

Children's Consultation on Their Right To Housing
13th November 2006 India Social Forum, Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium,
New Delhi

Report of The National Children's Consultation on Their Right To Housing

13th November 2006

**India Social Forum
Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium
New Delhi**

Organized by:

**ASES - Jharkhand, Bal Adhikaar Sangharsh Sanghatan, Child Rights for
India Social Forum(CR4ISF), Jeevanshala NBA,
Habitat International Coalition, Salaam Balak Trust, YUVA**

Ye apane ghar ka sawaal hai! (It's the question of our home)

The human right to adequate housing is an inalienable right closely linked to the right to life, in all its spiritual and material aspects. For a child, a home represents the one stable point in her / his life where s/he can turn to, where s/he will find love, peace and security. A home is the source of child's identity, the point from where her / his aspirations take shape.

In India, over 8 million households¹ are living in inadequate housing with either complete lack of or very poor provision of basic services and infrastructure. These very poor and inadequate living conditions certainly impede the development of the children living in such environments. In many places these slums are constantly faced with the threat of forced evictions. In fact, in some places such massive demolition of slums has been taking place in recent times - be it for the *Sanghisation* of Mumbai or the beautification of Delhi, or the development of Bangalore as major IT hub. While this is the case in urban areas, the rural scenario is no different with thousands of families being displaced in the name of 'development' - for the construction of mega dams, establishment of mega mining industries and Special Economic Zones. Apart from this, you also find a group of children who are homeless and live on the streets with not even a family to support.

Poor and inadequate housing, forced evictions, displacement in the name of development or just living on the streets with no support systems what so ever - the impact of these assaults on the housing rights of children is traumatic to say the least!

The opening up of the Indian economy to competition at a global level has forced the country to change its economic growth pattern in recent times which calls for massive investments in infrastructure to fuel such growth. The inadequate housing, demolitions and displacements one is witnessing shows that the economic planning and development being envisioned and implemented in the country is not equitable and just and biased against the poor and marginalised of the country.

In this light, a consultation with about 40 children who have faced violations of their housing rights in some form or the other was organized on 13th November 2006 from 9 - 12 am on the National platform of India Social Forum in New Delhi. These were the children who have faced forced evictions; development induced displacement, children living in inadequate housing conditions as well as homeless/street children.

For this consultation, YUVA with its experience in the field of housing rights decided to get all the partners who have been a part of the struggle for housing rights of the poor and displaced. The idea of the consultation was shared with these partners and all of them

¹ NSS 58th. round survey : CONDITION OF URBAN SLUMS (2002)

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decided to come together on the common platform of India Social Forum along with their child representatives. Following were the partners in this consultation:

- ASES - Jharkhand,
- Bal Adhikaar Sangharsh Sanghatan,
- Child Rights for India Social Forum(CR4ISF),
- Jeevanshala NBA,
- Habitat International Coalition,
- Salaam Balak Trust, YUVA

Though the consultation was planned on 13th November 2006, children played a key role in creating awareness regarding this issue of child's right to housing with the help of stickers, pamphlets and individual dialogue when they were attending other sessions on the three huge grounds of Jawaharlal Nehru stadium. The day of the session witnessed around 40 children and lot of adults who peeped inside the tent with interest and sat throughout the session.

The Session started with children giving a welcome in their own style to the resource person Santosh Shinde and other adults who were present. The session was facilitated by Santosh Shinde (called as Santosh uncle by children), Balprafulta and Durga Gudillu, Mayor of Bal Adhikaar Sangharsh Sanghatan (BASS)²

Durga gave a brief introduction about the consultation on child's right to housing and also shared her childhood experiences. She said that, she is the first one in her family having gone to the school and college. Children in her family were forced to beg and were never sent to school. She and other children from her community, along with the help of YUVA have been able to bring change in their lives through education and process of social empowerment.

My Name in my style!

After sharing her personal experiences, Durga and Santosh conducted an icebreaking exercise with children in which they told children to share their name, where they have come from with some action or the other and the adult crowd got to see different creative ways children presented their identities.



- *Bambaiki Harsha* presented herself in a *bambaiyya* language by saying "*apunka naam Harsha*". (My name is Harsha)
- Mumbai's Aakash asked the audience to look up and said "*upar jo dikhata hai wohi mera naam hai Aakash*" (What you see up is my name, Aakash)³

² BASS is a children's collective formed by them and facilitated by YUVA. It has its own structure of Children's Municipal Corporation. Currently BASS has membership of slum and street children from Mumbai, Nagpur and Nallasopara in Maharashtra.

³ The word Aakash means sky.

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- Delhi's Shiva showed Karate and introduced himself saying that he has been associated with Salaam Balak Trust for a long time.
- Jharkhand's Pinkikumari did the catwalk and acted as she was participating in the fashion show and introduced herself.
- Mumbai's Suraj acted like Don and asked the audience, "*arre diwano mujhe pehechano, mai hoon Suraj*" (My name is Suraj)⁴
- Children from Jeevanshala (children who are a part of Narmada Bachao Andolan) gave their introduction with various slogans like *Narmada Bachao Manav Bachao, Jeevanshala ki kya hai baat, ladai padhai saath saath* (What is Jeevanshala's theme, studies and struggle together)

Children insisted that even adults should introduce themselves in the similar fashion. Lot of adults introduced themselves on the famous Bollywood tunes like *Mera Naam chun chun*, *My Name is Anthony Gonsalves* etc⁵. UN Special Rapporteur on Right To Adequate Housing, Mr. Miloon Kothari was also present for this session and he along with his colleague Shivani Chaudhary from HIC enacted an interview situation and introduced themselves to the children.



Home Sweet Home...

After this Durga took over the facilitation of the session. She asked a question to the children "what is their idea of a home?" and following were variety of responses from all the children⁶:

- *Char diwarein aur chappar matlab ghar* (Four walls and shelter means house)
- *Pyar, Samman, Suraksha jahan hai wo ghar* (Home is where there is love, respect and safety)
- *Jahanpe mere Maa Baap meri sunenge wo hai ghar* (Home is where my parents will listen to me carefully)
- *Thandi, garmi aur baarishse jo bachata hai wo hai ghar* (Home is what saves us from cold, rain and summer)
- *Ghar ke aaju baaju ka parisar saaf hoi wo hai ghar* (Where the surroundings are clean, that is a home!)
- *Jahan sulabh shauchalay hai wo hai ghar* (Home is where there is a toilet)

⁴ This is a famous Hindi film song from the film Don

⁵ These are the famous Hindi movie songs

⁶ While recording children's responses, we have made an attempt to write verbatim by children in Hindi (translated in English) in order to document their feelings in their own words.

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- *Jahan Maa Baap jhagadate nahin, baap daru nahi pita wo hai ghar* (Home is where the parents do not fight and father does not drink alcohol)
- *Ghar matlab jahan achha khana ho, padhai ke liye achha light ho aur bahot khilone ho* (Home is where you get good food, good light for studying and lot of toys to play)
- *Ghar aisa ho jahanse school pass mein ho* (School should be near from home)
- *Ghar aisa ho jahan padosiyonka zagda na ho* (There should not be any fights with neighbours in our home)

Demolishing Homes - Demolishing Dreams!

When Santosh uncle asked children what did they feel when their house was demolished or when they were displaced, children became very emotional and many of them had tears in their eyes while sharing those painful memories. Their responses are as follows:

- *Ghar ke bina ek ladki kaise surakshit rahegi? Jo ladki ki ghar ke bhitar bhi suraksha ki guarantee nahi uska bahar kya haal hoga?* (How can a girl live safe life without her home? For a girl whose security is not guaranteed even in her home, what will happen to her when she goes out?)
- Priyanka, Jamshedpur - Jharkhand
- *Ghar tutane ke baad aisa lagta hai ki ghar tutanese achha ham mar jaate.* (When our houses are demolished, we feel that why didn't we die instead?)
- Aakash, Mumbai
- *Ghar tutanepar hamare saare dost chut jaate hai. Hamara padhai likhai khel kud sab band ho jaata hai.* (When our houses are demolished, we lose our friends, we also have to discontinue our studies)
- PinkiKumari, Jamshedpur - Jharkhand
- *Badonke jaise bachhonko bhi ghar ki chinta rahati hai, jab ghar todan ke liye municipality aati hai ti ham use bahot gali dete hai....* (Like adults, children are also worried about their home. When the Municipality comes to demolish our houses, we curse them)
- Harsha Lade, Mumbai
- *"Ghar tutane ke bad police hamara saaman lekar bech deta hai aur paisa kamata hai"* (After demolishing our houses, police sell our belongings and earn money)
- Mandar Lade, Mumbai

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- *Narmada ghati ke sabko tukadon jaisa feka hai, Ham sab bikhar gaye hai, ham dubkar mar jate to achha hota* (Everybody staying in Narmada valley have been thrown out like pieces, all of us are scattered, it would have been better if we would have died)

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"Mein raaste pe reheat hoon. Station mera ghar hai" (I stay on the street, my home is railway station)

- Salman, Mumbai

Sab Thik Nahi Hai (All is not well) say the children of India

After sharing their responses, children performed a street play depicting different situations of child labour, children deprived of educational opportunities and slum demolitions and displacement. After every scene, children made a circle and said "*Sab Thik Hai*" conveying the need for questioning social acceptance of different human rights violations of children. This street play was appreciated well by the audience. Following the play, children had a question answer session with all the adults present, in which they questioned the adults and expected the answers from them.



A Child from Mumbai, Aakash asked Mr. Miloon Kothari, (UN Special Rapporteur on Right To Adequate Housing), "What can be done now about the people whose houses have been demolished. Mr. Miloon Kothari in his response said, "You have asked me a difficult question! I will definitely reach your voice to the United Nations. As far as the response

to the demolition is concerned, we are trying our level best at the United Nations to pressurize government for stopping the demolitions and ensuring housing rights for the poor.

Drawing my home

Santosh then asked children to draw their idea of an ideal home. Children with their different creative imagination came up with beautiful drawings. These drawings also represented their backgrounds for eg; Children from Narmada valley showed river in front of their house where as a child from Mumbai showed *Sulabh Shauchalaya* near their home.

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Santosh then asked children to show their drawings and explained them about how these drawings are representing their dream home. All of them then showed the drawings very proudly and also looked at what their friends from different parts of India have drawn. While showing and explaining their drawings, Salman, a street child from Mumbai said, "This is my friend's house as I do not have house of my own but I want my friend to live in this beautiful home"

Songs, Slogans and Solidarity



Children then gave different slogans demanding their rights and supporting solidarity support for each other's struggle. Some of the slogans were *Ladenge Jitenge, Ham Hamara Haq mangte nahi kisise bhik mangte*. Children from Jeevanshaala of Narmada Bachao Andolan also gave different slogans and presented a song "*Number one banenge hum, Number one* and taught this song to their friends.

Joining with children from Jeevan shala, children from Adarsh Sewa Sansthan Jharkhand also presented the song, *Apne Man Ke Jeene Do*. Children from other states also joined them. There is a CD of this song in which children themselves are the singers. On the occasion of this consultation, Mr. Miloon Kothari and children inaugurated this CD.



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Is liye raah sangharsh ki hum chune

The consultation came to an end with the children holding candles in their hands and singing the song, *Is liye raah Sangharsh ki hum chune*, inviting peace, harmony and solidarity from the adult world for securing their rights. At the end of the consultation, Mr. Miloon Kothari told children, "This is the best session I have attended in the India Social Forum. I truly appreciate your maturity and thought processes"



Children while leaving, were busy taking contact details from their new friends. With these details, they were also carrying the beautiful memories of solidarity support, slogans, songs and the spirit of continued struggle for securing their rights.

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