

Change Makers For South Asia

Regional Consultation with Children and Young People,
Corporate Leaders and Governments of South Asia

KATHMANDU May 21, 2001

KATHMANDU, May 19 – Seventeen children and young people from all the seven South Asian countries are preparing themselves to engage and dialogue with leaders of corporate and business houses from the South Asia region as well as Government ministers and delegations, starting today in Kathmandu. The focus of the meeting is to make a case for more investment in children in the region.

Jointly initiated by the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia and Save the Children Alliance South Asia, the 5 days event “**Change Makers For South Asia**” initiative aims to prepare the children for the workshop with key decision makers; encourage them to see the micro-macro economic linkages, taxation, budgets and their impacts on public expenditure, especially for children and enable them to advocate their issues with Corporate Leaders and national planners.

“This is, to our knowledge, the first time that children from the region have been engaged at a regional level consultation with ministers and corporate leaders,” says Ranjan Poudyal, Regional Coordinator of the Save the Children Fund, Office for South and Central Asia Region.

Nigel Fisher, Regional Director, UNICEF- South Asia said, “the entire consultation with corporate leaders and the meeting with the government delegations from South Asia will be to highlight the important theme of ‘investing in children’. “We want the business leaders and the national leaders to be convinced that investing in Children is the right thing,” said Nigel Fisher while addressing the children this morning.

After two and half days of preparation the children, the 17 “Change Makers” will meet the Corporate leaders of the region on 21 and 22 May. On the 23 the children will sit in discussion with the Ministers and high level government official from all the countries of the region.

The workshop is the outcome of cumulative processes that have been taking place in various countries for the past 3-4 month, explains Poudyal. “Most of the children who are participants here have come through various groups and clubs through the process of representation.”

The Save the Children Alliance believes that the participation of the children is not only about human rights of children, but also brings important benefits to the process. By ensuring that the voices of those directly experiencing a situation are heard, it brings highly additional information to

deliberations and discussions. It aims to ensure that the outcomes of discussion are more appropriate and relevant to children.

The entire exercise is an integral part of the Global Movement for Children (GMC) and in preparation for the forthcoming Special session (UNGASS) on children scheduled to be held in September 2001 in New York.

HATEMALO

Two Children journalists Sushila 15 and Sanjog 14 from Hatemalo Children's Club, Nepal are covering the workshop and the Change Makers meeting with the corporate leaders and the Government Officials. Hatemalo Sanchar was established as an NGO in 1994 by a group of media journalists, writers, and children involved in promotion of the Rights of the child through Mass Media. Hatemalo 's mass media advocacy approach includes a radio broadcast and a colourful children's magazine *Sunkesra*.

Here is a translated version of what the children have written about the first day of the Change Makers workshop.

On 19 May 2001 a six day workshop on the Global Movement for Children (GMC) organised by Save the Children, UK started in Kathmandu.

Brother Ranjan(Regional Co-ordinator of the Save the Children UK) welcomed all the participants and Nigel, Regional Director of UNICEF talked with the participants for a while. Then there was a short discussion on the program going to be held on Sunday and Monday. After that the participants wrote their hopes and fears which among others are as follows:

HOPES

- * Others will listen to us.
- * Will be able to make friends with all the participants.
- * Will find out the conditions of children from all over South Asia.

FEARS & CONCERNS

- * Will the conditions of children improve after this?
- * Will big people listen to what we say?
- * Will the participants be able to express their real problems?

(Please Remember all the South Asian countries are participating in the work shop)

Then there was a short video show after making the rules.

Discussing on the problems of the Children all countries came out with:

- HIV/AIDS
- Lack of education
- Child Marriage

After all the exercise the participants discussed about why the industrialists helped the children if they had not helped then what would happen. Then there was a short talk on the High Level Meeting and the day ended

- By Sushila KC and Sanjog Thakuri

DAY 1

KATHMANDU, May 19 - All the children looked excited and were in full spirits when the workshop started today. They were welcomed and congratulated for representing their respective countries by Ranjan Poudyal Regional Coordinator of the Save the Children Fund UK and Nigel Fisher Regional Director of UNICEF –South Asia briefed them on- why change makers for south Asia?

After the review of the programme and a short exercise on logistics the children were asked to list out their expectations and concerns about the Change Makers workshop and the meeting with the Corporate leaders and the Government representatives that would follow. Each country group were to list out their three greatest expectations and three greatest concerns and were told that the motive behind doing that was to “fulfill our expectations and minimize these concern-from the children/change makers.”

As it turned out more than expectations, the greatest concern that the children had was that whether the leaders would listen to them or not and even if they did would they give straight answers or not.

The “Change Makers” were asked to list out the problems children faced in their respective countries and make a presentation. The children listed the problems they thought were being faced by boys, girls and children as a whole separately and found that the problems of children all over the region were very similar. As Emmen Saeed a 15 ½ year old Pakistani girl later put it, “I earlier thought that the problems faced by children from different countries would be different from ours, but now I realize that we all share similar problems.”

The common problems listed by all the children were displacement of children from their birthplace due to hard circumstances, political unrest, adult domination, female infanticide, no inheritance to girls, less interest of government to invest more on children etc.

The Children were then asked to prioritize issues to talk to the corporate and government leaders. The issues prioritized by the Change Makers could be summed up in three points a) education b) exploitation/disparities and c) participation. The other points put forward by the children were that they wanted peace, clean environment and world full of love and harmony.

At the end of the day after being prepared to sit and dialogue with the Corporate leaders, the Change Makers got involved in panel discussion on "Investing in Children", with Ashok Nigam of UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia. Nigam helped sensitize the Change Makers on why should the governments and the corporate sector invest in children, by asking key questions.

The Change Makers discussed why education was necessary for children, what were the long-term impacts of educating and not educating a child and the reasons why investments should be made in children now.

Then they discussed on the assets of children and ways to support their arguments and stands when they met face to face with the corporate leaders the next day. By the end of the day the Change Makers were confident that they would prove a point in front of the corporate leaders, that they would be able to convince the influential people that it was worth investing on children and that they could bring a change for the betterment of the world and all the children living in it. As 14 year old Kelzang Dorjee from Bhutan put it - " if we were to say things alone to our respective governments and corporate leaders then no one government or corporate leaders would listen to us properly but now they will have to listen to us and think over our demands."

BAL MAZDOOR KI AWAZ

Bal Mazdoor Ki Awaz (Child Workers Voice) is the name of a wall newspaper that has been produced by street children in Delhi, India since 1996. Street Children aged between 9 and 16 years are the reporters and the editors of the wallpaper. Two young reporters from Bal Mazdoor Ki Awaz are presently in Kathmandu to cover the five-day "Change Maker" event where 17 children and young people from all the seven South Asian countries will be meeting with leaders of corporate and business houses from the South Asia region as well as Government ministers and delegations. On 20 May the two young reporters **Raju Kumar** and **Anil Kumar** came up with the first "**Change Makers Special Issue**" of the wallpaper. Excerpts -

The children said they wanted a new world. In this world there are no wars All children will be able to participate, play, study, this is what they want.

- Anil Kumar

Hopes (of the Change makers)

1. Make New Friends

2. To know about problems facing children in South Asia so that after the workshop something will change.
3. Good opportunity for us to share (our) problem facing children with Ministers. Corporate sector and people from Government.
4. We will try to convince these people to invest money for children's development.

) Fears) (of the Change makers)

1. Children won't get their rights
2. Will there be any impact after the workshop or not?
3. Will the problems facing children change or not?
4. Will we be able to talk to the Government and the Corporate People or not and will they answer our questions or not?
5. Will they be able to share all the problems facing the children in their country?
6. We have a fear about language- will we be able to actively participate or not?
7. People speak too fast and the translator can do their job or not?

Workshop Rules

1. Listen to everyone's views and respect each other.
2. Be on time.
3. Give everyone the chance to speak.
4. We want games, which children who are blind can also play.
5. We want focused discussions.
6. Give importance to everything that everyone says
7. Don't interrupt when someone is speaking.
8. Speak clearly.
9. Everyone to follow the rules.

Interview with a lady from UNICEF:

- 1) What is your name, what do you do and where have you come from?

Answer: My name is Nooshad Shahjadi – I work in UNICEF.

- 2) What is your hope for this meeting?

Answer: Children will go back to their own country places where they will share their discussions about problems in their organisation, with parents and with teachers. Then they will find the path to solve their problems.

- 3) What do you think about participation?

Answer: My view is that if children want to change the problems in their organisation, with parents and with teachers. Then they will find the path to solve their problems.

- 4) After speaking with the leaders will it make any difference or not?

Answer: Children are very honest and they can share their views very clearly. But whether they will do anything or not I don't know!

5) Why do you (UNICEF) invest money in children?

Answer: We invest money in children so that we can solve children's problem.

Priority Problems facing children in South Asia:

- 1) Protection from all forms of child abuse
- 2) Quality Education For all
- 3) Health
- 4) Participation in decision-making

Priority Problem facing girls:

- 1) Discrimination
- 2) Exploitation
- 3) Treated as second class citizens

Priority Problem facing boys:

- 1) Intolerable work + Political use
- 2) Torture, Beatings +War
- 3) Early family responsibilities

BY: Anil and Raju Kumar

CHILD AND YOUNG PEOPLE JOURNALISTS

KATHMANDU, May 21 – As the 17 children (Change Makers) from all the South Asian countries are set to sit in dialogue with the corporate leaders and the high level government officials, another group of children are set for another equally challenging task to cover the entire event and report to millions of children back in their countries.

Six young journalist between – and 16 years of age from Bangladesh, India and Nepal are ready with their teams to report on the Change Makers for South Asia workshop and the children's meeting with leaders of corporate and business houses from the South Asia region which is starting today. They will also be covering the Change Makers meeting with the Government ministers and delegations.

Fifteen year old Sushila KC and Sanjog Thakuri, fourteen are representing Hatemalo Children's Club, Nepal. Hatemalo Sanchar was established as an NGO in 1994 by a concerned group of media

journalists, writers, and children involved in the promotion of the Rights of the child through Mass Media. Hatemalo AIRs a radio program every week through Radio Nepal and also publishes a colourful children magazine, Sunkesra.

“We will write about this event in the Sunkesra Magazine and will also broadcast in our Radio program so that all the children in the country can get to know what all is happening for them,” says Sushila.

11 year old Anil Kumar, a street child and a journalist from Bal Mazdoor Ki Awaz, India seems to be more sensitized by the child right issues than any of the other journalists. “Now we know what children unity can do for us,” he says with a smile. He flexes his small muscles and says, “We are going to tell children back in Delhi what children power is all about, what the children have told the leaders and what promises that the leaders have made to us. So in future if they don’t do what they have said we can together raise our voice.” His friend Raju Kumar, 12 agrees with him and nods.

Bal Mazdoor Ki Awaz is one part of an Alternative media Initiative run by children that is supported by Butterflies Programme of Street and Working Children in Delhi, India. Bal Mazdoor Ki Awaz (Child Workers Voice) is the name of a wall newspaper that has been produced by street children since 1996.

Similarly, Md. Sharfull Alam and Izmet Nashra Khan both 16 year old from Bangladesh representing Ekushey Television (ETV) – meaning television for 21st century are shooting the entire event with their crew for the 25 minutes children program that the TV airs every Friday evening. “Nepal is a very beautiful country and I am very happy to be here, says a very composed Izmet with a professional touch in her voice. “We have had a lot of experience out here and it will be another great experience sharing it with children back home.”

No doubt the 17 participants from seven countries are determined to make the voices of the children they represent be heard and are confident that they will be able to initiate changes in favour of the children all over South Asia. But these six young journalists are equally determined to convey the messages of the Change Makers to millions of children back in their country and are confident that they too will make a difference.

