



**Report of the Proceedings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Technical Consultation  
on  
Eliminating Harmful Practices Affecting Children in South Asia  
Based on Tradition, Culture, Religion and Superstition**

**26<sup>th</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup> September 2013**

**Thimphu, Bhutan**



*Organized by the SAIEVAC Regional Secretariat*

*Supported by the South Asia Coordinating Group on Action against Violence against Women and Children (SACG),*

*the SAARC Development Fund (SDF) and in collaboration with the*

*Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children (SRSG-VaC)*

*Hosted by the Royal Government of Bhutan*



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## List of Abbreviations

ASPP	Afghanistan Social Protection Program
ASEAN	Association of South East Asia Nations
CBSS	Council of Baltic Sea States
CCPA	Child Care and Protection Act
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CM	Child Marriage
CoP	Corporal Punishment
CPAG	Child Participation Action Group
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CP	Child Protection
CoP	Corporal Punishment
DG	Director General
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GB	Governing Board
GBM	Governing Board Meeting
ICT	Information Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMR	Infant Mortality Rate
INGO	International Non-governmental Organization
MCA	Missing Child Alert
NACG	National Action and Coordination Group for Eliminating Violence against Children
NCWC	National Commission for Women and Children
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
RAP	Regional Action Plan
RGoB	Royal Government of Bhutan
ROSA	Regional Office for South Asia
SAARC	South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation
SAARCLAW	South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation Law and Judiciary
SACG	South Asia Action and Coordination Group for Eliminating Violence against Children
SAIEVAC	South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children
SDF	SAARC Development Fund
SRS	SAIEVAC Regional Secretariat
SRSg – VaC	Special Representative of the Secretary General of Eliminating Violence against Children
TAG	Technical Advisory Group
TC	Technical Consultation
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UN-CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNFPA	United National Family Planning Association
UNICEF	United Nations Fund for Children
VAC	Violence against Children

## **1. Executive Summary**

Violence against children takes shape in many different forms and often includes practices deeply embedded in day-to-day community life which are perceived as accepted cultural, religious or social norms. Despite legislation which discourages use, such practices, which very often target young women and girls, are rarely perceived as harmful but in reality result in death, disability, compromised health and psychological trauma for many children around the world. Increasingly gaining the attention of the wider global community, harmful practices may be either traditional or newly emerging but in general usually have cultural, social or religious underpinnings. While all violations of children's rights can legitimately be described as "harmful practices", those based upon tradition, culture, religion or superstition are especially challenging as they are perpetrated or actively condoned by parents or influential leaders within the community and often enjoy continued support from the state and the wider community.

The United Nation's Study on Violence against Children has urged States to prohibit all forms of violence against children. Harmful practices have devastating consequences on the lives of children impacting upon their health, development, dignity, education and compromising further protection. Many practices involve "gross and unlawful discrimination against groups of children" and a large number manifest or are associated with gender-based beliefs or rituals while others are anchored in discrimination against those with disabilities."

The mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children (SRSG-VaC) highlights not only the need to ban all forms of violence against children in all settings but flags the need for continued efforts required to explore understanding of these practices, enhance awareness and consolidate knowledge related to better understanding harmful practices in order to prevent and eliminate these forms of violence against children. Additionally, in alignment and support of a systems building approach, development of an appropriate legal framework in support of prevention efforts, along with response to violence when it does occur, remain as priority focus areas.

With an aim to eliminate harmful practices affecting children in the region, the 3<sup>rd</sup> South Asia Technical Consultation which was held on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of September, in Thimphu, Bhutan, provided an excellent opportunity for regional partners and stakeholders to come together to share experiences and lessons learned. Identified as an urgent need, exploring and addressing harmful practices in South Asia was prioritized through a recommendation generated and endorsed at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Governing Board Meeting of the South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children (SAIEVAC). Focus and discussions on the issue reaffirmed and strengthened SAARC's commitment to children.

Building upon previous work and recommendations generated at past Technical Consultations organized by SAIEVAC on legal reform and on care standards and child-friendly services, the consultation further contributed to development of and strengthening of national child protection systems and national level mechanisms. In addition, the Children's Preparatory Meeting (which was held on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>) provided yet another opportunity for children from South Asia to gather together and share their own ideas and recommendations related to addressing harmful practices.

With a focus maintained on Child Marriage (CM) and Corporal Punishment (CoP), the consultation also allowed for discussion on other issues and concerns in order to identify the full range of harmful practices which are prevalent in South Asia. Country reports also outlined harmful practices prevalent in the region along with successful strategies and approaches used to address them and continued constraints. The Consultation resulted in the generation of 12 specific follow-up recommendations (later documented in this report) in support of a way forward and next steps needed to address and further strengthen action and response in addressing these issues and practices across South Asia.

## **2. Background and Context**

While international structures, conventions and treaties addressing harmful practices are in place and ratified, the South Asian Association on Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Convention on Regional Arrangements from the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia (2002) has set out roles and responsibilities for States Parties in South Asia to guarantee the following:

- Ensure that their national laws protect the child from any form of discrimination, abuse, neglect, exploitation, torture or degrading treatment, trafficking and violence (Article 4 (3)(a); and to,
- Make civil registration of births, marriages and deaths, in an official registry, compulsory in order to facilitate the effective enforcement of national laws, including the minimum age for employment and marriage (Article 4 (3)(d).

In order to respond to and implement these obligations, the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC), an Apex body of SAARC since 2011, identified early marriage as one of its five priority thematic areas (also including corporal punishment, trafficking, child labour and sexual abuse and exploitation) and as part of its 5-year work-plan has included the target that by 2015 all Member State countries will have raised the legal age of marriage for both boys and girls to 18 and fully implemented Article 4 (3)(d) of the Convention.

### ***SAIEVAC's Mandate and Focus to Address Harmful Practices***

An innovative initiative, SAIEVAC focuses on protection of children and asserts a vision that all children, both girls and boys, throughout South Asia enjoy their rights to protection from all forms of violence in all settings. SAIEVAC's structure was further endorsed at a Ministerial meeting taking place in the Maldives in 2010 and currently, National chapters have been established in all seven South Asia countries.

SAIEVAC's mandate is unique through its role as a regional initiative led by the governments of South Asia in partnership with children themselves, civil society organizations, INGOs and UN agencies. Through use of participatory, inclusive approaches that enable partners to strengthen both child protection activities and networks (including capacity development and exchange of best practices and lessons learned) in support of a systems building approach based upon awareness, prevention and response.

Efforts related to addressing violence against children also includes exploring and learning more about harmful practices in the region and this now has become an overarching priority. As mentioned earlier, SAIEVAC's five key thematic areas do include issues which can be considered harmful practices in the South Asian context – child marriage and corporal punishment – where significant progress has been made. However, at SAIEVAC's second Technical Consultation, taking place in Colombo in 2012, an initial discussion on harmful practices was held then tabled to the Governing Board and resulted in a recommendation addressing harmful practices in the region. Also prioritized as an urgent need, the issue was selected for focus at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Technical Consultation taking place in September 2013.

What separates actions and interventions related to other violence-related thematic areas mentioned above, despite definite linkages and interconnectedness, are the different drivers and root causes behind their existence and perpetrator motivations beyond culture, tradition, religion or superstition. For child labour, trafficking, sexual abuse / exploitation more specifically, these would include economic motivations or opportunities for abuse / exploitation based on power dynamics or control issues. However, vulnerability of children due to discrimination, poverty, marginalization, disability or other factors which place them at risk does have a role to play in terms of both harmful practices and other acts of violence against children. These dimensions are especially relevant for South Asia due to levels of gender inequality prevalent in the region and wide ranging diversity and inclusion issues related to caste, ethnicity, education levels, socio-economic status, migrating or displaced populations and emergency contexts which also characterize and contribute to the many challenges of South Asia.

### ***The Challenge of Child Early Marriage***

As highlighted earlier, early / forced marriage remains the most prevalent harmful practice taking place in South Asia with the region being home to more than half the world's child brides. According to UNICEF, almost half or 46% girls are married before the age of 18. 1 in 3 adolescent girls in South Asia are currently married or in union compared to 1 in 14 for the CEE/CIS region. Early marriages have lasting and damaging consequences to the health, development and well-being of these young women and compromise their right to take part in informed decisions. According to Save the Children (2010), although marriage of underage boys does take place, those most likely to experience child marriage are girls. National statistics on child marriage show that the percentage of women aged 20 – 24 who were married before age 18: 43% Afghanistan, 64% Bangladesh, 47% India, 51% Nepal, 24% Pakistan and 12% in Sri Lanka.

Often taking place due to poverty or lack of economic opportunities for girls in rural areas, these young women are viewed by the family in terms of the economic value they will bring when exchanged for goods, money or livestock or the preference for lower cost of dowry that child brides will bring. These child brides, again according to Save the Children (2010), are much more prone to experience domestic violence (and less likely to report or take action against this), have lower levels of school attendance and relegated to a lifetime of lower social status than that of their husbands. They also have less reproductive power or control and suffer higher levels of maternal morbidity and mortality, are more susceptible to sexual abuse – including non-consensual sex with their husband – which also makes them more vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections and disease.

Minimum age of marriage is not uniform in the region with some countries having higher minimum age of marriage for boys as opposed to girls. As highlighted earlier, SAIEVAC's recent efforts to ensure that all countries ensure a uniform minimum age of 18 for both boys and girls is underway.

### ***Addressing Corporal Punishment***

Although all countries in South Asia are committed to prohibiting all corporal punishment as a follow-up to the UN Study on Violence against Children Regional Consultation and the follow-up meeting in 2006, corporal punishment is still widely practiced tradition in both schools and at home across the region. Taking the form of hitting, slapping, kicking, beating, and hair pulling, these practices are often not often seen as abuse when used as form a discipline.

Use of violence is often justified by parents (and teachers) because this is the traditional form of discipline they experienced or that they are unaware of alternatives. Again reflective of the low status and societal views related to care and treatment of children,



the use of all forms of violent punishment against children in all settings, including within the home, at school, in care institutions and within the framework of the justice system, is often so deeply embedded as an adult's right and responsibility related to the upbringing or the disciplining of children, many do not even consider it an issue of concern.

### ***Additional Issues and Areas of Concern***

In addition to these two examples of harmful practices in South Asia, recent discussions taking place at the Regional NACG Consultation taking place in Male in April 2013 identified a number of other harmful practices specifically related to the South Asian context. These issues and practices were flagged as areas of concern and for further attention and discussion as partners move ahead and a number of these are highlighted below.

- **Gender discrimination, son preference and infanticide** (along with care practices and treatment of girls) (Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan (but for boys also in Sri Lanka))
- **Caste issues / discrimination** (Nepal, Pakistan, India)
- **Discrimination against disabled children or minority children** (Sri Lanka, Nepal, Afghanistan, India)
- **Girl Child Puberty Related Practices (nutritional and isolation practices)** – (Sri Lanka, Nepal and Pakistan)
- **Use of children in various religious practices and enlistment in religious institutes** (Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan – marriage to Koran / child sacrifice)
- **Dowry** (Bangladesh, Nepal and India)

Country Reports prepared in advance through national-level consultations highlight in greater detail prevailing practices within national contexts. Along with this, Technical Papers on Child Marriage and Corporal Punishment – along with other presentations, provided the opportunity to share best practices and successful approaches developed across the region including the importance of community engagement and involvement of religious or traditional leaders. Such community “influentials” – along with media - can contribute to social mobilization in support of shifting social norms towards abandonment of harmful practices. However, it has been widely acknowledged that any intervention designed to tackle these deeply engrained social norms will require multiple grassroots level actions and a serious investment of time.

### 3. Inaugural Session of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Technical Consultation

**Welcome Address - Ms. Phintsho Choden, Executive Director, National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC), Bhutan  
&  
SAIEVAC Governing Board Member**

On behalf of the Royal Government of Bhutan, Ms. Phintsho Choden, Executive Director of the National Commission of Women and Children (NCWC) of Bhutan welcomed the participants to the Consultation event. Explaining that the NCWC was the only national mechanism in place to protect the women and children of Bhutan, they were very pleased to be co-hosting the consultation together with SAIEVAC and in this regard, stand ready to provide a safe and protected environment for children so that they are able to fulfill their potential.

Emphasizing that the children of Bhutan hold an important place in the wider society of Bhutan and the Government of Bhutan had also ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) along with other international instruments and various SAARC Conventions, there is strong commitment to protect children in Bhutan. She also highlighted that enactment of the Child Care and Protection Act and the Child Adoption Act also ensures that children's rights are addressed and protected in the country.



Stating that across the region, millions of children are subjected to harmful practices and these result in devastating consequences on their health and development. She stressed that it is of highest importance that all partners come together to address and end harmful practices against children and that such conferences provide an opportunity to do this.

In closing she requested participants to open their hearts and to listen to what children themselves have to say as their views and perspectives will make a significant difference as the consultation and subsequent discussions will be about them and protecting their well-being.

## Objectives and Outcomes of Technical Consultation: Dr. Rinchen Chophel, Director General, SAIEVAC

Dr. Rinchen Chophel, Director General of the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC), then took the stage. He explained that the event of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Technical Consultation was yet another important milestone for child protection work in the region and it even more significant because it was happening in Bhutan. He further mentioned that despite the subject matter which might be sensitive and difficult, it was his hope that all participants would find easy deliberation in this Land of Happiness. Highlighting that SAIEVAC, since its inception in 2005 has addressed problems and issues which affect the children of South Asia. From 2010 SAIEVAC began functioning as a full-fledged agency and since this time had organized two other technical consultations on important themes impacting upon the lives of children.



Mentioning that all Technical Consultations were based upon previous recommendations and that the current event being held in Bhutan is an important follow-up to the last held in Colombo in Sri-Lanka, through partnerships with the South Asia Coordination and Action Group to End Violence Against Children (SACG) and SAIEVAC government mechanisms, reviews have been completed in order to inform the upcoming discussions. He stressed that in addition to reviewing practices which are harmful based on religion, culture, tradition and superstition, that discussion would also explore other practices as well while maintaining a focus on child marriage and corporal punishment in addition to linkages between these and the 5 thematic areas that SAIEVAC addresses - including the 13 different objectives that the wider SAIEVAC network strives to include in all of its work across South Asia.

Appreciating the great opportunity that the Technical Consultation presents to all, he also wanted to recognize all the contributions made by organizations, countries and individuals to strengthen SAIEVAC in moving forward to address such. Highlighting that the SAARC Secretariat had been instrumental in strengthening SAIEVAC's growth and process, he wanted to put on record his appreciation for their continued support. Additionally, one of the biggest challenges for SAIEVAC was to establish legitimacy and he went on to explain that efforts were made more meaningful through support coming from SAARC Development Fund (SDF). Further explaining that the SACG group has worked closely with Member States since 2005 and many of those who helped to initiate this movement and progress were also present at the event

including representatives from ECPAT, Save the Children, UNICEF ROSA, Plan International, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and World Vision International (WVI). He also welcomed the Regional Director of ILO who would be providing remarks on behalf of the SACG later in the program. He also stressed that National Action and Coordination Group (NACG) Chairs, also present at the event, have worked tirelessly to help strengthening national mechanisms and extended his thanks and appreciation to the Governing Board Chair from Afghanistan along with all Governing Board (GB) Members also in attendance.

Further emphasizing that one of the most important aspects of SAIEVAC is Civil Society Organization (CSO) inclusion along with child representatives who also hold seats as members of the Governing Board. Due to this, it is possible to fulfill SAIEVAC's aim of bringing together a wide range of stakeholders in order to address issues related to children. He also explained that the significance of SAIEVAC's approach is its foundation of strong child participation which incorporates children's views and places these at the center of SAIEVAC's strategies and work.

In closing he thanked the Royal Government of Bhutan, the NCWC and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFoA) and Immigration and the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affair and also Druk Air for support extended in order to host the consultation.

**Address by H.E. Wasil Noor Muhmand, Deputy Minister, MOL SMA,  
Government of Afghanistan  
Chairperson, SAIEVAC Governing Board**

Delivering an address on behalf of the Governing Board and delegates from Afghanistan, Mr. Muhmand, welcomed the group to the Technical Consultation. He further explained that it was his hope through this consultation that concrete and measurable actions to end violence against children in the region could be generated. He expressed his thanks to the Royal Government of Bhutan for providing the forum and in taking steps to end violence against children based on SAIEVAC's work-plan across the region. He reiterated his hope that violence against children will both be presented and soon eradicated from the region. Further explaining that there are more than 700 million children in South Asia which represents 55% of children in the world and out of these, some are provided with education but there remain more than 25 million who face different types of poverty, lack of education, are subject to early or forced marriage, trafficking and addiction to drugs. In addition he highlighted that internally displaced populations and migration along with health problems, sexual abuse and violence against children who are in conflict with the law are also key challenges for South Asia.



Further explaining that the cause of these problems are due to poverty, harmful practices, lack of attention in the judiciary system, lack of budget, lack of coordination between the

government and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners, along with weak parental responsibility. He stated that in order to protect children from all forms of violence and abuse which exists in the region, Member States countries need to pay more serious attention and further support child protection initiatives while continuing to advocate for child rights.

Reiterating that the duty and obligation to protect children from harm rests with all stakeholders and should be addressed through further strengthening of laws and treaties, Mr. Muhmand also emphasized the role of guardians, parents, schools, the judiciary and the media – all who have an important role to play in this regard. Raising awareness among people in communities and educating them in order to reduce poverty while at the same time addressing employment and economic problems are some of the strategies which can be used to eliminate child abuse and violence. He closed by stating that SAIEVAC, under the leadership of Dr. Rinchen Chopel, and with the cooperation of the SAARC Secretariat, Member States, the Governing Board and SACG has achieved many things during the past few years and he expressed his great appreciative for this effort. He also reiterated the commitment which the Government of Afghanistan also has to ending violence against children and that he wished participants a successful meeting that would result in achievement of positive outcomes.

### **Address by Representative of the Child Governing Board Member Ms. Rashmi Vidyani from Sri Lanka**

The Child Governing Board Member, Ms. Rashmi Vidyana from Sri Lanka who would soon be completing her tenure in this position and handing over to the new Child GB Members from Afghanistan and Bangladesh made her remarks on behalf of the Children of SAARC. She began by using her hands to speak in sign language and asked the group: "You might be wondering why I am signaling like this with my hands but this means 'Good Morning' in sign language." She first wanted to acknowledge the presence of differently-abled friends at the event who also represent children of South Asia and they are part of this consultation.



She stated that it was her privilege to be at the Consultation and to address the meeting as a child representative of the SAIEVAC Governing Board and to fulfill her role as a representative for all children of South Asia. She explained that the child participants had a very successful two-day preparatory meeting for the event where they discussed harmful traditional practices affecting children based on two prevalent problems in the region - Corporal Punishment and Child Marriage.

She went on to explain that the group came up with very valuable recommendations which will be presented later and that it was her hope that these recommendations would be taken seriously and implemented as a part of discussions on how to move ahead. She further



highlighted that in SAIEVAC, child representation is an absolutely great thing as it allows for the raising of children's voices and the sharing of their perspectives. To Dr. Rinchen, she expressed that for these child participants, the expectations are going beyond what they could imagine and that it has been like a dream coming true. Stating that together we are all marching towards success and the child participants are very pleased to talk about SAIEVAC and their involvement in SAIEVAC initiatives and plans. She closed by explaining that all participants here are working hard to make a better world for children and that each and every child needs love and affection. She further explained that all children are asking for is love, affection and attention which should be given to all children and a world where children are safe and recognized and given proper care. This was their request.

She further mentioned that because all of the participants are working hard to make a better world for children but children as well also want to join hands to make a better world for children as it is the children who are the future of this world and that all children need a safe childhood, love and attention and this is what they are waiting for. And in closing highlighted that the children strongly believe in the adults and those working on behalf of children – represent the 'Heroes' of the world.

**Address on Behalf of the SACG  
by Mr. Yoshiteru Uramoto, ILO Regional Director for Asia / Pacific**

Mr. Uramoto opened his statement by expressing his happiness to be present at the event and sincere appreciation to the Government of Bhutan for hosting the event in Bhutan. He acknowledged the hard work of SAIEVAC in organizing the Technical Consultation in collaboration with the SAARC Development Fund (SDF), SACG and NCWC and children along with support from the office of the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children (UNSRSG-VaC).

He highlighted that it was great to see the growing voice of children as part of the process and commended SAIEVAC in its work in moving to end violence against children in South Asia in location or setting.

Reiterating that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Technical Consultation which will focus on harmful practices and especially on corporal punishment and child marriage was very important as when compared globally, more than any other region, almost half the world's child marriages occurs in South Asia. He also mentioned that in the first decade of new millennium, more than 24 million had their childhoods terminated as they became child brides before the age of 18 years and that another 130 million will also suffer the same fate if the trend continues. Stating that corporal punishment is another form of violence which is pervasive across South Asia, it continues with wide social acceptance and takes place in schools, homes, workplace, and in communities in large.



Explaining that harmful practices are interwoven in a mesh of violence which regenerate again and again and continue on in a harmful cycle, he shared his view that child marriage is no longer is based on tradition or culture values, but instead is caused by poverty and exploitation and can link to sexual exploitation and trafficking. Such violence on immature children leaves a permanent and a lasting scar on them and that these children should be under the protection of their parents and families. Further explaining that we now live in one of the most fast-growing and economically strong regions but there are continued problems with trafficking and child labor. Noting that South Asia has high number of child laborers and that this needs to be addressed through coordinated efforts and by working with partners such as SACG, SAIEVAC and SAARC to strengthen both systems and structures for social protection and skills training.

He further mentioned the need for access to data and research as key to monitoring progress and tracking results and highlighted that information communication technology (ICT) can also be an innovative way to support monitoring and contribute to recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration of children with their families.

In closing he stated that momentum had been achieved in all countries and that he remains confident in the coming months that SAIEVAC will be further strengthened as a regional forum for children through the expert team providing guidance and by working with children themselves. We also commented that we should all look forward to preparatory work completed by both NACGs and children in support this event and further reiterated that as these mechanisms are being established and continually strengthened, that we now also need the courage of the children and that the SACG remains fully committed to support the partnership and process in order to achieve this vision.

**Address by Mr. Karma, Chief Executive Officer  
SAARC Development Fund (SDF)**

Mr. Karma opened his remarks to the group by offering solidarity from the SAARC Development Fund (SDF) to the children of SAARC and explaining that through funding commitments to the cause activities and actions on behalf of children are now taking place. He further explained that as a parent himself, he finds it natural to want to protect children as they grow and mature but that in reality, many children are falling by the side and that we also start to worry about our own. Stating also that there is something incomplete related to the whole process of looking after children and asked whether or not this is due to gender inequalities.

Further asking if there enough mothers who are involved in making laws, overseeing institutions, and working in leadership roles, he stated that perhaps there is need for further address the role of women in these processes. Also noting that despite there being many child labor and legal frameworks in our countries, we are not yet able to put this



right and that in some South Asia societies there are also caste issues which we are also grappling with and which also have an impact on the girl child.

Explaining that the SDF holds firm its commitment to protecting children and both SAARC and National Committees have been able to put funding to good use. He also highlighted that the SDF is now two and half years old and has funded projects worth 64 million dollars out of which 48 million is dedicated to efforts concerning women and children. In addition he also stated that there are projects supported for newborn care in all countries (17 million provided) due to the South Asia Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) being very high and there is need to support better care for these very young children. Additional projects funded also include water, sanitation and hygiene and that the SDF is also dedicated to working together with other international non-government organizations (INGOs) so that resources can be combined and contribute to wider impact.

In closing he offered his sincere appreciation to those who have dedicated their life and work on behalf of children because they are the future and that on behalf of the SDF, he also reaffirmed support to the children of SAARC and those working on behalf of children. Welcoming participants to Bhutan, he wished the group a wonderful, productive discussion.

**Video Message to the Consultation Delegates  
by Ms. Maria Santos Paris, Special Representative of the UN  
Secretary General on Violence Against Children**

*As Ms. Maria Santos Paris, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Violence against (UN SRSG-Vac) could not attend the consultation due to other pressing commitments she recorded a video message to share with the participants. Highlights from her message are as follow.*

As I am here attending the UN General Assembly taking place in New York, I would like to convey to you warm greetings and best wishes and let you know that I have been following your work with special interest and would like to reaffirm my support. I salute your decision to place harmful practices at the heart of your agenda for this consultation. We have developed a study on harmful practices which will be presented in greater detail including key aspects of harmful practices hampering children's development and which lead to devastating consequences, so promoting awareness and discussion around harmful practices is particularly important.

Our study addresses deeply rooted social processes, fears and other factors which contribute to harmful practices. It urges all states to prohibit by law all forms of violence against children including harmful practices. Despite this call, this is not yet a reality and many harmful practices persist. In countries with poor legal systems, there are additional complexities.

During the past decade many reflections and discussions about the consequences of harmful practices have been taken place and it is now understood that grass root mobilization processes have paved the way to change these practices and prevent them in the future. The study will be supportive for your future work and highlights the role of legislation in addressing these



practices - along the engagement of other influential community members. In addition, a number of other recommendations are also provided:

- New or existing legislation should be introduced or further strengthened in order to address harmful practices;
- Establishment of effective accountability mechanisms to address those accountable is also required;
- Universal registration is necessary to address early marriage and factors; and.
- Finally consolidation of research and data must be strengthened and further supported in order to inform legislation and policy action.

Real change can only happen when all stakeholders take an active part in social change, helping to preserve positive practices while promoting abandonment of those which compromise child rights.

I am confident that your discussions will be very valuable and contribute towards addressing harmful practices in both South Asia and globally. Children also need to be aware of their rights and support the process and there is need to develop materials which children can use and understand.

We have just published a child-friendly version of the Optional Protocol of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC). I am confident that you will help us to disseminate this publication in your countries and with translating it into local languages so that a wide variety of readers can access this.

I wish you a very successful meeting in Bhutan.

## **Launch of the Report “Violating Children’s Rights: Harmful Practices based on Tradition, Culture, Religion and Superstition”**

Following the video message, re-launching of the report by the International NGO Council on Violence Against Children was completed by the Chief Guest, Hon’ble Lyonpo Damchoe Dorji, Minister of Home and Cultural Affairs, Government of Bhutan. Electronic versions of the report were made available to all participants.



**Chief Guest, H. E. Lyonpo Damchoe Dorji**  
**Minister of Home and Cultural Affairs, Royal Government of Bhutan**

Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

South Asia is home to 700 million children and also 35% of the world's poor. The children of the region face great levels of vulnerability to violence due to the diversity of our region – including caste, ethnicity, religious beliefs and disability – which many a times prevents them from access to protective and other social services. Violence is also exacerbated when children lack protection from family or care-givers due to natural disasters or conflict which is also common to our region.



Harmful practices based on tradition, culture, religion and superstition result in many different forms of violence and harm to children - including physical, mental, sexual and emotional - but are often also very difficult to address. While legislation provides the critical foundation to protect children, in order to achieve greater understanding and awareness to stimulate social change, legislation needs to be supported by additional efforts including public information an awareness campaigns, collective discussions involving community members and influential leaders, capacity building of professionals that work directly with children and prevention and response strategies.

In South Asia, child marriage rates are second highest in the world: 46% of women between the ages of 20-24 are first married or in union before they are 18 years old and 18%of these are married or in union before they are 15 years of age. Child marriage results in many adverse physical, psycho-social and health effects on girls and impedes their overall development and well-being.

Similarly, as we all know, around 95% of the world's total child population resides in countries where they are not protected from all forms of corporal punishment and 29.3% of these live in South Asia. Negative effects of corporal punishment impact upon children's human dignity and social-emotional as well as physical health. Research also indicates that it produces long-term negative consequences including increased aggression, slower cognitive development, increased school drop-out and damaged family relations. No state can pretend that it has an effective child protection system while its laws and social attitudes still authorize and accept violent punishment of children. However, we can take pride in our efforts and progress made to

address violence against children and early work related to exploring and addressing harmful practices in the region. South Asian governments have come together to create the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) which continues to highlight these challenges and issues. Also guided by the SAARC Convention on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia (2002), focus is placed on five thematic areas – two of which represent common harmful practices of South Asia – child marriage and corporal punishment.

Therefore, the organizing and hosting of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Technical Consultation specifically exploring Harmful Practices Affecting Children Based on Tradition, Culture, Religion and Superstition with the Theme “In Solidarity with the Children of SAARC” is an excellent opportunity to share regional learning and promote best strategies and practices. The recent joint SAIEVAC and SAARCLAW conference also taking place in Bhutan on, “Child Protection and Constitutionalism – Securing the Future” where Chief Justices, members of the judiciary, lawyers, law students and other international and national partners came together to highlight achievements and address continued challenges related to protection of children also contributed to initiating discussion on harmful practices here in South Asia.

Bhutan has always cared for and strived to protect its children. From His Majesty the Fourth King’s vision of “nurturing the youth of today as the future of tomorrow”, His Majesty and the Royal Government have recognized that children ensure the “very survival of the Bhutanese society”. Reflecting this commitment, the Royal Government of Bhutan, putting words into action, positioned Bhutan as one of the first countries in the world to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) on 1 August 1990.

The Royal Government has also placed children at the centre of Bhutan’s development agenda within the framework of Gross National Happiness. The Government allocates an average 23 percent of the annual budget to education and 11 percent to health services to ensure the survival and development of children. Over the years, and especially with ratification of the CRC, Bhutan has come to address issues related to children’s protection such as corporal punishment in school, child labor, children in conflict with law and trafficking.

The Royal Government of Bhutan has been making tremendous efforts towards protecting and upholding the rights and wellbeing of children and women through various social and economic programmes and by adopting several global policies. To have a single agency coordinate all matters related to the well-being of Bhutanese women and children, the government established the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) in 2004, granting it full autonomy in August 2008. Besides providing a forum for receiving and investigating violations of rights of women and children, the NCWC also coordinates and monitors implementing activities under the CRC, the Convention on Elimination of Discriminations against Women (CEDAW), and other relevant treaties. The establishment of NCWC has been crucial step towards developing a solid foundation from which to launch a protection response for both women and children.

Despite these achievements, it is increasingly clear that more action is required to protect children in Bhutan from violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect. Due to new challenges associated with modernization, increased media influence, urbanization, diminishing job

opportunities, and the changing family structure within Bhutan, new risks are emerging for the children of Bhutan.

Recognizing these facts, the rights of children are more specifically upheld under Article 9 (18) of the Constitution where it is stated that: "The State shall endeavor to take appropriate measures to ensure that children are protected against all forms of discrimination and exploitation including trafficking, prostitution, abuse, violence, degrading treatment, and economic exploitation."

The passing of the Child Care and Protection Act (CCPA) (2011) by the Parliament of Bhutan is perhaps Bhutan's most significant achievement to date in protecting children: the legislation provides a framework for a comprehensive national child protection system whilst reflecting much of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in national legislation." The CCPA is the first act of its kind in Bhutan to deal exclusively with the care and protection of children in conflict with law and children in difficult circumstances. Enactment of the Act was an important step towards building a comprehensive child protection system in Bhutan.

Accordingly, the Penal Code of Bhutan 2004 was also amended in 2011 to include stronger penalties for offenses committed against children and also raised the age of criminal responsibility for children from 10 years to 12 years. The amended Marriage Act 1996 established the legal age of marriage for both boys and girls as 18 years and defined the age of sexual consent as 16 years.

The National Youth Policy (NYP) was launched this year to "to provide a broad framework for youth engagement that endeavors to ensure that all young men and women are provided with support and meaningful opportunities to reach their full potential as they actively participate in society". The NYP addresses major concerns and issues critical for Bhutanese youth and gives direction to youth programmes and services provided by governmental and non-governmental organizations.

The Parliament of Bhutan also passed the Child Adoption Act of Bhutan in 2012 during its 8<sup>th</sup> Session. The Act will ensure that adoptions are made in the best interest of the child and provide for procedures and mechanisms to facilitate monitoring the wellbeing of children and to prevent the abduction, sale, or trafficking of children. The Domestic Violence Prevention Act 2013 which was recently passed by the National Assembly in 2013 will help to close the existing gaps in our systems for promoting and protecting the rights of women, especially the victims of domestic violence. The Labour and Employment Act of 2007 regulates child labour through the minimum age of employment at 18 years of age, although children between ages of 13-17 years are allowed to undertake light work under certain conditions following registration with the Ministry of Labour and Employment.

Today, as I stand here, I must applaud the Governing Board and members of SAIEVAC for the continued work on eliminating harmful practices affecting children in Asia and the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) and its partners for undertaking numerous initiatives in combating harmful traditional practices. Besides framing legislations and developing policies to protect the rights of women and children, the NCWC has embarked upon an aggressive advocacy campaign in terms of sensitization programs, development of films and documentaries on the issues and IEC materials.

Lastly, I wish the consultative meeting on Eliminating Harmful Practices Affecting Children in South Asia organized by the SAIEVAC Regional Secretariat (SRS) a fruitful discussion. I also wish the delegates a warm welcome to Bhutan and a happy stay in Thimphu.

Thank you and Tashi Delek!

**Vote of Thanks**  
**by Deki Dema, SAIEVAC Coordinator, Bhutan**

On behalf of the Royal Government of Bhutan, I am happy to offer the vote of thanks.

We would like to sincerely thank Lyonpo for delivering the Key Note Address despite of his busy schedule. This illustrates Bhutan's commitment to working on behalf of the children of Bhutan and to all the other SAARC delegates for addressing this issue across the region.

Also I would like to express thanks to Dr. Rinchen Chopel, Director General, SAIEVAC, for his continued support to address harmful practices. We all are inspired by your dedication to work for the children of the region.

Special thanks also goes to the children amongst is today and their chaperones and we hope that you will take back what you have learned to share with others in your home countries. Also want to thank the Child Participation Action Group (CPAG) as well as both the team from the SAIEVAC Regional Secretariat and the NCWC for making this event come to life and reality for all.

Thank you.



## 5. Working Session of the Technical Consultation – 26 September 2013

### Opening Remarks, Selection of Chair and Co-chair and Review / Adoption of the Agenda Dr. Rinchen Chopel, Director General, SAIEVAC

Following the close of the Inaugural Session of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Technical Consultation, Dr. Rinchen Chopel, SAIEVAC, Executive Director, addressed participants with regard to nominating the Chairperson and Co-chair for the working days of the Technical Consultation. It was unanimously agreed that Bhutan as the host of the country, would take over these responsibilities. Aum Phintsho Choden, Director, NCWC and SAIEVAC Governing Board (GB) Member would serve as Chair and Mr. Muhammad Hassan Mangi, SAIEVAC Coordinator, Pakistan would support as Co-chair for the Consultation.



#### Brief Statement from the Chairperson – Aum Phintsho Choden

Once again welcoming everyone to Bhutan she expressed that it was her hope that the Technical Consultation would unfold as a productive meeting that would hopefully result in generation of a common understanding in support of achieving objectives. She invited all participants to participate actively and to take advantage of the forum and common platform so that at the end of the two days of deliberations, all would be satisfied with the results of discussions.

She then invited the first speaker to move ahead with the technical presentation.

### Defining and Addressing Harmful Practices Affecting Children Based on Tradition, Culture, Religion and Superstition Mr. Rasa Sekulovic, Child Protection Advisor, Plan International, Asia Regional Office

Mr. Sekulovic opened by stating that the consultation was a revolutionary step to open the discussion on the very sensitive topic of harmful practices. He explained that he would like to present key terms and concepts related to harmful practices and that this information was based on two reports – the SRSR and Plan International’s “Protecting Children from Harmful Practices



in Plural Legal Systems” and the INGO



Advisory Council on Violence Against Children’s “Violating Children’s Rights: Harmful Practices based on Tradition, Culture, Religion and Superstition.

He further explained that both reports are very important and in the future, there will also be child friendly versions of these reports as well.

He also stated that he hoped his presentation would help to increase commitment, intensify joint efforts and offer a proposed way forward as an initial consideration for South Asia (**For his complete presentation, please refer to Annex 1 – Day 1 Technical Presentations**).

Further elaborating on the topic, he highlighted that key aspects of the harmful practices include discrimination against groups of children, some based on tradition or superstitious, religion or based of false information and that many involve physical violence and pain or mental violence. He reiterated that all are an assault on children’s human dignity and violate universally agreed Human Right standards but despite this, they are often imposed on very young children which includes the assumption of parental power over children and allows preparation of these practices but instead, from the right based perspective. In order to address this dimension, he explained that the focus should instead be on parental responsibilities and application of the concept of “the best interest of the child”. Furthermore, all harmful practices affect children’s survival and overall development and comprise the ability to realize other rights.

In addition, he stated that such practices go against various human right treaties, bodies and standards but remain pervasive and are often socially condoned. He further mentioned that the UN study presented a range of strategic recommendations to prevent and respond to all forms of violence and especially it urged states to prohibit all forms of violence against children. Mentioning that the SAARC Convention on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia (2002) stands in contrast to the reality of child marriage in the region.

In closing he highlighted critical challenges which must be faced and include inconsistencies in legal regulations, lack of awareness, uneven capacity to address child rights violations, lack of gender perspective and sensitivities and defensiveness associated with this. Further stating that the Technical Consultation provides a unique opportunity to engage and work together in joint efforts and actions which could include under-taking a complete mapping of existing mechanisms and to strengthen legal provisions to prohibit the practices. He also highlighted that there was need to raise awareness and strengthen commitment to prevent and eliminate harmful practices and that the SRSO office would assist with this further contributing to global efforts

## Initiatives to Support the Abandonment of Harmful Practices around the World

Ms. Saana Kaki, Representative, UN SRSG – VaC Office

Ms. Kaki then began her presentation by asking the group why legislation was so important. She highlighted that the SRSG had identified the legal prohibition of all forms of violence as one of her three priorities and the critical role of legislation is to ensure children's rights and provide guidance about what is permitted and not permitted, what is acceptable and not acceptable in terms of treatment of children. She went on to explain that harmful practices comprise the enjoyment of fundamental human rights and hamper children's development and education while also often resulting in serious and long-term health and psychological consequences and in some cases, lead to disability and death.



She went on to explain that prohibition by law is not yet a reality despite general legislation available on assault or bodily injury but that this is rarely used or enforced as related to different harmful practices. In addition, she mentioned that distinct pieces of legislation and plural legal systems complicate the interpretation of law. She emphasized that both legal reform and awareness-raising including participatory social mobilization processes should go hand in hand in order to address these challenging issues. She further highlighted that the legal process also provides an opportunity to involve communities and religious leaders, parliamentarians, professional associations, academic institutions, grass-roots organizations and so as legislation is a foundation or an expression of states' accountability and commitment **(For her complete presentation, please refer to [Annex 1 – Day 1 Technical Presentations](#))**

Further reiterating that the involvement of community members help to avoid stigmatization and social exclusion and by working with communities can help members to understand and address the social dynamics behind deeply rooted traditions. In addition, she further mentioned that and social mobilization processes can result in communities' empowerment to promote the abandonment of harmful practices. And finally she stressed the importance of children's education on their rights and that learning around human rights should be included as both of formal and informal school curricula.

In defining the way forward, the presenter highlighted that clear legislation legitimizes efforts by national authorities and civil society organizations and provides an indispensable underpinning for other measures designed to promote and support the abandonment of harmful practices. She further mentioned that law reform should be an on-going process which offers a strategic platform to involve and engage communities, families, religious leaders, parliamentarians, professional associations, academic institutions and grass-root organizations, including children's group and organizations and that community level interventions are crucial in order to avoid stigmatization and marginalization of victims. Also this can address the social dynamics



behind entrenched traditions, consider opportunities for change and provide support to those communities in their efforts to abandon harmful practices.

**Outcomes of the Preparatory Meeting of the Child Governing Board  
Members and Observers: Representative of the Child GB members  
Mr. Anmol Mittal (India) and Ms. Rabiya Noori (Afghanistan)**

Next, the two Child Governing Board Members / Observers presented their work from a two-day preparatory meeting and Children's Consultation on harmful practices in Bhutan. Explaining that they worked to learn about and define harmful practices, they also considered the types of impact these had on children (include physical, emotional and psychological). The children's group then prioritized key practices from South Asia and developed recommendations to addressing these although these would depend on specific environments.

Key practices identified and considered included the following:

- Corporal Punishment
- Child Marriage
- Child Labor
- Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (including night-hunting)
- Child Trafficking
- Preferences for Boy Children

Recommendations to address harmful practices also presented by the children's group included the following:

- That the government should create services at grass-roots level (services such as school, health, security, counseling etc., for needy families);
- Awareness raising programs should be implemented at community level (emphasizing the roles of child clubs, government, social organizations and media);
- Educate people (through use of other community members who have understanding on the issues, government, social organizations);
- Children should be involved in the decision making process (through organizations working with children and establishment of children's forums to address all violence against children);



- Develop good laws and ensure its implications (role of government)
- Respect the views / ideas of children (for parents, teachers and civil society organizations); and,
- Media should contribute to raising awareness against all harmful practices

Additional focus and discussion was placed on the topic of both child marriage and corporal punishment and key points related to discussion and perspectives are highlighted below.

Related to child marriage in South Asia, the children noted that there were different ages which define the age of a child and that there are also differences in the age for male and female children. Pointing out that irrespective of what the domestic laws state, the children's group felt that all governments in South Asia should align and share the same standards related to defining child marriage.

They also explained that they discussed child marriage related issues as such giving away girls in order to compensate their family debt or solve family disputes or to reduce the economic burden. They also noted that in order to produce more children for help with farm work, they are married off early and for the group felt that the concerning issue was related to the dowry pressure. With regard to stopping child marriage, the children's group posed a series of recommendations for governments, INGO / NGOs / Social Workers, civil society organizations, community members and children themselves.

Additional discussion points and recommendations were also given to address continued use of corporal punishment (**For their complete presentation, please refer to Annex 1 – Day 1 Technical Presentations**).

One of the discussion points was raised by a young man from Bhutan who attends the Drugyal Lower Secondary School as a deaf student being mainstreamed into regular classrooms. He noted that students were confused as to whether or not they should be integrated or kept separate and wanted to know how other countries address or manage this.

It was also pointed out that exclusion of children who are differently able is also a harmful practice and that there is a global movement for inclusive education but it depends on different things and level of abilities but efforts to involve children who are differently-able should be encouraged. As all children have the same right to education, participation and so on and adults have the responsibility to address this. However, it was also mentioned that this issue should be approached in a cautious way to ensure there are services and capacities available and it was further suggested that maybe one of the next Technical Consultations should focus on children with disabilities or who are differently-abled.



**Technical Paper on Corporal Punishment: “Prohibition and  
Eliminating Corporal Punishment and Other Cruel and Humiliating  
Forms of Punishment of Children”  
Mr. Laxman Belbase, Save the Children**

Mr. Laxman Belbase, from Save the Children, began by explaining that there are plans to develop a technical paper on this topic and once completed, it would be circulated to all. Highlighting that about 80-98% of the world’s children experience physical punishment in their homes, another 54.70% of the global child population continues to live in countries where they are not legally protected from corporal punishment in schools.

He further explained that the UN CRC provides a specific definition of corporal punishment but many still ask why addressing this remains important. Going on to state, he explained that people are often puzzled why ending corporal punishment is a priority but in addressing this issue, we are challenging is not just one category of violence but all children’s rights to be respected, shown human dignity and protected in terms of their physical integrity. He also highlighted that the children of SAARC countries also developed their own definition – adults using violence to control children.



Reiterating that the CRC obligates ratifying States to uphold children’s physical integrity and dignity, it also calls for the eliminations of all forms of violence against children, including physical punishment. Further elaborating, on the list of harmful practices, there is emphasis on the high prevalence of all forms of corporal punishments and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment and that this continues to be a matter of global concern. In addition, he further highlighted that the SAARC Convention on Regional Arrangement for the Promotion of Child Welfare (2002) envisages facilitating the development of the full potential of the South Asian child and reaffirms the conviction that children in South Asia deserve urgent focused attention.

Mr. Belbase went on to explain that there is growing general consensus that use of physical or emotional punishment is not in the best interest of the child and that research now demonstrates negative development outcomes related to using physical punishment. He also mentioned, however, that there is also good news in that 34 states globally have achieved prohibition of corporal punishment in all settings. In addition, governments in 18 states have made public commitments to enacting prohibition in all settings and here in South Asia that includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

He further stated that continued work associated with legal reform needs to send a clear message that NO violence against child is acceptable and that accountability towards children, is everyone's responsibility and that legal reform is NOT about prosecuting more parents but related to sending clear message and providing an education to and most importantly, ensuring that all children are given the opportunity to survive and thrive. **(For Laxman's complete presentation, please refer to Annex 1 – Day 1 Technical Presentations).**

One issue raised in discussion following his presentation concerned capacity development on alternative forms of discipline. Laxman further explained that related to capacity building, SAIEVAC has a plan to develop a curriculum on positive discipline which can be shared with all partners as well. And in address a last comment related to the various settings which children experience violence, that there is need to both insist and ensure that there is no excuse or reasons why corporal punishment cannot be eliminated in all settings. That all levels and situations must be targeted and even in situations where parents are in difficult circumstances so strategies must be as diverse as the groups we engage with. This is the duty of all stakeholders – not just the government – but all segments of society as well.



## **6. Day 2 Technical Presentations – 27 September 2013**

Leading off the second day of the Chair and Co-Chair welcomed delegates again and reviewed a slightly revised agenda. Dr. Rinchen Chopel, Director General, SAIEVAC also requested participants to observe a minute of silence in respect and honor for those who had recently lost their lives in an earthquake in southwestern Pakistan and which struck just a few days earlier.

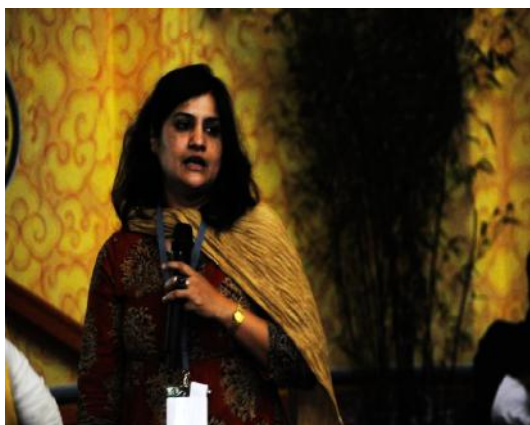


Key note presentations then began with a review of the Technical Paper which focused on Child Marriage in South Asia.

### **“Child Marriage in South Asia: Realities, Responses And the Way Forward”**

**Ms. Tanushree Soni, Regional Gender Program Specialist, Plan  
International India and Ms. Shobana Boyle, UNFPA India**

The presentation began with speaker’s highlighting that South Asia has the highest Child Marriage prevalence globally and noting that among the eight SAARC countries, Bangladesh has



highest numbers leading 66.20%, followed by Nepal with 51% and India with 47.4%. Maldives records the least at 3.9%. Further explaining these countries and considered “hot spot” countries in the region, they also noted that child marriage is more common in rural areas compared to urban settings.

Further explaining that enforcement of legislation is very weak despite countries having standard mechanisms based on human rights standards and the legal age for marriage in South Asia does not follow international standards with some countries having lower age ranges along with differences between boys and girls – so there are also differences in the illegal age of marriage as well. They further highlighted that the impact on girls is more inter-generational and also involves lower age ranges than for boys.



The team mentioned that causal factors associated with child marriage must be seen in an integrated manner as the issue is driven by inter-related set issues and factors. Gender discrimination and poverty are two of the leading factors but another leading cause is related to protection of a girl's or family's honour and control of sexuality. Further highlighting that dowry and bride price are also linked to younger age as the cost or price decreases with younger age. Limited education possibilities are also another dimension and the moment girls' transfer from primary to secondary school there is often a huge gap in continuation of education due to distance and possible violence on the way to schools and parents' concerns influence them toward marriage instead. Additional external factors also mentioned included weak enforcement of legislation and instability resulting from either natural disasters or conflict may push families to marry daughters in order to gain relief from immediate problems encountered.



The speakers then addressed consequences associated with child marriage which includes the following, violation of children's rights and robbing girls of their childhood, hampering of girls' education, poverty and low value which equal minimal investment in girls, increased teen pregnancy with poor maternal and child health outcomes. They noted that those between 15 – 19 years of age are twice as likely (and those under 15 give times more likely) to die due to maternal causes. In addition these girls and young women face increased vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases, have little access to health information, protection, and services, face increased vulnerability due to abuse or domestic violence and are twice more likely to report being beaten, slapped or threatened (India). Presenters also highlighted social isolation and limited access to support networks due to reduced mobility which decreases their quality of life.

Further explaining that for the countries included in the study, both desk based research and other reviews / interviews were completed in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Investigation dimensions explored minimum age of marriage, punitive actions to prohibit child marriage, validity of child marriage, birth and marriage registration and national plans and strategies to address child marriage across South Asia. A series of recommendations was also presented based on study findings and these included the following:

- Foster enabling legal and policy environments;
- Enhance accessibility and quality of education for girls;
- Promote life-skills education and reproductive and sexual health education and services;
- Invest in programmes that economically empower girls and women;
- Enhance safety of public spaces for women and empower girls with information and skills;

- Engage further with men and boys; and,
- Address the needs of married girls.

**For more detailed information and the complete presentation made by the speakers, please see Annex 2 – Day 2 Technical Presentations at the end of the report document.**

**The Child Protection Initiative of the Baltic Sea States  
Ms. Turid Heidberg, Head of Child Protection Unit**

Ms. Turid Heidberg, Head of the Child Protection Unit then shared experiences related to a new Child Protection Initiative established within the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and very much based on the SAIEVAC regional model. She explained that the Council of Baltic Sea States, which is an inter-governmental organization, was established in 1992 in response to the geopolitical changes taking place in the region.



In 1996, the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation recommended that regional cooperation also include children’s issues and in response to this, in 2002, the establishment of a Children’s Unit within the Secretariat was also completed.

She also highlighted some of the newer initiatives that the Secretariat is also trying to address such online abuse, early intervention and response mechanisms and care facilities which are being strengthened and supported through various interventions – the team is also providing capacity building and support to a variety of professionals – and they’ve set up a very comprehensive website which features information about meetings, projects and upcoming events.

In closing, Turid also mentioned on-going challenges which they are facing in their region. These include the need for more and increased children’s participation, closer cooperation with national level actors, higher prioritization for and close cooperation with political leadership, the need to build additional awareness on children’s rights in wider society and higher visibility globally of work and achievements in the region.

She also requested stronger linkages between to the two regions and with global initiatives so that there is increased understanding with regard to the inter-dependence of the situation of children especially related to child protection issues such as trafficking and migration which also bring the two regions together.

**For more detailed information and the complete presentation made by the speaker please see Annex 2 – Day 2 Technical Presentations at the end of the report document.**

As a follow up request to strengthened regional collaboration, Dr. Rinchen expressed his excitement to see a new regional initiative in place and supported the creation of the network to better link regional movements and mechanisms. In addition, Rasa from Plan International also

described similar initiatives in the ASEAN region but mentioned that the first would be to organization an ASEAN conference in order to generate good will and ensure that key actors are involved and supportive. Here he also mentioned that SAIEVAC would also have an important role to play through sharing of both positive experiences and pitfalls encountered along with way.

## **“Untying the Knot: Exploring Early Marriage in Bangladesh” Mr. Chandan Gomes, World Vision Bangladesh**

Mr. Chandan Gomes from World Vision Bangladesh then shared findings of research on child marriage conducted by World Vision in three countries across the globe. .

Highlighting that every year, 13.5 million girls around the world marry before their eighteenth birthday and based on current trends, 142 million additional girls will be married by 2020. He



further reiterated that early marriage is a global problem which cuts across all countries, cultures, religions and ethnicities. World Vision UK had recently completed research in fragile contexts especially in three countries – Bangladesh, Somaliland and Niger (which faced a variety of man-made and natural disasters). The research focused in particular on girls who marry below the age of 15 when consequences of early marriage are most harmful.

Further explaining that almost half of the world’s girls who marry before 18 years live in South Asia and Bangladesh has the world’s third highest rate of child marriage. 66% of girls marry before the legal age of 18, while 32% marry before the age of 15 (UNICEF, 2012).

Key findings from the study included:

- Poverty / dowry was the most widely cited cause of child marriage;
- Lack of education / school drop-out also contribute this – with a 2010 study by Save the Children Bangladesh finding that 72% of girls drop out of secondary level education as a direct result of early marriage;
- Child marriage is a deeply entrenched cultural tradition stretching back centuries and girls are quite simply seen as an unproductive economic ‘burden’ and many believe, albeit mistakenly, that Islamic teachings require marriage of girls at puberty;
- Birth registration or the lack of this means that the ages of the couple to be married can easily be falsified by parents, children and the marriage registrar;
- Lack of awareness of parents, *kazi* (marriage registrar), fathers leads to negative health and protection consequences; and finally,



- In some cases even girls and boys themselves were also frequently cited as a cause of child marriage (insisting on this).

Chandan then shared a number of follow up and response actions taken by WVI which included both creating awareness in the community about the serious nature and consequences of harmful traditional practices, educating young people – especially girls about their right to refuse early marriage and engagement of religious and community leaders to stop abductions and child marriages as they contribute to increased maternal mortality rates.

He also posed a number of key recommendations and highlighted the following:

- Harmful practices must be addressed holistically (socially, economically, from a health and education perspective, etc);
- Mainstream early marriage issues into education, maternal health and other programs to improve existing outcomes and to tackle the harmful impacts of early marriage;
- Use behavioral change communication to improve health conditions and contribute to prevention;
- Integrate cultural based health support systems through use of “cultural brokers”; and,
- Strengthen advocacy / policy oriented research along with technical cooperation.

**For more detailed information and the complete presentation made by the speaker, please see Annex 2 – Day 2 Technical Presentations at the end of the report document.**

**Any Other Issues – Opening Up the Floor**  
**Dr. Rinchen Chopel, Director General, SAIEVAC**

Dr. Chopel then led discussion with the group on several follow up issues providing updates and plans for moving ahead.

With regard to past discussion on **Faith Based Initiatives**, he explained that a draft document had been prepared and soon will be circulated to Member States in order to gain feedback and additional comments as part of the finalization process. He also requested that if any of the participants had relevant initiatives or examples of collaborations, if these could be shared for inclusion in the document – along with both – successes and challenges, it would be appreciated and these could be collected and forwarded through NACG chairs.

**Prioritizing Adolescents in Policy and Programmes on VaC:** This is another topic which has been on SAARC agenda for quite some time and a policy dialogue was held in Kathmandu earlier this month from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> September. Unfortunately Dr. Chopel was not able to attend

but he did have the chance to discuss with the SAARC Director. It was mentioned that he did want to flag this topic and introduce it at the Technical Consultation so that it is on the agenda and that participants know that SAIEVAC and SAARC will be further exploring how they can work together on this.

Dr. Chophel also took the opportunity to introduce the **South Asia Report on the Child-friendliness of Governments** and while not a SAIEVAC initiative or document, there were a number of colleagues here today who did contribute to the report. It is a good report and for those interested, Turid would share copies of it and participants are invited to improve upon it by further contributing additional thoughts or information. He requested that attendees do so by directly contacting her on this.

## **Review of Technical Consultation Outcome Recommendations Dr. Rinchen Chophel, Director General, SAIEVAC**

Based on discussions and suggestions offered during the two-day Consultation, the SRS put together a draft version of 11 or 12 recommendations for review and consideration by the wider participant group. Dr. Rinchen presented these and then also noted down comments and feedback.

He further highlighted that there should be understanding that these are regional recommendations and specific in order to and follow up on on-going while at the same time, initiatives. He then recommendations would input and feedback group and then the recommendations would SAIEVAC Governing their further consideration and approval. Once approved, the recommendations would be share with all



these are regional some must be quite address, build upon work and activities also include new explained the be revised based on received from the revised be tabled to the Board Members for

Please find a copy of the revised Technical Consultation Recommendations on the next page of the report.

## **7. Recommendations from the 3rd Technical Consultation on Harmful Practices**

**“In Solidarity with the Children of SAARC”  
3<sup>rd</sup> Technical Consultation  
Eliminating Harmful Practices Affecting Children in South Asia  
Dates: 25- 27 September 2013**

Hosted by the Royal Government of Bhutan  
Organized by the SAIEVAC Regional Secretariat  
Supported by the South Asia Coordinating Group on Action against Violence against Children (SACG),  
the SAARC Development Fund (SDF),  
In Collaboration with the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against  
Children (SRSG-VaC)

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**DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Introduction**

The 3rd SAIEVAC Technical Consultation (TC) on the theme of 'Eliminating Harmful Practices Affecting Children in South Asia based on Tradition, Religion, Culture and Superstition' was convened in Thimphu Bhutan from the 25-27th of September 2013.

The Key Objectives are to:

1. Review measures taken and concrete results achieved by Member States in addressing harmful practices;
2. Promote learning through exchange of experiences and sharing of best practices;
3. Strengthen children's participation in their own protection and in relevant decisions affecting them; and,
4. Formulate recommendations to strengthen the commitment and accountability of South Asian Governments and relevant actors to end harmful practices.

Key Outputs include:

1. Regional recommendations on addressing harmful practices informed by national action plans and country-specific experiences;

2. Outcome document generated outlining additional harmful practices, gaps and actions / efforts / approaches required to address these practices in order to further strengthen key stakeholder's commitment and responsibility in ending violence against children;
3. Learning, knowledge sharing and documentation from South Asia context contributed towards strengthening global efforts and progress on combating violence against children.

The Consultation was preceded by a one and half days Preparatory Meeting of the Child Governing Board Members and Observers.

Around 105 delegates attended the Consultation, which includes SAIEVAC Governing Board Members, Child GB and Observers, Coordinators, NACG Representatives and Representatives from the SAARC Secretariat, SDF, SAARCLAW, SACG, UN SRSG-VaC.

The Technical Consultation, after deliberating extensively on the different agenda items tabled for its consideration, which included technical discussion papers, Children's Report as well as reports on the thematic areas from the 8 Member States recommends that:

1. Recognizing the urgent need to address harmful practices that affect children, calls for increased commitment of all the key stakeholders including the political machinery of the SAARC Member States to reinforce effective implementation strategies of polices and plans;
2. The SAIEVAC Regional Secretariat (SRS) review the country presentations made and identify key challenges and proposed recommendations so as to ensure adequate follow up;
3. Appropriate and innovative approaches be adopted to strengthen national mechanisms which includes the NACGs to reinforce their capacity to institute service provision in relation to prevention, protection, response and recovery;
4. The on-going research work being undertaken by the SRS on Corporal Punishment take into consideration the information presented by the Member States in their country reports to update the existing information used by SRS for different materials/publications;
5. Documentation of regional positive caring practices for children which can build on/contribute towards addressing harmful practices and social norms including inter-generational dimensions be taken up as a priority in collaboration with the SACG and NACG agencies;
6. The review and reform of legislation pertaining to harmful practices as well as overall VaC needs to be addressed through dedicated efforts and urgently;
7. Taking note of the ongoing efforts in strengthening child participation in all SAIEVAC activities, and taking due consideration of the outcome of the Preparatory Meeting of the Child Governing Board Members and Observers, the SRS work towards the institutionalization of the National and Regional Child Participation Forums;

8. Taking note of the ongoing efforts to refine the Regional Action Plan (RAP) for Ending Child Marriage endorsed in the Regional Girl Child Review Meeting held in December 2012, the recommendations from the Technical Discussion paper and the country reports be reviewed and appropriately incorporated in the RAP;
9. There is an urgent need to improve/generate information and evidence on VaC and harmful practices and create a repository of such materials and information/data to support Member States/service providers;
10. Based on issues of the rights of children with disability reflected in all the presentations, the SRS in partnership with interested agencies of the SACG to explore the possibility of structuring the theme of the next SAIEVAC Consultation on 'Rights and Responses for Children with Disabilities';
11. To further reinforce the movement for children globally, and noting the encouraging initiatives in other regions such as the Council of Baltic Sea States, the SRS with support of the UNSRSG/SACG explore appropriate institutional linkages/collaboration with other similar Regional entities; and
12. The SRS take forward the current draft of the 'Desk Review of the Faith-based Initiatives' by circulating to the Member States for any inputs/feedback and finalizing it after incorporating the comments so received.

## **8. Closing Session and Statements from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Technical Consultation**

### **Closing Session Facilitated by Chair and Co-Chair and the Director General of SAIEVAC**

The closing session for the Technical Consultation was kept informal and low key but also included a number of statements made by participants representing various groups of stakeholders at the event. Highlights from their remarks are presented below.

Closing Statements made by **NACG Coordinators of the Region** expressed thanks to all the partners in Bhutan who supported the event and special appreciation was given to the efforts made by the SAIEVAC Regional Secretariat in organizing and hosting this Technical Consultation.

SACG member, **Antonella Bernardi, World Vision International (WVI)**, offered her congratulations to SAIEVAC and all NACG partners – and to the wider SACG members for their continued support – and in the realization of the conference which has also generated some fruitful draft recommendations.

**Gokul Pandey, Child GB Member from Nepal** also offered a short statement highlighting that all of the children's recommendations were presented and that the children's group would like to stress that the governments, SAIEVAC, SACG and other stakeholders should take all the recommendations on a serious note and move ahead to implement them. He also explained that the children's group had focused on key issues including corporal punishment and child marriage and that they were happy to see good cooperation across the SAARC region. He also mentioned that giving space to children is not enough and efforts must be made to ensure that the recommendations presented are included in country-specific National Action Plans. He closed by thanking all those who supported their participation and especially to the CPAG (Child Participation Action Group).

**Mr. Ghafoori, Director of SAARC** also contributed comments and further elaborated that as the Director of the SAARC Secretariat it was very good to be involved in discussions that involve everyone in all societies and although he noted he was not an expert in the area of child protection, hearing the reports and listening to the recommendations, it became very clear this is a very important issue in the region. He further elaborated that as we all are human beings with children of our own or parents who have cared for us at some point in the past we understand the importance of solving these kinds of problems and stated that through the discussion and brainstorming on these crucial topics which took place during the conference, it provides hope that one day we will be able to overcome such issues which begin within the family.

He further remarked that it is up to family members to raise children in an appropriate and healthy way in order to support both society and the nation and he thanked Dr. Rinchen for inviting him for the first time to such a meeting. He also stated that he would like to propose bringing all the SAARC bodies closer to SAARC (e.g. the Apex bodies) and hoped that one day, based on all the reports made by various countries, we would be able to witness a South Asia which is free from violence against children.

**Dr. Rinchen Chopel** making time to add a few additional thoughts, once again thanked the Chair and Co-Chair for steering this consultation to a successful close and for ending the conference in a successful way. He provided thanks to the Royal Government of Bhutan and Aum Phintsho Choden, the Chair of the Bhutan NACG Chair for hosting not only the Technical Consultation but the Children's Consultation and the MCA Trilateral follow up meeting here in Bhutan as well. He also took the opportunity to thank all GB members, delegates, NACG members and Chairs who have continuously supported SAIEVAC efforts as through this support and collaboration all are further strengthened.

And finally he noted, although the meeting is closing, this is not yet the end of the road and further explained if the degree of heat was 40 at today's meeting, that he would raise the temperature to 60 degrees by the end of December in order to fulfil our commitments and activities. Also thanking all of the child representatives and GB Members and Observers who will

continue with additional meetings and work in the several of days, he expressed gratitude for their support and commitment to SAIEVAC and in moving ahead.

Lastly, **Chairperson, Aum Phintsho Choden**, expressed that there was need for another day in order to do justice to all the presentations and preparations which have been contributed to this event. She wished everyone all the best and a very safe journey back home. She gave special thanks to the child participants and also wanted to leave them with a final thought – to please use what they had learned here at the Technical Consultation and never think that their views and opinions are not important. She also assured them that that all those present at the Consultation were always thinking about the children of South Asia and how to better address and improve upon the ways and means to make all of their lives both happy and better.

## **10. Country Reports on National Preparations for the 3rd Technical Consultation on Harmful Practices**

### **Country Reports and Presentation on National Consultations in Support of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Technical Consultation Prepared by Member States**

#### **AFGHANISTAN**

On behalf of the Afghanistan delegation, Dr. Ibrahimi presented “Child Protection in Afghanistan” which covered key issues and concerns relating to the situation of children in Afghanistan. He highlighted that approximately 760 orphans have been reintegrated to families - including 55,954 children less than 14 years old by the Afghanistan Social Protection Program (ASPP).

He also mentioned that the focus of CPAN/NACG is on the 12 categories of violence and problems of children at risk. Further elaborating that statistics show about 6.5 million of children in Afghanistan are considered at risk and this number is spread across the 23 categories outlined in the Child at Risk Strategy (2006). He also mentioned that 1.9 million children are involved in child labour out of which 1.2 million are engaged in hazardous forms of work. He also explained that over 5 million families have returned to the country and 28% of group is children. In addition, child drug addicts are estimated to be at 100,000 and there are 196,000 disabled children who are victims of the war and other diseases.



Stating that the Afghanistan Child Protection System focuses on many areas considered harmful practices and this included sexual abuse, child labor exploitations, trafficking, addictions, early marriage, neglect, abduction, disability, children in conflict with law, children without parental care and those recruited as child soldiers. The key issues discussed related to harmful practices were: early / child marriages, corporal punishment, and child trafficking and causes, challenges and recommendations were also identified.

Of special note – based on earlier discussions related to engagement and support from the SAARC Development Fund (SDF), Dr. Chophel and others are working to explore and confirm funding for priority activities in Afghanistan and to also enable activities which are already underway to be extended. .

## **The MALDIVES**

Ms. Zulaikha Shebeen presented on behalf of the Maldives and began her discussion highlighting the political changes and transformation which began in the 1990's and also noting that since this point of time that religious affairs have been more tightly controlled by the State which limits differing views or interpretations from those favored by the State. She also mentioned, however, that these controls over the years have been gradually loosened. Further explaining that at the same time, there has been an increase in both theological and scholarly exchanges with foreign countries, and in some instances these exchanges have taken place with followers who support literal interpretations of the Islamic faith.



Noting that the Maldives signed the UN CRC in August 1990 and ratified in February 1991 and this includes the Optional Protocols to the Convention which concerns the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the involvement of children in armed conflict. Harmful practices identified within the Maldivian context include: corporal punishment and lack of legislation on this, early marriage which is often supported through fundamental religious interpretation, female genital mutilation (FGM), breast-feeding / nutrition patterns (based on gender discrimination), and children born out of wedlock (both gender).

The presentation also included recommendations as a way to move forward against the practices and she further noted that a key challenge was to be able to bring these issues out in the open and promote discussion around what is taking place as they remain very sensitive. She also reiterated that there is a need to sensitize all stakeholders in order to generate awareness and understanding that these things are happening and that further research and data was also required and unless these actions can be taken up, it will be difficult to help and address these problems of children.

Dr. Chophel added a few thoughts as a follow up to her presentation including the increasing religious fundamentalism which is creeping into society but stated with the Child Rights Bill



currently being drafted, this could be reviewed and other partners can contribute to what can be done. He also highlighted that this year there wasn't a specific NACG presentation but there is need to reorganize and revitalize the NACG in order to move but due to elections taking place, this also slowed the process down.

## **BANGLADESH**

Dr. Md. Aminul Islam, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs / National Coordinator SAIEVAC shared with the participants findings from Bangladesh entitled, "Traditional Practices Harmful for Children in Bangladesh". He stated that existing laws are not enough to protect children from traditional practices and that there is no specific laws covering all forms of violence based on tradition, culture and religion, and where present, there seems to be lack of or faulty implementation of the laws. Highlighting that there is broad social / cultural acceptance of harmful practices Bangladesh and another challenging factor is that no comprehensive monitoring mechanism exists to document and respond to these issues.

Harmful practices identified from Bangladesh include: discrimination among boys and girls, superstitious beliefs among society members, discrimination against disabled children (social isolation), use of tradition medical treatments, circumcision of boys in unsafe means, disregarding children's decision, discrimination against eunuch (hizra), fatwa, child labor, early and forced child marriages, son preference, use of the dowry system, corporal punishment (both mental and physical) and acid Violence.



Mr. Islam went on to present responses and actions – including legislation drafted / taken by the government and shared additional recommendations. He also highlighted that Bangladesh was the only country which launched a very high-level campaign against corporal punishment and was pleased to share that the country has a fully functional NACG in place and a SAIEVAC office which is a great achievement for all.

## **BHUTAN**

Ms. Deki Dema from the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) spoke on behalf of Bhutan and introduced her presentation by stating that 41 per cent of Bhutanese youth are under 19 years of age. She highlighted that traditional beliefs and customs in Bhutan had a foundation in promotion of tolerance, compassion, respect and charity but not all did support the rights of children. She explained that child marriage is a socially established practice in the country that had been carried forward across multiple generations.



Stating that root causes associated with the practice are associated with poor economic conditions and limited opportunities for women and girls, however, she also noted that the trends associated with marrying girls before age 15 in Bhutan are on the decline.

Corporal punishment was another harmful practice identified which is justified by both parents and teachers due to the fact it was the type of discipline they experienced or because they were unaware of alternatives. She noted that its use is discouraged in schools and was also banned via notification from the Ministry of Education sent out in 1997.

Additional harmful practices discussed also included night-hunting – a traditional form of courtship which had changed over time and traditional use / drinking of alcohol and key achievements or actions initiated to address these issues.

## **INDIA**

Representatives from the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Mr. Shri Ananda Prakash and Ms. Smriti Kaul, from India presented 'Harmful Practices in India' which discussed that the status of child marriage, corporal punishment, gender discrimination, caste discrimination, discrimination against differently-abled children and dowry related crimes.

Exploring the definition of both child marriage and corporal punishment based on existing legislation presenters also listed several recommendations related to the way forward to address these two key issues. Recommendations included some of the following:

- Ensure that structures are in place and functioning as stipulated under various national laws and Schemes;
- Strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems;
- Stress capacity building and sensitization of functionaries;
- Finalize roll out the National Plan of Action on Child Marriage (which features an inter-department approach and convergence which is key to achieving goals outlined in the Plan);
- Work to create a child-friendly society and raise awareness of parents and teachers on the impact of issues such as corporal punishment;
- Continue to support the empowerment of girls and promote community awareness on this;
- Ensure survival, holistic development, protection and participation of children belonging to all castes, religions, language groups, communities, from all



- socio-economic status and geographical locations; and finally,
- Support children’s development potential in nurturing, protective, child-friendly and gender sensitive, family / community / programme / policy environments.

## **NEPAL**

Mr. Kiran Rupakhetee, SAIEVAC National Coordinator of Nepal, shared his address entitled “Country Report: Addressing Harmful Practices in Nepal”. According to Mr. Rupakhetee millions of children suffer from different types of violence, many which remain hidden and out of view. He further stated that violence against children takes a variety of different forms and is influenced by different factors including social and cultural dimensions. Common for most harmful practices is the devastating consequences which result to children’s development, health, dignity, education and protection.

Key harmful practices he highlighted from Nepal included child and forced marriage, the practice of “*chhaupadi*” (untouchability during the menstrual period), use of Jhuma system, circumcision / genital mutilation, corporal punishment, dowry system, son preferences and continue application of the *badi* system. Sharing the root causes associated with some of these practices, he also reviewed recommendations generated at the National Consultation on Traditional Harmful Practices on Violence Against Children, which convened on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of September in Kathmandu, Nepal. Detailed recommendations were given for to address both child marriage and corporal punishment and recommendation from children were also vetted and included some of the following:

- Broadcast awareness programs against child marriage through the media;
- Mobilize child clubs to actively work against child marriage;
- Provide formal education and skill development training for children who are already married;
- Sensitize and mobilize religious leaders such as priests (*maulavi pujari, purohit*) so as to minimize the practice of child marriages influenced by different religions;
- Organize meetings with the senior citizens of the community regarding child marriage;
- Include adequate subject matters on child marriage in school curriculum;
- Prioritize the issue of child marriage in the teachers’ training; and,
- Conduct awareness campaign and parental education programs about child marriage.



In addition, a detailed set of steps and actions related to the way forward for Nepal to address harmful practices was also outlined.

## **PAKISTAN**

Mr. Muhammad Imtiaz, National Program Manager, Violence Against Children, Society for the Protection of Rights of the Child, Pakistan next presented, "Harmful Traditional Practices: Pakistani Context."

He highlighted that child marriage is culturally ingrained in society and mostly affects girls and went on to describe causes.

He also explained that corporal punishment was considered the main tool for disciplining children and widely accepted and supported by traditions. He continued to state that in Pakistan, corporal punishment occurs in schools, madaras, homes and the work-place and that it is a major reason for school drop-out or children being pushed out of homes. He then went on to describe recommendations and follow-up actions related to addressing both early marriage and corporal punishment at multiple levels.



## **SRI LANKA**

Ms. Anoma Dissanayanka, Chairperson, National Protection Authority and SAIEVAC Coordinator / GB Member from Sri-Lanka, then discussed types of harmful practices identified through national level meetings and children's consultations held in Sri Lanka which included corporal punishment, early child marriage, girl child puberty-related practices, negligence and lack of parental support for education. Highlighting main causal factors associated with child marriages in Sri Lanka, she mentioned social norms / beliefs, need for social / economic security, child's family background, child's own preference and in the past, as a solution opted for by parents in order to avoid under-age recruitment by militants.



She also explained that corporal punishment was one of the most widely used harmful practice in the country with boys more prone to receive physical punishment while girls receiving verbal abuse. She further explained that Sri Lankan children are susceptible to corporal punishment both at school and home but that it more frequently occurs at schools.

Sharing continued challenges which included changing of attitudes and mindsets, the ability to provide adequate rehabilitation and psychosocial support and further challenging cultural practices, she went on to describe planned activities and response actions which would help to address various dimensions of these issues and challenges.

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## **Annex : Technical Paper on Child Marriage**

### **CHILD MARRIAGE IN SOUTH ASIA: CURRENT RESPONSES AND THE WAY FORWARD**

#### **Introduction:**

Child marriage is one of the most pressing development concerns in the world today. Defined as marriage under the age of 18 (UN 2000), child marriage disproportionately and negatively affects girls who are more likely to be married as children than boys (Mathur et al 2003; UNICEF 2005; Save the Children 2004). Currently over 60 million girls and women are affected by child marriage globally (ICRW 2011). Child marriage is particularly pervasive across South Asia and Africa, where 50-70 percent of girls in some countries are married before the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2009).

Early and forced child marriage is steeped in harmful traditional norms and practices passed across generations, which have s debilitating impacts on the lives of the girl, her family and society at large. The occurrence of child marriage is greater in poorer families and those with lower levels of education, and is also high in fragile states hit by natural catastrophe (World Vision, 2013).

Apart from being a human rights violation child marriage has adverse physical, psycho-social and health effects on girls, impeding their overall development and well bring. Child marriage deprives girls of their childhood, as well as education and employment opportunities. It also increases their risk of violence and abuse. Despite these adverse consequences, child marriages continue unabated. This is indeed a matter of grave concern and it requires serious deliberation and action. There are initiatives on child marriage prevention undertaken by state and development organizations in South Asia. However high numbers of child marriage in the region requires a review of the problem and more meaningful efforts for its elimination. Therefore child marriage should be part of South Asian countries' priority agenda for mobilizing adequate resources, energy and commitment toward ending the practice.

#### **Objective**

This technical note highlighted the prevalence of child marriage in South Asia and its devastating social, health and developmental impacts on girls' lives. It reviews legislative and other responses in the form of government policies and frameworks as well as programmes adopted by different South Asian countries to address child marriage. Additionally it offers a way forward for both policy makers and development practitioners in terms policy and program recommendations to eliminate child marriage in South Asia.

## **Methodology**

The findings and recommendations in this note are based on a literature review of secondary sources. These sources include: global evaluation studies of efforts to end the practice, empirical studies conducted by international development organizations and government reports/records to understand the legislative response to child marriage.

### **Child Marriage: Prevalence in South Asia**

Child marriage rates in South Asia are the second highest in the world, behind only West Africa. Nearly half (46 per cent) of young women in South Asia aged 20-24 in 2010 were married before they turned 18. And if present trends continue then 130 million girls in South Asia will be married as children by 2030 (UNFPA, 2010).

The prevalence of child marriage varies substantially between and within countries in South Asia. Bangladesh has the highest prevalence of child marriage in the region (66 per cent) followed by Afghanistan (57 percent), Nepal (51 percent) and India (46 percent). These four countries are considered the region's 'hot spots' due to their high child marriage prevalence. Girls living in rural areas are hardest hit by child marriage, and the problem is worst in rural Bangladesh with 70 percent of girls married early, followed by India with 56 percent. (ICRW, 2012)

In some countries, the prevalence of child marriage among the youngest adolescents has decreased. A recent quantitative analysis (Raj, 2012) of changes in the age of marriage in Bangladesh, Nepal, India and Pakistan reveals that over the past two decades (1991- 2007) significant relative reductions have occurred in the marriage of girls under the age of 14 across all four nations. However there has been no change in the marriage of girls aged 16-17 for any nation except Bangladesh – where marriages in this age group actually increased by nearly 35 percent. This requires further research and exploration. In comparison to the four "hot spots" Pakistan has a moderate level of child marriage. Approximately 30 percent of girls in the country are married as child brides. Similar to other countries, the prevalence of child marriage in Pakistan is higher among rural girls (37 per cent) than urban ones (21 percent).

The Maldives has the lowest rate of child marriage in the region with just about 4 percent followed by Sri Lanka (12 percent) and Bhutan (14 percent). However, according to the U.S. Department of State's 2010 Human Rights Report, many Maldivians travel to Pakistan or India to carry out illegal child marriages. Whereas in Bhutan child marriage has become less common in urban areas, girls as young as 15 in remote villages are still reportedly married in secret ceremonies. The incidence is highest in the western and central areas of the country, affecting between 24 and 28 percent of girls aged 15 to 18.

Except for Afghanistan and Pakistan the legal age at marriage for girls in the other six countries (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Bhutan) is 18. Afghanistan and Pakistan follow Sharia law which allows girls to legally marry at the age of 15 and 16, respectively.

### **Why does child marriage persist?**

Despite most countries enacting laws that stipulate 18 as the minimum legal age for marriage for girls, child marriage is widely prevalent in South Asia. Most of the marriages are arranged by parents and local leaders with or without the consent of the girl. A variety of factors perpetuate child marriage, including a high value placed on girls' sexuality, gender discrimination, illiteracy, poor access to education poverty and instability due to conflict and natural disasters. These structural drivers of child marriage are discussed below.

#### **Protection of Girls' Sexuality**

Early marriage is seen as a preventative measure to protect girl's chastity and sexuality upon which rests the family's honor and respect. ICRW found in a recent study that parents in India are often worried about the safety and security of young girls. Their worry stems from both fear of sexual assault and girls choosing to begin sexual activity (ICRW, 2013.) These findings echo similar ones from a study in South Asia by Raj et al (year). They noted that early marriage protects girls' ability to marry which can be destroyed by premarital sex through sexual violence or through choice.

#### **Gender Discrimination**

Gender inequality is a leading cause of child marriage across South Asia. Families and communities see girls as having little importance outside of their roles as wives and mothers. They place little value on the girl child, viewing her as a financial burden bringing no income to the family at the time of her marriage. In fact, delaying her marriage means additional expenditure for the family and a larger dowry to be paid. Thus many parents, particularly those living in poverty, see little merit in investing in their daughter's education and delaying her marriage once she reaches puberty,

#### **Limited Educational Opportunities**

There is a clear association between education and delaying marriage. Across nations it is the poor and least educated girls who are most vulnerable to early marriage (Raj et al, 2010, 2012). On average, women with more years of education marry at a later age. In Sri Lanka, the education of young women has been a crucial factor in increasing the age of marriage there (ICRW, 2012). Evidence shows that the more education a girl receives, the less likely she is to marry as a child. For instance girls in Nepal who completed grade



10 are five times more likely to marry at age 18 or older than those who have not received any education at all (Nepal Demographic Health Survey, 2011).

Low educational levels among parents and poor access to schools, particularly in rural areas, impede girls' education and increase their likelihood of early marriage. A 2010 study of 200 child marriages in Afghanistan found that 71 percent of parents who forced their underage daughters to marry were illiterate (ICRW, 2012). Lack of educational facilities or other alternatives for girls in rural areas force parents to marry off their daughters early. A recent study by ICRW in India identifies inadequate school infrastructure, lack of safe school spaces and long distances to schools as hindrances to rural girls' access to education. In rural India secondary schools are mostly located far away and parents are worried about sending their daughter to these schools, especially in the absence of adequate and regular transportation and high rates of public violence. In the absence of such educational opportunities compounded by a lack of employment options many parents arrange marriages for their daughter after she completes her primary education (ICRW, 2013).

### **Poverty**

Poverty is one of the main determinants of early marriage. Various studies reveal that marriage of minor aged girls is more likely to occur in rural and impoverished areas (Raj et al 2012). Girls from poorer families are more vulnerable to child marriage because the costs associated with education impede their attendance. Moreover poor girls are more likely to experience sexual harassment from men and boys from wealthier families, thus parents see marriage as safeguarding their daughter's chastity. Across rural Bangladesh and India and many parents consider girls as an economic burden to families, and therefore they are married off as soon as they reach puberty. Similarly in Nepal parents are encouraged to marry off their daughters as early as possible since older and better-educated boys can demand a higher dowry (ICRW, 2013). Interestingly in Afghanistan parents are quick to marry off their daughters to receive a bride price.

### **Instability**

In addition to other causes, instability caused by natural disasters and regional or national conflict exacerbate the likelihood of early marriage for girls. For instance decades of war and the devastating 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka pushed desperate families to marry off their young daughters to relieve economic strife. Girls were forced into early marriage with tsunami widowers, primarily to receive state subsidies and benefits for marrying and starting a family. (ICRW, 2012)

The recent report published by the World Vision (2013) also reveals that adolescent girls are extremely vulnerable to early marriage in fragile states hit by natural calamity such as drought, floods etc. In Bangladesh, out of all the married children under 18, nearly 2/3 of them were married (62 percent) in the 12 months following cyclone Sidr in 2007.

Insecurity of camp life, abandonment of girl's education due to closure of schools meant that adolescent girls were forced to marry without their consent. Study participants in Bangladesh reported fear of sexual violence, rape, unwanted pregnancy outside marriage, family honor and shame, hunger were reported as reasons for early marriage. Early marriage is viewed as a protective and safety measure by families and communities to safeguard virginity as well as preserve fertility of girls.

## **Legislative Response to Child Marriage in South Asia: Policy Overview**

National governments and the international community are increasingly recognizing child marriage as a serious challenge, both as a violation of children's human rights and as a barrier to key development outcomes. The International conventions, including the Convention to Eliminate all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW- Article 16) and the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides for the prohibition of child marriage. Most of the countries in South Asia have committed to protecting and ensuring child rights and are also accountable under international treaty obligations to combat early marriage.

Most national governments in the region are aware of the seriousness of the issue, and have taken some steps to prevent child marriage from occurring. For example, all countries have adopted laws designed to regulate its proliferation and prevalence. Laws in India, Bangladesh, the Maldives, Nepal and Bhutan reflect international standards, with legal age limits for girls set at 18. On the other hand, in Afghanistan and Pakistan where Sharia law bears a greater influence, girls can legally marry at age 15 and 16, respectively. And in Sri Lanka, a mixed legal system prevails, with non-Muslim girls allowed to legally marry at 18, while Muslim girls are allowed by law to wed at 15.

This section of the paper presents the legal and policy frameworks adopted by different South Asian countries to address child marriage:

### **Afghanistan:**

The civil law in Afghanistan mandates legal age of marriage for girls as 16 and for boys 18. Sharia Law that operates in the country goes by the age of puberty and therefore in practice, a girl is often married off when she is considered 'physically mature', which can occur at a much younger age.

a girl cannot legally marry until she is 16. However, according to Sharia Law, her father can allow her to marry at age 15. The government of Afghanistan has issued orders to take to control forced and early marriage in the country. In response to this, the Ministry of Labour and Social affairs and Disabled has developed a national strategy for children at risk in order to raise awareness on rights violation and negative health consequences for young girls due to forced and early marriage.

## **Bangladesh:**

The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 passed during British rule is still applied in Bangladesh. The law stipulates 18 as the legal age of marriage for girls. Enforcement of the law however is appalling as reflected by the extremely high rate of child marriage in the country. A national law passed in 2004 requires that all births be registered in order to determine a girl's age when she marries. This has resulted in high rates of birth registration in Bangladesh with registered births increasing from just 9.8 percent to 53.6 percent between 2006 and 2009. To combat child marriage efforts have been made at the grassroots level. For instance Gram Sarkars (village government bodies) have taken on the responsibility of combating child marriage. However stronger enforcement of national child marriage and protection laws is clearly needed.

## **India:**

India has taken positive and progressive legal steps to prevent child marriages. India's first law setting minimum age limits for marriage was the Child Marriage Restraint Act, enacted in 1929. A new law banning child marriage was passed in December, 2006, which prohibits marriages in which either party is a minor and sets the legal age for marriage at 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys. The new law mandates punitive measures against all who perform, permit or promote child marriage. These measures include imprisonment of up to two years or a fine of up to INR 100,000 (US\$1,800). The law provides for the intervention of courts to prevent child marriages through stay orders. Another positive feature of the law is the nullification of a child marriage with the provision for providing maintenance and residence from husband/in-laws to the separated female until she is remarried. In addition, a 2006 Supreme Court decision requires registration of all marriages, which creates a more favorable environment for the law's implementation and enforcement. Despite these laudable changes enforcement and monitoring is the biggest challenge in India.

## **Nepal:**

The Nepalese Child Marriage law stipulates that both girls and boys can marry at age 18 with parental consent, and at age 20 without consent. In addition, it recognizes daughters as rightful heirs, and increases the punishment for child marriage to imprisonment for up to three years and a fine of up to ten thousand rupees, and with an increase in the age of the girl, the punishment decreases. The other legislation includes the Marriage Registration Act, 1971, and the Birth (Registration) Act 1977. While these are positive steps against child marriage, high numbers of girls continue to be married before the age of 18.

### **Pakistan:**

The law in Pakistan stipulates that the legal age for marriage is 16 for girls and 18 for boys, in accordance with the colonial-era Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929. Punitive measures for the violation (for a man 18 or older) include a fine of up to 1,000 rupees or a maximum prison sentence of one month, or both. However, unlike India, nullifying illegal child marriages is not mandatory under the current law. Tribal customary law namely vani and swara, which mandates the forced marriage of girls as compensation or currency to settle a dispute or debt, persists, although a recently proposed amendment would authorize stringent punishment for perpetrators of vani and swara. Birth registration is very low in the country (27 percent) and is a major contributing factor to poor enforcement of the 1929 law. Marriage registration is also extremely low despite the 1962 Muslim Family Law which mandates it. This poses serious challenges to preventing child marriage in the country.

### **Sri Lanka:**

In 1995, the minimum age of marriage for both boys and girls was set at 18 years for the non-Muslim majority of the population. Progressive legal reforms and judgments pronounced by courts in Sri Lanka have played an important role in reducing child marriage prevalence. For instance all marriages and the mutual consent of both parties to those marriages must be registered, essentially invalidating non-consensual marriages forced on girls by parents. This has helped educate the public about the injustice and illegality of child marriage. There is, however, a mixed legal system that exists in the country for Sri Lanka's minority Muslim community. The Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act of 1951 continues to regulate matrimonial law for the community and allows girls to marry as young as 12 years old or even younger with the permission of a "Quazi," a Muslim court.

### **Maldives:**

The legal system in the Maldives is based on a mixture of Islamic law and English common law. According to civil law the legal age of marriage is now 18 for girls in the Maldives. However, the minimum age for marriage that is commonly observed in practice is 15. This is because Sharia law is more dominant in defining marriage practices than the modern Maldivian judicial system. Moreover over the past 10 years there has been no record of children under 15 being married in the Maldives. The government has established Children's Courts and Units for the Rights of the Children (URC) to work on work towards eliminating child marriage and violence against children.

### **Bhutan:**

Child marriage law in Bhutan, in compliance with international standards, stipulates the minimum legal age of marriage is 18 years for both boys and girls. Violation of the law

results in a fine ranging from Ngultrum 300 – 1,000 (about US\$5-18), and the return of property received in marriage. Also as per the law, no marriage certificate are issued for marriages under 18, however it is still happening according to the anecdotal evidence in the hospitals. Also, the government has made birth registration compulsory within one month of the birth. In 2007, women and child protection unit was established with Royal Police to work towards reducing child marriage. While the law's existence is an important first step, enforcement remains weak in remote, rural areas.

## **Negative Consequences**

Child marriage is not only a human rights violation but has numerous and serious educational, health and developmental consequences for girls. It robs them of their childhood and sentences them to a life of poverty and economic dependence, with little or no education. Child marriage negatively impacts married adolescents as they are highly vulnerable to poor maternal health outcomes, a higher risk of HIV infection and are more likely to suffer from domestic and sexual abuse. These negative consequences are discussed below within the context of South Asia:

### **Child Marriage Impedes Girl's Education.**

The low value of girls is closely linked to minimal investments made in their future. Girls are withdrawn from school once their marriage is fixed and they are less likely than boys to be educated. Research in Pakistan shows a direct correlation between education and age at marriage. Many studies have also highlighted that adolescent married girls' access to formal and informal education is severely limited because of domestic and child rearing responsibilities, and unequal gender norms that do not value education for girls (ICRW, 2005, IFFP: 2006). Also, poverty stricken families often prefer investing their limited resources on boys rather than girls due to the belief that investment in a girl's education will not generate monetary benefits for the families.

### **Early Pregnancy can Result in Poor Maternal and Infant Health Outcomes.**

Girls face enormous pressure to prove their fertility soon after marrying, and have little access to information on reproductive health and ability to influence family planning decision making. Once they become pregnant, adolescent girls are physically, mentally and emotionally unprepared for childbirth. According to UNICEF (2009) adolescent mothers between the ages of 15 and 19 are twice as likely to die of pregnancy and childbirth complications as women between the ages of 20 and 24. The situation is even graver for girls under age 15, who are five times more likely to die from maternal causes. And young pregnant girls are likely to deliver a low birth weight and premature infant who is more likely to die. If they live, these children are at increased risk of malnutrition. (Raj et al, 2012)

In Afghanistan, early marriage and pregnancy contribute to the country having the second highest maternal mortality rate in the world, with 24,000 deaths each year, many of them under the age of 18 (2010 report Afghanistan, ICRW, 2013). Data from India's National Family Health Surveys 2005–06 reveal that those married as minors (in comparison to adult mothers) are less likely to use contraceptives before a first child birth, and more likely to have high fertility, repeat childbirth in less than 24 months, have multiple unwanted pregnancies and undergo pregnancy termination - all factors associated with maternal and child health risks (Raj et al, 2009).

### **Child Brides are at Increased Risk of Sexually-Transmitted Infections, including HIV.**

Across South Asia, child brides often marry much older men who have a higher chance of being HIV positive than younger men, due to a greater likelihood of having had unprotected sex with multiple or high risk partners (ICRW, 2012). In addition, girls have less control in negotiating condom use or refusing sex with their partners than their adult female counterparts, and also have little access to health information, protection, and services. All of these factors make them more vulnerable to contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

### **Child brides are Vulnerable to Abuse and Poor Mental Health.**

Violence is a major consequence of child marriage in South Asia where married adolescents are highly vulnerable to abuse including physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence (Levine et.al, 2009; UNICEF, 2005, ICRW, 2007; IPPF, 2006, World Vision, 2013). A study in India found that young women who married before age 18 were twice as likely to report being beaten, slapped or threatened by their husbands than girls who married later. Also they were three times as likely to report being forced to have sex without their consent in the previous six months (ICRW, 2007). Recent research in Bangladesh reveal that girls regularly face domestic violence if they fail to meet household and sexual demands and expectations from husband and family members This includes conflicts over dowry, which are a frequent cause of heinous instances of violence directed at girls including mental torture and physical abuse. The pressure of early marriage is even felt by young men in Bangladesh, as they attributed their aggressive behavior towards their wives to their unpreparedness for marriage and family life (World Vision, 2013).

Girls married as minors are at increased risk for poor mental health outcomes, including depression and suicide. Many child brides in Bangladesh reported forced social isolation and limited access to support networks such as family, friends and community. In the absence of safety networks girls are often left alone to cope with the physical and emotional challenges of marriage. (World Vision, 2013) Research in Afghanistan reveals that 2,400 women commit self-immolation each year, and child and forced marriages, along with sexual and domestic violence, are key causes (2010 Government report).

## Recommendations and Conclusion

Early marriage of girls is socially valued and is a widespread practice in South Asia. Despite the existence of national and international treaties and laws, child marriage continues to be pervasive in the region, particularly in the four hotspot countries of Bangladesh, Afghanistan, India and Nepal. Clearly, there is a need for effective policies and programmes to eliminate child marriage. Key priorities recommended for national and state governments are as follows:

### 1. Strengthen law enforcement:

Although all the South Asian countries have adopted laws to prevent child marriage, lack of awareness and enforcement remain the biggest challenges as child marriage practices continue unabated.

#### ***What should be done:***

- **Ensure stringent punishment for violators of the law:** Identify and prosecute all parties involved in child marriage so that the law becomes a deterrent. Also, increase penalties in countries where they are currently low.
- **Conduct comprehensive training programs:** Inform law enforcement officials, registrars, judiciary officials and religious leaders about the negative impacts of child marriage especially in high-risk and poverty-stricken areas where child marriage is rampant and their role in its prevention.
- **Increase public awareness:** Mount public campaigns to increase awareness of the laws and punishments associated with the practice.
- **Strengthen vital registration systems:** Improve the birth and marriage registration systems to better prove a girl's age at marriage.
- **Develop and strengthen effective child protection mechanisms,** including community based child protection systems.

### 2. Increase Educational Opportunities for Girls

Providing education especially at the secondary level to girls is a key strategy for eliminating child marriage. Girls who marry early often abandon formal education. To keep girls in school, parents and girls need greater assurances about the quality, safety and value of continued education. Families also need financial incentives to make education affordable, particularly for secondary and tertiary education in which enrolment lags far behind that of primary education in the region. While achievements



have been made in primary education girls' enrolment across many South Asian countries in secondary and tertiary enrolments lags behind.

Research from Bangladesh illustrates that providing scholarships for secondary school greatly influences parents' decisions to keep their daughters in school. Evaluation findings indicate that when such scholarships were provided to girls ages 11 to 15 from 1994 to 2001, they had a positive influence on girls' enrollment, attendance, and retention rates (World Bank\_ reference). Similarly, a child protection and welfare scheme introduced by the government of Nepal which includes a scholarship program is encouraging girls to continue on to secondary school and complete their studies.

***What should be done:***

- **Increase investments in girls education:** Allocate sufficient resources from national and state budgets to ensure quality education at all levels for girls.
- **Provide incentives to girls from economically impoverished families:** Offer conditional cash transfers or scholarships for secondary education to financially disadvantaged girls to continue their education.
- **Make schools safe and accessible:** Make schools more attractive to girls and their parents by providing secure and clean toilets, having more women teachers and improving overall school quality.
- **Promote education for married adolescent:** Promote the re-enrolment of girls who have dropped out of school so that they can continue and complete at least their secondary education.

**3. Provide Life Skills Training and Reproductive Health Education and Services:**

Early marriage and adolescent child bearing pose serious consequences to girls' health and development. Life skills education that engages girls, their families and communities can play a role in delaying marriage. Sexual and reproductive health information and services also are important for adolescent girls, especially in supporting those who are already married.

***What should be done:***

- **Include a focus on life skills, sexual and reproductive health and rights in school curricula.** Train teachers or special staff to undertake discussions with students about relationships, gender discrimination, contraception and maternal and neo-natal health.

- **Promote adolescent girls' access to sexual and reproductive health information and services through government as well as NGO initiatives.**
- **Improve health systems:** Train health providers to provide information regarding sexual and reproductive health issues to adolescent girls. Gender-sensitive health policies, standards, and protocols should also be put in place.

#### **4. Invest in Programs that Economically Empower Young Women and Girls**

Programs that build girls' financial literacy and income generating skills can have a positive impact on preventing early marriage in South Asia. In Nepal a program providing livelihood and income-generating skills to girls has been found to be effective in preventing child marriage (Reference).

##### ***What should be done:***

- **Support market-oriented interventions that economically empower girls and women;** Such interventions should be at both the national and local levels, and should prioritize girls and women in marginalized communities with a high prevalence of child marriage.

#### **5. Enhance Safety in Public Areas**

Young women and girls live in danger of sexual harassment and violence in many public places. The risk of sexual harassment and rape forces parents to marry off their daughters at an early age, before they lose their virginity (ICRW, 2013)

##### ***What should be done:***

- Make public areas safer for women and girls.
- Provide safe transport facilities for girls to reach school safely.
- Create safe areas for women and girls especially during humanitarian emergencies.
- Establish user friendly helplines for girls and women to report and seek help in instances of abuse and violence.
- Sensitize law enforcers and the public about the importance of safety for women and girls.

#### **6. Engage with Men and Boys in Preventing Child Marriage**

Working with boys and men can be a promising strategy in child marriage prevention. A study in India found that boys could be successfully trained as educators and advocates for delaying marriage among girls (Gupta et al, 2008, ICRW).

Young boys and girls who articulate their views on marriage and education with clarity and maturity are often able to persuade their parents to prevent child marriage. Therefore it is important to provide young boys and girls with knowledge and information about health, education and their rights regarding child marriage, and also build their capacities and equip them with confidence so that they become ambassadors of child rights in their community.

World Vision is working with men and boys in India to challenge the beliefs and behaviors of fathers, sons, husbands and brothers as they have the capacity to influence harmful practices in their communities.

*What should be done:*

- **Work with men and boys in the community:** Engage men to challenge traditional gender norms and roles and address gender inequity.
- **Better understand the perspectives of married young men on child marriage.** To engage men and boys as advocates against child marriage, it is important to understand the experiences and attitudes of young men who marry early to underage girls.
- **Strengthen capacities and empower boys and girls in the community:** Platforms should be created at the community level to educate young boys and girls regarding negative consequences of child marriage and discuss issues and concerns regarding sexuality.

## **7. Address the Needs of Married Girls:**

There are limited public and civil society programmes that exist to meet the needs of married adolescents. In order to protect married adolescent girls from health and social vulnerabilities, it is imperative to provide measures specifically designed and targeted towards them.

*What should be done:*

- **Amend laws, which prevent married and or pregnant girls from attending school.** Increased support for girls to go back to schools after marriage or child bearing.
- **Make programs and services available to married girls.** These include sexual and reproductive health, life skills and livelihoods interventions.
- **Mount community awareness and education campaigns to stress the value of completing secondary education for married girls.**

## **8. Increase the Value of the Girl Child:**

Girls are traditionally undervalued and discriminated against in South Asia. The low social value placed on daughters is due to structural gender inequities that result in lack of access to educational and employment opportunities for girls in comparison with boys. In order to enhance the value of girls and women in society it is crucial to address the root cause of such inequalities by pressing for equal opportunities for girls. .

### ***What should be done:***

- **Provide equal opportunities for girls** in education, employment, and access to safe public spaces.
- **Showcase positive girl role models.** Support public campaigns, and engage with parents, local leaders, and government officials to discuss and promote positive girl role models from the community and society.

## **CONCLUSION**

Of the various measures outlined above, no single measure alone will be sufficient to achieve significant reductions in child marriages. The answer lies in a comprehensive approach with a clear emphasis on enhancing the value of the girl child. Programs already under way must find ways to connect with each other or enhance their strategies. For example, an existing program to promote education among girls should be expanded to include community based campaigns and engagement with key stakeholders including parents and families to explicitly discuss and discourage child marriages and find ways to monitor the marriage process in a culturally sensitive manner. At the same time, the program should pay special attention to enhancing girls' safety and security while traveling to and attending school to ensure their protection from sexual and other forms of violence.

In conclusion operational linkages must be found and implemented between education, livelihood and sexual and reproductive health and rights interventions. These linkages must operate within a favorable legislative framework and with the active engagement of community members and families to effectively address the issue of child marriages. Efforts also must be made to create gender equitable norms and practices that value girls' education, employability, earning potential and positive sexual and reproductive health outcomes.