

State Consultation of Children on Alternative Report for CRC Gujarat

Organized by
Shaishav on behalf of
Child Rights Collective – Gujarat
at
Police Sanskar Kendra,
Bhavnagar – Gujarat
On (9,10 & 11 June, 2008)

No of participants

Boy	Girl	Total
9	18	27

Participant Organization:-

1.	Shishumilap	Baroda
2.	Gantar	Patdi
3.	G.S.S	Rapar, Kuttch.
4.	Marag	Chotila
5.	Sarjan	Ahmedabad
6.	Shaishav	Bhavnagar

No of accompanying adults male (6) female(9) Total(15)

Facilitators:- Ashok, Nilam, Komal, Alpesh, Parul, Falgunbhai (Shaishav)

Draft of Alternative Report for CRC Gujarat

Introduction

The State Consultation of Children to prepare the Alternative Report for CRC Gujarat was undertaken by Shaishav, Bhavnagar, Gujarat, on behalf of the Child Rights Collective, Gujarat. It was held at the Police Sanskar Kendra, Bhavnagar between June 9-11, 2008. A total of 27 children (18 girls and 9 boys) from Child Rights organizations such as Shishu Milap in Vadodara, Gantar in Patdi, Gram Swaraj Sangh in Rapar (Kutch), Marag in Chotila, Sarjan in Ahmedabad, and Shaishav itself in Bhavnagar. They were accompanied by 15 adults and the facilitators were from Shaishav.

The Alternative Report is a very important document in highlighting issues related to Child Rights. One of the ways in which this Report could be made even more effective and 'real' is in having children themselves report on the state of affairs vis-à-vis Child Rights in their own neighborhood and present them in this Alternative Report. A few organizations working with children have tried this approach with some success. For the time frame under review for preparation of this report, Terre des Hommes (Germany), South Asia office in India took the initiative and worked with several NGOs that are part of the CACL and CACT network. A national training of trainers (ToT) was organized in Hyderabad for facilitators where Shaishav was also represented. Shaishav then volunteered to CRC Gujarat to undertake the responsibility for harnessing children as 'reporters' in Gujarat and filing the state report from Gujarat to be included in the national document.

Shaishav's Bal Sena (25 children from the Senior team) created a comprehensive questionnaire that touched in detail upon each issue related to Child Rights. Similarly, in Tamil Nadu, the NGO Shakti Vidiyal also did a similar exercise and Shaishav and Shakti Vidiyal got together to create a final questionnaire for the child reporters.

The Process

Shaishav organized a 3-day Workshop with children to introduce and familiarize them with the concept of Child Rights and what was expected of them when they presented their reports. It accessed as much of the resource materials that it could find – manuals, skits, activities, games and so on – and translated it in Gujarati for use during the Workshop so that the children could be trained to do their work with ease, confidence and a true understanding of why they were doing what they were doing. Several NGOs working with children were invited to participate and though Shaishav did get a lot of confirmations, finally 27 children attended. Shaishav conducted the Workshop according to the guidelines laid down at the Hyderabad ToT.

Through a series of ice-breaker and role-play sessions, the 27 participants and their accompanying adults were made to feel at ease with the new child-friends they were making. They were gently introduced to the concept of CRC and Child Rights – its history, UNCRC guidelines, categories of rights (Participation, Protection, Livelihood,

Development), state accountability and so on. To get the children used to the idea of becoming aware of what they had heard and learnt and putting it down on paper, they were asked to present the each day's proceedings on the next day of the Workshop. They were also made aware of the significance of the Alternative Report and the value addition of children's participation in creating this report. The next step was designed to make the children reflect upon their own situations as well as of children around them, and to encourage them to articulate their views about these. They were also made aware of the numerous rights under the four major Child Rights, who is responsible for implementation of these Rights (government, parents, community, family), the different kinds of children that they must look at and how children in difficult circumstances need special care and protection. For the regional representation, two children from each of the six organizations were selected.

Collecting Information and Reporting by Child Reporters

Each of the 27 participating children was given two questionnaires that they could use as guidelines in their reporting activities when they contacted other children in their NGO/school/neighborhood who would be the respondents. One questionnaire focused attention on the four major Child Rights and the smaller rights, and the child-reporter would have to collect information about whether the child-responder was aware of its Rights (if not, then take the opportunity to do so if possible) and note down if that child's Rights were upheld or violated. The second questionnaire was much more elaborate and it covered general information about the child-respondent, and had questions that touched upon the practical translation of Child Rights as services, facilities and protection in the field available in the day to day existence of the child-responder. A comparison of answers to both questionnaires by the same child-respondent would also offer a cross-check on how much the child had understood what it was being asked and whether its responses were genuinely reflective of the existing situation. This would ensure that the Alternative Report was truthful and mirrored the ground reality with all its plus and minus points.

The 27 children collected information from 872 child-respondents:

Sr. No.	NGO/Organization	Respondents
1.	Shishu Milap (Bal Samiti), Vadodara	7
2.	Shaishav (Bal Sena), Bhavnagar, Saurashtra	55
3.	Sarjan, Ahmedabad	4
4.	Gantar (Bachpan Sena), Patadi	67
5.	Gram Swaraj Sangh (Bal Vrund), Rapar, Kutch	720
6.	Marag (Bal Panchayat), Chotila, Saurashtra	19
	TOTAL	872

Response Analysis

A detailed study of the responses to the questionnaires have thrown up several interesting and significant data as well as issues related to Child Rights. We find that the children (both reporter and respondent) have been perceptive, sensitive and amazingly practical in their understanding of Child Rights and how these should translate into actual terms so that they can enjoy their Rights, benefit from the opportunities they offer and protect themselves with the Rights' safety net. Given below are the responses, tabulated as each one of the four Rights.

Sr. No	Right to Survival	Need	Present Condition as articulated by children
1.		Clean and safe drinking water	Water available is dirty, smelly, stale. Sometimes have to walk long distances to fetch it, might even have to cross open railway tracks. Unsafe situation. Schools do not often have water facility; and if it is there, the water tank is rarely cleaned.
2.		Nutritious food	Midday meals in schools are often not cooked properly, the raw materials are not cleaned; there could be uncertainty about availability of the meals as well resulting in children going hungry for very long hours. In the home, if the parents are very poor, nutritious food may not be available because of poor quality of raw materials affordable by parents.
3.		Health care	Primary health centers in urban areas are between 1-5 kms and in rural areas between 5-45 km. They are also open only during fixed hours and almost never in the late evenings when laborer-parents come home. This makes it very difficult for pregnant mothers, infants and children to get health facilities easily and urgently. So childhood vaccinations are also a problem. Poor children fall easy prey to diseases like measles, chicken-pox, boils, malaria, jaundice, typhoid, ear infections, loose motions and vomiting, anemia, fits due to various reasons. This leads to most poor people having no option but to go to private clinics that they can ill-afford.
4.		Clean and protective clothing	Children should get proper clothes to protect themselves according to the seasons. This is of special importance to street children who may not even have a roof over their heads.
5.		Safe and clean home	Children should have a home that protects them during the winter, monsoon and scorching summers. It should have toilet and tap water. Children who see their homes demolished in slum clearance drives often suffer great shock. Alternate homes offered are

			usually very far from areas familiar to children and their parents generally have no choice but to spend money on commuting, which they cannot afford.
6.		Hygiene	Common toilets should have enough water for personal hygiene as well as to keep toilets flushed. Children should be spared the indignity of having to bathe or go to the toilet in the open.
7.		Religious freedom	Children are indoctrinated from childhood about their religion and the prejudices that strengthen dislike about religions not your own. Children are often actively discouraged from wanting to know about other religions, visiting their places of worship and so on. If this is curbed, children may grow up to become more compassionate human beings.
8.		Clean air	Children should be protected from vehicular and industrial pollution. Some children also protested against potter's kilns that spewed carbon-particle gases in their neighborhoods. In urban areas, rivers have also been turned into smelly gutters that auger disease and pestilence.
9.		Love and caring	Children need to feel safe and loved within their families with equal affection from both parents. Those who are orphans or have single parents often suffer exploitation at the hands of family members. A solution must be sought for such children so that their childhood is not painful and miserable. Handicapped children, especially those dependent on others for many daily chores, should get a loving environment.
10.		No breaks in education	Children of migrant laborers often suffer 'breaks' in schooling. They are also not very happy with the alternative of residential schools since they would then have to live away from their parents for long stretches of time.
11.		Finance	Needy children should get support for purchase of good quality school uniforms, school bags, study tours, new text and notebooks
12.		Entertainment	Playgrounds, gardens, akhadas should be planned near poor localities. Sports coaching camps should also be organized. Rural children who do not have access to entertainment at all should be thought about. Girls cannot even go out and play in the streets and so have to do housework during play-time.
13.		Good social environment	Child-friendly neighborhoods should be encouraged. Social evils like child marriages, purdah system and dowry that affect children and teenagers needs to be eradicated.

14.		No discrimination	Children should not be discriminated against because of gender, caste, race, colour differences. Strict steps should be taken against those practicing female foeticide, infanticide, abandoning of live newborns in garbage dumps, celebration of a boy's birth and mourning of a girl's. Abusive behavior towards the handicapped and those weak in studies in school should be stopped. Similarly 'low-caste' children should not be made to sit separately during meals or given place only on the back benches in classrooms. School infrastructure should be modified for ease of movement for physically handicapped children. The girl student's school should not be discontinued so that she can look after younger siblings or do house chores, or because the secondary school is in another village.
15.		Relocation	Arrangements should be made on top priority for families with children whose houses have been damaged or destroyed in natural or man-made calamities.
16.		Physical safety	Children should be given top priority in ensuring their physical safety during emergencies of every kind.
17.		Birth Certificate	Each child born at home or in remote village area must be ensured the birth certificate by the parents who must register the birth.
18.		Status of Refugee children	Children from international border areas need their citizenship established.

Sr. No.	Right to Development	Need	Present Condition as articulated by children
1.		Education	In rural areas, schools are often far away with no transport or teachers are not regular. School buildings have tiny poorly ventilated classes, classes are held on staircases, lobbies, and classrooms often leak in the monsoon. Children are made to work in teacher's home, in extra, non-academic activities in the school and similar exploitative practices that deny the child recess time or is made to miss classes. Govt. teachers are often burdened with census, election, exam vigilance and correction duties during which time schools may remain closed or one

			teacher is left with responsibility of all classes. This is not fair to students. Children in schools equipped with computer and other technologically advanced facilities often are denied the exposure to their use since either the teachers themselves are not trained or the teacher would use it personally only. Children have also expressed the desire for career counseling in primary school itself so that their dreams could be achievable and they have enough time to work towards them.
2.		Play time	Children must have enough time to play every day since it plays an important role in their physical, social and intellectual growth. Infrastructure for indoor and outdoor games must be made available in the neighborhoods and in enough quantity. Schools with sports equipment often keep the equipment in the cupboards only!
3.		Co-curricular Education	In addition to regular curriculum, children should get exposure to the state/country in which they live with the help of organized study tours. They should also be exposed to the working of public institutions such as railways, roads, banking, govt. offices, traffic, police and so on, so that they can deal with public officials with confidence.
4.		No to Child Labor	No child should be required to work to earn money either for his guardians or himself. Children in family craft trades should also attend school with regular students and not at separate times.
5.		Special Schools	Special schools with trained staff should be there for children with special needs. Children also said that a special school for children of sex workers should be started in areas where these women work and stay. This is not on account of discrimination but because compassionate teachers can be appointed to teach in such schools otherwise teachers generally remained absent from schools in such areas.
6.		Equality of Education	Children felt that all children should go to schools with same facilities so that the discrimination between haves and have-nots is not there.

Sr. No.	Right to Protection	Need	Present Condition as articulated by Children
1.		Against Child Labor	Children in exploitative labor situations should not be exposed to harmful chemicals and

			substances that may cause them immediate or long-term physical damage and illness. They should be protected against over work, long working hours and poor wages. When such organizations are raided by the police, children want the police to arrest the persons in charge as well as their parents/guardians. Children do not want to go to the remand home that taints them for life but to a safe, decent place until they are rescued. Some children work since the family situation needs them to be earning, i.e. they are not sold into labor-slaving. Such children are aware of the situation but feel that while they work, they have a right to protection against physical and psychological abuse at the workplace and a decent wage for their labor. Runaway children and street children also need this protection against physical exploitation.
2.		Against Sexual exploitation	Children demand protection against sexual abuse and exploitation in the home, school and neighborhood. If they live in high profile tourism areas, they need to be kept safe from paedophiles interested in sex tourism.
3.		Against Physical Violence	Children need protection against violent parents, teachers, guardians, no matter what the reason.
4.		Against Caste-based exploitation	Children from Dalit, DNT, Harijan are often made to do certain kinds of menial work by upper-class exploiters on the grounds that they were 'born' to do that kind of work.
5.		Against Emotional and Psychological Exploitation	Generally suffered by girl children – subtle familial pressures to stop them from going to school, lowering self-esteem, entering early marriage, keeping them house-bound and so on
6.		Protection in times of civil strife, natural and man-made disasters	Children should be kept safe in such situations at all times. Children must also be trained to look after themselves and go to safe places until the trouble is over.
7.		Maintain the child's dignity	The child's dignity should always be safeguarded and he should not be exposed to humiliating situations, either deliberately or even by chance. If the child is a victim of sexual harassment, rape or a witness to any horrific incident, he should not be subjected to repeated explanations and descriptions of the trauma.

8.		Against Trafficking	Children need to be protected against their sale/bonding and trafficking. Such incidents always go up in the aftermath of any man-made or natural disaster when children may find themselves orphaned or estranged from parents and siblings and easy prey to traffickers.
9.		In Hostile Environments	Children living in deserts, hilly areas, deep jungles, industrial areas, islands, areas habitually ravaged by droughts, famines and floods, on borders with unfriendly countries, riot-prone and violent areas, need to be given their right to education, healthcare and safety at all times.

Sr. No.	Right to Participation	Need	Present Condition as articulated by children
1.		To Unionize	Children should be allowed to come together so that they can discuss and share their problems and desires.
2.		To Express	Children should be allowed to express themselves without fear. The decision taken in the wake of what the child has said should also be in the favor of the child. At the same time, if a child does not want to speak, he cannot be forced to do so.
3.		To be heard seriously in the decision-making at home that will affect their lives in whichever way.	Children want to be part of the decision-making process in their families. They want their opinions to be taken seriously.
4.		To be heard in decision-making in schools	Children want to be a part of the decision-making process in school in issues of where to go on study-tours, the content of the cultural programs and such other areas. Children also want to know and therefore be told of decisions taken by school boards and school managements that affect their future in the school.

The child-reporters also prepared a special list of “Needs” based on the data they had gathered. This included :

Sr. No	Age Group	Needs for ALL children
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1.	0-5 years	All vaccinations must be completed
2.	6 years	Every child in school
3.	0-3 years	Should be breast-fed
4.	3-6 years	Daily nutritious food and admission in Anganwadi
5.	Neonatal	Careful looking after by parents/grandparents
6.	12-14 years	Sex education, sensitively imparted
7.	14-18 years	Career counseling

They also prepared a detailed list of Child Groups that are most vulnerable and need to be taken care of immediately.

1. Handicapped Children (Physical, Mental)
2. Child Laborers
3. Children working in hazardous industries
4. Children in hotels and dhabas
5. Children staying on Railway Stations, Footpaths and Bus Stations
6. Children who have already come into conflict with law
7. Children with addictions
8. Children whose parents are addicts
9. Children of sex workers
10. School Drop-outs
11. Straying children, who have a home
12. Children faced with severe problems
13. Migrant children
14. Children staying in hostels/ashramshalas
15. Victims of child marriage
16. Children with serious/chronic illnesses
17. Children with parents having serious/chronic illnesses
18. Children of single parents
19. Orphaned children
20. Victims of natural/man-made disasters
21. Adopted children
22. Abandoned children
23. Kidnapped children
24. Spoiled-brat children of rich parents
25. Transsexual children
26. Children of parents who are in jail
27. Children in circuses
28. Siamese twins
29. Children 'donated' to organized religious sects

Conclusion

If the child's Right to Participation is respected in its true spirit and implemented in practical life, then the other three rights will automatically be his. Shaishav concludes that this process of dialogue with children has proved immensely fruitful looking at the

kind of insights that children have offered us. In fact even though we have been working in this field for so many years, the in-depth observation (and surely, the felt experiences of children in unfortunate circumstances who were part of the working group) of the children have opened our eyes to so many realities that these children face and combat in their day-to-day lives.

We are very proud to talk about Gujarat, its forward-looking people, high rate of industrialization, general state of education, well-being and progressiveness. But when we see the state of the children, whom we *ad nauseum* term as the 'future citizens of the state', we understand what an uphill task lies ahead of us and how many more years will it take to be able to make children in Gujarat feel truly safe, protected and empowered.

This report was compiled by Sandhya Bordewekar