

OUR ASPIRATIONS FROM OUR GOVERNMENT

THE VOICE OF INDIA'S CHILDREN



WHY INDIA NEEDS TO HEAR WHAT ITS CHILDREN HAVE TO SAY

India is home to over a billion people; of which almost 40% are below the age of 18.

That's over **47.2 crore children**. Not a small figure, is it?

Children matter. They are the building blocks of our future and as a nation, we must pay heed to what they need. Their opinions count, their voices deserve to be heard and they must be prioritised by the adults around them – be it the State, civil society organisations, their parents and teachers or even the general public at large.

“We hope to be taken seriously by our leaders because they have the power to transform our lives for the better.” - Child Panelist

This document is an attempt by CRY to capture children's aspirations from across the country - with the hope that it leaves an impact in the minds of those who can help turn them into reality – political leaders, policy makers and even citizen voters.

We hope that India recognises the voice of its children and that it inspires political parties to prioritise children in their manifestos.



THE PROCESS

The process of amassing children's opinions and understanding their perspective was spread across November and December 2018. It included interactions with children in the age group of 7 to 18 years as well as with the parents and caregivers of children in the age group of 0-6 years.

From each of these interactions, a few children were selected to form ground level panels (GLPs) across India. These children's GLPs came together for a two-day workshop to discuss the challenges faced by them, the expectations they have from their family, government and society and their hope for their future.

Preparatory meetings in 14 States

- Caregivers of children in the 0-6 age group
- Children in the 7-11 age group
- Children in the 12-18 age group
- Children studying in private schools in Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata
- Total number of participants: 1093

Regional ground level panels

- South: Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh
- East: Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha
- North & West: Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Haryana
- Total number of child panelists: 70

Discussing the constitution, every citizen's fundamental rights and the purpose of a manifesto

Identify key issues faced by children and prioritizing them

How The Children's Panel Put This Document Together

Sharing primary and secondary research data with the panel

Using group discussions and interactive tools like films to finalize document



WHO ARE WE: INTRODUCING THE CHILDREN'S PANEL

We, a group of children from across 14 states of India, represent the voice of India's children.

We come from rural areas, slums, small towns and metropolitan cities alike - across Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Delhi and Haryana.

Some of us identify ourselves as Dalits and Adivasis; others as Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Ambedkarites. But while we may be different from each other, with respect to our socio-economic backgrounds, we recognise that we are all citizens of India - a common thread that binds us no matter where we come from.

We are the children of India.

Our panel comprises of 70 children who took part in the regional ground level panel workshops held in Bengaluru, Delhi and Kolkata. At the workshops, we analysed data collected from the interactions held with 1093 children and caregivers across 14 states. We spoke about our dreams, our hopes as well as our expectations from the government and we've put them all together for you to understand us better and to help us make our dreams come true.

We are the children of India and this is what we have to say.

OUR ASPIRATIONS FROM OUR GOVERNMENT



A Healthy Childhood For All

“The Government should provide health services to poor people. We want to see all children in the village grow up healthy and happy without any disease.” - Child Panelist

1. Everyone to get quality primary health care, irrespective of rural and urban areas.
2. Doctors and hospital staff to treat patients equally, irrespective of religion or caste.
3. Fully functional government health centres to be available with doctors, staff and equipment in place.

“The absence of facilities and doctors in Government health centres in our village cause trouble for poor people. They are forced to borrow money to pay the private clinics in the absence of quality Government hospitals.”
- Child Panelist

4. Government hospitals to be made accountable to people.

“There is no medicine available in the Government hospital in our city. Instead, one has to buy these from medical shops located right next to the hospital.”

“We want Government hospitals to be better equipped and more accountable to us as citizens.” - Child Panelist

5. All villages to be clean so that we can prevent the spread of diseases.

6. A ban on alcohol and stricter rules on sale of tobacco and alcohol to children.

“It is not surprising to find school children smoking. How do they get access to cigarettes?” - Child Panelist

Reality Check:

- There is an acute shortage of medical professionals, with vacancies of over 70% in many posts in the Government healthcare system in rural areas - Rural Health Statistics (RHS) 2017
- 19% of the adolescent boys consume Tobacco (in any form), and 9% consume Alcohol - National Family Health Survey- IV (2015-16)
- Of every Rs. 100 allocated by the Union Government, only Rs. 3.40 is being allocated for children.



Adequate Nutritious Food For All

1. Every village to have Anganwadi centres that cater to all children in the age group of 0-6 years.
2. Children who are not going to school to get food in either Anganwadi centres or any other place.

“There are children who do not get mid-day meal benefits because they drop out of school or have never attended school. This extension will benefit such children.” - Child Panelist

3. Making sure that no child is malnourished and that all children get nutritious food including eggs and milk. Good quality mid-day meals to be provided for all children up to Class 12 - should include eggs and bananas for those who don't eat eggs.

“In our school, we don't get eggs in mid-day meals. The meals are not even warm.” - Child Panelist

“In our village, the sevika does not regularly distribute iron tablets or give proper nutrition to adolescent girls. She is unable to manage the children on her own.” - Child Panelist

“The quality of the food provided by the Anganwadi in our area is not good.” - Child Panelist

4. Poor people to receive Government ration and food grains at a subsidised rate.
5. People to get ration and other benefits based on whatever identity documents they have available with them.

“We have heard that because of non-availability of Aadhaar cards, children were not given ration and they died.” - Child Panelist

Reality Check:

- More than 60,000 Anganwadi worker (AWW) posts are vacant across the country and approximately 50% of the children under 6 years of age are able to access Anganwadi services - ICDS 2015



Clean Drinking Water, Functional Toilets and Proper Sanitation For All

1. Every village to have proper usable toilets with working drainage and water facilities.

“In our village, not all houses have toilets and people who have toilets still defecate in the open because there is no water facility in the toilets. The Government should provide financial help so that even poor people can build proper usable toilets - otherwise they will still defecate in the open. At least 10% of houses in our hamlet do not have toilets. People don't have the money to build a toilet.” - Child Panelist

2. Public toilets to provide sanitary pads at Re. 1/- and soaps for hand wash.
3. Public toilets in urban areas to have running water and be made available free of cost.

“In our area, there is only one community toilet, but it so difficult to use it because it stinks. The public toilets in our slum charge a user fee between Re. 1 and Rs. 5 for every user for using the toilet and bathroom. This may seem like very little to you, but we have to pay it every day. How will our parents afford it?” - Child Panelist

4. Proper disposal of garbage to prevent pollution.

“Children in my class miss school because of mosquito bites. This is because water collects around open drains.” - Child Panelist

5. Use of CNG to be promoted as much as possible.

6. Safe drinking water facilities to be made available.

“We have to wake up at 4am to fetch water. As the water pressure in the pipes installed in our areas is very slow, it takes a long time. At times, we also miss classes because we have to wake up early and fetch water.”
- Child Panelist

“Scarcity of safe drinking water is the biggest problem both at home and in school. At least we should be provided with drinking water on the school campus.” - Child Panelist

Reality Check:

- Less than 60% of rural household have access to water in their premises - NFHS IV (2015-16)
- Only 45% rural households reported having access to sanitary toilets - Swachhta Status Report 2016, NSSO, GoI
- 44% of villages have no proper arrangement for drainage - ibid
- 23% of villages did not have their community toilets cleaned regularly- ibid



Access To Quality Education For All

1. The Right to Education Act to be extended to cover children aged between 15-18 years as well.

“Though the Constitution provides the Right to Education until the age of 14, this is not enough. What about the older children? For them, the Act should be extended until 18 years of age. This should be amended in the Constitution, too.” - Child Panelist

2. Number of good quality Government schools to be increased.
3. Special focus to be placed on the education of child labourers / children of migrants / children of nomadic tribes.
4. Children to have a platform in school to make their voices heard.

“There are no systems and mechanisms within schools where children’s voices and concerns are heard. There needs to be such a platform.”
- Child Panelist

5. Appointing more and better quality teachers so that:
 - a) All teacher vacancies are filled and children can get quality education
 - b) There are enough number of subject-wise teachers.
6. English as a subject to be given priority in Government schools.

““We need teachers who can teach us in English, especially in Classes 7 and 8. Students like me do not have the scope to learn English unless it is taught properly in school.” - Child Panelist

““There should be English medium education in Government schools because knowledge of English gives all children the necessary competitive edge. We want to be able to speak English as well as children studying in private schools.” - Child Panelist

7. Hindi to be also offered as a language subject in schools along with regional languages.

8. Computer teachers to take classes regularly where computers are available.

9. Digital teaching using modern technology to be introduced in schools.

““We want computer education for all students along with digital classrooms.” - Child Panelist

““Computer education is a must for us; if we are not taught computers, we will lag behind in our career and future.” - Child Panelist

““Why can't our teachers use the internet in the classrooms? It will open our eyes to what is happening in other states.” - Child Panelist

10. Strong monitoring systems to be put in place so that things function well:

a) Mandatory surprise inspections to be held (twice a month and without teachers accompanying the panel) to understand quality of teaching and functioning of school.

b) School teachers to be accountable to the Gram Panchayat.

c) Strict action to be taken against teachers who resort to physical punishment and emotional abuse.

- d) School Management Committees to be functional in all schools**
- e) Books, uniforms, sports equipment and other necessary things to be distributed regularly.**

““Teachers are often busy with other activities. How will they teach us?”
- Child Panelist

““Sometimes, when a committee comes to inspect the school, the teachers accompany them. How will they give an unbiased report in such cases?”
- Child Panelist

11. An improvement to be made in school infrastructure so that:

- a) There are playgrounds / green spaces within all schools.**
- b) Every school has clean, well-maintained and separate toilets for boys and girls.**
- c) All school toilets for girls provide sanitary pads and their disposal facility.**

““Girls stop going to school once they start menstruating.”
- Child Panelist

““Our school does not have proper classrooms; some don't even have toilets and others don't have a playground or equipment.”
- Child Panelist

12. All schools to have adequate tables, chairs, classrooms and boundary walls.

13. An exclusive transport facility to be provided for school going children; especially for Government school students.

14. Girls to be given free coaching/training for civil services and better opportunities in higher education.

15. All Dalit children to have access to higher education.

“I want to study, but my parents never sent me to school.”
- Child Panelist

Reality Check:

- Less than 5% of schools in the country offer complete education from Class 1 to Class 12; thereby creating a challenge for smooth transition among educational levels - UDISE 2016-17
- Less than 1/3rd of the schools in the country have computers - UDISE 2016-17
- Over 20% of children dropout after Class 8 - UDISE 2016-17
- Less than 2/3rd of children in the country finish school education - UDISE 2016-17
- More than 20% of the schools in the country do not have the mandated pupil teacher ratio and 19% of teachers don't have the required professional qualifications - UDISE 2016-17



Basic Living Facilities For All

1. Basic facilities like land, house, water and electricity to be provided free of cost to poor people; especially farmers or those living on the streets.
2. Relocation of slum dwellers in safe and hygienic locations; close to place of work.

“People living in slums are evicted. We have been rehabilitated in houses that are cramped, dingy and do not have basic facilities such as electricity, water and drainage. How are we expected to live in these? Such houses pose a threat for the people living in them. Our parents’ place of work and our schools are far from the place where we have been relocated.”- Child Panelist

“We do not live in notified slums. So we don’t even have proper toilets. The drain flows right outside our house and sometimes the water comes in. There is a tube well for water, but often, there is no water.” - Child Panelist

3. Homes to have playgrounds nearby so children can play.

“We do not have any space to play and end up playing on the road. There have been many small accidents too.” - Child Panelist

Reality Check:

- Nearly 12% households in India do not have electricity - NFHS (IV) 2015-16



Good Roads For All In Every Town and Village

1. Good roads to connect every town and village in India.

“If there were buses connecting even remote villages, children would not be deprived of going to school. Parents hesitate to send their children to school, because it is so far from home and they have to walk the distance. My school is half an hour away by walk.” - Child Panelist

2. Public transport system to be improved so that air pollution is prevented.

“We are concerned about the increased air pollution caused by the growing number of cars in cities. Good public transport that links even the most distant areas will encourage more people to use public transport in cities.” - Child Panelist

Reality Check:

- Over 1.5 lakh schools in India are not approachable through proper roads - UDISE 2016-17



Everyone Has Opportunities To Work and Earn

1. All families to get work opportunities locally. If migration is the only option, then children of migrants should get basic education and the migrants should not be deprived of benefits they would have got otherwise at their hometown.

“We do not want to see our parents migrating to faraway places in search of work, leaving us behind. Government should create livelihood in rural areas for the landless people.” - Child Panelist

2. Ensuring that no family is forced to send their children to work.

“In some families, children are forced to work because their family does not have any earning member. There must be some support for such families so that their children are not forced to work.” - Child Panelist

“If there are enough jobs for adults, would parents send their children to work?” - Child Panelist

“There are some children who are forced to work on the fields of others or graze their cattle, just because they are poor.” - Child Panelist

3. Better job opportunities to be provided to Dalits including reservation in Government jobs.

4. Sewage workers to get all benefits that any Government employee gets.

“My grandfather was a sewage worker. Only people from our caste engage in cleaning the drains. Why should this be so? He had an accident and lost his leg. But he did not get compensation.” - Child Panelist

“A man who goes down the drain to clean sewers gets less than Rs. 500 a day. How will he survive? He is performing such a dangerous task. Why doesn't he get gloves or boots? Who will answer his family if he dies?” - Child Panelist

Reality Check:

- There are over 33 million children working as child labourers in the country - Census 2011
- Nearly 75% of working children under 18 years of age are in agriculture as cultivators or agri-laborers - Census 2011



Safety and Protection For All

1. All orphans to get special care and protection by the Government.

“There are children whose parents have died or abandoned them. Sometimes they live in homes and sometimes on the streets. Something should be done for them. Orphans should be given special care and protection by the government so that they are not left on the streets.” - Child Panelist

2. The bonded labour act to be amended to prevent the practice of child labour and child labour to be banned till the age of 18 years.

“There may be laws to prevent bonded labour, but then why does the practice continue?” - Child Panelist

“Children are treated very badly especially in brick kilns and in agricultural fields. There should be a law to ban child labour completely.” - Child Panelist

“In trains, some children go and sell fruits and small knick-knacks. They do not have any option but to go and do this work. Sometimes, they are also kidnapped and sold.” - Child Panelist

3. Schools to made free from all forms of child abuse and exploitation.

“Our parents pull us out of school and get us married off instead - because of harassment by boys.” - Child Panelist

“Boys stalk girls after school hours and forcibly talk to them. If they refuse, they are threatened in a number of ways.” - Child Panelist

“There are no proper security measures in the Government girls’ hostel. We are afraid during night.” - Child Panelist

4. Self-defence training to be provided to all women and girls.

5. That no child, boy or girl, faces sexual harassment or is made to feel ashamed of themselves.

“Sometimes, boys are also sexually harassed. Especially fair boys are targeted.” - Child Panelist

“Small boys are sexually abused while playing. Sometimes boys of one gang abuse boys of another gang.” - Child Panelist

6. Sale of drugs and liquor to be banned so that there is no harassment and no violence at home.

“Drunkards and drug addicts even tease women and touch them inappropriately in public and private spaces. Sometimes, they also commit rape.”
- Child Panelist

7. Practices like child marriage, Devdasi traditions and dowry to be stopped.

“A friend’s parents had fixed her marriage. Some of us got together and complained to the police. Even today, when she meets us, she says thanks to us.” - Child Panelist

“There are laws banning Devdasis but the practice continues even now. Something needs to be done to prevent the practice and stop it altogether.”
- Child Panelist

Reality Check:

- 70% of the married children in the country are adolescent girls - Census 2011
- Rape, Assault or Insult to Modesty of Girl Children and Crimes under POCSO (other categories) add up to 33% of all crimes against children - NCRB 2016



Respect and Equality For All

1. There should be no discrimination on the basis of caste.

“In our village, if somebody from our Dalit community goes to the shop to buy something, the shopkeeper drops the goods from a height, rather than place it in our hands. It is almost as if we have a disease that will get passed on by touch.”

- Child Panelist

“In some schools, Dalit children are made to wash vessels.”

- Child Panelist

“In our village, Dalits do not have a place to cremate the dead. There is a cremation ground that is used by the upper caste people who do not allow us to use it. We need a separate cremation ground until we can get access to the existing one.”

- Child Panelist

“The upper castes take away our land and claim it is theirs. In our village, they even claim that our hamlet is situated on one upper caste man’s land.”

- Child Panelist

“Why is it that only people from our caste are made to go down the drain?”

- Child Panelist

“In our block, you will see only Dalits employed as cleaners and sweepers in Government service, while people from other castes would be employed in other posts.”

- Child Panelist

2. There should be no discrimination on the basis of religion.

“We all should have the freedom to celebrate festivals according to our culture.”
- Child Panelist

“There should be spaces where we can mix with people from different religions and cultures without fear and welcome each other into our homes.”
- Child Panelist

3. All children should be treated equally irrespective of gender.

“There should not be any gender discrimination. Every child should be allowed to do as they want.”
- Child Panelist

“Families tend to marry off their daughters early. Girls are also pulled out of school to take care of their siblings.”
- Child Panelist

“There are no public toilets for girls and women in our village.”
- Child Panelist

“Girls do not have as much freedom as boys do.”
- Child Panelist

SUMMARY

To conclude, here's a framework that summarizes all our aspirations and needs - we hope it helps you take specific steps to fulfil them over the next five years:

IMMEDIATE

- Good quality Government health facilities to be made available for all.
- Safe drinking water to be made available for everyone in Anganwadi centres, schools and villages.
- Anganwadi centres to be made available and to be able to provide good quality nutritious food.
- Drainage facilities to be ensured in all places which currently do not have them and damaged drainage systems to be repaired.
- All children to receive free and compulsory education up to Class 12.
- All Government schools to have required number of qualified subject teachers.
- All schools to be inclusive and have required basic infrastructure like furniture, libraries and playgrounds.
- Schools to use digital technology in teaching.
- All schools to have separate toilets for girls and boys and to be functional and well maintained.
- Good quality mid-day meals to be served in all schools; Noon meal scheme to be provided for all children.
- Children to get free transportation to school.

- Public transport services to be made available that connect all villages and towns so that health and education facilities can be reached easily.
- Dalits to be allowed access to crematorium facility for last rites of their dead.
- Children's safety to be ensured everywhere - in schools, at home and in public spaces.
- No corporal punishment - strict action to be taken against teachers who resort to physical and emotional abuse.
- Law against abolition of devadasi system to be implemented strictly.
- Law against child marriage to be enforced in a better way and monitored regularly.
- Provision of reservation for Dalits to be enforced in higher education and jobs.
- Bonded Labour Act to be strictly enforced and monitored.

INTERMEDIARY

- Parents to have work opportunities made available locally so that they do not have to migrate to faraway places and children are not separated from them.
- Everyone to be treated equally - ensuring that there is no discrimination and violence based on caste, religion gender and sexual orientation.

LONG TERM

- Technological improvement in teaching and learning at classroom level.
- Systems to ensure better connectivity so that villagers can have increased access to Government welfare schemes and entitlements.

OUR HUMBLE SUBMISSION TO YOU

We are the children of India and we've bared our hearts and our reality to you.

Even though we're children, we truly believe that our needs are significant and require your attention. In fact, if you really stopped to think about it, what we're asking for isn't a lot. It's the bare minimum that we, as citizens of India, are entitled to. Wouldn't you agree?

Our voices often do not reach our leaders and we do not even have the right to vote - but we hope that this process will help us get through to you. You...who have the power to change our situation for the better.

We hope that the government that steps forward to lead the nation this year takes our aspirations seriously, but that's not all. We also appeal to every single voter to please keep us in their thoughts when they go out to cast their vote this year. This summer, when you stand in that queue to choose our country's next leader, we hope that you keep us in mind.

Our dreams know no boundaries. But without you and your support, they will never see the light of the day.

We are the children of India and we are counting on YOU!



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