudsperson(s).

"Continue to inform and engage the youth, the staff and other relevant stakeholders about the Ombudsperson office." (18- to 24-year-old, Sierra Leone)

Key suggestions about the best ways to inform children, young people, and other actors about the Ombudsperson were:

- Organising meetings and training with children and young people who can share information with their peers
- Organising information sharing sessions at SOS for caregivers, staff, volunteers, and promoting outreach information sharing in communities

Additional ideas were to share information through: WhatsApp and social networks, posters, newsletters, and through offline and online forums.

Organising meetings and training with children and young people (peers) to share information

Children and young people described how meetings and/or training could be organised for them and their peers to learn more about the Ombudsperson, and that they could then share information

with their peers. Children and young people can play an important role to help develop and disseminate accessible and relevant information with their peers.

“Relaying from children who have participated in the training, sharing information with participants by word of mouth.” (16- to 24-year-olds, Benin)

In Benin, children and young people across each age group emphasised that child/youth representatives of existing Child/Youth Executive Councils (CEE/CEJ within SOS) could play an active role in sharing information and promoting awareness of the Ombudsperson.

“The best ways of informing children/young people about the mediator are: meetings, exchanges with CEE/CEJ.” (14- to 17-year-old, Benin)

Organising information sharing sessions at SOS for caregivers, staff, volunteers, and promoting outreach information sharing in communities

Information sharing sessions should also be more broadly organised for caregivers, staff, and volunteers who are part of SOS Children’s Villages Programme, as well as for community members. Creative approaches, such as using posters, theatre, and sharing information through WhatsApp and social networks, were mentioned.

“Organising information sessions at SOS.” (10- to 13-year-old, Benin)

“Through awareness raising workshops in the villages and locations... Dramatising the office of the Ombudsperson and its functions.” (18- to 24-year-old, Sierra Leone)

“Inform Family Strengthening volunteers to take the information back to their families.” (14- to 17-year-old, Benin)

2.8 The SOS Ombuds Model

86 children and young people from Benin (46 male, 40 female) and 4 IYC members (3 male, 1 female) took part in validation workshops to share their views, questions, and suggestions for the SOS Ombuds Model. This section shares key findings about:

- What children and young people like about the SOS Ombuds Model
- What children and young people do not like about the SOS Ombuds Model
- Views on the Staff Confidantes and their training needs
- Views on the Children and Young People Connectors, their roles, and training needs
- Questions from children and young people about the SOS Ombuds Model

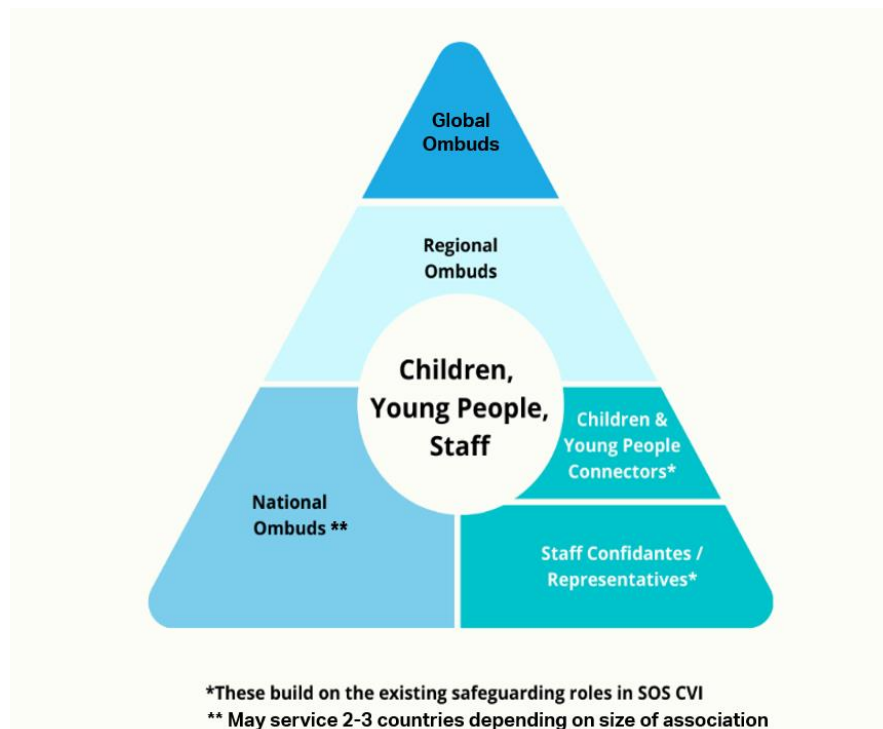


Figure 9: SOS Ombuds Model

What children and young people like about the SOS Ombuds Model

- That the Ombuds recruitment starts from the bottom up, with the establishment of the Ombuds starting from the national level, and then moving up to the regional and global level
- The separation of different levels of the Ombuds model—children and young people can contact the Ombuds in their country, but know there is also an Ombuds at the regional and global level
- The Master Charter will help the Ombuds fully accomplish their mission

What children and young people do not like about the SOS Ombuds Model

- Some groups of children and young people did not express anything negative about this model
- One youth in Benin thought that the Safeguarding team and Safeguarding focal points were already playing relevant safeguarding roles, and wondered if there was a duplication in roles

Views on staff confidantes and training needs

- The presence of staff confidantes is a good idea, but the tasks of the staff confidants should be clarified
- A question was raised on whether the staff confidantes would be available to do the work required, in addition to their usual job descriptions
- To be a staff confidante, they would need training on:
 - SOS protection policy and reporting procedures
 - Children's rights
 - Values such as honesty and knowing the limits of their interventions with children/youth
 - Activities to develop with children

Views on the Children and Young People Connectors, their roles, and training needs

- It is a good idea for children and young people to play an active role, but children and young people in Benin thought there were already participation bodies (CEE/CEJ) that play this role
- The role of the children/youth is to inform other participants of the programmes, to participate in child protection, and to encourage children to raise their concerns

- Thus the CEE/CEJ (Child/Youth Executive Council) participation bodies that exist in the programmes could play the role of Children and Young People as Connectors
- The CEE/CEJ members refer participants to the child safeguarding focal points
- It is important to avoid duplication of functions
- To be CYP Connectors, children and young people would need awareness and training on:
 - SOS protection policy and reporting procedures
 - Children's rights
 - How to communicate with peers
- The CYP Connectors could receive training through face-to-face or online meetings
- Members of CEE/CEJ mentioned that they could organise periodic meetings, public events, and a WhatsApp forum with children and young people to share information about the Ombuds approach—the public events could include recreational activities to attract their peers
- They can also seek feedback from children and young people about the Ombuds

Questions from children and young people about the SOS Ombuds Model

- Wouldn't it be difficult for children/youth to contact the Ombuds because it is at the national level?
- What would be the limitations of the Ombuds work compared to the current SOS system?
- Does the presence of staff confidants in the process guarantee the independence of the Ombuds?
- Are the teams (CYP connectors and staff confidantes) national or per site (e.g., in three sites in Benin)?
- How will the Ombuds be connected (in close contact) with the children/youth at the three sites?

3. Moving forward with children and young people

Children and young people are at the centre of the Ombuds approach. Moreover, child/youth representatives from existing participation structures such as the Child/Youth Executive Councils in Benin, the Children's Assembly in Sierra Leone, and the IYC were actively involved in the Ombuds approach consultations. Ongoing collaborations with existing participation structures from local to global levels are being cultivated to enhance meaningful and sustainable participation of children and youth in ongoing efforts to design, implement, and monitor the Ombuds approach.

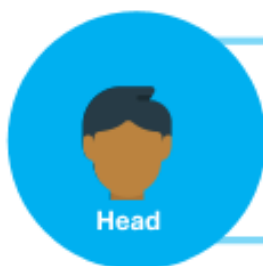
The consultation findings from children and young people were seriously considered by SOS Children's Villages and Proteknôn team members. They were used to influence the design of the Ombuds approach, including:

- Shaping the **SOS Ombuds Model**, particularly the idea of having Staff Confidants—as a third party support to reach the Ombuds, as well as Children and Young People Connectors to support information sharing and awareness raising about the Ombuds with their peers, and to monitor the accessibility and child-friendliness of the Ombuds
- Prompting refinements to the **Ombuds Master Charter**, a document that outlines the scope, roles, and guiding principles for the Ombuds as well as inspiring and shaping the development of a **Child/Youth Friendly version of the Master Charter**
- Informing the **Person description of the Ombuds for recruitment** of national, regional, and global Ombuds, particularly drawing upon children and young people's views on the ideal qualities of a Child/Youth Friendly Ombudsperson
- Informing the development of additional **guidance and training materials** to support:
 - Children and young people's active role in recruitment processes for the Ombuds
 - Children and Young People Connectors, building upon existing child/youth participation structures and processes at local and national levels

SOS Children's Villages Ombudsperson

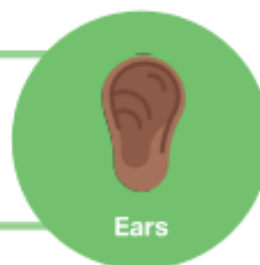
Key findings from consultations with children and young people

What are some of the key qualities children and young people want to see in the Ombudsperson?



RESPECT & UNDERSTAND CHILDREN
GOOD CHARACTER: calm, peaceful, patient, humble, determined, courageous
INTELLIGENT & HAVE GOOD EDUCATION
Knowledge of CHILD RIGHTS, SAFEGUARDING, CHILD DEVELOPMENT, CHILD CARE OPTIONS
THINKS ABOUT CHILDREN, SOLVE PROBLEMS & GIVE ADVICE

READY TO LISTEN & A GOOD ATTENTIVE LISTENER



GOOD OBSERVATION SKILLS
They must be present to children and young people get to know & **TRUST THEM**
Emotional intelligence
No paedophile (emphasised by girls in Uruguay)

GOOD & RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATOR with children, youth and adults
RESPECTS CONFIDENTIALITY
DEFEND CHILDREN
Do not use bad language or remind us about our past (Sierra Leone)
SHARE INFORMATION with children/youth and give them **CHOICES** (IYC)
Doesn't smoke or drink too much alcohol (Benin, 10-13)



Figure 10: Example of a Child Friendly Poster sharing part of the Consultation Results

Appendices

Appendix A: Overview data of participants involved in the information sharing sessions and the consultation workshops

Geographic Location	Information sharing sessions						Consultation sessions and/or for IYC Analysis session:					
	10-13 years		14-17 years		18-24 years		10-13 years		14-17 years		18-24 years	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Benin												
Nattingou	11	10	15	9			11	10	15	9		
Abomey-Calvi			9	8	10	8			7	7	10	3
Dassa- Zoume	14	8			13	7	14	8			13	7
Sierra Leone												
Makeni			15	15	12	15			15	15	12	15
Bo			10	14	14	8			10	14	14	8
Freetown			14	15	7	11			14	15	7	11
Uruguay												
Florida	7	14					7	14				
Payasandu			17	10					15	10		
IYC Global Online					2	3					3	2

<i>Overall Total</i>	32	32	80	71	58	52	32	32	76	70	59	46
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SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES



proteknôn