

REPORT ON THE LAUNCH OF THE PARLIAMENTARIANS GROUP FOR CHILDREN



CONSTANTIA HALL, YMCA, NEW DELHI
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Parliamentarians Group for Children was launched on 23rd August, 2013. It was conceptualized and organized with the help of Centre for Legislative Research and Advocacy, and has received technical support from UNICEF. Members of Parliament, the civil society and members of the 'Nine is Mine' participated in the launch of the PGC.

The PGC aims to raise visibility of issues related to children in Parliament and ensure they remain on top of the political agenda. PGC envisions to be able to equip the Parliamentarians' to monitor programmes in their constituencies, push for enhanced resources for children's programmes and advocate for child-centric policies.

Vandana Chavan, MP and Convenor of the PGC, welcomed the august audience. She stated that the cause of the children is related to the brighter future of human kind and India as a whole. There are various rights that have been recognised for the children. India will be the largest contributor to the next generation of global citizens and it is in this backdrop that the Parliamentarians Group for Children has been conceptualised.

One-third of India's population is that of children below the age of 18 years. These children have various rights such as the right to survival, food and nutrition, health and shelter, education, right to participate, equality and protection, as given under the UN convention on the rights of the child. The fact that such a large portion of India's population are children, puts a greater onus on the parliamentarians to ensure that children get the due benefits.

The concern and importance given to protection and development of children in the overall development of countries and the world as a whole is also evidenced by the fact that 6/8 MDGs relate directly to children. In India even though several steps have been made in the positive direction these scenarios still remain quite grim. A few examples to show this situation; 8 states contribute to 75% of total mortality and 85% of total maternal mortality rate. India has 28 million child labourers (2011). 43% of India's children are underweight. Only 54% have been fully immunised. There are 97 girls per 100 boys in primary schools and 86 girls per 100 boys in secondary schools in India. These statistics are alarming as they show that we are lagging behind in child centric indicators.

India is lagging behind on the MDG targets. Significant policies, programs, decisions of the government, have been made. The focus of the goals have moved from welfare and development to a rights based approach. Child rights should become an indicator of the country's development. It is in this context that the PGC acquires relevant urgency. Parliamentarians have a unique position in the polity and perform various functions from representation to policy making, law making, advocacy and making budgetary allocations. The parliamentarians are not just representatives of those people who can vote but also of children.

In March 2012, some of parliamentarians under the leadership of Najma Heptullah had the opportunity to participate in the meet of Asia Pacific Parliamentarians and CSOs in Bali, to discuss the various MDGs and post 2015 development agenda. The idea to make the PGC first came about during this meet. Therefore to achieve the MDG the parliamentarians must join hands to support and champion this cause and hence PGC is being launched here.

The PGC was conceptualized and organised with the help of CLRA, which is an interface between parliamentarians and civil society and has expertise and proven experience in running such initiatives. UNICEF has been invited as the technical partner, since they have been working in this field for the last 60 years in India.

The objectives of the PGC can be fulfilled only with the concentrated effort of all concerned parties and stakeholders. The PGC will equip the parliamentarians with programs related to children in their constituencies, push for enhanced resources for children's programs and budgetary allocations, making child centric policies, organizing briefing sessions and field trips to keep the MPs updated on children's issues. The PGC will also help ensure participation of parliamentarians on a global platform where they can share ideas, pressing issues and discuss the policies



Smt. Vandana Chavan
Member of Parliament
Rajya Sabha
Convenor PGC

"6/8 MDGs relate directly to children"



"The parliamentarians are not just representatives of those people who can vote but also of children."

Dr. Najma A. Heptullah, M.P. was the former Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha. She officially launched the The Parliamentarians Group for Children. She stated that this was a praiseworthy effort being made in the direction of recognising and protecting rights of the children. India has promised to safeguard and protect the rights and lives of the children under the MDGs. Parliamentarians have a unique position and therefore they must resolve and raise issues at the highest policy making level in the country. The experts at the ground level should work with the parliamentarians to ensure India's children are provided programmes and policies that they have a right to.

She noted that the various indices related to children in India were shameful. Thus the creation of the Parliamentarians' Group for Children in the background of the meet in Bali was a commendable effort to change the present situation.

Dr. Najma A. Heptullah pointed out that the child survival and development was also linked to the climate and environment. Therefore efforts have to be made from this generation onwards to create a sustainable future for the generations to follow. But more importantly, it was the health of the mother and children that have to be improved. Child indices are reflected in the HDI and Human Development Reports that are now considered worthwhile targets that countries should strive for world over. It was hence vital that programmes be made to safeguard and promote all the factors that influence child survival such as health, education and environment.



Smt. Najma Heptullah

Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha

Key Note Address

"Indices related to children in India are shameful"



Dinesh Trivedi, former Union Minister for the Railways pointed out that the high instances of malnutrition prevalent in children weaken the constitution of the child and that was where interventions should be introduced. Granting equal opportunities for children to compete with each other were futile until their health and education was looked after right from the start. A greater share than 9% of the GDP must be asked of the government to make any significant improvement.

He noted that the resourceful demographic dividend of a largely young population must be fortified before it turns into a liability in a few decades. Despite the prevalence of mass malnutrition Indian children from impoverished backgrounds are known to excel in various fields. The potential exists and a will to make it happen must be fostered. The country would not be able to progress till every child was granted the dignity a human being needs that comes from having access and ability to acquire good health and education. He suggested that in view of the upcoming election, it must be insisted that the promise to children be made a part of the election manifesto of every political party.



Shri Dinesh Trivedi
Member of Parliament
Lok Sabha

"A greater share than 9% of the GDP must be asked of the government to make any significant improvement"



David McLoughlin, Deputy Country Representative, UNICEF, noted that India had made great strides in several areas with respect to her economy, reduced child mortality in the past 20 years and near eradication of polio in the past 2. However, progress was not being shared by everyone in the country. Every year, just under one and a half million children do not live in India to celebrate their fifth birthday and 55,000 women die during and after child birth. He said that if things remained the same then, in every 100 children born in India, more than 4 would die before their first birthday, 48 of these 100 would be stunted, 43 of these 100 would be under weight, 39 out of these 100 would not be fully immunized, and 49 out of these 100 would be without any sanitation.

He laid emphasis on the point that children's welfare was linked to every aspect of the nation's development-economic, social and political. In this right the PGC could have a lasting impact on every child in India. The voices of the children would be heard at the highest policy making platform in the country. Policies, programmes and plans would be seen through the lens of children's rights. Parliamentarians could ensure that the policies and programmes are being effectively implemented in their constituencies. UNICEF has the technical knowledge and experience of launching successful programmes on child related issues such as nutrition, education, health and sanitation and as such has been associated with the Indian government on various schemes for children since 1949. The PGC would get closer to the cause of children in India and this could be facilitated through schools, public health centres, etc. He suggested that by organizing workshops on child related issues such as nutrition, education, one could create a knowledge bank for MPs to access all kinds of child related knowledge and information easily.



Mr. David McLoughlin
Deputy Country Representative,
UNICEF

*"Just under 1.5 million children don't live to see their fifth birthday
55,000 women die during and after childbirth."*



*In every 100 children born in India
4 die before their first birthday
48 are stunted
43 are underweight
39 will not be fully immunized
49 will be without any sanitation*

Kushal Singh, Chairperson, NCPCR briefly summarised the laws related to children and their shortcomings. She stated that the Parliamentarians were making a commendable effort in coming together to recognise the rights of the child a sector that has been quite neglected. In the 1970s 'child rights' was a slogan, which was in a need for a definition. However, now there are specific rights mentioned under the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child. Although many other laws have been formulated which are related to the rights of the child, there were areas that need immediate attention and amendments.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified by India in 1992. Some of the rights mentioned have been specifically incorporated in Indian laws. India recognises the right to survival, development, protection and participation.

She supported her statement by citing a few examples related to these rights, such as the right to survival entails the compulsory registration of the child within 21 days of its birth, getting adequate nutrition and health care. The right to freedom of thought, religion, association, peaceful assembly, and education, entitlement to childcare if he is a child of working parents. The Right to Protection includes such rights which protect children from violence free environment, safeguard them from narcotics, protect them from exploitation for work, especially in such areas which may take away from them their education.

She said that "Nothing about us, without us" was a slogan that best described the Right to Participation. Children have the right to express views on matters that concerns them. They even deserved to get opportunities in administrative and judicial forums, where rights related to them have to be decided.

She then laid emphasis on the various Acts related to children. Some of them include the Child Labour Regulation and Prohibition Act, the Right to Education, and the Juvenile Justice.

The Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act, according to her was perhaps the most regressive legislation made, as, the Act only prohibited employment of children below the age of 14 in hazardous occupations only. The Juvenile Justice Act covers two categories of children; those in conflict of the law, and those in need of care and protection. Under this law they are not treated as criminals but as delinquents. She suggested that sufficient efforts should be made to rehabilitate them. The State should also take responsibility of those children who face abuse at home.

With respect to the role of the Commission for the Protection of Child Rights, she stated that they have been made both at the National and State levels. She took note of the fact that, the state of UP had not made such a commission and Andhra Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh were in the process of making one. For many Acts the implementation agency is the Commission, and in absence of the same the laws could not be properly implemented.

Kushal Singh stated that the Prevention of Children from Sexual Abuse Act was perhaps the only Act where the rights of the child had been specifically mentioned.

According to her, the mindset of the people was the biggest problem as they do not view children as individuals. She pointed that the observation homes and other homes were in dire need of funds as they lack adequate infrastructure. Facilities should be provided for the development of the child as well, not merely for the child's survival.



Smt. Kushal Singh
Chairperson, NCPCR

*Right to Participation:
"Nothing about us, without us"*



"The state of UP has not made such a commission and Andhra Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh are in the process of making one. For many Acts the implementation agency is the Commission, and in absence of the same the laws cannot be implemented."

Joaquin Gonzalez Aleman, Chief, Policy and Programmes, UNICEF, statistically laid before the participants and the audience the grim situation present in India. India was among the 189 countries that had signed up for the MDGs. There are 8 MDGs that directly relate to children. These goals include, eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, gender equality, reducing child mortality and participation.

He stated that even though over the years India has relatively done better in terms of poverty, however there are 629 million people still living below poverty line. The BPL had been set at 816 INR per month in rural areas and 1000 INR per month in urban areas, and to survive on 1000 INR per month in an urban area was rather difficult. Though there had been some reduction in poverty, the inequality in India has not reduced.

As per the reports, 42% of children show under-developed brains. Even though many children were registered in schools, he said that one had to take note of those who were not able to move up in grades, and see how many girls were being left behind who do not get secondary education. Another area of concern was the quality of education. He stated that, 4% of children in class 5 cannot read a textbook, 12% cannot identify letter, and 15% cannot identify words.

Gender equality was another area that needs focus. Only 11% of the parliamentarians are women. The figures in lower levels, like the Panchayats, were better as there is a 50% reservation for women. India has a long way to go to achieve gender equality.

Joaquin Gonzalez Aleman emphasised that India should focus on reduction of child mortality. 9 lakh children die every year within the first month of their life. The U5MR was pegged at 14.5 lakh per annum, which was something that could be completely avoided. Even in terms of maternal health India was not doing well.

For combating HIV/AIDS India has done well, but for other diseases such as TB, India has a lot to do.

He took note of the role that the civil society has played in the development of the country. He said that even though the corporate sector is a part of the civil society, an increased participation is needed from them, as presently they are not doing much.



Mr. Joaquin Gonzalez Aleman
Chief, Policy and Programmes,
UNICEF

42% of children show under-developed brains.

The quality of education is a major point of concern. 4% of children in class 5 cannot read a textbook, 12% cannot identify letter, and 15% cannot identify words.



The corporate sector is also a part of the civil society. An increased participation is needed from the corporate sector as presently they are not doing much.

Shri Mohammed Basheer, former Minister for Education, Kerala, delivered the closing remarks. He lauded the efforts of the dignitaries in taking a proactive role in issues related to the rights of the children. He stated that this day would be written in golden letters in our country. There were very high expectations regarding the decision to launch such a group of parliamentarians that would work for the welfare of the children.

He emphasised that one needs to work hard for welfare of the children and that one should unite for this cause.



Shri E. T. Mohammed. Basheer

Member of Parliament

Lok Sabha

Closing Remarks and Vote of Thanks



**PARLIAMENTARIANS GROUP FOR CHILDREN
LIST OF DIGNITARIES PRESENT**

A.V. Swamy, M.P.

Anu Aga, M.P.

Anup Kumar Saha, M.P.

Anurag Thakur, M.P.

Avinash Pandey, M.P.

D.P. Tripathi, M.P.

Dinesh Trivedi, M.P.

E.T. Mohammed Basheer, M.P.

Kaushal Singh, Chairperson, NCPCR

Dr. Najma A. Heptulla, M.P.

Prakash Javadekar, M.P.

Rabinarayan Mohapatra, M.P.

Ratna Bai, M.P.

T.K. Rangarajan, M.P.

Vandana Chavan, MP

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

| Name | Designation | Organisation |
|----------------------|--|--|
| Abhijeet Nirmal | Advocacy Coordinator | Save the Children |
| Alex George | National Lead - Child Rights | Action Aid |
| Aparajita | Academic Fellow | CECED, AUD |
| Brother Steve Rocha | | Nine is Mine |
| Chris Anthony | Director | Shades of Happiness |
| Darshana Vyas | Project Director | Pathfinder International |
| Dr. Prasad BM | | The Union |
| Dr. Reema Kochar | Project Associate | CECED, AUD |
| Farhana | Programme Director and Officer | HAQ: Centre for Child Rights |
| G B Rao | Director | NSW |
| Gaurav Goel | Advisor to Ashok Tanwar, M.P. | Sirsa Lok Sabha, Haryana |
| Happy Pant | Senior Programme Officer | CBGA |
| K.K. Tripathy | Head Alliance | Butterflies |
| Krinna Shah | Programme Director | HAQ: Centre for Child Rights |
| Kumar Ratan | National Advocacy Coordinator | National Coalition for Education (NCE) |
| Lakshya Narayana | Project Manager | Pathfinder International |
| Mercy Minal | Programme Manager | World Vision India |
| Mridula Bajaj | Executive Director | Mobile Creches |
| Preeti Mahalwal | Project Assistant | CECED, AUD |
| Priyanka Samy | Programme Consultant | CBGA |
| Purva Narain | Associate Coordinator | Pravah- CYC |
| Rameshwar Yadav | Programme Manager | Dr. A. V. Balika Memorial Trust |
| Ranjit Bhattacharyya | General Manager | ASER Centre |
| Rita Panicker | Director | Butterflies |
| Ritakynti | Project Coordinator | CHETNA |
| Saha Moitta | Regional Director | CRY |
| Sai Krishna | Student | Amity University |
| Sakrama Somyajit | Social Development Advisor to Ashok Tanwar, M.P. | Sirsa Lok Sabha, Haryana |
| Shekhar | Manager | Bal Vikas Dhara |
| Sudeshna Sengupta | | Mobile Creches |
| Tanuja | P.M. | World Vision India |
| Vijay Kumar | National Secretary | Barthe Kadam |
| Vijayalakshmi Arora | Functional Director | CRY |



Nine is Mine campaign is an advocacy initiative of the children, for the children, by the children. 25 children from the *Nine is Mine* campaign under the guidance of Brother Steve Rocha, performed a short skit at the launch of the Parliamentarians Group for Children.

