9th SAARC Chief Justices’ Conference
&
12th SAARCLAW Conference

Child Protection and Constitutionalism
“Securing the Future”

24th – 26th May 2013
Thimphu, Bhutan

A BRIEF REPORT ON THE PARTICIPATION
OF
THE SAIEVAC CHILD GOVERNING BOARD MEMEBSRS

Hosted by the Royal Court of Justice, Bhutan
Organized by the SAARCLAW Bhutan Chapter
&
The SAIEVAC Regional Secretariat
Supported by SACG
Background and Introduction

Related to activities and in alignment with events taking place around the 9th SAARC Chief Justices’ Conference and the 12th SAARCLAW Conference held in Thimphu, Bhutan from the 24th – 26th May 2013 with the theme of “Child Protection and Constitutionalism”, the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) also organized a Children’s Participation Day. The event was held at the Jigme Namgyal Lower Secondary School in Thimphu where SAIEVAC international and regional delegates paid a visit in order to interact with students and learn more about an innovative discipline approach (Emotional Bank Account – EBA) which has been evolved at the school. The school visit was followed by an interactive discussion between students, child governing board members and conference delegates on corporal punishment and alternative forms of discipline in Bhutan, the region and within the global context.

Visit to Jigme Namgyal Lower Secondary School

Delegation members arrived early to the Jigme Namgyal Lower Secondary School to attend the morning school assembly. They were welcomed by School Principal, Mr. Tshering Drukpa, teachers and students. Dr. Rinchen Chophel, Director General, SAIEVAC, explained to students the purpose of the visit and introduced visiting guests. This included child governing board members of SAIEVAC, Mr. Mamun Bokaul from Bangladesh and Ms. Nabila Noori, from Afghanistan. Following this, Mr. Mark Pierce, Regional Director, Plan International, Asia Regional Office, Bangkok also addressed the group.

Ms. Sonam Palden, 8th grade / class student then delivered an address to both school students and teachers as well for visiting guests on her views associated with Corporal Punishment. She highlighted the many negative consequences which are resultant of this form of
discipline while at the same described use of an alternative form developed at the school, Emotional Banking Account, as a good practice. (Please see Annex 1 for the full transcription of her speech).

The team then paid a visit to a classroom to have time for one-on-one interaction and discussion with students. Questions and answers were exchanged both ways (e.g. between students and visiting guests – especially with the child representatives from Afghanistan and Bangladesh) and covered a diverse range of topics including sports and recreational activities, favorite subjects and class loads, environment of countries in South Asia and gender dimensions.

Children’s Exchange - Corporal Punishment and Alternative Discipline Forms

Following the school visit, both delegates and selected students met again at the Phuntsho Pelri Hotel in Thimphu for refreshments and tea. Following this, a formal discussion and exchange was held exploring the topic of Corporal Punishment.

Dr. Chophel welcomed the group and provided a brief introduction on the purpose of the consultation along with a briefing on SAIEVAC’s role in promotion child participation and exchange of their views and perspectives on relevant topics. Mr. Peter Newell also provided comments on work to eliminate use of Corporal Punishment globally and various initiatives in South Asia.

Following this, the Principal of Jigme Namgyal Lower SS, Mr. Tshering Drukpa, described forms and use of disciplinary practices (and views related to these) and how these have changed during his 31 years of experience. He went on to described that since corporal punishment was banned in schools in the late 1990’s, teachers and school officials have worked to develop alternate systems and discipline policies that an alternative. In the past, one of these approaches included a 4-stage or step discipline policy which included engagement of teachers, school counselors, parents, school management committees and specialized counselors at the Department of Youth and Sports.

He further elaborated that because this strategy had limitations, staff wanted to take it step further. Together with the School Management Board, the school team worked to evolve a new strategy in order to create an environment conducive for learning which also outlines roles and responsibilities for both children and parents.
Mr. Pema Gyeltshen, Vice-principal and head of discipline at the school then went on to share / explain a new and innovative approach developed for the school: Emotional Bank Account (EBA).

Highlighting that the EBA approach is based on use of a point system for each student given for both positive and negative behaviors or actions and at the end of every month, each student’s balance is reviewed by the School Management Board. If the balance for a student is below a certain level, parents are contacted and together with the child, teachers and the school counselor develops a strategy to either increase deposits or decrease withdraws.

The EBA is based on rights and respect for each student in the school.

Following the presentation and description on this new approach, students were invited to share their thoughts and feelings on use and application. Some of their views included the following:

“It is a good system as it has an impact on the life and behavior of students and is useful and effective.”

“EBA helps prevent use of violence and also prevents unwanted behavior.”

“It is good and useful as it helps to develop good habits and helpful attitude in the students.”

In addition a number of issues and concerns about the approach were also voiced by both students and delegation participants.

- CP may be banned in schools but if used at home can be confusing for students. Are parents involved and do they support/understand?

- Prevention aspect of discouraging negative behaviors is important and the approach also has an impact on the life of the child not only within the school environment but it is useful outside and helps to cultivate important values and habits as they grow toward adulthood as well.

- Wonder about the situation where one student might report on other and cause them to have a deduction and if bullying takes place because of this?

- Does participation in volunteer activities (in order to gain positive points) cause students to miss classes?
• CP also not compatible with the concept of GNH …

• We require a clear statement in our laws that CP is completely unacceptable and that we need leadership from the Government to assist parents and teachers;

• What works is approval and encouragement as opposed to punishment or humiliation;

• What about the ability of children to make deposits or withdraws for behaviors associated with adults or teachers – also important to consider this as well?

• Most people feel we are trying to correct student’s behavior but it is important to realize that every child is a “story on its own” and prevention is key;

• Lastly, in terms of reporting or having a supportive adult to turn to – in an atmosphere of confidentiality – related to other problems or more sensitive issues or situations they may be facing – need ideas on this. Possible use of “drop box” or seeking support from school counselor or other adults or friends.

Closing Remarks and Lessons Learned So Far

In closing it was highlighted that the EBA approach is a new system and still evolving and while not perfect it is an innovative alternative which everyone appreciates and the school should be proud of their efforts. It was also highlighted that other schools in Bhutan are also interested in this approach and that school staff have been sharing information so that it can replicated. Involvement and engagement of parents both prior to the launch of the program and through-out the period of implementation was also highlight and emphasized to be very necessary. School representatives indicated that parents are very supportive of the approach and that some families were even trying to apply it at home.
Annex 1: Student Speech by Ms. Sonam Palden

Sonam Palden is 13 years old and studies in the 8th grade at Jigme Namgyel Lower Secondary School in Thimphu, Bhutan. She likes reading very much and also singing, dancing, playing and drawing. Her ambition is to become a doctor. She says her favorite things are: the colors green and blue, the book “That’s So Raven” by Abby Hayes (from the Geronimo Stilton series). Her favorite school subjects are: English, science, history and maths and she also loves dogs and rabbits.

As the saying goes, “We worry about what a child will become tomorrow, yet we forget that he is someone today.” There are various definitions of a “Child” in the dictionary such as “a person between birth and puberty,” “a person who has not attained maturity”, etc. The UN considers any person below the age of 18 as a child.

When a child is born, most parents are happy but this isn’t the case with everyone. While some love their children so much, there are also others for whom children, whether their own or other’s are nothing but a mere object who can be toyed with or even worse, manipulated and abused. Children are said to be precious gifts from God but not everyone know how to cherish and love this gift.

Teachers and parents always want the best for their children but they are so much engrossed in shaping the future that they forget we children are someone today, “someone who is a human being” with an inherent right to life and expression. In our society, beating, scolding and hitting a child in the name of discipline is the right thing to do. Even parents agree that teachers should hit their children to make them learn. This is Corporal Punishment against children. Corporal Punishment, in fact is the most common form of violence against children globally. It affects millions of children in all countries and in all settings of their lives. It has vast harmful consequences on children’s development and on society at large. Prohibiting and eliminating all violent punishment of children is acknowledged across international and regional human rights monitoring bodies as human rights imperative.

Researchers have found that corporal punishment to train a child has always resulted in failure. Failure because discipline in original sense is a systematic instruction intended to train a person in some craft or trade. All corporal punishment does is instill fear and hurt a person both physically and psychologically.

Every demoralizing word or a simple slap on the face that morally and emotionally hurts a child is corporal punishment. The physical scars may fade away with time but the psychological and emotional hurt in the heart is carried on coupled with hatred.

People might say without corporal punishment a child or student cannot be “tamed,” they will lose their respect for teachers and create chaos in the school. But there are other alternatives. For instance, counseling. We can have trained counselors in the schools to deal with behavioral change. We can have topics and curriculums on Child Rights and Responsibilities. All these would inculcate positive attitude in a person from a very early age. Our own school’s practice of EBA (Emotional Banking Account) is a good example for alternative form of discipline.
Last but not the least, my speech today only covered the issues of corporal punishment against children in schools and homes. But to say honestly, no human being should ever be subjected to such harsh treatment in the name of discipline. Every individual is a human with a heart and flesh and it hurts when treated with violence. Instead let us spread the message of peace and love, helpfulness and positive attitude from a very young age. This way we can all stop violence against children. After all, “Children are the living messages we sent to a time we will not see.”

Thank you and Tashi Delek.

**List of Participants**

Along with about 20 students and teachers from the Jigme Namgyal Secondary School, the following persons participated in the event:

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title / Organization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mr. Mark Pierce</td>
<td>Regional Director, Plan International, Asia Regional Office</td>
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<td>4. Mr. Rasa Sekulovic</td>
<td>Regional Advisor, Child Protection, Plan International, Asia Regional Office</td>
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<td>5. Mr. Ashish Damle</td>
<td>Regional Coordinator, Missing Child Alert, Plan International, Dhaka, Bangladesh</td>
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<td>6. Mr. Ron Pouwels</td>
<td>Regional Child Protection Advisor, UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA), Kathmandu, Nepal</td>
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<td>7. Mr. Laxman Belbase</td>
<td>Regional Gender and Child Protection Specialist, Save the Children, Nepal Country Office, Kathmandu, Nepal</td>
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<td>8. Mr. Peter Newell</td>
<td>Global Initiative to Eliminate Corporal Punishment, London, UK</td>
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<td>10. Mr. Mamun Bokaul</td>
<td>Child Governing Board Member, Bangladesh</td>
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<td>11. Ms. Nabila Noori</td>
<td>Child Governing Board Member, Afghanistan</td>
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<td>12. Dr. Rinchen Chophel</td>
<td>Director General, SAIEVAC, Kathmandu, Nepal</td>
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<td>Mr. Tshering Drukpa</td>
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<td>Mr. Pema Gyeltshen</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Ms. Sonam Palden</td>
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