

CHILDREN'S ACTIONS TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS AND BOYS

A contribution to the United Nations Study on Violence against Children



Save the Children

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The vision

Save the Children works for:

- a world which respects and values each child*
- a world which listens to children and learns*
- a world where all children have hope and opportunity*

The mission

Save the Children fights for children's rights.

We deliver immediate and lasting improvements to children's lives worldwide.

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Preface

ASK A BOY OR A GIRL about violence in their life, and they will tell you in very clear terms what it means, what it feels like, and that they want it to stop. This is what I have heard from children all over the world through the nine regional consultations facilitated by the Study and its partners. No matter how complex academics and others describe the task of defining violence against children as being - and certainly it is complex - it is not theoretical or abstract to those who are affected. In most parts of the world we are just beginning to collect the research and technical information we need to respond more comprehensively, but it is clear that we have enough examples and knowledge to be strategic and effective – if only we would apply what we know.

The involvement of children in the Study process over its two years has been very strategic. Thanks to their enthusiastic participation I have had the benefit of hearing first-hand from children; and I have also talked to others who have discussed the issues with children and young people: decision-makers such as politicians and parliamentarians, and others working with children such as care providers and professionals. While it is somewhat of a generalisation, the stereotypical image is of the helpless child as victim, or the out-of-control teenage boy as a delinquent – but this publication brings together experiences of children who are taking action, to overcome challenges in their individual lives, in their schools, and in their communities. These examples show that adult support is important, but that given the space and opportunity, children themselves have a lot to offer.

Treating children as faceless victims or uncontrollable adolescents is an over-simplification that ignores the linkages across multiple violations of children's rights that often bring them into situations of violence in the first place. It also fails to disentangle the causes from consequences, and does not see the opportunities for prevention of violence and the promotion of protective factors in children's lives. Feeling disenchanting with life, marginalised, or excluded are all part of the problem of violence – but this publication shows how inclusion, focusing on assets and capabilities, and getting involved can create success.

This publication helps to illustrate, from a child's perspective, the sliding scale that makes up the social definitions of violence – the sliding scale that allows acts of violence against children to be treated so differently from the same acts when committed against adults, when they are considered crimes. Too often acts of violence towards children are not normally regarded as violence at all. This publication also attests to the fact that nobody is free of violence and that every day there are more lessons in violence acted out around us – but it is at the same time motivational to see the innovation in the responses.

As a fairly recent “convert” to the imperative of involving children in decisions that affect them, I would not want this publication to be misconstrued as fully transferring responsibility onto children. Participation of children and adolescents requires the full support of families and governments for the implementation of their

rights; they are important partners who should be consulted in appropriate ways, and who have a great deal to offer. Working to prevent violence and reduce its impact where it occurs, requires integrated partnerships and broad networks of expertise that can recognise and respond to the ways in which forms of violence and violations of children's rights are interlinked.

I deeply appreciate the efforts of those supporting children's participation in all its forms, and I trust that this publication will not only stand as a contribution to the Study process, but will also contribute to expanding the opportunities for children to be involved as a routine and essential part of community consultation, and especially on decisions affecting them.

Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro

Independent Expert

United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children

Foreword

IN 2001, THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY requested the United Nations Secretary-General to conduct an in-depth study on violence against children. In 2003 the United Nations Secretary-General appointed an Independent Expert, Professor Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, to lead the Study in close co-operation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations International Children's Fund and the World Health Organisation. The United Nations Study Secretariat was set up in Geneva, with Dr Amaya Gillespie as the Director.

From the outset Save the Children has been closely involved with the United Nations Study on Violence against Children. The aim of the Save the Children involvement is to influence and contribute to the Study, which will form the foundation of an international strategy with clear recommendations on how to end violence against children. Beyond the contributions to the Study Save the Children has used and will continue to use this major global initiative as an opportunity to strengthen its own work of persuading governments, the UN, and other agencies to implement concrete actions that will effectively end violence against children.

Save the Children established at an early age a close relationship with the Study's Independent Expert and Secretariat, and has also appointed an advisor on Children's Participation. A Save the Children Task Group has been set up, consisting of a network of Save the Children regional and national focal points working to co-ordinate the priorities of Save the Children within the framework of the United Nations Study in their respective regions and countries. In particular, the key priorities of Save the Children are: children in conflict with the law, physical and humiliating punishment, gender-related violence, and sexual abuse of girls and boys.

All Save the Children's work relating to the United Nations Study is based on the principles of Child Rights Programming, including strengthening and promoting children's participation, accountability, and non-discrimination, which embraces gender equality. Save the Children focuses on the participation of girls and boys as part of an overall strategy to combat violence against children. The purpose of children's participation is to empower them as individuals and as members of civil society, giving them a genuine opportunity to express their views, be involved in decision-making or take actions.

As an important part of preparing the United Nations Study, nine regional consultations were held in 2005. They were organised by UNICEF with support from partner organisations organised in regional steering committees, and were hosted by the governments of the countries where they were held. The purpose of the consultations was to provide opportunities for governments and members of the civil society, including non-governmental organisations and children, to put forward key issues and recommendations to be covered in the Study. Save the Children took the leading role in many regions in terms of promoting and supporting children's meaningful and ethical participation during the consultations. Children's recommendations were reflected in the outcome documents from most of the regional consulta-

tions. After the consultation procedure, a document called *Act Now!* was produced, highlighting recommendations put forward by children themselves in the course of the regional consultations.

Save the Children recognises that it is also important to highlight practical actions taken by children to address the violence they find themselves facing, and that is why this ACTION document has been produced. This document will be used for influencing the United Nations Study and its follow-up actions. It is to be presented to governments, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations in order to advocate for children's views and experiences to be incorporated in programmes to combat violence. The document will also be used for strengthening Save the Children's existing work. In addition, a film on children's actions is being produced for worldwide distribution.

I would like to thank Ravi Karkara and Shoma Fahmida Jabeen for pulling this innovative piece of work together and I join in Ravi's acknowledgement of everyone who has contributed.

Lena Karlsson

Chair, Save the Children Task Group on Violence against Children

Acknowledgements

This document has been compiled using inputs from many colleagues. In particular, I am indebted to colleagues from Save the Children, their partner organisations and other key agencies that work for and with children. The Save the Children regional offices that have contributed to the work include South East Asia and the Pacific, South and Central Asia, Middle East and North Africa, East and Central Africa, West Africa, Southern Africa, Europe and South America.

Valuable contributions have come from children themselves who are advocates of child participation and child rights.

I would like to thank the following colleagues and friends for their tremendous support: Dominique Pierre Plateau, Luz-Maria Sequeira, Y. G. Bhavani, Claire O'Kane, Elkane Mooh, Blanca Nomura, Tove Myhrman, Rania Saba Ayon, Aisha Saeed Mohammad, Rasa Sekulovic, Essam Ali and Etsub Berhaneselassie.

Particular thanks are due to Lena Karlsson, Clare Feinstein and Alana Kapell for their invaluable input to this document and process. Special thanks to Amaya Gillespie for her vision and belief in child participation.

Thanks to Shoma Fahmida Jabeen and Neha Bhandari for working very hard with me on this document. I would also like to acknowledge the support of Emily Palma in reviewing and contributing to this document.

Last but not least Lisa Lundgren deserves special thanks for permitting me to work on the United Nations Study side by side with my regional programme work. Her vision and commitment to child rights know no boundaries.

Ravi Karkara

Advisor on Child Participation

Save the Children Task Group on Violence against Children

Introduction

Definition

For the purpose of this publication and in accordance with Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the word violence is defined as: “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse”.

Throughout the world, girls and boys from all ethnic, cultural, religious, geographic and income groups are at risk of violence. The violence committed against children ranges widely in kind and degree: children are mistreated and abused; they endure severe physical and psychological punishment; they are exposed to neglect, torture, forced labour, forced prostitution, early marriage, rape, even murder. Similarly, violence may occur in different environments: the family, the community, school, at work or on the streets.

Violence against children and young people breaches human rights – in particular, the right of every person to human dignity and physical integrity. This right is upheld in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The CRC emphasises that children are holders of rights and are actors in their own lives, not mere recipients of adults’ care and protection.

The United Nations Study on Violence Against Children provides a unique opportunity to bring worldwide attention to the violence committed against children all over the world. It will provide an in-depth global map of the problem, and propose clear recommendations for the improvement of legislation, policies and programmes relating to the prevention of and responses to violence against children.

Article 12 of the CRC clearly establishes children’s right to be involved in decisions that affect them, and children want to be actively involved in combating the violence to which they are exposed. There are many cases where active participation by children has had a positive impact in combating violence against them. In recognition of this, it was decided to produce this report, which documents examples from around the world of how children have organised themselves into a collective force to free themselves from violence. It is our hope that the case studies described on the following pages will encourage adults to believe in the abilities of children and young people and recognise them as having a key role to play in their own development and in the development of more inclusive, responsive and just societies.

Objectives

The aim of this report is

- to show how children’s actions, when given the right support, have helped to combat violence against them.

- to strengthen the ability of children, governments and organisations to identify, document, promote, exchange and adapt successful practices for use in eradicating violence against children.
- to provide a resource to be used for advocacy purposes at national, regional and global level, and as a foundation for ensuring that children are involved in planning actions to address violence.
- to provide an additional contribution to the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children.

Methodology

The case studies were contributed by different regional offices of Save the Children, their partner organisations and other key agencies that work for and with children. The regional offices involved are East Asia and the Pacific, South and Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, East and Central Africa, West Africa, Southern Africa, Europe and South America.

This report provides examples of how children, with adult support, are forming child-led organisations and initiatives to take collective action against violence.

Section 1 introduces the report and lays down its objectives. It also provides an overview of child-led advocacy, and outlines Save the Children's priorities and specific contributions to the United Nations Study on Violence against Children. Section 2 describes examples of children's actions in a variety of contexts, focusing especially on children's work to combat physical and psychological punishment, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, early marriage, and injustices faced by children in conflict with the law. The document ends with a set of conclusions which look at what can be done to increase the strength and efficacy of the measures children take to combat violence committed against them.

Limitation

This document is not exhaustive. There are many more examples of children's action to end violence against them. Due to time and resource constraints we can only include case studies that came to our attention before 30 November 2005. It is recommended that the document be reviewed, with more case studies being added at a later stage.

Child-Led Advocacy

Children's Right to Participation

The term 'participation' is used by Save the Children and others to refer to situations where children and young people are actively involved in decision-making processes and practical actions that directly affect them. For this to succeed it is important that children are enabled and encouraged to:

- Think for themselves
- Express their own views
- Interact in a positive way with other people.

For Save the Children, the core purpose of children's participation is to empower them as individuals and members of civil society (that is, as social actors), thus giving them the opportunity to influence their own lives. They can do this in a number of ways, whether as individuals or in organised groups:

- Through speaking out – for example to expose abuse, to complain about services, to ask questions, to raise awareness of a problem or to press for a change in policy.
- Through involvement in decision-making – for example in assessing needs, designing projects or programmes, sharing in school management, drawing up policy guidelines, developing legislation or evaluating services.
- Through practical action – for example, through peer education, setting up child-led organisations, carrying out research or preparing a children's radio programme.

Save the Children adopts a rights-based approach. Promoting children's participation and addressing non-discrimination are the guiding principles of rights-based programming. Through its child rights approach Save the Children aims to empower children girls and boys from various backgrounds to play an active role in obtaining respect for their rights such as the right to survival, protection and development.

It is important to learn from children's own experiences when developing programmes and policies to combat violence against children. It is equally important to encourage and support children to take their own actions, in partnership with adults. This does not, however, alter the fact that ultimate responsibility for addressing the problem of violence against children rests with governments and the adult community in general.

State Parties are those with the greatest degree of obligation. Article 4 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child requires them to undertake all appropriate leg-

islative, administrative and other measures to guarantee children's rights. This is therefore a key article and means that children can hold governments and public organisations accountable for their commitment towards safeguarding and promoting children's rights.

Children and Advocacy

Advocacy is a central element of Save the Children's work. We view advocacy as a *dynamic, long-term process through which, building on the foundation of our values and beliefs, we seek to change power relationships by analysing systems and institutions and by taking action*. This broad definition leaves room for different approaches to advocacy. Advocacy may make use of an extensive range of tools, and lead to interventions in a wide variety of arenas. Its fundamental components are organisation, participation and action, which are to be directed towards bringing about changes in policy. Advocacy also entails the framing of proposals for implementation, regulation and budget allocation, and since these steps are shaped by cultural constraints and political limitations, advocacy initiatives need to be accompanied by strategic planning.

Bearing in mind what was said about participation in the preceding section, at Save the Children we naturally endeavour to place the child at the centre of our advocacy work: we do not simply carry out advocacy on behalf of children, we support the development of children's own advocacy. Child-led advocacy (also called child-centred advocacy) can be seen as a tool for equity and equality; it is a way of enabling children to ask for themselves the questions to which they want answers.

If children are to be able to carry out their own advocacy work, we need to find ways of providing them with the knowledge they need as a basis for asking questions and proposing solutions. In other words, child-friendly information has to be made available – for example, to help children understand issues of law and policy. Further, within any given group of children preparing a campaign, there may be members with special needs which it is important to identify and respond to. For instance, within a group of students there may be autistic children who need specific kinds of additional support from adults in order to participate in the advocacy work.

It should be borne in mind that child-led advocacy does not imply leaving children to themselves. They need support to help them campaign for change in "the adult world" (and among other considerations, we need to ensure that they are not exposed to risks). We can learn a lot about how to support children by listening to children themselves – how do children exercise their influence? How do they get themselves together and express their views? Children know how to influence the people with whom they have relationships. Our task can be seen as enabling children to amplify their voices, through whatever medium they find most appropriate, such as drama, art, etc. The commercial media also represent a possible channel for advocacy, though caution needs to be exercised to ensure that they observe their ethical responsibilities.

One of the important challenges for child-centred advocacy is to find ways to emphasise things that are missed in policy discussions – for instance, how can children become involved in the processes which lead to the preparation of policy or laws? Above all, the most important task, the biggest hurdle to be overcome, is to get adults to listen to children. The test of how successful child-led advocacy is, is not only what laws or policies are adopted, but whether adults accept the fact of children leading the efforts. In other words, the challenge is to ensure that child-led advocacy in itself is accepted, that it is welcomed as something normal, indeed a democratic right. To effect this change in perceptions, it is important that we have practical examples of successful child-led advocacy which clearly demonstrate its benefits.

Child-Led Advocacy in Practice

Children's actions to end violence against children

This chapter highlights actions taken by children across the world to end violence against girls and boys. The case studies describe the specific challenges faced by children, the actions they have taken to combat the issue, the partners they have worked with or been supported by, and the lessons learnt. The case studies in this report focus on children's actions to combat violations such as abuses in the juvenile justice system, child sexual abuse, sexual harassment, physical and humiliating punishment, early child marriages, domestic violence.

South and Central America

NICARAGUA

Prevention of child and adolescent sexual abuse, particularly of rural and urban working children and adolescents.

The National Movement of Working Children and Adolescents (NATRAS) is an organisation active in promoting children's rights in Nicaragua. The project described below began in 2003, and is focused on preventing and eradicating sexual abuse of children and adolescents, especially of working children. Eighteen organisations have contributed support to the initiative which aims to achieve the following concrete and measurable goals: a reduction of sexual abuse in the thirteen targeted municipalities and increased awareness of this crime within society and the state.

Actions

The report below was prepared by adolescents: Teresa Castellón (NATRA/León), Marcos Alemán (NATRA/Diriamba) and René Pineda (NATRA/Managua).

“ Our aim was to bring this problem to public attention. We received training from NATRAS representatives, and our work was based on active involvement in social communication, and advocacy activities targeted on the state and various organisations.”

The following methods were used by the children:

- Fora and municipal meetings with the authorities
- Campaigns to prevent sexual abuse
- Press conferences
- Meetings with municipal authorities
- Workshops on prevention of sexual abuse
- Preparation and distribution of communication materials
- A meeting with Centro Ecumenico de Integracion Pastoral (CEIPA – Centre for Integration of Multifaith Pastoral) Guatemala to exchange experiences in this area
- A diagnostic survey of the incidence of sexual abuse among urban and rural working children

Impact/Outcome

- The project highlights the problem of sexual abuse faced by children in their daily lives. It addresses the issue of sexual abuse from a prevention perspective, including components such as outreach training and the design and implementation of a nationwide campaign against sexual abuse.
- The project has strengthened children's self-esteem and security, particularly with regard to defending themselves from sexual abuse and violence.
- NATRAS has developed co-ordination with public institutions and voluntary organisations, to increase awareness of the problem of sexual abuse in all regions of Nicaragua.
- Organisations participating in the project have begun to integrate the issue of sexual abuse into their operating profile.
- The project has achieved a milestone in the broadening of child participation, ranging from involvement in decision-making to the formulation of proposals for establishing commissions which can work with questions such as training, social communication and political advocacy at national and municipal level.

The following are among the concrete achievements of the project:

- NATRAS has entered into a strategic alliance with the “Municipal Commissions on Children” in the municipalities where the campaign was concentrated. This has encouraged local organisations to participate in project activities, and committed municipal authorities to supporting the work.
- NATRAS has communicated directly with public officials, an important advocacy opportunity.
- NATRAS has become increasingly identified as an organisation committed to defending children's right to live without violence.
- Through the project we were able to position ourselves as a reference group for initiatives aiming to prevent sexual abuse in the project's targeted municipalities.

- A diagnostic survey on sexual abuse of working children and adolescents was conducted for the first time in Nicaragua. It was designed, implemented and assessed by NATRAS volunteers, using the tools learnt.

In all these activities the role of adults is limited to being facilitators and companions to children and adolescents.

Save the Children defines child sexual abuse as the imposition of sexual acts, or acts with sexual overtones, by one or more persons on a child. Sexual abuse is the most hidden and under-reported form of violence against children. It takes place in all settings and the perpetrator may be male or female, although offenders are predominantly male. Many children choose not to talk about it due to shame and the stigma attached to it. They also want to protect themselves, the perpetrator and the reputation of the family. Those children who do speak up about sexual abuse are often blamed, threatened or bribed by the abuser and adults might not believe them. Boys and girls who have been sexually abused are also at heightened risk of being drawn into the commercial sex trade. They might even blame themselves and/or be blamed by their parents for what has happened.

PERU

School Councils work to strengthen children's rights and put an end to corporal and psychological punishment and other violence against children

Municipios Escoleres (School Councils) exist in 6,000 schools throughout Peru. Council members are democratically elected every year, and work to spread the ideas enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Actions

The School Councils arrange seminars for parents on children's rights, including the question of corporal punishment. Once they identify specific violations of children's rights they take up the issue with the Municipal Children's Rights Office. This office is recognised by local bodies such as the police and health-care clinics. The Ministry of Education has passed a law making School Councils mandatory in all state schools. They play an active role in promoting alternatives to corporal and psychological punishment as means of disciplining children at school and in the home. The work with a group named "Pacto pã el buen trato" (Pact for positive treatment) to carry out campaigns aimed at changing violent cultural trends and the aggressive way in which adults interact with children.

Impact/Outcome

Save the Children Canada has been at the forefront of efforts to strengthen school organisations in Peru. School Councils and School Defence Organisations are mechanisms enabling children to participate and express themselves. School Councils, Save the Children and other organisations are involved in strengthening co-ordination between the government and national and international agencies.

South and Central Asia

ORISSA, INDIA

Children's dialogue with politicians on physical and degrading/humiliating punishments in schools and institutions

Following the emergence of the Global Movement for Children (GMFC) as part of the United Nations Special Session on Children in 2001, Save the Children UK (South Zone) organised and collaborated with UNICEF and other international non-governmental organisations like Plan India, Catholic Relief Services, World Vision and the Indo-German Social Service Society to start consultations with children in the Koraput district of Orissa.

Actions

These consultations identified physical and humiliating punishments as the most prevalent form of violence against children, impeding their development and overall well-being. Children also prioritised this issue during the National Plan of Action for Children (NPA) in 2002. This was followed by a Country Strategy Plan (CSP) review by children. Thereafter the issue of physical and humiliating punishment was incorporated in the programme plans.

At the micro level, the issue was taken up in an integrated manner. First, support was provided to partner non-governmental organisations to address the issue. This presented an initial challenge since partner organisations lacked clarity on it. Thereafter discussions with children were held on the impact of physical and humiliating punishment. Replicable models were created, such as 'Education – A joyful and continuous journey'. Topics like teacher/student ratios, access to schools and bilingual teaching were also addressed. Sensitisation of stakeholders such as parents, teachers, media and officials was carried out using a variety of different media, such as wall writings, theatre, letters, meetings and workshops. Children were involved in making a film on physical and humiliating punishment, which was shown to the community members.

At the macro level, children were involved in planning the strategy to address the issue. An analysis of existing policies and systems (for example the education rules in Orissa) was made to identify areas for advocacy. Collaborations took place with other agencies and networks in the state. The organisation also created a platform for children to interact with duty bearers. Support was mobilised from teachers, village education committees and Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs). This

was a mammoth task as MLAs initially tried to evade the subject, although they later raised the issue in the State Legislative Assembly. A state-level interface with MLAs was organised in 2004 (the first time in India that such a meeting of children with political representatives had taken place on this issue), after which the media played a key role in generating public opinion.

Impact/Outcome

In August 2004, the Chief Minister of Orissa issued a Government Order banning corporal punishment in schools in the state. That being said, the ban now needs to be supported by implementation.

Physical punishment is a form of violence. Save the Children defines physical punishment as hitting a child with the hand or with an object (such as a cane, belt, whip, shoe, etc.); pinching, kicking, shaking, or throwing a child; pulling their hair; forcing a child to stay in an uncomfortable or undignified position or to take excessive physical exercise; burning or scarring a child; or the threat of any of these actions.

Physical and humiliating punishment is so pervasive and widely accepted throughout the world that, until recently, it was not really regarded as a form of mistreatment that has severe consequences. Many societies value the ideals of older generations more than those of the young, and children's obedience towards adults is a cherished value. Where this outlook prevails, punishment and establishing control over children is accepted method and preferred over other forms of effective and positive discipline.

DHAKA, BANGLADESH

Ichchey Media Group produces a film, "Stop Violence against Children".

The Ichchey Media Group consists of girls and boys from various sections of society who use media to raise issues on matters that are critical to their lives. They use contemporary media like newspapers, television, radio, the Internet, drama, workshops and seminars to make their opinions heard.

Actions

One of their initiatives was to produce a film on violence against children in Bangladesh. The objective of the film was to initiate a dialogue between children and community leaders, parents, teachers and policy-makers, and to hold them accountable for stopping violence against children. The film highlighted violence against children in different settings, including the family, school, workplace, community and on

the street. It also focused on children's actions to counter violence against them, such as street demonstrations, and participation in media, workshops and seminars. The film also included interviews with policy-makers, law-enforcement agencies and so on.

The film was produced by a group of children who compiled footage of different forms of violence, devised the story-lines, selected the background music, and edited the film. Ichchey Media group organised a première showing of the film on June 10, 2005 with an audience consisting of girls and boys, NGO representatives, teachers, parents and representatives of the media, including editors from the country's leading newspapers, such as the 'Daily Star' and 'Prothom Alo'.

Impact/Outcome

- Girls and boys were seen, heard and recognised as important actors in raising awareness and taking action to combat violence against children.
- They were able to initiate a dialogue with people from the media. Two leading newspapers in Bangladesh published articles and editorials on the subject in their papers, and have committed themselves to addressing the issue in their newspapers on a regular basis and to involving children from the media group in this work.

NEPAL

Child Club creates awareness on child abuse, child marriage and trafficking

Bhowani Child Club, in Eastern Nepal, started in 1997 with support from local organisations and Save the Children US. The Club has approximately 80 members, 50 boys and 30 girls aged 8–18 years. Girls face more discrimination and have thus been less encouraged by parents to become club members.

Actions

The children meet at least once a month, sometimes more often. The Club members raised funds from the local community and built a Child Club house. The children have also established a children's library there.

The Child Club has helped the children achieve the following:

- They have learnt a lot about their rights;
- Through drama, talks, etc. they have raised awareness of children's rights in their village;
- They have brought various issues into the open: school enrolment, birth registration, child abuse, child marriage and trafficking, health and sanitation (for example vaccinations, diarrhoea).

The children are also anxious to develop better relations with higher officials in the Village Development Committee (VDC), so that child rights concerns can be addressed in a serious manner – they feel that the VDC and district level officials do not yet take children or Child Clubs seriously and believe that additional communication training could help them establish a stronger dialogue with the adult com-

munity. They are also seeking travel funds for visiting other Child Clubs in order to exchange ideas and experiences.

Impact/Outcome

The children feel that their Child Club has brought about much change locally. They have been able to express their own views and are increasingly recognised within the family and village as people with worthwhile opinions and suggestions. A network of Child Clubs has been established at VDC level, with monthly meetings at which the children can share their experiences with members of other Child Clubs.

Early marriage is yet another form of violence against girls and boys. The practice of marrying mainly girls – and some boys – below the age of 15 is widespread in developing countries. Some children are forced into marriage at a very early age, while others are simply too young to make an informed decision about their partner or about the implications of marriage – but for all of them it means the end of childhood. Poverty and gender discrimination are the major factors leading to early marriage. Families in extreme poverty try to get their young girls married off as they regard them as an economic burden. Many traditional societies believe that as soon as a girl reaches puberty she becomes a woman and is therefore ready to get married and bear children.

TANGAIL, BANGLADESH

Shishu Parishad takes action on early child marriages

In Tangail, Bangladesh, Shishu Parishads (Children's Councils) use various means to raise awareness to prevent child marriages. They use local media like theatre, along with newsletters and TV to create awareness. This is followed by extensive community discussions which highlight negative aspects of this practice.

Actions

Children, mostly girls, from different Shishu Parishads created a play on the theme of child marriage. Overcoming traditional barriers, the girls' groups in the village confidently presented their drama to a crowd of about 200, including male village elders. The play highlights the negative impact of child marriage and the range of actions Shishu Parishad members are taking to end this practice.

In another village in the same area, a group of girls and one boy presented a drama telling the true story of a girl from the village who was married at 13 years of age. She became pregnant and although she had health problems during her preg-

nancy her in-laws prevented her from seeing a doctor. She had a miscarriage and died at the age of 14. Shishu Parishad members had previously informed the media about the case and a TV channel reported on it.

The children in this village also undertook a survey of child marriages in their village. They found that 65 children under the age of 18 had been married during the past year. A nine-year-old girl was the youngest, with the majority being 13 or 14 years old. The children have shared their findings with adults and taken part in discussions on the negative impact of child marriage. They sought support from local non-governmental organisations and Save the Children Australia to bring together religious and community leaders and other influential people to form a committee against early child marriage.

Impact/Outcome

Members of the Upzila level Shishu Parishad know of five cases where the children have succeeded in preventing early child marriage. Child journalists have written about these cases in various newsletters.

ANDHRA PRADESH, INDIA

Children take collective action against sexual harassment

“In our village the teacher molested a girl. We organised a rally and took a petition to the police station. They arrested the teacher.”

(Boy, Sangha member)

Actions

In July 2000 in a village school in Andhra Pradesh, India, a Physical Education teacher molested a 13-year-old Dalit girl. The girl complained to her mother, who, in turn, made a complaint against the school. Playing on the children's loyalties, the school authorities sought to mobilise children to demonstrate their support for the teacher. Since the children lacked adequate information they supported the teacher. Most of these children, including the girl affected, were members of the Children's Sangha (Children's Group) supported by the Young India Project (YIP). When the YIP organiser came to the village the Sangha members discussed the incident and the children formed a fact-finding committee. They then decided to take action against the teacher, and child representatives met with the district police authorities to call for the teacher's arrest. Although the superintendent of police was a woman who was known for her sensitivity and courage, political pressures led her to try to dissuade the children from proceeding further. Even some of the women teachers tried to prevent further action, saying: "Harassment of women by men is so common that there's no need to make mountains out of mole-hills".

YIP, however, continued supporting the children to pursue the case. At the same time, the girl's brother and sister stopped attending school. Sangha girls started visiting the girl's house to persuade her mother to let her children continue attending school. Although initially the mother would not listen to them the Sangha members convinced the parents and the girl returned to school.

Impact/Outcome

The Adult Union also took up the issue on behalf of the children and after two months of struggle succeeded in having the teacher suspended and eventually removed from the school. Unfortunately the girl left the village and is continuing her education elsewhere.

Middle East and North Africa

The participation of girls and boys in the Middle East and North Africa is a relatively recent phenomenon, which makes the process of sharing information on successes and failures all the more important.

YEMEN

Children's actions to end violence against them in police detention in Yemen.

Juvenile offenders have reported being subjected to physical and sexual abuse at Aden City police stations and have been illegally detained for prolonged periods. Their accounts have been confirmed by the judge in charge of juvenile court cases and also by the head of the Juvenile Rehabilitation Centre to which children found guilty are sentenced.

Any time a child comes into conflict with the law, their risk of violence is elevated, directly through the acts of commission or omission of those working in the system, through the acts of others caught up in the system, and through the insensitivity of the system to children's needs. An overwhelming majority of these children are petty or first-time offenders, and all too often they have committed these minor offences just to survive. They are usually street children, children on the run from abusive families or school dropouts, who survive by begging, scavenging or petty theft. But these children can also be victims of trafficking or sexual exploitation, and sometimes they are even detained simply because of what is deemed to be 'anti-social' or unruly behaviour. They are denied due judicial processes, detained under appalling conditions, subjected to violence at the hands of guards and police and sometimes even put to death.

Actions

Children at the Rehabilitation Centre decided that a national sensitisation workshop held for police was an opportunity to describe the different forms of violence against children committed at police stations. Protected by the juvenile justice system, the children had the courage to face policemen who had tortured and abused them, and say exactly what had happened to them and how they had been illegally detained in police stations for long periods. It was encouraging that the policemen's superiors attended the workshop and subsequently took action against the perpetrators.

Impact/Outcome

Aden's police stations are now free from violence against children. Girls and boys are no longer detained in police stations but are sent on remand directly to Rehabilitation Centres.

PALESTINE

Girls fight for their rights in Palestine

Save the Children Sweden has been supporting its local partner organisation, Defence for Children Palestine Section (DCI-P), since 1998 in implementing a girl-child project in the old town of Hebron.

The purpose of the project, which now involves six schools, is to focus on the rights of Palestinian girls, providing them with the opportunity for personal development and empowering them with tools and life skills to transfer their knowledge and experience to other girls. One of the activities of the girls trained by the project is to create awareness in their communities on children's rights.

Actions

A major challenge to this project has been the security situation in Hebron, which has a large presence of Israeli soldiers. This means restricted access for DCI-P staff to the schools where the project is being implemented. The girls are also affected by curfews, road-blocks or conflict with the Israeli settlers. To meet these problems DCI-P staff, in partnership with school authorities and girls and boys, negotiated with the soldiers and settlers to ensure that the project would not be impeded.

Another challenge is the conservative nature of the local community. Girls are less likely than boys to be allowed by their families to participate in extra-curricular activities, or to be listened to by their families and the community at large. To overcome this challenge the staff of DCI-P has worked with the girls' self-confidence so that they develop the courage to stand up for their rights. Peer support has been used so that the children can gain confidence from each other. DCI-P has also worked with the parents and teachers of the girls and boys who participated in the project. The adults have been informed about the project, and invited to special parents' evenings and teachers' meetings at which DCI-P have talked about children's rights and the girls' need for adult support.

The girls also organised a conference with mothers, fathers, teachers, decision-makers, representatives from other organisations in Hebron and 120 girls. The girls were active participants in the planning, implementation and follow-up of the conference, which lasted for three days and dealt with topics such as violence and abuse, freedom of speech and the right to participate, and discrimination. The conference called for the creation of a violence-free environment in the family, school and nation, and legislation to prevent violence and punish those who commit violence against children.

Impact/Outcome

The significance of the conference was that the girls were given autonomy in planning the activities and running the conference – they themselves framed the questions, led the discussions, etc., thus strengthening their self-esteem. Counteracting the stereotyped view that Palestinian girls are brought up in a traditional and somewhat oppressive manner the conference portrayed how girls can be active, equal partners in any project that allows them participation and self-expression. The “Conference of the Girl-Child” was very well attended by the Hebron community.

As a result of the project, girls were able to share knowledge and information with other children about their right to protection from violence. They were able to make other children aware of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The support they received from DCI-P staff and their peers has enabled them to oppose a structure that stifles their rights and to demand laws that legally safeguard these rights. Many girls expressed pride at being part of the project and said that it has increased their self-esteem. They have also been given tools to spread their knowledge and self-confidence to other girls.

East and central Africa

ETHIOPIA

Partnering with boys and young men in Ethiopia

Save the Children Sweden has started a new programme of partnering with boys and young men in three localities in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The new approach takes into account the gender implications of HIV/AIDS, and aspires to secure active involvement of boys and young men in establishing gender-equitable relationships, as a means of ensuring the right of girls and boys to good sexual and reproductive health.

The programme appreciates the reproductive health needs of boys and young men, and aims to educate them to become aware of their own entitlements and responsibilities, to help them build relationships based on mutual communication, trust and respect.

The targets are adolescent boys and young men, and also some girls' groups. Groups and clubs have been established both in schools and in the community; they have been running peer education initiatives and coffee ceremonies as a means of

communication with the target young people. The programmes will be further developed and the experiences of Save the Children Sweden in establishing and running the programmes will be documented in 2006.

Save the Children defines gender-based violence as violence inflicted or suffered on the basis of gender differences. Infanticide, honour killing, acid attacks and female genital mutilation are examples. Gender-based violence is most commonly directed against women and girls, for the sole reason that they are female. But the concept also applies to boys – for example, more boys than girls are subjected to beating as a result of the belief that boys need greater physical discipline in preparation for their adult roles and responsibilities. All forms of violence have a gender dimension, but factors such as age, sexual preference, religion, ethnicity, ability, and socioeconomic background also have a strong determining influence.

Southern Africa

ZAMBIA

Children's group's intervention on behalf of a fellow member who was sexually abused by a teacher

The Zambia Civic Education Association (ZCEA) is a non-governmental organisation working to promote and protect children's rights through civic education. It has three programme areas, one of which is the Child Participation Programme whose objective is to involve children in promoting and protecting their rights. The programme's Child Rights Clubs project seeks to empower children by raising their awareness of their rights as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and other instruments. ZCEA believes that the participation of children in their own programme is fundamental to the attainment of their justice and dignity. With this in mind, ZCEA has established 300 Child Rights Clubs in community and in primary and high schools in all nine provinces of Zambia.

Actions

In February 2004 a Child Rights Club was established at Mchini Community School, on the outskirts of Chipata, the provincial capital of Zambia's Eastern Province. The school provides education to girls and boys from an extremely deprived community. Community schools in Zambia provide education to children who are unable to find places in state schools.

One of the school's male teachers was chosen to be the Child Rights Club facil-

itator. A facilitator must above all be someone who loves children and genuinely has their interests at heart. The facilitator established the club with 40 children, the majority of whom were girls. The first club president elected was a girl.

After about one year it was discovered that the facilitator had been sexually molesting girl pupils for some time and threatening his victims with death if they disclosed the secret. This abuse continued even after he had been made facilitator of the Child Rights Club. However, with the knowledge of their rights which he himself was instrumental in imparting to the children, those of his victims who were members of the Child Rights Club realised that they could do something. But, initially, they did not know where to start and were afraid, so for a while they did not break their silence.

Eventually, one of the sexually abused girls became withdrawn and would no longer socialise with her friends even outside the club and school. Other members of the club (who had not been abused by the teacher) realised there must be something wrong, but when they asked her, at first she denied having any problem. However, the girl-members of the Child Rights Club continued to express their concern and the girl disclosed what the teacher had done to her. These girls immediately reported the matter to the head teacher. At first the teacher denied the allegation and it was his word against the children's. But the girls persuaded the victim to speak out, which she did despite her fear, and following her disclosure 18 other victims came forward and recounted their ordeals.

Impact/Outcome

The teacher and Child Rights Club's facilitator was dismissed, and arrested. At the time of writing he is in police custody pending trial for sexually molesting 19 of his girl pupils, who were all under-age and most of whom were members of the Child Rights Club.

This case shows that when girls and boys organise themselves and receive training on the Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child they can combat injustice. They were able to break the culture of silence attached to sexual abuse and challenge an adult's misuse of power.

Youth Media and the Children's Press Bureau

One of the girl members of the Children's Press Bureau (CPB) attended the Regional Consultation for the United Nations Study on Violence against Children in Ljubljana July 2005. She has established corporal punishment and other forms of violence against children as the priority issue for the Children's Press Bureau in 2006. The mainstream media will be publishing articles on the the bureau's activities to tackle violence against children. The specific work on corporal punishment will start next year, and is currently in the planning and preparation stage.

WEST AFRICA

What Next in West Africa? Following up the Regional Consultation for the United Nations Study on Violence against Children.

As part of the United Nations Study on Violence against Children, a Regional Consultation was held for the West and Central Africa region in Bamako, Mali, in May 2005. The aim was to provide a detailed global picture of the nature, extent, and causes of violence against children and to propose clear recommendations for actions to prevent such violence.

Actions

About 30 children from 15 West African countries participated in the Regional Consultation. Present were also various delegates of child-led organisations in the region such as EDEN, a multi-national children's group, the African Movement of Working Children and the Voice of the Young.

Following the consultation, participating children from various countries in the region decided to hold national consultative meetings to follow up what was said at Bamako and, with the support of Save the Children, to develop an Action Plan to put a stop to violence against children.

The discussions led to the formulation of three recommendations:

- The documented findings of the national consultation should be sent to the different organisations concerned.
- Findings should be shared with non-governmental organisations and national coalitions.
- A working group should be formed, bringing together representatives of participating countries for the finalisation and follow-up of the plan of action.

Impact/Outcome

Kossi, a 12-year-old from Benin, said: "It's unbelievable to see how we were considered by adults during our meeting. And the media have paid attention, too. I spoke to three different journalists and my friend called to tell me that I was on national TV. I hope this recognition will continue because we know our situation better than adults."

Aissatou from Senegal was very happy that she could share her experiences with children from other countries: "This is the first time I've ever travelled out of Senegal, and now I know other children face the same problems as us in Senegal. We can stand together and claim our rights. I am very satisfied because we are not alone any more."

Mrs Saine, the co-ordinator of a children's rights project in Gambia, was surprised by the level of children's participation: "Before this meeting, I was very reluctant about children's participation. For me it was only a buzz-word but what I have seen and heard during these three days has convinced me that children are key actors for the implementation of their rights. Believe me or not, this workshop has changed my mind."

Children taking action themselves

The children decided it was not just enough to feed information into the UN Study on Violence against Children. They wanted to get involved in the fight to end violence themselves.

Actions

After the Regional Consultation, the under-18 delegates went to their respective countries to develop action plans. The children were then brought together once again in the Gambia to discuss what they had done so far. Already they were quite active and had initiated activities such as:

- Sensitize children about violence
- Start a radio and television sensitizing campaign
- Network with other children's groups to fight violence
- Collaborate with police and other authorities on violence against children
- Sensitize teachers on corporal and humiliating punishment
- Develop concrete action plans to guide the children to be organized in fighting to stop violence against children

Impact/Outcome

Children are motivated to continue their campaigns to end violence. A few years ago, violence was an accepted part of every child's experience. They took the violence for granted. Now, they are beginning to see that it does not have to be this way and that, in fact, we all need to do our part to try to end violence perpetuated against children. Children of West Africa have taken up the challenge and they are doing their part. Now it is up to adults- parents, teachers, governments and so on to do their part as well.





Europe

ROMANIA

Children's National Forum

The Children's National Forum is an annual event that provides an opportunity for volunteers and leaders who work with children's rights to conduct a dialogue with the authorities and with representatives of organisations active in the field of child protection. This year the theme chosen was violence against children, in response to the multitude of signals regarding this problem, including actions at international level (particularly the United Nations Study on Violence against Children). In this context, children's participation in preventing and combating violence has been a valuable resource.

The Forum lasted two days. The session's objectives included: exchange of experience, establishing how children view violence, and identifying solutions for fighting it.

Children formulated a series of recommendations:

- greater involvement of pupils in school decision-making processes;
- improved selection and supervision of professionals who work directly with children;
- more commitment of volunteers and children in out-of-school activities;
- improved safety on the streets;
- the provision of optional school subjects (such as Communication Techniques);
- higher levels of involvement of class teachers.

In addition, children called for parent education through compulsory classes.

Children say NO! to violence – brochure

As part of the activities for preparing the Regional Europe and Central Asia Conference in July 2005, Save the Children Romania published a national and a regional brochure, both entitled “Children say NO! to Violence”.

The brochures are made up of children’s opinions regarding violence. The process of producing the brochures included different ways of gathering opinions – questionnaires, focus groups, case studies – which gave the children involved the opportunity to make their voices heard and also to offer new perspectives on possible mechanisms for intervention in such cases.

Save the Children points out that humiliating punishment can take various forms, such as verbal abuse, ridicule, isolation, or ignoring a child. It is damaging to the child’s self-esteem, with long-term and far-reaching effects on their development and mental and physical health. The adults, whatever their relationship with the children, are usually in positions of responsibility, trust and power, which further heightens the damage inflicted.

South-East Asia and the Pacific

HONG KONG

Children’s initiatives in response to the problem of violence against children

Three child-focused non-governmental organisations in Hong Kong – Against Child Abuse, the Hong Kong Committee for UNICEF and the Hong Kong Committee on Children’s Rights – have, since 2000, had a joint Co-ordinating Committee, whose objective is to increase public awareness of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in Hong Kong and to promote children’s rights.

In 2003, with the support of many parties, the first Children’s Council of Hong Kong was established with the sponsorship of the Home Affairs Bureau of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China. The Children’s Council was set up as an annual forum for children to participate in public discussion and decision-making on issues that affect them. In March 2003 60 children aged between 12 and 18 met to debate issues of direct concern to them. The second Children’s Council was held in May 2004.

The topics debated at the first two meetings of the Children’s Council were:

- child participation in curriculum development;
- integrated education;
- medical services for children;
- child abuse;

- extra-curricular activities;
- children's participation in education reform;
- children in poverty;
- school bullying.

Encouraging responses were received from the government, schools, non-governmental organisations, media, individual guests, and most importantly of all, the children themselves.

The third Children's Council was opened in June 2005. The Councillors decided that four issues were to be presented to the Council in November:

- protecting children from family violence;
- the basic development needs of children in poverty;
- raising the overall quality of pre-primary education;
- establishing a platform for child participation.

Actions

A group of participants from the third Children's Council decided to work to end domestic violence and protect children from its adverse effects, taking their cue from the Council's call to the government to improve current measures to protect children from violence in the home. With guidance and support from a mentor from the Co-ordinating Committee the group conducted a survey to collect views from other children and interviewed relevant parties including Against Child Abuse and the Family and Child Protective Services Unit of the Social Welfare Department. The child survey, conducted in October 2005 with 909 respondents submitting completed questionnaires, showed that over half of primary and secondary school pupils have been hit by adults using their hands or hard objects. 35 per cent of primary school pupils have witnessed domestic violence.

Impact/Outcome

In the motion they presented to the Children's Council meeting on 19 November 2005, the group highlighted the effects of domestic violence on children, the current extent of the problem in Hong Kong and the existing government measures and their defects. They made the following recommendations to protect children from the damaging effects of domestic violence:

- Mandatory parent education.
- Provision of funding for a children's hotline. Hotline counsellors should either be trained professionals, social workers, or volunteers who receive specific training on domestic violence.
- Production of documentary TV programmes.
- Involvement of children in relevant committees. Child representatives should be invited to join the current Working Group on Combating Violence and the



Committee on Child Abuse, so that their voices can be heard.

- Strengthening the information provided in schools.
- Review and assessment of current public education efforts.
- Amendment of the Domestic Violence Ordinance.
- Promotion of training in and awareness of domestic violence for the police force.

Two legislative councillors, a government official from the Social Welfare Department, a representative of the police force and an academic who is very concerned with child abuse and domestic violence were present at this motion debate and the attendant Questions & Answers session. They listened to the views of the group and expressed theirs, and also responded to the questions raised by these Child Councillors.

The 2005 Children's Council approved the group's recommendations and passed their motion.

Follow-Up

The group's motion paper on domestic violence, together with the other three motion papers produced by the Child Councillors of 2005, are to be published and disseminated to secondary schools, non-governmental organisations, government officials, legislative councillors and public libraries in Hong Kong as well as actors overseas who work for children's rights.

The Co-ordinating Committee will be meeting the Children's Council Working Committee in the near future to discuss strategies for following up the recommendations of the Child Councillors' four motions.

Conclusions

THIS REPORT IS A COMPILATION of case studies and activities which show how children from countries around the world have organised themselves into a collective force to combat various kinds of violence. The report focuses on how girls and boys are making decision-makers and care-givers accountable, and forming child-led organisations and initiatives to take collective action against violence.

From the accounts presented in this report, we can draw the following conclusions about children's participation in combating violence:

- Organisations such as clubs or national movements provide children with a useful platform for their efforts to eradicate violence. Groupings of this kind increase children's knowledge of various issues, boost their motivation and sense of belonging, and strengthen their commitment to uphold their rights and work for a cause.
- Boys and girls have actively committed themselves to the cause of putting an end to violence against children. Their involvement has taken the form of awareness-raising activities, public meetings, organising workshops and conferences, producing and distributing communication materials, entering into strategic alliances with municipal commissions, and seeking to influence the conceptions and behaviour patterns of civil society.
- Consultations and dialogue, together with concentrated pressure from children, have produced immediate results at institutional and national level – although these successes need continuous follow-up and support.
- Children are engaged at all stages of projects – assessment, planning, implementation and follow-up. Children's active participation has increased their self-esteem and self-confidence.

Recommendations

- Governments need to provide support and develop skills to enable adults who work with young people to develop better processes and systems for meaningful and ethical participation of children in anti-violence programmes.
- There is a need for child-oriented and child-friendly systems and mechanisms where children can express themselves, and feel confident about participating in decisions and actions that affect their lives.
- There is a need for more child-oriented and age- and diversity-specific material on child protection and children's rights. This material can be produced by children.

It is very important that children's voices and recommendations are included in the final United Nations Study report, that these are taken up by key decision-makers and that children are recognised as partners in follow-up actions to the United Nations Study.

Further reading:

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- Act Now!* Highlights from children's participation in the Regional Consultations for the United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children, Save the Children 2005
- After the United Nations Study what's next?*, a discussion paper on possible outcomes of the UN Study on Violence against Children, Save the Children 2004
- Beyond All Tolerance*, Child pornography on the Internet – a growing problem demanding new counter-measures, Save the Children Sweden, 2004
- Call for action!* Key advocacy messages and recommendations on priority themes for the United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children, Save the Children, 2005
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- Concept paper for the Secretary-General's Study on Violence Against Children*, United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence Against Children, 2003
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- Corregir no es pegar, part 1*, a Spanish campaign against physical and humiliating punishment. Save the Children Spain, 2005
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The Right not to Lose Hope, children in conflict with the law – a policy analysis and examples of good practice, Save the Children, 2005

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