



infocus

National Commission for Protection of Child Rights

New Government Brings New Hope

A new government always promises to be a harbinger of change, hope and aspiration for the marginalized, especially for children who constitute a sizeable 40 per cent of India's population. The Commission had hoped that the finance minister would initiate the process of child budgeting in this year's Budget.

The additional allocation from the process of child budgeting would have enabled more children to enjoy their childhood and all their entitlements to health, education, nutrition, safety and a life of dignity and freedom. Though there has not been any formal initiation of this process in the present Budget, the Commission will continue to seek investments for children which are proportionate to their size in the population and sustained at a pace commensurate with that of the overall increase in national productivity, to bridge existing disparities and inequalities. This will require a conscious strategy to persuade every department and ministry to make a commitment for children while deciding their financial allocations.

As in the case of gender budgeting, specific budgets for the child must be initiated by the government by instituting a child budgeting cell in every department. Through such an exercise there has to be a mainstreaming of child rights in all public expenditure, and implementation of all programmes and policies. These child sensitive investments should go a long way to increase the efficiency and professionalism of services to rescue children from vulnerabilities that come with trafficking, migration, displacement, physical and mental abuse, gender discrimination and so on.

The Integrated Child Protection Scheme, which is a priority of the Ministry of Women and Child Development, is one such investment which will provide a safe and secure environment for children.

The Commission also welcomes the enactment of the 'Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act' as a step in the right direction towards guaranteeing education as a fundamental right. Through this Act, the state is obliged to ensure that no child in the age group of 6-14 years is denied access to education in full time formal schools, with clearly laid out minimum quality standards and norms. The Act guarantees millions of children across the country, currently outside the school system, including child labour, street children, children with disabilities, orphans and the girl child, access to schools and retention in them. It mandates that school drop outs as well as out-of-school children are mainstreamed and integrated to an age appropriate class. It would also effectively initiate a national ban on corporal punishment and private tuitions by school teachers.

It is essential that the Act is implemented in the spirit in which it was created and this can happen only with support from all sections of society which includes civil society, teachers' unions, parents, corporates and governments. The Commission will monitor the implementation and assess the progress on all entitlements guaranteed for our children. ■

Shantha
Shantha Sinha

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Delhi Gets Action Plan to Abolish Child Labour



Photos courtesy: UNICEF

The Delhi High Court has accepted an action plan formulated by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) to ensure strict enforcement and implementation of the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act (CLPRA), 1986 and other related legislations in the Capital. The Court has directed the Delhi government to immediately implement the provisions mentioned in the plan and file a first action taken report in six months.

The Delhi Action Plan which has proposed the constitution of a steering committee comprising the deputy labour commissioner, the district level health officer, the deputy commissioner of police along with a representative from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) in each district, provides a detailed procedure to be adopted at the pre-rescue and rescue stage.

The pre-rescue plan deals with prior information collection and verification. It also outlines the composition and training of the rescue team. The NCPCR will pilot its strategies under this Action Plan in northwest Delhi and south Delhi.

“Today’s children constitute tomorrow’s future. To ensure a bright future for our children, we have to ensure that they are educated and not exploited. In fact, children are the most vulnerable members of any society,” said the Court.

This significant judgment, which was made in July this year by a division bench of the Delhi High Court comprising Chief Justice Ajit Prakash Shah and Justice Manmohan, strengthened the hands

of not only child protection authorities and activists but also the police. It widened the involvement of the Delhi Police in the rescue of child labourers in the Capital by giving it extra powers to effectively abolish the practice. It stated “We direct that the responsibility of lodging a police complaint against a person employing child labour would lie with the Delhi Police and not the labour department.”

The labour department’s power to take action under the Bonded Labour System Abolition Act, 1976, has also been given to the Deputy Commissioner of Police of the district concerned. The Court also directed the Delhi police to make the necessary arrangements to undertake police raids as per demand. The Court also directed that the employers of child labour should be arrested immediately.

The Court also accepted the NCPCR suggestion that those employing children should be fined Rs 20,000 immediately and that the labour department will not have to await a conviction order. “The money would be recovered as arrears of land revenue and the said amount would be utilised for the educational needs of the rescued children, even if the child has subsequently crossed the age of 14 years,” the bench said.

The Court also said that cases related to the children of age group 14-18 years would be governed by the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 as well as Bonded Labour



System (Abolition) Act, 1976 as stipulated in the Delhi Action Plan prepared by the NCPCR.

Mandate For Action

The NCPCR Delhi Action Plan was formulated based on the directions of the Delhi High Court in September 2008 seeking specific suggestions to abolish child labour. The NCPCR constituted a special committee comprising the chairperson NCPCR and secretaries of the departments of labour, social welfare, edu-

cation, health and revenue to look into the matter. The committee was given the mandate to detail measures not only to ensure effective coordination within various departments for the abolition of child labour but also provision of education and health-care and financial support to the rescued children. Suggestions were also to be given on measures for timely recovery and proper utilization of funds collected as fines and penalty from employers of child labour.

Several meetings were held by the committee members with the relevant authorities and suggestions sought from government departments. The NCPCR team visited three different regions of Delhi to estimate the magnitude of out-of-school children, child labour and their work profile. The areas visited were Jahangir Puri (northwest), Kotla Mubarakpur/Shahpurjat (south) and Seelampur (northeast).

Strategies to Abolish Child labour

It is difficult to arrive at an estimate of number of out-of-school children in Delhi. One estimate states that Delhi has 28,31,947 children in the age group of 6-13 years, of whom 27,47,523 are school going, and the rest 43,735 are out-of-school. The profile of child labourers in Delhi is essentially of two types, namely out-of-school children currently living with their parents and those children who have migrated from other states leaving their families behind.

Two strategies have been formulated. The first strategy is an 'area based approach' where all children in the 6-14 years age group in an identified area will be covered, whether they are in school or out-of-school. This will be piloted in the northwest district.

The second strategy is an approach to be adopted mainly in the context of migrant child labourers who live away from their families with little or no linkages with the resident community. It involves a process of identification, rescue, repatriation and rehabilitation of child labourers. This strategy will be piloted in the south Delhi district where there is a large presence of migrant child labourers. ■

Protocol for Repatriation and Rehabilitation Proposed by Government of Bihar

The children from Bihar constitute a large proportion among the rescued children in Delhi. Keeping this in view the government has proposed a protocol to work on the issues of Prevention, Rescue, Repatriation & Rehabilitation. For total abolition of child labour from the capital, Bihar government will do the following:

- (i) Constitution of a Commission on Child Labour
- (ii) Creation of a position of Joint Labour Commissioner (JLC) at Bihar Resident Commissioner's office, New Delhi
- (iii) Creation of Special Task Forces at District and State level
- (iv) Preparation of State Action Plan
- (v) Active implementation of NCLP in 24 districts of the 38 districts

With regard to the repatriation of rescued child labourers in

Delhi, the JLC would arrange for their repatriation to Patna at government expense and the district labour officials will make arrangements for sending the children to their respective villages and hand them over to their parents.

Once the rescued children are reunited with their parents, the government will deposit Rs 5,000 per child into the fund of the child labour welfare committee chaired by the district magistrate of the concerned district. Similarly Rs 20,000 received as compensation from the employers is also to be deposited in the same fund. The rescued child will be given Rs 1,500 for one month's ration and Rs 200 for one set of clothes. These children would be sent to the NCLP school with a stipend of Rs. 100 per month. The state government has also prepared an action plan to reach the benefits of various welfare schemes under various departments. ■

Source: Joint Labour Commissioner, Bihar Bhawan, New Delhi

Take Care of Tribal Children



Photo courtesy: UNICEF

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights has been monitoring the status of children in Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh, especially in the areas affected by conflict.

To follow up on progress in Andhra Pradesh, a team which included NCPCR member Dipa Dixit, education consultant Swati Narayan and R Venkat Reddy of MV Foundation visited Andhra Pradesh on July 9-10 and met government officials and civil society in Khammam. The team discussed development initiatives for both the local populace and the migrant Guthi Koya tribals from Chhattisgarh who are suffering from high levels of malnutrition.

The NCPCR felt that irrespective of their origin, every child in a humanitarian crisis needed attention sans discrimination. While the initiatives undertaken since 2007 at a district level to address the needs of the migrants were in the right direction, they needed to be expanded and regularly monitored. There is a need to increase the present number of four Residential Bridge Camps as there is an estimated 1,000-1,500 out-of-school children especially in the Palvoncha division.

The team suggested a habitation-wise mapping of out-of-school/anganwadi children in the appropriate age groups and their nutritional status to enable their education and nutritional interventions. Expansion of the only Nutritional Rehabilitation Centre in Bhadrachalam would also be necessary.

The team recommended the creation of a multi-stakeholder coordination committee and child rights cell (with the participation of civil society) at the panchayat, mandal, district and state level to monitor the situation and update the NCPCR regularly.

The team also met government officials from Kurnool, Mahabubnagar and Adilabad in Hyderabad to follow up on the progress of the children's issues in their respective districts.

Hope for Child Labourers in Kurnool

Kurnool district in Andhra Pradesh has a high incidence of child

labour. According to the census (2001), nearly 1.38 lakh children were recorded as workers. The NCPCR has been engaged with the state government officials on strengthening measures to stop child labour.

The Commission was informed that a project level society had been instituted in Kurnool called the Kurnool District Society for Rehabilitation of Child Labour (KDSRCL) to facilitate abolition of child labour and their rehabilitation under the aegis of the National Child Labour Policy. To ensure better enforcement, the society has formed 54 inspection teams jointly with other relevant departments.

According to the report given to the Commission, the KDSRCL has taken several steps to abolish child labour, especially of girls, from the cotton fields. Among the various district specific activities undertaken is the institution of child labour enrollment registers at the village level to enable better monitoring and rehabilitation. In addition, a district resource centre has been established at the NCLP centre to facilitate better convergence and coordination.

Malaria and Malnutrition Prevention in Adilabad

The officials from Adilabad outlined the measures undertaken to prevent and control malaria. While the action plan to control epidemics was a good step, the planned spraying of insecticide in every habitation and the distribution of sanctioned mosquito nets at the village level needed to be monitored. The NCPCR has also suggested that the results of the rapid fever survey conducted by 75 teams in high-risk habitation be shared and their recommendations followed up.

The Commission also felt that the Giripragahi scheme for 62 health and nutrition centres for pregnant and lactating women to get nutritious hot cooked food seemed promising but recommended the inclusion of malnourished children and the provision of double rations as mandated by the ICDS scheme. ■

Give Girls a Chance, End Child Labour



'Give girls a chance, end child labour,' was the theme of June 12, World Day Against Child Labour. Gursharan Kaur, the wife of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, as well as artistes like dancer Geeta Chandran, actors Nandita Das and Farooque Shaikh, painter Jatin Das and singer Peenaz Masani joined hands with UNICEF, ILO and the NCPCR to plead for the rights of the girl child.

They were attending a function organised in Delhi to observe the day. On the occasion, a joint statement was also released by UNICEF, ILO and NCPCR which pointed out that pervasive discriminatory attitudes towards girls threaten their very existence in society. Across the country, girls who make it into the world often face illiteracy, anaemia, malnutrition, early marriage, violence and exploitation leading to violation of their rights at every stage.

Acknowledging the extreme gravity of the challenge, the three premier organisations called for urgent action to fully implement the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 including children in domestic labour along with the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000 – including subsequent amendments in 2006. All forms of work by girls at homes, on farms and in other places of work, which deprive them of their right to education in full time formal schools are harmful and must stop, they pointed out.

India continues to have the world's largest number of child labourers with many being trafficked. Large numbers of girls are deprived of their rights and engaged as domestic child labourers in their own homes and those of others. Many are engaged in childcare and agriculture and some are even forced into prostitution and pornography.

A strong plea was made to ensure that girls are not married

before the age of 18 years as specified by the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 and their legal rights to participate in free, universal, quality education is honoured so that they escape poverty and attain their rightful life of dignity and freedom.

At the event, Gursharan Kaur pointed out that millions of children were not as fortunate as 'our children.' Every day little girls can be seen selling magazines at traffic signals and small boys serving food in road side dhabas. Others work in factories and workshops or in homes taking care of other people's children, in fields and even in their own homes. These are terrible violations of the rights of children. We cannot hope to build a just society and a strong nation as long as our children are subjected to such physical, mental and moral harm, she pointed out.

Clearly it is an enormous task to give every child a decent childhood so both government and non-government organisations must do this jointly, she said. Gender imbalances in society have to be corrected; sustainable livelihoods created in villages and cities and the education system strengthened. Social service organizations were needed that would deal with children's problem in a sensitive way and a vigilant and caring system of juvenile justice and law enforcement was vital.

NCPCR chairperson, Shantha Sinha, gave examples of young girls and boys who, with some support from NGOs, panchayats and child welfare departments, had broken free from labour work to join school and rebuild their lives. Teachers, community members and panchayat leaders, she said, had supported the state efforts to fulfill its obligation towards children and their right to education. The effectiveness of the education policy depended on the energy that it got from society, she said.



N M Adyanthaya, member of the ILO Governing Body (Workers), spoke of the need to bring all legislations that affect child labour under one consolidated child labour and education act with a special provision that takes care of girl child labour.

Actor Nandita Das spoke from her experience as a social activist of the enormous joy a child from a basti gets when she gets a chance to wear a school uniform and hold a chalk and write on a blackboard. If the campaign to ban smoking in public places could be a success, she saw no reason why the right of every child to formal schooling could not be equally successful if implemented in a mission mode.

Anant Kumar Singh, Joint Secretary, School Education, said with the 86th amendment to the Constitution, education to a child up to the age of 14 is a fundamental right but it has not been actualised. The Bill which will make education a fundamental right, has been introduced in the Rajya Sabha (and passed in the Lok Sabha at the time of going to press). Once enacted, it will ensure quality and equity in education. Special strategies for ensuring education for girls have already been taken through the Kasturba Gandhi Vidyalayas that bring back to school children who may have dropped out. Regarding investments, he pointed out that a three per cent cess was levied. Furthermore, in the Tenth Plan, four times more money had been provided for education and the Eleventh Plan was going to be a plan for education, he said.

Sheetal Mehta of Mahindra Foundation which runs the Nanhi Kali project for the underprivileged girl child spoke of the many benefits of education. Investing in a child's education is

investing in a country's future and economic growth, she said. There would be reduction in infant and maternal mortality, improvement in child health and improved economic productivity. Through its project, the Foundation provides uniforms, books, garments and other support for the child's education. The Foundation works in tribal and rural areas as well as in urban slums. It has 25 NGO partners who work at the grassroots level. In areas where the Foundation and its partners are working the drop-out rate has reduced to 10 per cent.

NCERT director, Professor Krishna Kumar, pointed out that terror had become a reality in today's world but little girls experience terror all through their years of growing up. He said it was important to reform schools to make them fit for little girls. Though over the last 20 years there had been significant improvement in bridging the gender gap, the battle for schooling continues to be a tough one for small girls. Irrespective of the social class they belong to, they face the full weight of patriarchy in all its forms, he pointed out.

Professor Kumar said radical measures were being taken in teacher training to enable teachers to handle the improved curriculum of the National Curriculum Framework. But for every step forward that education takes, there are countervailing forces. There is a force of negativity that exudes towards girls from the mass media, he said. The forms of violence and expressions of male aggression seen in films and television serials could stifle the growth of a girl child's independence and self esteem required if they are to be shifted from child labour to a healthier experience of education. ■

Reducing Child Migration to Cotton Farms

Every year in the months of July, August and September, tribal children from Dungarpur, Rajasthan, in the age group of 9-17 years migrate to Gujarat to work in the BT cotton farms in Sherpur, Laloda, Ganeshpura and Hassanpura districts. These children are hired at a cheap rate to facilitate manual pollination of the crop. Contractors, who are mainly local villagers of Rajasthan, work as middlemen between the child labourers and the employers.

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has held several meetings with the officials of the states of Gujarat and Rajasthan in this regard. In April 2008, the NCPCR held a meeting with these state officials to evolve a joint action plan to address the issue.

In July this year, a NCPCR team comprising member Dipa Dixit and consultants SK Ravi and Sonia Sarkar, made a follow-up visit to Dungarpur and Udaipur districts of Rajasthan to see initiatives being taken by the state government to tackle the migration of children. Both at district and state levels, the team met with officers in departments of labour, education, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), women and child development and local police.

Children Return Home

During the field visits, the team met children who had migrated in the past years to work on the cotton fields as well as some touts/contractors who had earlier taken many children to Gujarat.

Badi Lalji, a 17-year old girl of village Billia Bargawa, who had earlier worked in the BT cotton fields in Gujarat, returned to Dungarpur in September last year as she was underpaid by her employers there and the working and living conditions were pathetic. She said she did not want to go to Gujarat anymore but expressed her desire to resume studies. She had studied till Class V before going to Gujarat. She also revealed that there were other girls who had gone to Gujarat, but were back in the village and wished to study further.

In the same village, the team met a former tout who used to charge Rs 10 per child from the employer. He had left the job of contractor three years ago and was working as a volunteer with the NGO Dakshin Rajasthan Mazdoor Union (DRMU) to stop child migration to Gujarat. He said there were children who are being targeted by contractors of other villages and that migration was still taking place.

In Kanela village, Dungarpur district, the team met some young boys who had worked in Gujarat's BT cotton fields last year. Prakash (17) and Mukesh (12) revealed that their father Homji had sent them to work in the BT cotton fields. They received Rs 1,500 each from their employers, which was half the amount promised to them. So this year, they decided not to go. Sharing their experience Prakash said, "Our day used to begin at 4 am and end at dusk.

We were given a lunch break in the afternoon."

Prevent Trafficking from Rajasthan

During discussions with state officials, the NCPCR team was informed about the steps taken by the labour department to prevent children from being trafficked from Dungarpur to Gujarat. These included the setting up of a control room in Dungarpur. Here all complaints received on trafficking of children were investigated and addressed. In addition, all border check-posts have been directed to screen outgoing vehicles for movement of children to Gujarat and a coordination committee headed by the district collector was set up to monitor trafficking activities. About 257 children whose parents had migrated out for work were admitted to schools.

Schools, too, kept a track of children. The head of each school prepared a list of enrolment and dropouts periodically. Also, the task force formed in the vulnerable districts of Udaipur, Dungarpur and Banswara meets once in a month from July-September to share information.

However, given that the border is porous and that there is a large number of children still out of school, a multi-pronged effort is needed to stop trafficking of children to work in the cotton fields.

In this regard, the NCPCR has made the following suggestions:

- Strengthen the child tracking system to monitor each child by name
- Teachers should undertake door-to-door campaign to ensure no dropout
- The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) should trace out-of-school children and enroll them in residential bridge courses
- Convene meeting of sarpanchs, motivate them to take preventive steps, dissuade *mates*/contractors/touts
- Child Helpline (1098) be requested to run a helpline in Dungarpur
- Control room be kept operational for one and a half months starting from first week of July 2009

Stop Child Migration into Gujarat

NCPCR chairperson Shantha Sinha has written to the Gujarat chief secretary, recommending that the government enforce the Interstate Migrant Workman (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979 to effectively track labour migration to the state. The state government should also give a strict warning to all the middlemen and recruiters that action would be taken against them under the Bonded Labour System Abolition Act (1976), Juvenile Justice Act (2006), and the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986.

She has also requested that meetings be held with departments of education, labour, panchayati raj, women and child develop-



ment, railways, police and concerned district collectors in areas where BT cotton seeds are being produced to discuss village and district level mitigation strategies. A task force consisting of relevant departments to monitor border check posts is also important to stop trafficking and migration of children into Gujarat. Setting up of an audit team to verify how many children have crossed the border, the numbers rescued and repatriated is equally crucial.

Other suggestions to stop migration to Gujarat include:

- Encourage collectors to hold meetings with members of gram panchayats and local NGOs in all villages in the BT cotton growing districts to stop child migration
- Initiate week long publicity and awareness drive throughout the district against recruitment of children
- Hold meetings to sensitise farmers, seed contractors and the

corporates producing BT cotton seeds to ensure that they refrain from hiring child labour

- Involve various Chambers of Commerce, Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) and Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) state chapters in initiatives to stop child migration as part of their corporate social responsibility
- Share success stories like that of a company involved in production of BT cotton seeds in Andhra Pradesh which came forward to protect child rights with the help of Naandi Foundation, a NGO in Hyderabad
- Alert the railways, the police and the roads and transport departments to keep a watch on all transport of children so as to immediately rescue them ■

FOLLOW UP

More Guidelines To Stop Corporal Punishment

Corporal punishment is banned by 16 state governments, including Delhi. Yet, it continues in schools, both government and private, and government institutions for children. One of the active interventions by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has been to protect children's dignity and safety in public institutions. Its guidelines in August 2007 on corporal punishment were a significant step in this direction.

These guidelines were not only to be displayed in every school but also adequately publicized to help prevent violence against children. However, when the NCPCR held a public hearing in Tamil Nadu in 2008 to specifically address this issue, they were shocked to hear the tales of torture. These brutalities ranged from electric shocks, physical and sexual abuse and discrimination based on caste resulting in some children committing suicide.

Dr Shantha Sinha has stated that, "All forms of corporal punishment are a breach of fundamental rights. These scars cannot be healed and affect the child's abilities throughout life. The current Indian Penal Code also allows punishment of children less than 12 years if done in good faith. In a way this provides for protection of the perpetrators of violence – that is, of the adult over the child."

The Commission has therefore decided to issue additional guidelines to stop corporal punishment and enable school teachers to treat children as equal human beings with respect and dignity. The District Collectors/District Magistrates/Deputy Commissioners have been resent the guidelines before the start of the 2009 academic year and have been specifically asked to take further action as per the additional guidelines and submit an action taken report.

It has also requested the Secretary (School Education) of state governments/union territories, to issue necessary instructions to ensure that children, especially first generation learners, are treated with respect and dignity in schools and to submit a consolidated report by September. ■

Supplementary guidelines issued in May 2009

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights has directed the education departments of all the states to:

- Conduct block meetings for school headmasters on corporal punishment highlighting that serious action would be taken against the school for violence on children
- Issue instructions to district and block education officers and Cluster Resource Centres staff holding them accountable for any violation of children's right
- Inform school education committees/PTAs about NCPCR guidelines and the procedures adopted for protecting children and their rights

Guidelines issued in August 2007

- Inform children of their rights against corporal punishment through campaigns and publicity drives
- Institute forums for expression in every school, including hostels, JJ Homes, shelter homes and other public institutions meant for children
- Provide a complaint box where children can drop their complaints
- Hold monthly meetings of the PTAs/SEC/VEC to review complaints and take action
- Encourage PTAs to act immediately on any complaints made by children
- Empower parents and children to speak out against corporal punishment without any fear of adverse impact on children's participation in schools
- Establish review procedures of responses taken to complaints at block, district and state level and monitor action taken ■

Photo courtesy: Ranjeet Kumar/The Hindu



Children carrying electronic voting machines on the eve of third phase of Lok Sabha elections in Bhagalpur constituency in Bihar

'Voting' Against Child Labour

Chief Election Commissioner Navin Chawla has assured the NCPCR that the Election Commission will issue instructions that there must be no involvement of child labour in any part of the electoral process. This was in response to the NCPCR drawing attention to a photograph in the media (*see picture*) showing children carrying electronic voting machines in Bhagalpur, Bihar.

In a letter to Navin Chawla and RJ Mohan Pillai, chief secretary of Bihar on April 30, NCPCR chairperson Shantha Sinha said, "Our democratic process cannot be at the cost of children and their rights." Urging them to investigate the matter and send the NCPCR an action taken report, she suggested that instructions should be issued to all concerned that the management of the electoral process should be free of child labour. Sinha pointed out that existing government instructions are quite clear that no government servant or establishment shall employ child labour which is a gross violation of child rights.

Child Assistance at Railway Stations

Fourteen year old Golu, a runaway boy from Buxar who had reached New Delhi Railway Station on the morning of July 9, the day that a NCPCR team visited the station to survey the condition of children living on railway platforms, was assured all help by the railway officials accompanying the Commission team. Golu had approached the Child Assistance Booth for help in returning home as he had no money and the mobile phone of his friend in Delhi was switched off. Chief Station Manager Paramjit Kumar Singh told NCPCR member Sandhya Bajaj that Golu's return ticket for reuniting him with his family would be purchased from the Local Contributory Fund being managed for the purpose by the senior superintendent at the station.

Golu is one of the 15-20 unaccompanied children that the Capital's Railway Station receives every day. The Commission reviewed the collaborative work in identification and rehabilitation of the children between the Government Railway Police (GRP), Railway Protection Force (RPF), NGOs like Salam Balak Trust and Prayas and organisations like the Human Rights Law

Network. Bajaj visited the station's medical and non formal education facilities for destitute children and the CCTV room where the station's 52 surveillance cameras are monitored. The paucity of female constables in the RPF for the safety of destitute girls vulnerable to trafficking was identified by the Commission as an area of concern.

Newborn Care Unit Saving Lives

The NCPCR carried out an inspection of institutions of child care in Gwalior and Shivpuri in Madhya Pradesh on July 4-5. A visit was made to the Sick Newborn Care Unit set up with UNICEF assistance a year ago in the District Hospital of Shivpuri. About 1,500 children have been treated here so far and their lives saved using high tech electronic equipment. Hospital officials pointed out that they also required machines like the Oxymeter, Blood Pressure Machine and Portable X-Ray Machine for provision of better facilities and that they were facing a shortage of staff. A visit was also made to a Nutrition Rehabilitation Centre and to a Girls' Hostel.



NCPCR member Sandhya Bajaj held a meeting with officers of the department of Women and Child Development and NGO representatives working in child care in Shivpuri. Issues such as distribution of midday meals in schools and ensuring that the names of children are included in ration cards were discussed. In Gwalior, she reviewed the progress of schemes like the Laadli Laxmi Yojna, Jagriti Shivir, Kishori Shakti Yojna and Usha Kiran Yojna.

Exchanging Notes with Ireland

Issues of child rights and child centred development were discussed by the NCPCR with a visiting Irish delegation headed by Minister Barry Andrews on March 17. At the meeting, the Commission team led by chairperson Shantha Sinha raised a number of issues which will be explored for further exchange and dialogue. Irish Ambassador Kenneth Thompson said the issues of child rights and child-centred development were high priorities for Ireland in their development cooperation globally and in India. ■

Drug Abuse-Treat Them Young

Photos courtesy: UNODC



With youngsters becoming addicted to substance abuse at an increasingly tender age, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights has proposed separate Children's Drug De-addiction Centres in Manipur and Mizoram. In addition it has suggested an integrated 'One Stop' facility for providing help to these children. The pilot project will be implemented by the state governments, Assam Rifles and local NGOs.

There are no child-specific strategies presently in Manipur and Mizoram though it is clear that substance abuse is penetrating younger age groups and requires immediate attention. A NCPCR team that visited the two states from May 5-11 found that since 2000, more children are being referred to de-addiction centres at an increasingly younger age. A major lacuna is that there is no data on substance abuse by children.



Children taking the pledge not to use drugs boldly saying "I Decide"

Playing with drugs

Even though there is no specific data on children, a rapid assessment on substance abuse in Mizoram, conducted by the Department of Social Welfare in 2005-06, states that 87 per cent of the respondents started using drugs between 11-20 years. Most respondents were injecting drug users (IDUs) who began taking drugs orally as children. The report states that before they turned nineteen, 89 per cent of the respondents had been initiated into alcohol, 69 per cent into opium, 53 per cent into heroin, 84 per cent into cannabis and 62 per cent into Spasmaproxyvon addiction.

The central government-sponsored Women Against Drug Abuse (WADA) de-addiction centre in Lunglei, Mizoram too confirms a steady increase in the number of children in the facility. In 2007-08, 68 children were admitted to the centre and in the subsequent year, their numbers increased to 80. Other centres in the state like the Chhawm Dawlnain Rehabilitation Centre in Lunglei run by Grace Society also reported that children below 15 now constitute about 20 per

cent of their admissions. Till the nineties there were no children in the clinics.

Interviews with residents at the Sahara Home in Churachandpur in Manipur substantiated the assessment that the drug users were getting younger. A resident, Tomba*, said he started sniffing dendrite at nine and graduated to becoming an IDU at 13 when he was in school. He had suffered three relapses and was currently undergoing his fourth therapeutic treatment. At the Divine Light home in Churachandpur, Chaoba*, said he began taking four tablets of Spasmaproxyvon when he was 15, increasing it soon to 14-16 tablets daily. There were 25 children among the 538 residents at Divine Light over the last two years and most of them said that they had started drug abuse in school with their friends between class 9 and 11.

The report says children are now taking to drugs at a younger age because of socio economic factors like unemployment, lack of education, broken homes, peer pressure and curiosity. ■

(*Names have been changed to protect their identity)

SPECIAL REPORT

the NCPCR issuing guidelines to them. Converting them into exclusive centres for children would ensure institutional care for a greater number of children. In the second stage, land would be allotted and a 'One Stop' state of the art facility developed within two years of the guidelines being issued. The facility would encompass all facets of intervention for Alcohol and Substance (drug) Abuse specifically for children. This would include a Research and Advocacy Centre, a Counselling Centre, a 50-bed De-addiction Centre, a Rehabilitation Centre (including vocational training), an After-care Facility and a Monitoring Cell.

The study team identified some core areas of concern that need to be addressed for child specific interventions. Lack of segregation between children and adults in de-addiction centres results in high relapse rates among children. The average relapse rate is three months after discharge from a centre. Ricky, programme manager of Sahara De-addiction Centre in Churachandpur, pointed out, "Not only are there common de-

addiction programme for all ages but several homes run specific programmes that leave out children. They have targetted interventions meant for persons above 18 years. Most programmes focus on treating Injecting Drug Users (IDUs) whereas most children use drugs orally and move to injecting as they get older."

Instead of a clinical approach to the problem of drug addiction, sustainable social intervention strategies were suggested. De-addiction in the homes has been unsuccessful and many children suffered a relapse. Poor public awareness and lack of preventive interventions are major factors for relapse. The de-addiction programmes also need to integrate a nutrition component. The district and state administrations in both Manipur and Mizoram strongly favoured separate de-addiction centres for children with sustained funding and dedicated manpower. With overall consensus on the NCPCR proposal, the Commission chairperson Shantha Sinha has now written to the state governments to finalise a child-centred drug de-addiction strategy based on its guidelines. ■



Feedback

Thanks for sharing *Infocus* with us. All its issues are very informative, giving an account of the efforts and initiatives taken in the field of child rights protection in the country.

In the March issue it was really encouraging to read the success story of the sarpanch and his gram panchayat in Nilavaram village, Dantewada district, Chhattisgarh who have mobilised every child to school. Another inspiring story was of the sarpanch from a village in Madhya Pradesh's Chhindwara district who worked hard to get all the children in his village back to school including 18 bonded labourers.

It would be good if NCPCR could compile such stories from all parts of India and publish a volume on 'Best Practices at Panchayat/Block level for Protecting and Promoting Rights of Children in Our Country'. It will truly inspire other panchayats/blocks to follow the model for providing a better future to their children. ■

K K Tripathy
Coordinator

Butterflies - Programme with street and working children
New Delhi

Thank you for the newsletter. For an organisation like us working in the rural mountains it is nice to hear what is happening on child rights in other parts of the country.

I was just wondering if in the next edition you could carry a piece on the Juvenile Justice Act and also the status of the State Commissions for Protection of Child Rights in the different states. ■

Aditi P Kaur
President
Mountain Children's Foundation
Dehradun

This is with reference to the story on NCPCR's intervention on malnutrition deaths in Satna, Madhya Pradesh through a public hearing organised with the support of voluntary organisations and the Right To Food campaign's group in the state. I have come to know that the district administration has taken several steps since then to activate ICDS and PDS (Public Distribution Service) centres. Congratulations to the NCPCR team for ensuring child rights and for taking up issues of governance. ■

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