

National Consultation

Recognising Children's Voice for Creating Child Friendly India

11th May 2018, New Delhi, India



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The 11 elected leaders of National Maha Bal panchayat with Mr. and Mrs. Satyarthi and Mr. Santosh Gangwar

About National Maha Bal Panchayat

The Child Friendly Village (CFV) model has been a crucial aspect of the project **Child Friendly Villages in Rural India**. It is a holistic and preventive model that tackles child labour by providing and strengthening education for children in villages that are a major source of child labour in cities and towns. CFVs also bring awareness for child rights in rural parts of the country. Each CFV constitutes its own *Bal Panchayat* (Children's council) elected and managed by children in the village. A *Bal Panchayat* provides platform to children in the village communities to advocate and campaign for changes keeping in mind their needs.

The concept of *Bal Panchayat* promotes child participation in decision making processes and democratic participation practices in the young budding leaders of India. The National Maha Bal Panchayat (NMBP) or National Children's council aggregates legitimate and democratic voices of children from different parts of Indian states and provides them a platform at national level. The primary objective of *Maha Bal Panchayat* is to bring together 11 democratically

elected child leader representatives from each CFV state who have been active change makers in their respective villages on child rights. These budding leaders voice the necessities of the communities they come from and while the list of achievements and success stories are innumerable, some of the key focus areas of intervention through *Maha Bal Panchayat* are - eliminating all forms of child labour, child abuse or violence against children, ensuring quality education services and infrastructure in villages, monitoring for regular attendance of teachers and children, preventing cases of early child marriage and facilitating links to several social welfare schemes.

As a part of strengthening the impacts of the project **Child Friendly Villages in Rural India**, the children's council was upscaled for the first time to work towards ensuring child representation from all child-friendly villages (new and old villages) to state and national level. The children from bal Panchayat of six states - Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, where CFVs have been implemented in past years got an opportunity to be a part of a historic event that was previously witnessed in 2010 where more than 200 children from different CFVs participated. After 7 years, in 2018, the *Bal Panchayat* members from 6 states (11 members from each state) along with the children of *Bal Ashram*¹ came forward, nominated themselves and through elections formed the *Maha Bal Panchayat*, comprising of 11 elected young assembly leaders. The elected assembly of children put forth their achievements, concerns and a charter of rights at the national consultation held in New Delhi on 11 May, 2018, organised by Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation and Global March Against Child Labour.



The 11 elected leaders with Mr. and Mrs. Satyarthi

¹ Bal Ashram was established in 1998 as the rehabilitation and training center of Bachpan Bachao Andolan (Save the Childhood Movement) catering for the special needs of victims of child labour/bonded labour. It also generates awareness in the communities on the issues of child labour, child marriage, child trafficking, gender disparity and forced labour.

The *Maha Bal Panchayat* drives its mandate through these guiding principles:

1. Establishing an independent children's body that will voice the issues concerning children of their communities at the national level such as issues regarding alcoholism, infrastructural facilities like toilets, roads and school boundaries, abolition of caste, gender and religious discrimination, etc
2. Ensuring children's participation as a right in taking decisions related to their empowerment and the community's holistic development
3. Instilling democratic values in children through self-governance and providing a platform for grooming leadership
4. Mainstreaming and recognising the *Maha Bal Panchayat* for ensuring children's participation in influencing decision and policy making at a national level

The objectives behind the national consultation are stated below

1. To have a dialogue between the elected members of children's council, policy makers and other stakeholders on wider issues concerning all children of the country (particularly on child labour and education)
2. Position charter of demands, followed by the recognition of national children's council to mainstream the national children's council at the institutional forefront
3. Experience sharing of elected children of NMBP, and demonstrate BMG as a successful model of intervention in social transformation

Opening Ceremony and Keynote Address

The opening ceremony was graced by Nobel Peace Laureate Mr. Kailash Satyarthi, Mrs. Sumedha Kailash, founder of Bal Ashram, Hon'ble Minister of Labour and Employment Mr. Santosh Kumar Gangwar and Lalita Duharia, President of NMBP. The consultation commenced with their welcome, establishing the event as an open space for all the children who have come a long way as child leaders to share their experience in the presence of influential decision makers of the society.

Nobel Peace Laureate Mr. Satyarthi recalled the initiation of *Bal Mitra Gram* as a concept and philosophy towards holistic development of villages and emphasised on the importance of child participation as it is the best tool to empower the children.



"In our BMGs, child participation is best showcased through the concept of Bal Panchayat, which is an elected children's council at village level. The elected councils of 6 states have come together with the objective of formation of a National Maha Bal Panchayat. Today will be a historic day as the members of NMBP will be demanding a child friendly India to Ministry and Parliamentarians."

The event commenced with unending round of applause for the 11 elected members from NMBP and equally supported by the Labour and Employment Minister of India, Mr. Santosh Kumar Gangwar. He acknowledged the work that Mr. Satyarthi has put in towards the welfare of children not only in India but worldwide and was evidently moved by the presence of the children in the consultation who have fought their ways through all forms of exploitation and are the budding leaders of the society. Mr. Gangwar also extended warm gratitude to Mr. Satyarthi's vision of making India child friendly and pledged to support the children in order to make India free of child labour and exploitation. "The Indian government extends its full support to the vision -- Bal Mitra Gram, and I am proud to inform that this model of BMG is not just the best practice in India, but it is also an internationally recognized model," the minister told the gathering which included a former Supreme Court Judge M K Sharma and Member of Parliament Mr. Ravi Prakash Verma.

Experience sharing by young leaders of children's council

The most crucial aspect of the consultation was to make the elected members of NMBP and other young leaders from different *Bal Panchayats* of 6 states reach a platform where they can share their journey, challenges and achievements and also have a dialogue with the policy makers. The elected members of NMBP who along with other children experienced a journey of new learning through previous workshops and interaction with children from other regions acquainted the dignitaries and the participants with the struggle to fight against the



Mr. Santosh Gangwar, Minister of State with Ministry of Labour and Employment

age old practices prevailing in the villages such as discrimination on the basis of caste, religion and gender, child rights exploitation through child labour, child marriage, child trafficking and so on.

The consultation provided a space for the NMBP members where they came up and shared their stories of success in the presence of Mr. Santosh Kumar Gangwar, Mr. Kailash Satyarthi and Mrs. Sumedha Kailash. The session was chaired by Ms. Rupa Kapoor, member of National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) who introduced the 11 members of NMBP who further shared their experience of becoming leaders in their communities.

The members of NMBP passionately spoke about the prevailing problem of child rights exploitation in their village which included child labour, child marriage, negligence towards children due to alcoholism, limited access to livelihood options, lack of awareness and so on and showed how amidst these issues they emerged as leaders after becoming a member of the *Bal Panchayat*. The members of the NMBP at their village level have been able to enroll former child labourers to schools, foiled child marriages and have also been able to raise awareness in their community about the various social welfare schemes.



“If children like the NMBP members come forward from each village in India, then India will progress much faster and people like us are always there to push the efforts of the children at a higher authority.”

Rupa Kapoor, Member of National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)

Voicing children's priorities through the charter of demands

The national consultation provided a platform for the voices of these children who directly engaged with the policy makers to ensure their participation in a legislative set up and key decision making processes that concern them the most. These young leaders presented a charter of demands to voice their concerns, ideas, and opinions and explore their trust with democracy. The charter, which was made with the engagement of the 11 elected leaders and participation of the children in previous workshops during the NMBP elections, was presented to Mr. Ravi Prakash Verma, Member of Parliament (*Rajya Sabha*/ Upper House). The demands were made basis the experiences and learning of the children, especially the elected change makers based on issues (banning of alcohol, zero corruption, lack of employment to name a few) grievances and suggestions at the village level few voicing the needs of the children across India at the national level.



11 elected leaders presenting the charter of demands at the Consultation

The charter of demands holds a crucial concept in NMBP. As Mr. Verma stated “The efforts will be made to convince the Members of Parliament and Public Representatives to listen to the issues raised by *Bal Panchayat* and try to provide them suitable solution timely.” Mr. Verma was also astounded by the demands that were made by children and pledged to keep supporting the efforts put in by *Bal Panchayat* members to make the environment a better place to live for children. He congratulated the NMBP members for setting a landmark for the children of rural India and for being the role models for children of rest of India.

The Charter of Demands had the following crucial points

1. A child should not be involved in any injurious workplace such as cracker factories, mica mining
2. The CFVs should be implemented in all the villages to make sure the child participation and leadership.
3. There should be a neighbourhood school as the girls find it difficult if the school is not nearby.
4. There should be a proper teacher-pupil ratio. The teacher should report to school on time. And do not involve the child in any kind of work.
5. Every school should have a library, sports equipment, playground, computer labs and other material for cultural activities.
6. Any kind of alcoholism and drug use should be prohibited.
7. Portable drinking water should be available in every home.
8. Any kind of discrimination should be prohibited. for instance: caste difference, gender difference.
9. The employment opportunities should be created near to the village where they can go and work.

A dialogue between change makers and policy makers

A first of its kind event, the consultation brought the elected members of NMBP and key decision makers such as Mr. Ravi Prakash Verma) (MP), Mr. R.S. Chaurasia (Chairperson, Bachpan Bachao Andolan) and Ms. Pammi Sinha (District Welfare Officer from Koderma district of Jharkhand) at one platform, in the capital of the country.



Ms. Richa Anirudh, a renowned Indian primetime news anchor and one of the most popular faces of Indian television was the moderator of this panel discussion. She questioned the panelists about the sensitivity and knowledge of communities towards child rights and the ways in which rights of children are exploited. The moderator appropriately emphasised on the essential need to speak about the exploitation of children and opened the platform to discuss the issues of child exploitation and the adverse effects of the same.

“Even if India is a developing nation we see children working in both public and private realms. There is an urgent need to end child labour and exploitation of all children and we as a nation have to stand up against this violence.”

Richa Anirudh, moderator, renowned Indian TV news anchor

The dialogue reflected honesty, depth of knowledge and level of empowerment that these children have gained by getting elected to the *Bal Panchayat* in their villages and their journey so far. The dialogue was a reflection of novelty, enthusiasm and a discussion which kept children at the forefront, where they questioned, challenged and moved the key stakeholders. Chirag, one of the members of NMBP from Rajasthan challenged Mr. Ravi Prakash Verma by saying “I don’t believe that poverty is the reason behind child labour but it is the reverse which means we are poor because there is child labour and which is cheap and hence the adults do not get a job.” Other than Chirag, the children also engaged the panelists in the discussion by questioning them about the infrastructural condition of their village and schools, lack of awareness in the community members about social welfare schemes, the prevalent problem of alcoholism and so on. The panelists in response to the questions suggested taking the help of their local bodies which is the *Gram Panchayat* and if they are not heard Mr. R.S. Chaurasia (BBA Chairperson) advised the children to directly write applications to the block or district level officials.

The entire session was extremely powerful and empowering as these emerging leaders came out of their comfort level and debated with some of the influential individuals. Ms. Richa Anirudh also remarked that platforms such as NMBP give the children an opportunity to display their leadership skills and be vocal about the exploitation issues faced by children in the presence of otherwise intimidating group of stakeholders at a national level.

Recognition and felicitation of National Maha Bal Panchayat

This multi stakeholder consultation was a platform for NMBP to be recognised as a national children's council at a national level to voice the issues of children. The recognition of *Bal Panchayat* as an independent decision making body is crucial because it gives the community members an opportunity to know their young leaders and make them understand that the *Bal Panchayat* at a village level is capable of working in close proximity with the *Gram Panchayat*.



Hon'ble Mr. Justice M.K. Sharma, former Judge of Supreme Court of India

The recognition process was one of the most sought after session in the event and was chaired by the Hon'ble Mr. Justice M.K. Sharma who has been a respected former Judge of Supreme Court of India. Along with his work towards building a just and safe India, he has been a supporter of Bachpan Bachao Andolan since 2006. Justice Sharma re-emphasised that NMBP is the biggest opportunity for any child to be heard and to make a difference in the lives of millions of other children who are hard to reach. He stated "Through this platform I believe that the children will be able to express their ideas and achieve their dreams along with that I thank the organisation for giving me this opportunity of meeting this young group and I will always support them."

Mr. Satyarthi was clearly overwhelmed by the presence of such passionate and vehement child leaders. He also showed immense pleasure in sharing the dais with Justice M.K. Sharma who has been a supporter and friend. Mr. Satyarthi expressed that in order to bring justice for the children a strong support from the judiciary is crucial; in this case Justice M.S. Sharma has shown immense support and dedication towards the vision and mission of organisations led Mr. Satyarthi. He gave an inspiring speech and advised the children to let go off the social evil practices like discrimination on the basis of gender, caste and religion and to build a friendly world.



As the event neared its conclusion, Mr. Satyarthi called on the lawmakers to take into consideration the views of children and ensure their participation during decision making, to make the country an "inclusive democracy". "*Bal Mitra Gram* (child-friendly village) is the first step towards my aim of making a child-friendly world. This means parents, teachers, communities and leaders should listen to and respect the voices of children and involve them in decision making as the soul of the child-friendly village lies in inculcation of caring and sharing, participation, democracy and leadership values among village children through the formation of *Bal Panchayat*," he said.

Outcome of the consultation

The consultation provided a platform to both the children and affluent decision makers of the society to come together and have a dialogue about the current situation of children in the country and the need to address their problems at its core. Apart from the existing issues faced by children, the NMBP also questioned the system about the lack of facilities in their communities and asserted the need to strengthen their participation in key decisions and policy making processes with respect to issues that concern children the most. The consultation was a knowledge and experience sharing platform as well where children from various socio-cultural background came together to put forward their story of success. The success stories shared were inspiring and heartbreaking when one realises the struggle of these children against the evil social norms to achieve the successes, experiences and challenges, inspiring the bureaucrats and representatives from the Ministry of Labour and Employment to the extent of pledging to work towards these issues.

ANNEXURE I



NATIONAL CONSULTATION RECOGNIZING CHILDREN'S VOICE FOR CREATING CHILD FRIENDLY INDIA

THE SURYA HOTEL, NEW FRIENDS COLONY, NEW DELHI | 11TH MAY 2018

Agenda

Time	Session	Delegate
9:00 - 9:30	Registration	
9:30 - 9:40	Welcoming the participants and sharing aims and objectives of the Consultation	Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation and Global March Against Child Labour
9:40 - 9:55	Opening remarks	Nobel Peace Laureate Shri Kailash Satyarthi
9:55 - 10:10	Sharing the philosophy of Bal Mitra Gram and Bal Panchayats (Elected Children's Assembly)	Smt. Sumedha Kailash, Director, Bal Ashram
10:10 - 10:25	Keynote Address	Shri Santosh Kumar Gangwar, State Minister (Independent Charge), Ministry of Labour & Employment, Government of India
10:25 - 10:35	Launch of the Book on Bal Mitra Gram - A best practice model on Child Participation & Keynote Address	Shri Santosh Kumar Gangwar Minister (Independent Charge), Ministry of Labour & Employment, Government of India
10:35 - 11:00	Tea/Coffee break	
11:00 - 12:15	Experience sharing by young leaders of Children's Assembly <i>11 elected members of National Bal Maha Panchayat (National Children's Assembly) from 6 states of India talk about their journeys, challenges and achievements</i>	Chair – Stuti Kacker, National Commission for protection of Child Rights Elected Members of Children's National Assembly
12:15 - 13:15	Canvassing the Charter of Demands <i>11-elected National Maha Bal Panchayat members will put forth the Charter of demands</i>	Chair – Shri Ravi Prakash Verma, Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) Elected Members of Children's National Assembly
13:15 - 14:15	Lunch with the Change Makers	

14:15 – 15:45	Dialogue on Leadership and Change <i>Panel discussion of elected members of Children's National Assembly will engage in a dialogue with key decision makers like Members of Parliament, Child Rights Agencies, Bureaucrats, PRI members and Media</i>	Chair- Nobel Peace Laureate Shri Kailash Satyarthi Panelist: Shri Ravi Prakash Verma, Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha); Shri Ajit Anjum, Broadcast, Editors Association; Smt. Stuti Kacker, Chairperson, NCPCR Moderator: Richa Anirudh, Senior News Anchor
15:45 – 16:15	Tea/Coffee break	
16:15 – 17:00	Recognition of National Bal Maha Panchayat 2018 <i>Recognising the democratically elected body of Children's National Assembly to promote the formation of child friendly communities</i>	Hon'ble Shri Justice M.K. Sharma, Former Judge of Supreme Court of India
17:00 – 17:30	Closing remarks and way forward	Nobel Peace Laureate Shri Kailash Satyarthi
17:30 – 18:30	Distribution of National Maha Bal Panchayat Certificates	Smt. P.Nagasayee Malathy, Executive Director- Programmes, KSCF Smt. Purva Gupta, Global Coordinator, Global March against Child Labor



GLOBAL MARCH

Against Child Labour
Contra el Trabajo Infantil
Contre le Travail des Enfants

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