



South Asia Initiative To End Violence Against Children [SAIEVAC]

SAARC Apex Body

"In Solidarity with the Children of SAARC"



PRESS RELEASE

Kathmandu, Nepal, 14 November 2014

4th Technical Consultation on "Stepping Up Protection of Children with Disabilities in South Asia"

What and Why:

The South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC), will hold the 4th Technical Consultation on "Stepping Up Protection of Children with Disabilities in South Asia" from 5-6 December 2014 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The consultation is being organized by the SAIEVAC Regional Secretariat, supported by the South Asia Coordinating Group on Action against Violence against Children (SACG), the SAARC Development Fund (SDF) and hosted by the National Child Protection Authority (NCPA), Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs, Government of Sri Lanka.

Children with disabilities are not valued or treated in the same manner as other children and are many times seen as not needing or being capable of receiving love, affection, friendship, cultural / artistic expression and intellectual stimulation; they remain segregated, isolated and marginalized.¹These children are also often "defined or judged in terms of what they lack as opposed to existing strengths or capacities"² and this denies them access to education or other opportunities for positive growth and development while at the same further contributing to their isolation. Consequences related to this can be extreme and further add to the process of compounding their

¹Save the Children, 2009. *See Me, Hear Me: A Guide to Using the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to Promote the Rights of Children*, p. 1.

²*Ibid*, p. 1.

invisibility and also denying their very existence as many times they are not registered at birth.³ Also “because of the high degree of stigma associated with disability in certain countries, family members may be reluctant to report that their child has a disability – so they are not known to health, social services or schools” and service providers associated with each.⁴

Disabled children are also less likely to be protected, have access to protective or supportive services. They are much less able to protect themselves and the combined effects associated with lack of power, social isolation and stigma, limited confidence, insufficient information and other barriers linked to information or proper services make them much less likely to report violence experienced at home or in care centres, within institutions or while living on the streets.⁵

Limited access to response and / or rehabilitation services can also actually exacerbate challenges or the negative effects of disability and contribute to a scenario where disability and inadequate protection become mutually reinforcing. Similar to other harmful practices and further highlighting “the unique situation which arises when gender and disability intersect”, disabled girls and women remain more vulnerable to violence and harm due to traditional gender roles and stereotypes that continue to persist. This is also due to unfounded beliefs that disabled women or girls are weak or asexual and that they will give birth to children who are also disabled or impaired.⁶ The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), further explains that, “State Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social, educational and other measures to protect persons with disabilities, both within and outside the home, from all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse, including their gender-based aspects”.⁷

The Convention is unique in that it calls for a “paradigm shift” both in attitudes and treatment of persons with disability in order to change attitudes and approaches which view the disabled as “objects of charity” and instead see them as individuals with human rights.⁸ It also puts forth a more “revolutionary” view by further elaborating on how to address, promote and realize human rights of persons with disabilities as opposed to claiming or identifying additional rights on behalf of this group. It further articulates the roles that government, NGOs and other stakeholders can play in countering invisibility and removing barriers to participation through an approach which champions both respect for dignity and human rights.⁹ And as very eloquently stated, many of the barriers faced by children with disabilities, including having their abilities over-looked, capacities under-estimated and needs placed at a lower priority, are more a reflection of the external, social-cultural environment in which they live as compared to limitations associated with their actual physical, sensory or emotional impairments.¹⁰ The CRPD gives emphasis to equality and non-discrimination associated with all human rights instruments and supports a view that shifts traditional thinking from “obstacles to the participation of disabled people arise primarily from their impairment” to one instead which focuses on addressing the environmental barriers that disabled children and their families encounter and can include such as:

³ *Ibid*, p. 1.

⁴ UNICEF, 2007. *Promoting the Rights of Children with Disabilities*, p.4.
http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/children_disability_rights.pdf.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 19.

⁶ Plan International, 2013. *Fact Sheet: Protection and Disability*, p. 2 as cited from Human Rights Watch (2010), “As If We Weren’t Human. Discrimination and Violence Against Women with Disabilities in Northern Uganda” p. 33-34. http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/ngos/HRW_CEDAW47_uganda2.pdf.

⁷ UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), Article 16.
<http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁹ UNICEF, 2007. *Promoting the Rights of Children with Disabilities*, p. 12.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. iv.

- Prevailing attitudes and pre-conceptions leading to under-estimation;
- Policies, practices and procedures of local and national government;
- Structures of health, welfare and education systems;
- Lack of access to buildings, transport and to the whole range of community resources available to the rest of the population; and,
- The impact of poverty and deprivation on the community as a whole and more specifically on persons with disabilities and their families.¹¹

Yet despite the progress, achievements outlined above and the call to action on behalf of children with disabilities in both the UN CRC (which includes nearly universal ratification) and the social / political mobilization which resulted in the creation and adoption of the UN CRPD, violence, neglect and denials still persist for children with disabilities.

Children with disabilities and their families continue to encounter and be confronted with daily challenges that compromise the realization of rights - especially those ensuring freedom from violence and harm. Discrimination and exclusion associated with disability also profoundly impacts upon care, treatment and protection of children with disabilities across South Asia and can often result in negative and harmful consequences linked to their survival, development, protection and participation as well as the respect, dignity and human worth that they must be given.

It is only through addressing such negative social - cultural attitudes and perceptions along with environmental barriers (physical or informational), institutional (policies, laws or systems) and / or economic limitations, that rights for these children can be realized and violence against them eliminated.

As far as SAARC countries are concerned except Bhutan and Sri Lanka all other countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. These two countries have only signed the convention. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been signed and ratified by Nepal alone, whereas Afghanistan and Bangladesh has ratified the document. Rest of the SAARC countries (Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Maldives and Sri Lanka) have neither signed nor ratified it¹².

The **overarching goal** of the Consultation is to bring together relevant stakeholders from across South Asia so as to:

- To contribute to the elimination of violence and discrimination against children with disabilities in South Asia based on renewed Regional/SAARC commitments and other related instruments.

Key objectives are to:

- Raise awareness about protection of children with disabilities;

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 5.

¹² <http://www.un.org/disabilities/countries.asp?id=166>

- Review measures taken and concrete results achieved by Member States in addressing rights and responses for children with disabilities;
- Promote learning through exchange of experiences and sharing of best practices (related to protection and response actions, addressing barriers or challenges and disability / child-friendly legislation);
- Build capacity of government partners, SAIEVAC network members and other stakeholders related to issues of disability and understanding / application of the CRPD and social / rights-based approach;
- Strengthen children's participation in their own protection and in relevant decisions affecting them with a special focus on inclusion and accessibility;
- Formulate or revisit recommendations in order to further strengthen the commitment and accountability of South Asian Governments and relevant actors to end violence against disabled children, strengthen fulfilment of rights and protective responses; and,
- Agree Action Plan / Framework for Action which will be further elaborated upon in the respective countries;
- Strengthening the commitment and accountability of South Asian Governments and relevant actors based on application given in the Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006, in General Comment No. 9, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol.

The **Expected Outputs** are to:

- Make Regional recommendations addressing violence against children with disabilities and a strengthened response informed by national action plans and country-specific experiences;
- Make Regional recommendations based on Committee on the Rights of the Child-2006, in General Comment No.9, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol;
- Produce an outcome document outlining key barriers and challenges for South Asian children with disabilities, legislative gaps and advocacy actions, efforts / strategies / approaches required to address these challenges or barriers in order to further strengthen key stakeholder's commitment and obligations to ending violence against children with disabilities;
- Learn, document and share knowledge from the South Asian context in order to strengthen global efforts and progress on combating violence against children with disabilities; and,
- Map child protection / service providers / SAIEVAC network partners so as to contribute towards the creation of a cadre of specialists across the region with enhanced skills and shared understanding on disability-related issues, the CRPD by employing the social / rights-based approach.

Who:

Around 100 representatives from South Asian Governments, NACG/Civil Society Organizations, SACG/ UN and INGOs, experts and Child Governing Board members and child representatives from SAARC member states, active in child rights and disability issues will be participating in the consultation.

When and Where:

Building upon and further contributing to practices, experiences, modalities and time-frames employed for the past three Technical Consultations, the structure or format of the 4th Technical Consultation will follow a similar schedule and include concurrent or overlapping sessions across five days as outlined below.

3-4 December 2014: Venue/Place/Country:	Regional Children's Consultation Hotel Ozo, Colombo, Sri Lanka
5-6 December 2014: Venue/Place/Country:	Technical Consultation – Stepping Up Child Protection for Children with Disabilities Hotel Ozo, Colombo, Sri Lanka
7th December 2014: Venue/Place/Country:	6th NACG Review Meeting with SAIEVAC Governing Board Hotel Ozo, Colombo, Sri Lanka

What to Look for: 2 Events

1. **Closing Session of Regional Children's Consultation and Meet the Press at 2:00 PM on 4th December 2014 at Hotel Ozo, Colombo.** Present at the event will be SAIEVAC's Child Governing Board Members, Observers and Child Representatives from SAARC member countries. Also present will be Hon'ble Ms. Tahmina Begum, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, Government of Bangladesh who is also the Chairperson of SAIEVAC Governing Board, Dr. Rinchen Chopel, Director Director of SAIEVAC Regional Secretariat, and Ms. Anoma Dissanayaka, Chairperson of NCPA and SAIEVAC National Co-ordinator in Sri Lanka.
2. **Inaugural of 4th Technical Consultation on Stepping Up Protection of Children with Disabilities in South Asia at 9:30 AM on 5th December 2014 at Hotel Ozo.** Present at the event will be high level dignitaries from the Government of Sri Lanka, leading government delegates from all SAARC member states, child rights activists, experts, children from the region, NACGs/CSOs and SACG-UN/INGO partners active in child protection and in particular dealing with issues affecting children with disabilities. This event will also be quickly followed by an opportunity of a **Press Conference for the media at 11 AM** at the same venue.

For more information, please contact:

Dr.Rinchen Chopel
Director General
Tel. number : Direct +977-1-4001601
Tel.number: PABX + 977- 1-4001685/4001602 Ext 107
Email: rinchen.chophel@saievac.org

Mr. Mr. RoshanLal Chitrakar
Administrative and Logistics officer
Tel. number: PABX +977-1-4001685/4001602-Ext- 102
Email: roshan@saievac.org

Mr. Rajan Burlakoti
(Advocate) Campaign Co-ordinator
Tel. number: PABX +977-1-4001685/4001602 Ext-103
Email: rajan.burlakoti@saievac.org

Mr. Nim Karma Sherpa
Advocacy and Communications Officer
Tel. number: PABX +977-1-4001685/4001602-Ext-104
Email: nimkarma.sherpa@saievac.org



About SAIEVAC

The South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) is a regional inter-governmental body including representatives from civil society and children with a vision that all children, girls and boys, throughout South Asia enjoy their right to an environment free from all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation, neglect and discrimination. SAIEVAC was formally granted the status of SAARC Apex Body for Children during the 17th SAARC Summit in Maldives in November 2011. It is the first ever regional body to represent the cause of South Asian Children at the highest level of SAARC.

SAIEVAC's Vision

- All children, girls and boys, throughout South Asia enjoy their right to an environment free from all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation, neglect and discrimination.

SAIEVAC's Aims

- To ensure the realization of children's rights as stated in the UNCRC and its Optional Protocols ;
- To prevent and respond to all forms of neglect, abuse, exploitation and violence against children in all settings;
- To promote the adoption, implementation, and monitoring of integrated national strategies with adequate budgets and resource allocation to prevent and protect children from violence and ensure response;
- To reinforce regional cooperation to end violence against children in South Asia.

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