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Children Issues in Focus

Dear Reader,

Issues of child rights have been taking remarkable shape in the society, but receiving inadequate space in different forms of media. Highlighting the children's issues in media is today is extremely essential because it has direct bearing on the policy environment at international, national, regional and local levels. JOURNALISTS ALERT is an attempt to remind you to pen down on different issues and aspects of the children in our society so that their future can no longer remain bleak; ultimately they are the future citizens of our country and the world. Supported by Plan International, this Alert consists of some critical story ideas with a glance. This set of stories drives us towards realizing the gravity of the problem and to act upon the burning issue. Hope you will subscribe some of the story ideas and act appropriately.

We have back up information related to the stories, which we may provide to the interested journalists. We are also open to work in close coordination in order to take on the issues.

Looking forward to hear from your side for the cause of children.

Sincerely,

Hasrat Arjjumend



**key story ideas for media
coverage and discourse**

Media to monitor National Commission for Protection of Child Rights

National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has been constituted recently with Ms. Shantha Sinha as its Chairperson. This is an opportune moment for all of us working for protection of children's rights in the country today. Since this is the first such Commission for protection of children's rights, it would require abundance of ideas and monitoring on how it could take forward the agenda. Some ideas to monitor the functioning of Commission could be: (1) How can the Commission be accessible to voices in the country? Could some systematic frameworks or mechanisms for flow of information on violation of children's rights be in place? (2) Till such time that Commissions are appointed at the state level, what would be the viable institutional framework for taking up cases? (3) How does the Commission enter into an effective dialogue with the Government and its various Departments/Institutions for strengthening their will to work for children's rights? (4) Has the Commission taken up properly the cases of violation of child rights? (5) How can the media play integral role in efficient functioning of the Commission? There may be many such things to do for monitoring or facilitating the efficiency of the NCPCR.

For more information, please contact Grassroots Media or Social Jurist (socialjurist@socialjurist.org).



Repeated deaths of tribal children due to malnutrition

Numbering about 6 lakhs (5.6% of India's tribal population and 22% of India's primitive tribes), the Sahariyas are mainly concentrated in the Chambal valley of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Their eviction from the forests started from around 1860. They have faced a long history of social ostracism, living in separate hamlets on the outskirts of the main village settlement. They were forced to work as labourers. They have been known to eat roots of forest plants to survive and migrate in large numbers to look for work. Sahariyas are much more vulnerable to diseases like TB than the general population. Studies also have shown that Sahariyas as a group suffer from severe malnutrition. A report on Sahariyas shows that 94% of the Sahariya children are malnourished, with 15% severely malnourished. 74% of Sahariya children are reportedly underweight. 87% of the adults suffer from anaemia. Studies have also compared the health status of Sahariya children with some of the world's poorest countries, saying that Sahariyas place them amongst the worst in the world. Resultantly, Sahariyas especially their children are prone to starvation deaths in Sheopur district of Madhya Pradesh.

For more information, please contact Grassroots Media or Grassroots India (grassrootsindia@rediffmail.com).

Rescuing children from nightmarish

Hundreds of thousands of children occupy the streets, railway platforms and bus stations in India – they are faceless and nameless – either runaways, abandoned or trafficked. Hungry and desperate, these children beg, do petty thefts, pick pockets or do menial jobs in sweatshops, becoming a mere digit in the national statistics on child labour or in the local ‘missing persons’ list. Many find solace in drugs – not the kind the elite and the celebrities could afford – but anything from turpentine fumes to crude opium or cheap tobacco will do. Seva Gram, established by Mana Seva Sansthan, is a modest shelter for homeless children in a village called Campierganj near Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh. Gorakhpur has the dubious distinction of being the largest transit centre for human trade in the India-Nepal border. Thousands of children at the station from various parts of Uttar Pradesh and other States of India and also Nepal – some voluntarily to escape violence and starvation at home and some are sold by hapless parents and forcefully trafficked by unscrupulous agents. The intervention of MSS focuses on needs like education, nutrition and basic amenities, vocational training, social & moral development of children, advocacy for policy reforms and reducing the vulnerability of children towards trafficking & sexual abuse.

For more information, please contact Grassroots Media or Skillshare India (Julie.George@skillshare.org) or Manav Seva Sansthan (manavseva@vsnl.com).



Indian policy on child labor has discrepancy

India’s policy on child labor is evolving. It has made significant gains in the past two decades and continues to adopt refining features. However, there is a discrepancy between the fundamental assumptions made by the UN Convention and Indian laws. Two assumptions that broadly influence government’s policy are explained in paper released recently by CACL. The current policy in India is based on combating ‘exploitative’ child labor. Children are already banned from working in factories, mines, and other ‘hazardous’ work environments. Recently adding two more, residences and the hospitality sector, the list now includes 57 professions children are prohibited to work. There are three problems with this list. First, corruption and lack of definition in terms of enforcement provides safe haven for child labor even in these hazardous environments. Second, it still allows child labor to continue to exist in some form. Third, it protects children up to the age of 14, leaving ages 14-18 still highly susceptible to exploitative child labor. There are many more issues connected to Indian policy on child labor.

For more information, please contact Mr. Ranjan Mohanty, Campaign Against Child Labor at cacls@yahoo.com, cacls@sancharnet.in .

Giving children a voice in the media

Media Code of Conduct to realise Children's Rights, developed by the Concerned for Working Children is an effort towards creating a paradigm shift in the media's approach to children – from recipients of adult benevolence to full partners in society. The violation of children's rights by the media, whether through insensitive reportage, misrepresentation or denial of space for children's opinions on various issues, forms the backdrop to this Code. Media Code of Conduct is a code developed in consultation with children, other organisations working with children's issues and media persons, on how the media should protect and promote the rights of children in the design, production and distribution of media. This Code portrays (1) Children as 'users' of Media, (2) Children as 'producers' of Media, and (3) Children as 'subjects' of Media. The media has to follow this Code.

For more information, please contact Ms. Kavita Ratna, Centre for Working Children (cwcbclr@vsnl.com) .

Union budget 2007-08 inadequately allocated for the children



Of every Rs. 100 in the Union Budget, only Rs. 4.84 was set aside for children. The Union Finance Minister of India reduced the allocation for children this year as against last year, when he had allocated Rs. 4.90. Despite claims to increase the social sector allocation, particularly for education and health, the child's share reduced by 1.23 per cent. With children being increasingly plagued by malnutrition, disease burden, the fall in allocation for health was a matter of concern. The allocation for child health fell from 0.55 per cent in 2006-07 to 0.48 percent this year. Child protection constituted a mere 0.04 per cent of the Union Budget. While the total allocation for education has increased by 34 per cent this year.

For more information, please contact HAQ Centre for Child Rights (haqcrc@vsnl.net) .

For further information, please contact:

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