

Focus



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Beyond the Right to be Heard

Children's participation rights include the right to freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion, freedom of association and peaceful assembly, the right to privacy, the right to have access to information, and the right to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

The idea that children should be heard and that they, like adults, have this range of civil and political freedoms, and economic, social and cultural rights presents a challenge not just to governments but to every family and every adult in society.

For years, many children, including and especially those in very challenging circumstances, have strived for recognition of their presence, and for respect for their dignity, their competency, and their agency as human beings. They work hard and show by experience their capacity to act responsibly and be part, even lead the process of change in their lives, and in the lives of their families and communities.

There is still a long, long way to go before majority of Asian children could be truly heard and considered in decisions made about their lives and there is even a longer way ahead before children's meaningful participation becomes real in every aspect of society. The real life stories though of children and the way they have influenced positive social changes in the past and in the present serve as our starting points, and as the beacons in the long journey.

Prevention of Trafficking, Abuse, and Exploitation: Role of Children

Brian Jungwiwattanaporn

Children in the Greater Mekong Sub-region face pressures to migrate within their own countries and across borders as a solution to local poverty. Save the Children's Cross-border Program is currently engaged in supporting the development of child protection models for children affected by trafficking, migration, and those without legal status. While trafficking prevention requires strong involvement from policy makers, local authorities, and community members, children and their participation within the system are crucial for its effectiveness. Children's participation in Vietnam forms the foundation of local protection systems while a research in Thailand brings attention to the challenges of supporting children's participation among working children in migrant communities. Children play a role in the prevention of trafficking and exploitation despite differing local contexts in the Mekong region.

Building Community Protection Systems

Save the Children in Vietnam supports the development of child protection systems to meet the needs of all children facing exploitation including protection from trafficking. The program supports a partnership

with local and provincial-level authorities at the Department for Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs (DOLISA) which is building community-based child protection systems. Children are actively engaged in this process. In Mong Cai, a small gateway to China in Vietnam's northern Quang Ninh province, child leaders in local schools and in rural community centers, organize and lead trafficking prevention and awareness activities while collaborating with local authorities on assessing and designing future directions for their work.

Community-based child protection systems involving children operate with different degrees of effectiveness in Vietnam. Within Mong Cai, and its surrounding villages, the systems are well established and act as models for potential replication. Through leadership and support of the Quang Ninh provincial level DOLISA, adult volunteers drawn from community leadership positions in villages form local level Project Management Boards (PMBs) which implement reporting and response systems for child protection along with awareness-raising on risky migration, trafficking, and exploitation. Children are encouraged to form children's clubs focusing on child protection through trainings and

workshops. They interact with PMBs to disseminate information on child protection among their peer groups while PMBs promote child protection messages in community meetings. Protection cases identified either by children or adult volunteers can be addressed through community interventions through discussions with families experiencing protection challenges or if serious can be referred to officials in DOLISA with whom they meet regularly. Communities in Mong Cai have intervened in cases of domestic abuse and have also raised community funds enabling vulnerable children to continue schooling and preventing the risks associated with leaving school early.

Situated on the border between China and Vietnam, Mong Cai has seen its economy develop, marking the small city as a destination and transit point for migrants and traffickers. Many internal migrants are attracted to Mong Cai which hosts several migrant communities from throughout Vietnam. Cross-border trafficking of children and infants remains one of the many challenges being addressed through a protection system. Through the support of local authorities, children are learning to protect themselves and their peers.

Child leaders implement weekly information dissemination sessions for students and young children in village-based community centers. Using a variety of strategies including role play, singing, games, discussions, and question-and-answer sessions they communicate awareness on trafficking and protection. As lead organizers they determine the content for their sessions based on their protection interests, enabling them to explore many subjects of concern for local youth including child abuse, domestic violence, migration, and trafficking. Child leaders are provided with training opportunities to develop their facilitation, communication, and leadership skills along with their knowledge base on trafficking and protection issues. Reflections from child leaders indicate greater confidence and feelings of empowerment. One child leader in Mong Cai has commented "I used to be very shy, but since I joined the activity I became more confident. I have increased my knowledge and skills. I can come back to my community to protect myself and my friends." These sentiments are reinforced through collaboration with community leaders and local authorities in building the local protection system. Children communicate with adult volunteers in PMBs and local DOLISA officials about the challenges their peers confront. Responses to protection cases can then be developed as the awareness-raising activities of the children become part of the community's monitoring system.

Child leaders are active participants in workshops organized by DOLISA. Along

with adult volunteers they assess program implementation progress, lead discussions, and compose messages for Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials that are distributed by local officials. Afforded the status of equal partners, children are recognized for their engagement in prevention work with the realization that child leaders are most appropriate in addressing the concerns of their peers. Adult volunteers and local officials acknowledge that the insights and contributions of children are crucial in challenging the forms of abuse and exploitation children face. Within communities, greater support for children and positive changes within local children has been noted along with reduced rates of trafficking and children leaving school. The PMB of one of Mong Cai's rural communes remarked that children in their area have greater self – protection knowledge and awareness on social issues which they link to having no reported cases of trafficking during the past three years or cases of dropping out of school which increases a child's vulnerability. A secondary school student stated "I see changes in my community. Before they had no knowledge of child protection or abuse, but after our dissemination session, they have knowledge to protect themselves and tell their families." This reduction in child vulnerability can be credited to the active involvement of children, community, and local government in developing a comprehensive approach in addressing protection. Village elders of a rural commune in

Mong Cai discuss the advent of children's clubs raising the issue of protection to local adults and officials. Children monitoring the protection challenges of their community provide the impetus for interventions such as direct support for students to access education and health facilities. Effective participation beyond token leadership has developed over several years of engagement in Mong Cai and is cited as a defining success for prevention efforts. As models for participation are replicated in new communities, supporting child leadership and confronting established attitudes towards children are being led through DOLISA's efforts.

Child leaders have contributed to building a community-based protection system through their engagement in prevention work and their inputs into local government dialogues. As they look to expand their role within the system they need to strengthen their reporting of cases of trafficking, abuse, or exploitation. There is a referral system to support cases at the local and provincial levels that children can access. As child leaders take roles beyond prevention towards actively monitoring their communities their ability to protect themselves will be enhanced.

Challenges to Children's Participation in Environments of Exploitation

Recently Save the Children and the Columbia Group for Children in Adversity conducted a research along the border of Thailand and the Lao People's Democratic Republic to test a new mobility assessment tool for migrant children. Economic

inequalities, cultural and linguistic similarities, and a long, porous border have encouraged many Laotians to seek work in Thailand. With a strong sense of obligation to support their families, children travel to Thailand, often unaccompanied in search of temporary work. Easy access across the border has made both formal and informal crossing point locations key transit and destination areas for children seeking employment. While preliminary research results are being reviewed, the methodology highlighted several challenges in utilizing child participation to prevent trafficking.

Vulnerability for children seeking work across borders begins at home. Labor agents and brokers, friends, and families may all encourage migration to work that leads to situations of trafficking and exploitation for some children. Save the Children works with local non-governmental organization (NGO) partners and child leaders to raise awareness on safe migration and trafficking in areas of origin through the building of children's clubs focused on child protection and community activities. Creative arts are being employed in trainings and events to build awareness on trafficking and develop the communications skills of child leaders. Prevention efforts impact communities positively, but they do not ensure safe migration, and many children leave to find work in Thai border communities.

During the research, children were found to be engaged in a

variety of work. Children worked in restaurants, hotels, and small stores with several children employed in the sex services industry at karaoke bars. Many children lacked freedom of movement with employers not allowing them to leave their place of work. This problem was compounded by their status as unregistered migrants that increased the hesitation of employers and the children to engage with researchers. Children often slept at their work place, limiting their engagement with other migrant children in their community and creating feelings of social isolation. Children employed in karaoke bars often had the most freedom of movement and social relationships with migrants outside their place of work. Organizing undocumented children who face restrictive movement and finding suitable methods and outlets for participation and training development are considerations that need to be addressed.

Although children did not participate in the research design, migrant children organized through a local NGO were provided with training on research skills. These children had migrated previously with families and were enrolled in Thai schools. As members of a children's club they seek to build the capacity of their peers to protect themselves against trafficking. They were employed as researchers and to seek out potential interviews for the research team. However, although migrants themselves, they had few contacts with recent migrant arrivals. A lack of communication with newer

migrants and working children poses a challenge in developing stronger participation of recent migrants in existing structures for children. The social status of working children, and their place of employment, also placed a barrier between interactions of established and newer migrants. While migrant children leaders are engaged in trafficking prevention and protection, reaching the most vulnerable segments of working migrant children through their peers needs support.

Children Lead the Way

While cultural and political spaces differ within the Greater Mekong Sub-region, countries as diverse as Cambodia and Myanmar are producing effective community protection models for children. The Children and Life Association, located in Prey Veng, Cambodia, supports a network of child peer educators and Youth Coordination Committees in thirty villages. Utilizing creative arts these groups regularly conduct awareness-raising activities on trafficking prevention and unsafe migration. Child leaders organize children's clubs to disseminate information on trafficking while providing information on how children can protect themselves. Children report when "labor agents" attempt to recruit their peers and provide information to local child protection networks on the new tactics traffickers use to attract and exploit children. These networks intervene in cases of trafficking and unsafe migration and consider children's participation an integral part of their structure. The success of Youth

Coordination Committees, which consist of experienced child leaders and peer educators, has enabled them to engage with local government structures on the issue of trafficking. The Council Committee for Women and Children (CCWC), a commune-level authority, invites child and youth leaders to officially attend and contribute to their meetings. Young participants provide insights on how to protect children from traffickers which has resulted in the CCWC to agree in adopting new indicators on trafficking and abuse into their work plan. Building the knowledge base of the CCWC on the changing tactics traffickers employ, child rights, and protection mechanisms to prevent and address abuse and exploitation is helping the body engage in child protection at the community level. Youth leaders are lobbying the CCWC to allocate more budget resources for protection from, and prevention of, trafficking while the CCWC had been encouraged to take an active role in supporting parents to register their children, as a lack of birth registration limits opportunities for children and creates a situation for exploitation.

Save the Children in Myanmar employs organized consultations with children in nine townships across the country. Children's consultations have been held in Kawkaik in Kayin State, Mawlamyine and Kyeikmayaw in Mon State; Meikhtila, Tharzi, and Kyaukpadaung in the Mandalay Division, Shwe Pyi Thar and Hlaing Tharyar in the

Yangon Division, and Muse in Northern Shan State. Children's groups participate in consultation workshops to highlight the challenges they face within their community, raising issues of exploitation, trafficking prevention, and abuse. Follow-up feedback sessions allow children and local child protection groups to define priorities and determine approaches to prevention activities. Anecdotal reports from Hlaing Thayar relay children taking action on issues of abuse and exploitation through reporting cases to referral systems and acting to raise awareness among vulnerable children in their communities. The actions of children have in turn galvanized parental and community support into addressing the protection, trafficking, and exploitation faced by the young in their villages.

Conclusion

Children's participation is an effective approach to addressing trafficking prevention and child protection. Children with the knowledge to protect themselves and their peers represent the first line of defence against trafficking. Migrant children leaders who can express the challenges they face provide the insights necessary to make these systems efficient and capable of addressing the needs of all children who face not only trafficking, but abuse, neglect, violence, and exploitation in their daily lives. Supporting the participation of the most vulnerable children, often already in situations of exploitation, remains a

challenge. Deepening child involvement within trafficking prevention systems, moving from prevention and awareness-raising to monitoring and reporting on abuses are beginning to occur.

Across the Greater Mekong Sub-region, children collaborate with community systems and authorities to create protection systems. At the national and regional level, children are participants in forums on trafficking and protection, contributing their ideas and recommendations on anti-trafficking policies. Community-based protection models and the voices of migrant children are informing the development of more comprehensive protection systems addressing trafficking, abuse, and exploitation. As trafficking prevention models replicate across communities, overcoming established mindsets on children through demonstrating the effectiveness of their participation will be key in establishing prevention efforts at the local level.

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Child-friendly Spaces in Japan: An Integrated Approach for Child Protection in an Emergency

Warangkana Mutumol

Children are most vulnerable during emergencies. When basic resources become scarce due to multiple and severe disasters that lead to loss of homes and livelihoods, survivors give priority to security matters. In crisis situations, children are not always recognized as persons with capacity to make decisions. With protection systems being weak or non-existent during emergencies, children are at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation, physical harm, separation from their families, and other forms of harm.

A child protection system during emergencies is an important component to ensure appropriate care and protection of vulnerable children. During natural disasters, children encounter various difficulties: separation from families, witnessing death, and living in unfamiliar and continually changing situations. They cause both physical and psychosocial distress. Children therefore are in need of different kinds of support to rebuild their lives. The minimum response should include delivery of services to secure the basic needs of children, make children properly understand on-going changes, help build their own resilience, and support reunification with their families and communities. Therefore, child protection in an emergency

should be viewed through a holistic approach, entailing elements of promotion of physical and emotional well-being as well as addressing prevention of abuse, exploitation, and other harm. Child protection initiatives should respond quickly to the needs of children and ensure their meaningful participation and recovery over a long-term period.

The child-friendly spaces (CFS) are created as a special intervention outreach for children, as a place to listen to them and respond to their needs. CFS assists children in regain their resilience and sense of normalcy while in emergency situation.

Although it is referred to differently by other agencies as a safe space, child-centered spaces, or child protection center, this intervention is part of a common lineage of support for children to relax, play, and interact with others. CFS can also lay foundations for better protection of children so that they are well safeguarded from possible harm and accidents. In areas where there is an emergency situation and the normal security system is not yet fully functioning, children are likely at risk of various forms of abuse, exploitation, and neglect. A CFS is there to prevent harm and establish

monitoring systems that address possible risks that children face.

Before a CFS is established, responsible agencies have to conduct a needs assessment and review available resources. Objectives have to be clearly stated at the outset to determine which direction the CFS will lead to and how to involve children, parents, and the affected community in the planning and implementing process. In case of many unaccompanied orphan children; those who lack appropriate care and suffer trauma or other previously unknown adverse affects, a CFS should serve as an initial mechanism that supports children's emotional well-being and has to refer cases to responsible bodies. It must introduce platforms for establishing child protection systems that also enable children to continue their lives after the emergency situation.

2011 Earthquake and Tsunami in Japan

The earthquake-tsunami disaster that struck in northeastern Japan¹ on 11 March 2011 is one of the most alarming crises Japan has faced. The disaster is compounded by the emission across the disaster-affected area of high-level radiation from the damaged Fukushima nuclear

power plant. This disaster led to a number of casualties including at least fifteen thousand dead and more than five hundred thousand displaced persons. Of the thousands displaced, many were children.

Initial estimate put the number of affected children to 74,000. Initial on-site assessment revealed extremely harsh conditions for children and families. Many children suffered displacement and separation from home and family. They were unable to sleep, suffered nightmares, and experienced anxiety and stress. Striving to live in the unfamiliar surroundings of the evacuation centers, children also faced continuing aftershocks, possible risk of another tsunami, and evacuation from areas around the damaged Fukushima nuclear power plant. Freezing weather worsened living conditions; there was no electricity or running water when the evacuation centers were initially established. This environment also made many infants and young children vulnerable to illnesses.

"Our house was swallowed by the big piles of waves. It continued to come in directly to where we were standing, I was so afraid. Now I want to go home, I need a bath and want to be together with my friends" - Kosuke, six years old.

"I was terrified, I could not believe what I was seeing. We could not even think about returning home - my house was destroyed and besides, we were frightened that another tsunami would come" - Riko Tomita, twelve years old.

Save the Children began mobilizing its resources and identifying partners, relief agencies, and authorities in and around the impact area to assess the services available and to efficiently meet the needs of children and families. A field survey at the very outset of the emergency response found that children were in urgent need of basic relief items as well as psychological support to deal with fear and uncertain environments.

Child-friendly Space as a Primary Approach

The field survey disclosed thousands of homeless children staying in different evacuation centers, with nothing to do. The children often could not express their feelings and held back what they wanted to say.

"I would just walk up and down the corridors, and try to do something like run about, but mostly it was not interesting" Kazuki Seto, eight years old, in an evacuation center in a primary school in Miyagi prefecture.

In response, Save the Children in collaboration with Japanese partners established CFS as the easiest, quickest approach to learn more about children's problems and also render systematic support to them. The first CFS opened on 16 March 2011 at a primary school, while many more were established subsequently totaling nineteen CFS in different affected areas. Staffs at CFS initially helped children understand what had happened and how to manage their feelings of loss and uncertainty. The spaces also freed parents and families from worries and stress; the parents could then focus on re-establishing their livelihoods knowing their children were in safe hands.

Save the Children started involving children at the very beginning of the process. In Miyagino ward, Sendai city, Miyagi prefecture two weeks after the disaster, Save the Children staffs explained the idea of having spaces for children to the people in the evacuation centers and asked some children volunteers to work together in setting up the area. Children helped clean and



make the space ready. They also made posters explaining what a CFS was to invite more children to join.

The CFS is tailored to support children in different age groups from four to fourteen years old. Activities include making *origami* (paper folding), drawing pictures, molding clay, and playing games in which children are involved in designing rules and contents. After participating in the CFS activities, children express relief and the feeling that they are getting stronger with the many friends and adults standing by their side. Adult staffs have played games to assess children's psychosocial conditions as well. In close cooperation with doctors and counselors from the government, Save the Children has developed a referral system that is ready to help children found suffering from serious trauma.

Play and Games

CFS empower children through play. Staff members who organize activities are also tasked to observe the situation of the children; they bear in mind that stress and worries may not surface from daily conversation with children. Therefore, play and games are used as tools to help children relax and feel comfort. While participating in various activities supported by trained adults, children feel more secure, and start to speak of their fear and worries. Children also have chances to interact with other friends, which help them express themselves as they rebuild their lives.

Parents and caregivers are guided on how to work with children. They are given materials on how to support children's emotional well-being, including tips on talking to children about their experiences. Occasionally, those found having serious traumatic stress are referred to professional social workers for further counseling.

"I play with everyone! All along, just fun"

"At first when we saw it (CFS) opened, we thought it was a bit boring because there was no activity. The place was not lively, but now it is and we like it. It seems really good to be here because there are a lot of things going on and I am happy about it"

"It's a great place where we feel safe. We have no concerns of being on our own. We don't want to be alone."

CFS helps build the resilience of children and creates an entry point for developing other life skills. It is also important for adults and the community to provide continuous support to help children cope with the aftermath of the disaster. Therefore, Save the Children has also implemented a school- and community-based approach to help children live with high spirit. Delivery of five thousand five hundred "Back to School Kits" and the organizing of a creative event called "Dream Truck Theater," where children have the chance to celebrate children's day through games, concert, and drama, are another steps to empowering children

and ensuring healthy integration to their communities even while they are undergoing the recovery process. This kind of community-inclusive program aims not only to promote the rights of children, but also to ensure that after the rescue stage has passed there will be an effective children's development program where parents and other childcare providers will be highly motivated to be part of.

Children's Resilience and Participation

"We have friends who lost their families and their homes, some have left our school. The town is covered with wreckage and it will take a long time to get back to normal. But we will work hard for this and bring back our town.

A Japanese medical aid worker's diary:

I talked to a boy who had a fever and a loss of appetite. He showed me a *Doraemon*² book covered in mud. I asked him what his favorite was of all of Doraemon's tools.

'I used to like the *ozashiki tsuribori* (indoor magic fishing mat), but now my favorite is the *taimu furoshiki* (wrapping cloth of time). I want to wrap up the whole city with the *taimu furoshiki* and make it go back to how it was before the earthquake.'

In emergencies, children are often recognized as passive victims who merely receive relief items and services.

Working closely with them makes us realize how much strength children have and the ways they use to cope with loss and tragedy. Right after the Japanese disaster a great number of child survivors were rescued, who kept their hope and spirit. Many children waited quietly in line for many hours with their parents to receive food and water. In the evacuation centers, older children also helped taking care of younger ones; they shared food, snacks, toys, and hardly complain about the difficult situation they have faced.

Recently, the CFS gathered children to do an art piece to build the morale of everybody in the evacuation center. Children worked on an *origami* poster – folding papers and writing messages to encourage people. The small art pieces were placed on a wall where other people in the evacuation center can write something on to express their own feeling as well. This child leadership activity is an entry point towards community healing – children have helped a lot in lifting up the spirits of people who are still in difficult circumstances and in the process of recovering from the tragedy.

Future Tasks

The CFS established for the recent northeast Japan disaster consult the Japanese children disaster victims on any matter that affects their lives. They will later on develop long-term recovery plan that provides for the children's involvement in emergency preparedness planning processes. Under the long-term recovery plan, the

CFS will be adjusted to become community child protection centers that work with children after school to provide further support during the post-emergency situation. They will also make children take part in decision-making; and will provide opportunities for children to learn about their rights and how to become active citizens in their own communities.

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Save the Children Emergency Response Blog for Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, www.savechildren.or.jp

Save the Children Exclusive Briefing Document: Save the Children's Commitment to Children and Families Affected by Japan's Massive Earthquake and Tsunami, www.savechildren.or.jp

A Japanese medical aid worker's diary, <http://jkts-english.blogspot.com/>

Endnotes

1. The earthquake and tsunami struck mainly three prefectures (Fukushima, Iwate and Miyagi) in the so-called Tohoku (northeast region) of Japan that faces the Pacific Ocean.
2. *Doraemon* is a popular television cartoon character in Japan.

Challenges to the Right of Children to Participate: Child Labor and Situations of Armed Conflict

Edelweiss F. Silan, Sucharat Satharpornanon and Chakkrid Chansang

Child labor in Asia is a huge burden. But we believe in the resources of Asia. We also believe in the vitality and wisdom of child workers themselves. The problem of child labor cannot be solved without the participation of children. They have their own analysis of society; they have their own strategies not only for survival but also their conditions of work, their conditions in life. We can learn from them, we have to.¹

Recognition of the human dignity, competence, and agency of working children has underpinned the work of institutions in addressing child labor in Asia for decades. Working children and youth leaders have the voice of the youth and children from vulnerable communities that challenged governments and societies on the way children are treated and their problems addressed. With the emergence of stronger civil society support for children's participation after the universal ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, good examples of strong children and youth groups and initiatives have evolved in Asia and other regions, including in places affected by armed conflict.

Experience and research show that even in situations of war where lives of children and their communities are frayed and fragile, children and young

people have shown strength, resilience, and interest and capacity to be part of the solution. The children know the risks, and their stories show myriads of strategies to survive, keep themselves safe, and even help other people. Truly, in the world of work and in the world of war, failure to take into account children's perspectives is a step away from more effective solutions and may even result to their exposure to greater risks. Recognizing children as actors in their lives, and tapping their wealth of resources on the other hand could lead not just to children's individual development and better protection, but also to more effective solutions to the bigger problems that they and their communities face.

Children's Organizations

Children's organizations exemplify the value of participation of children in addressing their problems. Two children's organizations prove this point.

Child Labor Club in Thailand

The Foundation for Child Development, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that provides health and other services to children working in factories around Bangkok, started the idea of forming the Child Labor Club in 1982. As explained by the staff

of the Foundation for Child Development:

We were ... motivated to set up the Child Labour Club because we [thought] that these working children should be given an opportunity for self-development. We went to find ... children in small factories, through hotlines, festivities (during peak times of migration), and organising mobile child clubs in areas near factories that have working children. After some time, we learned that children who had on-going contact with us were enthusiastic to express themselves and to consult with us, both when they had problems and when they'd like to plan for the future, say, education....This indicated that these children could develop their potential when they are given opportunities like other children.²

The core members of the Child Labor Club go through leadership training, attend seminars on collecting data on child labor, and plan activities to reach working children in their workplaces and encourage their participation.

While less Thai children migrate for work at present due to the improving economic situation of Thai families, children and young people from neighboring countries – Myanmar, Cambodia, and Lao PDR – take their place in Bangkok. The Child Labor Club now faces

new challenges, particularly the vulnerability of most migrant child workers who do not have proper documentation. These child workers are subject to arrest by the police and to control and exploitation by employers. Getting permission from employers to allow them to participate in activities becomes more difficult, while the child workers themselves do not want to leave their workplaces for fear of getting arrested. The Child Labor Club persists in finding creative ways to pursue its role of being a place for child workers, by child workers. It continues to monitor workplaces, approach child workers to encourage participation in club activities, organize peer-to-peer support for them, and hold activities (creative arts workshops, recreation activities and sports) and radio programs. It reports on situations of exploitation and abuse, and organizes dialogues (together with the Foundation for Child Development) with employers and business owners, and local authorities. One of the earliest leaders of the Child Labor Club, who is now a teacher said:

I was very shy when I first joined the Club but after a few activities, I became active... I developed my leadership skills after working as volunteer to organise activities for other working children. I had to contact children working in factories, produce newsletters and attend the Clubs' board meeting. I also served as mentor for other children who had problems and did not want to talk to the [Foundation for Child Development] staff due to age differences. [Because] I speak other dialects ... children from those dialect-speaking areas talk to me. Then I can

further discuss their problem with other staff. Although I was paid more by working in a factory than by being a volunteer, that is not as important as the opportunity to develop myself. I have a dream of becoming a teacher. If I finished my study, I'll return to my hometown and teach there.

Through the work of the members of the Club, which has been running for almost thirty years now, thousands of vulnerable Thai and migrant child workers have not only found protection in their workplaces but were also helped to find new and better directions in life.

Children's Clubs in Nepal

During the decade-long internal armed conflict in Nepal, local NGOs and communities in affected areas strongly supported the development of children's clubs that would allow children opportunities for development and protection in their localities. The children's clubs seriously took their roles in reaching out to children in their communities, sharing information to them, advocating for the rights of children, and reporting situations of children at risk. The following report provides a glimpse of the significance of children's clubs in the lives of children in conflict zones. A child was recruited to join the armed group of the Maoist Communist Party of Nepal. He was later caught by the Nepali police, and suffered torture while in detention. Upon release, the members of the armed opposition group came back to convince him to stay with the group. Given the name "Bigyan," he was trained and

armed. He joined military operations. But he tried to escape a number of times, only to be caught and warned that if he succeeded in escaping, his family would suffer. He gave this account with the help of his friends:³

After the Dingla attack, I finally escaped and was admitted to a school in Sunsari. Some child club members came to know about my past and approached me. I tried to avoid them in the beginning because I never liked to talk to anyone and could not concentrate on my studies. First, I was hesitant to share my pain but later, when I became convinced about the child club's motive, I honestly told the members how I was forcibly made to join the Maoists and escaped from them.

With the support, care and encouragement from child club friends, I joined the club and started to mix with them. I started contributing to the wall newspaper that was regularly published by the club. I shared my pain through poems and articles. I had the opportunity to participate in child club training. The trainers discussed child rights and concerns about children affected by the conflict. I shared my experiences with a staff member from the Centre for Community and Social Awareness (CICSA). I used to spend many sleepless nights till then. I was always worried about being caught at any moment.

Once I returned from the training and went home, my mother told me that my former friends (Maoists) had come in search of me... From that day, my life became mobile, shifting from one place to another, asking shelter from my friends. I received life-threatening

messages from the Maoists again and again. When child club friends came to know about this, they approached CICSA, thereafter UNICEF at the district and finally UNICEF in Kathmandu appealing for my life and the right to continue my studies. After nearly a month of regular follow-up from the child club and CICSA, I was rescued by Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) through UNICEF and was able to continue my studies in Kathmandu in a peaceful environment.

I am really grateful for the support I received from the child club. I got back my life and this has given me hope to live. I feel that if child clubs raise a united voice, it will be possible to protect the rights of thousands of conflict-affected children in our country. I feel it is our responsibility too.

Children as Part of Solutions

Investing on children and young people's participation can have not only an impact on their own protection and development but also contribute tremendously in addressing broader social, economic, and political issues. Oftentimes, issues that affect children similarly affect adults and their communities. And positive changes on the plight of children positively impact on the quality of life of adults. Conversely, adult-led efforts in changing the social, political, and economic conditions of communities can benefit from listening to the thoughts of children and young people. The children can be directly engaged in the activities relating to economic initiatives, advocacy, peace building,

strengthening social services, and governance.

Behind the successful lobby of civil society groups for the adoption of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers in June 2011 are the many domestic workers organizations that called attention to the plight of domestic workers, especially children and women who comprise about 80% of domestic workers. This Convention provides for the protection of the rights of an estimated fifty-three million domestic workers across the world. In the Philippines, an organization of domestic workers called Samahan at Ug n a y a n n g m g a Manggagawang Pantahanan sa Pilipinas (Organization and Network of Domestic Workers in the Philippines) or SUMAPI was organized in 2005 with the support of Visayan Forum, an NGO working on child labor issues. Many of SUMAPI's eight thousand members were still children when they joined the organization. The group actively reaches out to domestic workers through park and market visits. It provides counselling service, referrals to social services, and educational support. It works hand in hand with their NGO, government, and civil society supporters to achieve changes both for children and adult domestic workers. They were at the forefront of the campaign for the Magna Carta for Domestic Workers in the Philippines aiming to achieve decent work for Filipino domestic workers.

The Children's Development Khazana (CDK) is a bank established in 2001 for street

children in New Delhi by the NGO Butterflies. The bank, also known as Bal Vikas Bank, serves street children who despite adversities still look forward to a bright future and thus want to save money earned. It evolved from the saving and credit union scheme (*Khazana*) of Butterflies. Supported by the partnership between Butterflies and Childhope, and in collaboration with local partners, CDK operates in several cities in India, and also in other countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal and Sri Lanka).⁴ The children's bank operates on banking and cooperative principles. The bank is only for children and adolescents, mainly street children. It is owned and run by children under the guidance of adult facilitators. The project is implemented as a component of life skills education program, that train children to become responsible, learn how to prioritize needs, make budget, and save money.⁵ Their savings provide security for their future. CDK "enables its members to earn an interest on their deposits and its adolescent members to access advances for initiating small economic enterprises cooperatives."⁶ Those who apply for funds are taught how to make business plans, and manage enterprises.

OK Negros is a youth organization in one of the provinces most affected by the internal armed conflict in the Philippines. It was established in 2009 by the participants of a child rights and humanitarian law workshop organized by a coalition for young people from the upland communities of Negros province. Young people from the upland communities were very much affected by the

armed conflict between the Philippine government and the Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa ng Pilipinas (RPM-P) and its armed wing Revolutionary Proletarian Army-Alex Buncayao Brigade (RPA-ABB), a break-away group of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF). The young people realized that they could help change the situation in their communities by educating young people on their rights.⁷ They held children's forums in conflict-affected areas in the province, advocating for the protection of children from recruitment into the armed forces. Eventually, they participated in forums with the RPA-ABB, which has adopted a declaration in 2005 stating its objection to the use of children as soldiers.⁸ OK Negros continues its education work with children and young people in the communities of Negros. It is also getting support from the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process. The 2000 peace agreement between the Philippine government and the RPA-ABB is helping in the work of OK Negros.

Bhima Sangha is a union of working children in Karnataka, India that was formed when working children who were participating in the activities of the Concerned for Working Children realized that they were being taken into account by the government and by trade unions. They have over 20,000 children-members (under eighteen years), advocating for their rights and the rights of their parents and communities to a better quality of life. The children are often referred to as

protagonists. Being social actors, they reach out to other working children and inform them of their rights. Bhima Sangha members are actively involved in local government structures in their villages through the *Makkala Panchayats* or children's village councils that the children's union organized as 'parallel governments' of children that interacts with official village authorities to represent children in decision-making and governance at *Panchayat* (village) level. They campaign for issues confronting children such as education and child marriage. They have formed commissions to study and collect information on accidents that killed working children. Bhima Sangha is helping other working children in India in organizing their own unions. It is a member of the organizing committee for the first international meeting of working children and a founding member of the International Movement of Working Children.

Challenge of Weaving Children's Participation into Work and Lives

While these exciting and inspiring experiences are expanding as more agencies grow in their appreciation of the children's rights to participate, truly meaningful participation enjoyed by children still remain in geographical pockets or occurs in short periods based on special policy events. In general, engaging children is still seldom thought of as a critical part of strategies to solve enormous issues affecting children and society. Engaging children is often an afterthought

or is assumed as just an element of the implementation strategy. For example, just recently, the International Labour Organisation released the report "*Children in hazardous work: what we know, what we need to do*". The report cited studies from industrialized and developing countries indicating that every minute of each day, a child labourer somewhere in the world suffers a work-related accident, illness or psychological trauma. The report estimates that one hundred fifteen million of the world's two hundred fifteen million child laborers are engaged in hazardous work and that forty-eight million of children in hazardous work are in Asia. Recommendations included renewing efforts to ensure that all children are in school, strengthening workplace safety and health for all workers with safeguards for those under eighteen years, and providing the legal foundation for action against hazardous child work. Interestingly, the report is quiet on how the perspectives of this huge number of children in hazardous work can be heard and considered and how they can be actually engaged in refining these strategies or in finding new solutions to the problems. Perhaps children participation is assumed since the ILO Recommendation 190 requires programs to take into consideration the views of the children directly affected by the worst forms of child labor.

However, to be able to truly tap the enormous wealth, energy and skills that young people offer and to fully recognize children and young people as

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Human Rights Events in the Asia-Pacific

The Gwangju Metropolitan City Government and the May 18 Memorial Foundation co-hosted the 2011 World Human Rights Cities Forum held on 16-17 May 2011 at Gwangju city, Korea. The conference aimed to serve as a platform to solidify international cooperation among local communities around the world and to network cities and municipalities committed to the implementation of internationally recognized human rights standards and norms. It had the following objectives:

- * To enhance international cooperation and solidarity among human rights cities
- * To share experiences and case studies from advanced human rights cities
- * To promote the spirit of May 18 Democratization Movement and the human rights-oriented policies and actions of the Gwangju Metropolitan City.

Several Asian cities were represented in the conference (Kaoshiung [Taiwan], Sakai [Japan], Penang [Malaysia], and Lamphun [Thailand]) along with those from North America and Europe. A number of Asian, north American and European non-governmental organizations were also represented in the conference. For further information, please contact: The May 18 Memorial Foundation

May 18 Memorial Culture Hall, Seo-gu Ssangchondong 1268, Postcode 502-260 Gwangju, Republic of Korea; ph (8262) 457-0518; fax (8262) 456-0519; www.518.org/eng; or Korea Human Rights Foundation, 4/F, Seomoon Bldg. 368-22, Seogyo-dong, Mapo-gu, Seoul, South Korea 121-893; ph (82-2) 363-0601 (office); fax (82-2) 363-0208; Khrrf99@gmail.com; www.humanrights.or.kr.

TSF South Asia Regional Workshop

The Technical Support Facility (TSF) South Asia held the South Asia Regional Workshop on 27-30 June 2011 in New Delhi for capacity development of consultants and implementers on delivering quality technical assistance for advancing human rights and gender equality for the HIV response. The workshop had the objective of building the capacity of consultants by equipping them with tools and resources needed as gender consultants. The workshop introduced the consultants to key issues in gender and human rights for HIV response and then the specific skills based on engendering national strategic plans (NSPs) and integrating gender in Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM) proposals. The specific objectives of this workshop were: 1) Create a cadre of promising and functioning gender and HIV consultants; 2) Provide participants with

practical tips and hands-on skills in developing and understanding some key tools particularly relating to engendering NSPs and integrating gender into GFATM proposals; 3) Increase the pool of consultants who are female, men having sex with men (MSM), and transgender people. Twenty-eight consultants participated in the workshop. For further information, please contact: TSF-South Asia Secretariat, Ranibari Marga # 86, Lazimpat, Kathmandu, Nepal; ph (977-1) 4426792, 4433902; fax (977-1) 4439643; e-mail: info@tsfsouthasia.org; pemu.bhuria@actionaid.org; www.tsfsouthasia.org/advertisement/add_new.php

Meeting of the Asian Society of International Law

The Asian Society of International Law will hold its 3rd Biennial Meeting in Beijing on 27-28 August 2011 with the theme "Asia and International Law: A New Era." The meeting will explore the many issues confronting the peoples of Asia and the international community more generally. The topics to be addressed include, broadly, human rights, international economic law and private international law, the law of the sea, development and the environment, international law relating to security and conflict, and the history and theory of international law. A panel will be devoted to the crucial issue

of the teaching and dissemination of international law in Asia. The conference will explore Asian state practice, regional developments and the Asian traditions of international law, and the ways in which Asian societies are attempting to formulate and adapt international law to meet their needs and their growing economies. At the same time, the conference will examine developments in international

law more broadly. Both Asian and international perspectives on the selected topics are welcome, as it is only when international lawyers are fully conscious of the changing international political environment, and truly understand the economic needs and social conditions of both the developed and developing world that they can genuinely facilitate the creation of a system which helps ensure

equal opportunities and mutual benefits for all parties and thus contribute towards achieving the great and enduring goals of international law: global justice, peace, and prosperity. For further information, please contact: Chinese Society of International Law, 24 Zhanlan Road, Xicheng District, Beijing 100037 China; ph (86-10) 68323096; (8160) 68314018; e-mail: secretariat@csil.cn; www.csil.cn.

Children's participation

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human beings with equal rights and dignity and potentials as adults, there is a need to invest more time, more effort, and more faith in facilitating meaningful partnerships with children and engaging them better in the work on human rights education, in addressing discrimination, poverty and social issues, in improving social services, and in promoting peace and justice. Perhaps better strategies can be designed to help achieve targets.

The bigger challenge though is in weaving the principles of respect for children's dignity, integrity, and competence in day-to-day life, placing them in focus, listening to them, and honestly considering what they say and what they can do. If this can be done in day-to-day interaction with children, perhaps this can also be done in the more serious matters that adults are responsible for.

Ms. Edelweiss F. Silan is the Regional Cross-border Programme Director, Ms. Sucharat Satharpornanon is the Regional Programme Assistant, and Mr. Chakkrid Chansang is the Regional Advocacy Coordinator in the Asia Regional Office of Save the Children UK.

For further information, please contact: Edel F. Silan, Save the Children UK, Asia Regional Office, 14th floor Maneeya Center Bldg., 518/5 Ploenchit Road, Lumpini, Patumwan, Bangkok 10330 Thailand; ph (66-2) 6841291, 6520518 to 20 ext 304; email: edel@savethechildren.or.th; www.savethechildren.org.uk.

Endnotes

- ¹ Quoted from the editorial of *Child Workers in Asia newsletter*, volume 1, no.1, July -Sept 1985, <http://asiasociety.org/policy-politics/social-issues/human-rights/child-workers-asia>.
- ² Chompoonuj Klomklom, Coordinator of the Center of Concern for Child Labour between 11982-1986, quoted in *Child Labour Club for Working Children: A summary of Child La-*

bour Club work from 1982 to 1998, under the Child Labour Project, Foundation for Child Development.

- ³ Quoted from *Capacity Building Workshop on Strengthening Meaningful and Ethical Participation of Girls and Boys* (Kathmandu: UNICEF and Save the Children Sweden, 2007), page 73.
- ⁴ See the website of Children's Development Khazana in www.cdk.co.in/cdk_presence.php.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, in www.cdk.co.in/cdk_objectives.php.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, in www.cdk.co.in/lifeeducation.php.
- ⁷ Telephone interview with Redo De Leon, President of OK Negros, June 2011.
- ⁸ See Southeast Asia Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (SEASUCS) and the Philippine Coalition to Protect Children Involved in Armed Conflict (Protect CIAC), *Preventing Children's Involvement in Armed Conflicts in the Philippines: A Mapping of Programs and Organizations* (Quezon city: Southeast Asia Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers and the Philippine Coalition to Protect Children Involved in Armed Conflict), page 21.

HURIGHTS OSAKA Calendar

HURIGHTS OSAKA has published a pilot version of a booklet on business and human rights entitled *Respecting the Dignity of People* (in Japanese language). The booklet is expected to be used by the employees of business enterprises at human rights training seminars or workshops. The booklet refers to the recent development of corporate social responsibility (CSR) theories and international standards and guidelines on the business activities, in particular their impacts on human rights. Based on feedbacks from various interest groups and business enterprises in Japan, the final version of the booklet will be published by the end of 2011.



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HURIGHTS OSAKA, inspired by the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, formally opened in December 1994. It has the following goals: 1) to promote human rights in the Asia-Pacific region; 2) to convey Asia-Pacific perspectives on human rights to the international community; 3) to ensure inclusion of human rights principles in Japanese international cooperative activities; and 4) to raise human rights awareness among the people in Japan in meeting its growing internationalization. In order to achieve these goals, HURIGHTS OSAKA has activities such as Information Handling, Research and Study, Education and Training, Publications, and Consultancy Services.

FOCUS Asia-Pacific is designed to highlight significant issues and activities relating to human rights in the Asia-Pacific. Relevant information and articles can be sent to HURIGHTS OSAKA for inclusion in the next editions of the newsletter.

FOCUS Asia-Pacific is edited by Osamu Shiraishi, Director of HURIGHTS OSAKA.

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