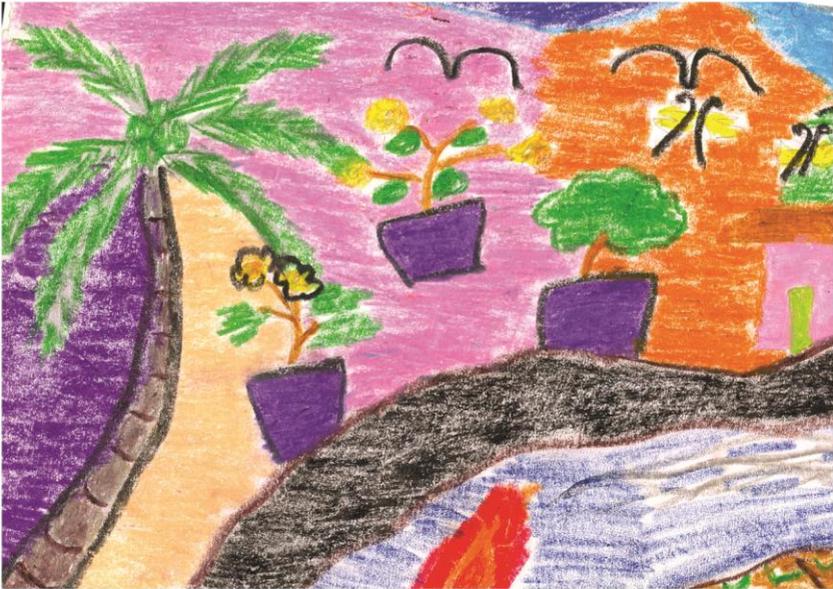


“The World We Want”



**Consultations with Sri Lankan children on their
priorities for post 2015**

September 2013

Cover Drawing Theme : “Keep the environment clean”

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FOREWORD

Consulting with children is a big part of how we at Save the Children know what to do. Save the Children is committed to making sure that children's voices are heard and heeded; from problem identification to project design, from implementation to evaluation.

We adults often miss two important aspects of communicating with children. The first is that children know what their problems are. If we fulfil their right to participate, there is a very strong chance we will learn about what is really bothering them. We'll learn what scares them. And we'll know what troubles them about their daily lives.

The things that bother children are real. They wish traffic was better controlled and drivers were more courteous. Children wish we adults would not drink so much. They wish their mothers would not go abroad to work and that children with disabilities were better cared for. These issues came up when the children were consulted on what is the world they would like to live in by 2030.

Second, and this may seem surprising to some readers, the children have sensible solutions to the issues they have identified. They want the governments to stop child labour. Children want the governments to prevent parents, especially mothers from migrating abroad for work. Children want parents to take more responsibility for their children with disabilities and stop putting them in hostels. They want to see the governments put an end to child abuse as well as drug and alcohol abuse.

The children of Sri Lanka have given voice to their thoughts. I hope you enjoy reading this report as much as our staff has enjoyed preparing it. And when you are finished reading it, we invite you drop us a note with your thoughts or the thoughts of the children in your home at feedback.srilanka@savethechildren.org.

William Lynch
Country Director

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Introduction

The current Millennium Development Goals (MGDs) are soon coming to an end. They were historical in a sense of unifying the globe in trying to reach a better world by 2015. A world was dreamt of where no one would suffer from hunger, every single child would have access to education and less children would die, among other goals.

As 2015 is soon in sight, the world leaders are busy at the moment on planning how the world should look like in the future, by 2030 for instance.

As with any decision making affecting children, they have to be consulted. We are talking about the world when current one year olds would be young adults. So it is crucial to consult the children of today to hear what is the world they want to live in, when they are grown up.

66 children from the Eastern and Southern Province, between the ages 8–18 years old, want the end of sexual abuse and exploitation, they want to be with their mothers rather than experience them migrating overseas and thus experiencing the trauma of not having one of the most important people around to protect them, they want the early marriage practice to stop. Additionally, they want to enjoy the proper care of their parents and not to live in institutions, and they would rather enjoy

education than have to be working. Also, the children are afraid of dangerous traffic.

Let us take these messages forward and commit to eradicating the problems the children identified. Only in that way can we ensure that those who are the future – whether they will become a future leader, parent or professional or all of these – have influenced the global agenda. The post 2015 agenda needs to include the voices and inputs of the future generation.

Summary

Save the Children organised a consultation with 66 children (40 girls, 26 boys) from vulnerable areas of the Eastern Province and Southern Province about their priorities for change in the post-2015 MDG framework. At the end of the discussion they came up with the following suggestions.

1. To be protected from sexual abuse and exploitation

- “Beyond 2015, if not sooner, children should be free from sexual abuse. Special attention needs to be taken to prevent girls from sexual abuse ” – A boy from the age group 13–18
- “Children are subjected to abuse at homes and in schools ”- A boy from the age group 8–12

2. To not to have their mothers migrate.

- “Mothers going abroad and leaving children should be avoided and it has to be treated as crime.” A girl from the age group 13–18

- “It is good if a mother is with her children and makes them happy and doesn’t go abroad.” – 10-year-old girl

3. To be safeguarded from early marriage

- “Children should not be allowed to marry at an early age. Stop early marriage legally.” Boys and girls from the age group 13–18
- “Educate parents about the negative impact of early marriage” A girl, 17 years old

4. To avoid child labour and rather have access to education

- “Children should not be sent to work for any cause. Parents should avoid sending their children to do domestic work.” A boy from the age group 13–18
- “ All children should receive quality education without being sent to do child labour” Girls from the age group 13–18

5. To live in a good family environment with the proper care and attention of parents

- “Parents have to be at home with their children and protect them from danger. It is the responsibility of each parent.” A girl from the age group 13–18
- “If my father stops drinking liquor, we would be happy. Drinking liquor should be stopped totally.” A boy from the age group 8–12

6. Children should be with their parents and not left in institutions / children’s homes.

- “Due to the death of my father, my mother left me in an institution and went abroad. It makes me very sad ...” A girl from the age group 8–12
- “Parents should take personal care of their children and not send them to institutions or homes.” Boys from the age group 13–18

7. Living in a country where traffic safety measures are ensured

- “Take action to stop driving under the influence of liquor. Insist that drivers follow the traffic rules.” A boy from the age group 13–18
- “Take measures to stop careless driving and exceeding the speed limit. The violators should be punished.” A boy, 10 years old

The following matters were also brought up by the children as concerns during the consultation:-

Special protection for the excluded children

- “Protection for disabled, orphaned and street children should be improved.”
- “Protection should be further improved for orphaned children.”
- “Take action to protect both girls and boys.”
- “Keeping disabled children with their parents and not left alone.”

Destruction of historical heritage

- “Our historical monuments should be protected and benefit the next generation – steps should be taken immediately to safeguard them.” Girls from the age group 13–18– Southern Province.

Abuse of drugs and alcohol

- “Alcohol and drug outlets should be closed in all countries”
- “By 2015 there should not be any drug abuse. Make next year an alcohol free year.” A boy from the age group 13–18

Development of their motherland

- “There should be development in the country. Village people must work in unity for the development of our country.” A boy from the age group 13–18 Eastern Province.

Background

The children involved in this consultation were from vulnerable areas in the Batticaloa and Matara districts. The consultations took place in September 2013. In total, 66 children between the ages of 8–18 participated in the consultation. They were divided into two groups, one of younger children one of older children. The children who were 8–12 years old were categorized as *younger*. The age group had in total 35 children taking part. In the older age group 31 children took part in the consultation altogether. On average, there were 15 to 16 children in each consultation group and the duration of each consultation was approximately three and half hours, including breaks.

Following the introduction of the facilitation team, the children were thanked for coming to the consultation. In order to start the interaction between children, few icebreakers were introduced. Written consent was obtained from them for their participation, sharing information and for using the same in the framework. Their consent has been recorded in printed form.

The purpose of the consultation was shared with the children, as it was highlighted that the information gathered from them will be used for the development of the post MDG framework. A child friendly version of the

current MDGs (2000–2015) was shared with the children that covered their background, as given below.

1. 'MDGs' means the 8 International development goals accepted by world leaders.
2. This was officially established following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations (UN) in 2000.
3. All the 192 UN member states and 23 International organisations have supported and agreed to achieve these goals by the year 2015.

The **aim** of the MDGs and how they help the poorest countries to improve their social and economic conditions, and their development was also explained briefly. In addition, while giving more detailed information about the current eight MDGs, the children were informed of the Sri Lankan government's achievements related to the current MDGs.

Children's input is also mentioned as an important factor for contributing to the future agenda. They were requested to focus their discussions on their priorities based on the things they would like to be changed or improved in their lives after the year 2015. Children also had a discussion focusing on other vulnerable children, such as children with disabilities, unaccompanied children, children living in institutional care and working children.

Methodology

The purpose of the discussion was to let the boys and girls voice their priorities for influencing a new development agenda, post 2015. A participatory approach was used, which means that the group activities were designed to enable the younger and older children to express their views and experiences freely. To encourage the involvement and active participation of all the children, they were asked to work on three main activities to discuss the following:

- The things that make them feel **Happy– Unhappy** in their families, schools and communities –the 8–12 age group
- The things that they **Like – Dislike** in their families, schools and communities – the 13–18 age group
- The things that make them feel **Safe– Unsafe** in their families, schools and communities – both the 8–12 and 13–18 age groups

The things that they **would like to change about their lives** and the lives of other children in their communities – both the 8–12 and 13–18 age groups Consultation methods included: writing, drawing, pair work, small group work and a plenary discussion. The printed version

Next, the plenary discussion took place. Children were given an opportunity to explore the ideas and the reasons that justified their thoughts. Here, children were able to see the differences between the presentations of boys and girls, and about their priorities as well. For instance, in the south, the boys raised the issue of having a different experience due to the fact that they were more exposed to the outside world, unlike the girls who were culturally more restricted to the home.



Figure 2: Children are discussing on actions that are needed to change their lives

Finally, children were asked to come out with any other comments they might have, and asked if they had anything to say to the world leaders about the changes needed in their lives. Almost all the children responded with their own or other children's experiences. The consultation

finished with a group exercise to show the effectiveness of working together. A vote of thanks was delivered by the facilitation group for children's active participation.

Findings

Theme I: Children want to be protected from sexual abuse and exploitation

Children feel that it is the first and foremost duty of parents to protect them from all forms of abuse and exploitation. They feel safe when they are with their parents, despite the fact that at times it can be a parent who is the abuser. The absence of parents, and the lack of proper care and attention of children that often results, create opportunities for other adults to commit sexual abuse and exploit children. According to the children, they insist that adults should not make use of children's vulnerability for sexual abuse and exploitation. Children are aware of laws and regulations against this menace, but they say that they are not properly implemented.

- “Children are subjected to sexual abuse by the rich, village people and neighbours.”
- “Eradicate child abuse in the country.”
- “Don't abuse children. Parents have to protect children from abuse “ Boys from the age group 13–18

Theme 2: Children do not want their mothers to migrate overseas

A mother's role is crucial laying the foundation stone for the development of a child. However, according to children's opinions today, mother migration shatters all hope of this. Mother migration leaves most of the affected children in the lurch. Annually, over 100 000 Sri Lankan women, most of them mothers, migrate to work overseas. Some estimate that one million children are left behind. The main impact on children's lives due to mother migration are: loneliness, dropping out from school, vulnerability due to increased access to child abuse, avenues open to different forms of child exploitation, child labour, institutionalization and, mental stress. Many children expressed that being with their mother and enjoying her love and affection is far more important than the wealth from abroad. The children hope that the government will take remedial action to stop the migration of mothers, and they also stated that no child anywhere in the world should suffer from this.



Figure 3: Children feel that mother migration shatters all hopes of them

- “It hurts me a lot to see my friend’s sadness when her mother was abroad.” A girl from the age group 8–12
- “We children are facing lot of difficulties due to mother migration.”
- “The government has to take action to stop parents going abroad and has to inform them that they will be punished for doing so.”
- “My mother went abroad, leaving me in my uncle’s house.” A girl from the age group 8–12
- “It is good if a mother is with her children and makes them happy, and doesn’t go abroad.” A girl, 10 years old

Theme 3: Children want to be safeguarded from early marriage

According to the children, poverty, a lack of education, the absence of mothers, conflict among parents and not knowing about the negative impact of early marriage are some of the main causes for early marriage. The loss of parents or mother migration play a part in this problem. In this scenario, it is the responsibility of the government to oversee that no one violates the marriage ordinance.

- “Children should not be allowed children to marry when they are still teenagers. Stop underage marriage.” Both girls and boys from the age group 13–18
- “The early marriage of children happens due to the lack of education of their parents.” A girl from the age group 13–18

Theme 4: Children do not want to be engaged in child labour and rather would go to school

The poverty of a family pushes children to be engaged in child labour. The children expressed that, at this young age, they are pushed to shoulder the burden of their household. Though there is a compulsory education

policy, and strict laws against child labour, the children were of the opinion that these laws are not properly implemented. It was felt that some parents do not know the value of education and the negative impact of child labour, and therefore do not follow the law. Children from remote areas are especially affected by this.

- “Parents have to send the children to school and not allow them work.” Boys from the age group 13–18
- “If the government takes action to stop child labour we would be happy.” A girl from the age group 13–18
- “Take legal action to make the parents send their children regularly to school.” A girl from the age group 13–18
- “Children will be happy if they are sent to school and not to work.” A boy from the age group 8–12
- “Make all the children go to school.” Children from the age group 13–18

Theme 5: Children want to live in a safe family environment with the proper care and attention of their parents

The family environment is the best place for a child to grow up. The children expressed a need for a peaceful

atmosphere in their family, without quarrels between the parents. As stated above, the children do not want the mothers to migrate. Fathers' alcohol consumption was raised as a concern. Children want their voices to be heard and they want to be looked after in their homes. They trust that if their parents are with them they will be protected from all sorts of abuse and exploitation.

- “If mothers and fathers would not fight, we would be happier“ Children from the age group 8–12
- “Mothers should avoid leaving children alone at home. Parents should have their children with them when they visit faraway places.” Girl, 10 years old
- “A father should not give alcohol to his children.” A boy from the age group 8–12
- “Parents should not fight at home and should live with their children happily.” Boys from the age group 13–18
- “Parents have to be with their children and make them happy.” A girl from the age group 13–18
- “Keep disabled children with their parents and do not leave them.” Girls from the age group 13–18

Theme 6: Children should be with their parents and not in institutions / children's homes

Institutions / children's homes should be regarded as the last resort for a place for children to stay. Research in Sri Lanka shows that most of the children placed in institutions have one or two parents alive. Whatever the reasons parents have for placing their children in the institutions, they are not generally accepted by the children. Children would rather be with their parents and siblings. Also, the children consulted are of the opinion that there is room for the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in such institutions. Therefore, it seems that children are totally against institutionalization.

- “Instead of sending children to institutions, the parents should take care of them.” Boys from the age group 13–18
- “Due to the death of my father, my mother placed me in the institution and went abroad. It makes me very sad ...” A girl from the age group 8–12
- “It was agony for me not to see my mother while I was in the hostel.” A girl from the age group 8–12
- “I was sad when my friend went to the children's home and left her house.” A girl from the age group 8–12

Theme 7: Children want to live in a country where traffic safety measures are ensured

Children are very much concerned about road accidents, in which mainly children and the elderly are victims. According to the children the causes for such accidents are: careless driving, taking unnecessary risks, speeding, driving while tired and at risk of falling asleep, and the competitive behaviour of drivers. Also they said the most of the drivers are not following the traffic rules; for instance, they chat on their mobile phones while driving. This endangers the lives of the passengers. Therefore children demand immediate action to be taken to rectify these problems.

- “Take action to stop drunk driving.” A girl from the age group 8–12
- “Take measures to stop careless driving and punish those who drive too fast or drunk.” A boy from the age group 8–12

The children's messages to the Heads of the Governments:

- The government must take stern action to stop mother migration.
- Leaders must see that the prohibition of underage marriage is strictly adhered to by parents, magistrates and religious leaders.
- Safeguarding children from child abuse and exploitation is the paramount duty of the country's rulers.
- Take action to stop drug abuse, including taking strong legal action against the perpetrators.
- The government is to ensure that "Education for All" is not just words but also deeds, in order to stop child labour.
- Authorities should see that the traffic rules are followed strictly by drivers in order to safeguard the typical victims – children and the elderly.

Conclusion

The findings from the consultations clearly demonstrate that children have vision about their needs and wants. Most of their suggestions reveal that they are very concerned about children with disabilities, children in institutions and children who are involved in child labour, and they strongly raised their voices on behalf of these children. Also this reflects that their wants are not for material things, but are mainly focused on matters related to enhancing the lives of all children in the future. It was observed that the boys and girls had a clear sense about the changes needed in the lives of children and the messages they want to deliver to leaders in order that the points raised are incorporated in the post MDG 2015 frameworks.