

INDIA

“Empowering Students for Participation and Decision Making in Schools in the Context of Kasaragod District, Kerala, India.”

P. Bhaskaran, Anil Kumar, Carmaly Pathikunnel Abraham

1. Frame of Reference

Human rights belong to all people, regardless of their age, including children. However, because of their special status – where by children need extra protection and guidance from adults - children also have some special rights of their own. These are called children’s rights and they are laid out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989. The convention is guided by the principles of ‘*Best Interest of the Child*’ and ‘*Non-discrimination*’ and ‘*Respect for views of the child.*’ This is the most significant of all international laws for children. This, together with the Indian Constitution and Laws, determine what rights all children must have in our context.

- **The back ground of the project**

We may read the UN Convention as a suggested "contract" between the child and adult generations, as a desired model where children have access to resources, they are protected and they are allowed to participate. The contract is built upon the three hard **P's**; **provision, protection and participation**. The three hard P's will touch upon sharing of material and mental resources, sharing knowledge and experiences, and even affection and power. The Convention could be seen as an attempt to make these aspects of the generational model explicit.

This Project has in its focus on all the 3 three P's – *Provision, protection and Participation*. Importance is given to the child’s right to possess, receive or have access to

resources and services particularly in schools. The focus should be that children should get a lot and the best.

It is also expected that the school should provide a healthy and *protective* environment for the emotional, social and physical wellbeing of children. This project emphasizes for subtle change in this area in favor of children.

Participation stands for the right to do things, express oneself and have an effective voice as an individual child and as a larger group. This project helped schools to create an atmosphere where in children were given new chances of participation and co-determination.

- **Implications of Articles of UN CRC in this project**

The various Articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the child have its implications in this Project. The following articles have special relevance to this project.

1. Article 3- The best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children.
2. Article 12- the child is capable of forming his or her own views; the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child.
3. Article 13 - The child shall have the right to freedom of expression.
4. Article 31 - The right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities.
5. Article 36 - Protect the child against all other forms of exploitation.

- **Country & Regional Strategies**

Education in India has been fast changing. *The Right to free and compulsory Education Act passed in 2009* by the Indian Parliament was a mile stone in Indian education for equity based quality education for all children. The Union Government at the central and the Governments at States and at lower levels work for achieving the aim “**Quality Education Pupils Right**”. It is a fact that equity based quality education could be achieved only by ensuring a friendly, rewarding and supportive school environment as conceived by the UN Convention on the **Rights of Child**.

- **Child Rights and classroom-The Kerala Scenario**

Kerala state is in the fore front in educational attainment. The enrolment of children is near total. The school environment and facilities are fast improving to facilitate activity-based teaching-learning process. More or less, every child has the right to possess, receive or have access to resources and services needed for his/her well being. But there are issues when we talk about Child rights in Kerala context. The child is always a passive partner; his voices are least listened to when things are decided. The

best interest of the child has not been considered while taking decisions pertaining to him/her. This issue is very serious when we talk about the quality of learning.

- **Child Rights & classroom-The scenario in Kasaragod District**

Though situation in Kasaragod district is not much different from Kerala context the district has some specific issues and challenges of its own in the field of education. The bi-lingual (Malayalam & Kannada) situation, the social and educational backwardness of minority and tribal are some of the key factors that affect the policies and programmes of education in the district. Majority of the schools are Govt. schools and this is a positive factor for implementing programmes in schools.

The schools in the district have been changing fast towards creating a child friendly atmosphere. The Govt. schools are much ahead in this march. In many of the schools we could see that serious attempts have been taken by teachers and the local community to make their school premises clean and eco friendly. Attractive drawing can be seen on the walls of schools and class room that provides a conducive learning atmosphere in such schools.

In spite of these attempts, children are still not taken to the desired position as conceived by the Convention on the Rights of Child. Child is still a passive partner or listener when decisions are taken on his behalf. The participation of children in school affairs pertaining to the child is still the weakest area in the district. This must be changed.

- **The Base Line**

The studies conducted by different agencies shows that the situation of children in Kerala is not that good. Children are subjected to exploitation and denial of rights in schools, at homes and in other places. The studies conducted by DIET Kasaragod and DIET Kozhikode have clearly revealed this fact.

The study conducted by DIET kasaragod on “Child Rights and School Management Practices in High Schools of Kasaragod District” had brought out a clear picture about the situation of children in schools. The crux of the findings of the study is given below.

1. In many cases school’s physical environment is not healthy, safe and protective child’s physical and emotional well being.
2. Schools are not able to provide friendly, rewarding and supportive atmosphere for the emotional and psychological well being of the child.
3. There was not an effective classroom and school management practice in many schools essential for a Child friendly School.

4. The participation of parents and the community in school activities was quite good but the participation of children in school activities was very poor and in many cases very pathetic.

- **Initiatives to reform class room in tune with CRC**

Serious attempts have already been initiated in Kerala to reform the classrooms and the schools in accordance with the demands of the Rights of the child. People who got training from LUND University on Child Rights, School and Classroom Management have formed a strong CRC net work now in the State to coordinate and plan activities. Starting from Batch 3 to 15 (now) there are 23 Change Agents in Kerala (Wayanad-7, Malappuram-6, Kozhikode-4, Kannur-3, Kasaragod-3). These Change Agents started working in Kerala to transform the schools based on the vision of CRC.

The main focus of all the teams in Kerala was to promote children's *participation* in decision making in schools. As part of this, the following programmes have already been implemented in the state.

1. Awareness programmes for parents
2. Training programme for Educational Officers, teachers and Headmasters
3. Strengthening of School Parliament activities
4. Campaign for promoting girls education
5. Developing new models on Activity based, participatory mode of teaching learning process.
6. Formation of *Jagratha Samithis* (Child Right Protection Councils) in schools
7. Reading materials to teachers on Child Rights
8. Programmes for enhancing enrolment and reducing drop-outs.

As in other districts of Kerala, some attempts have been initiated in Kasaragod district also. Sri George Joseph, former Principal of DIET Kasaragod had organized programmes for popularizing the concept of CRC in schools. Training was given to teachers and Headmasters of selected schools on CRC. Parents were given orientation. As a result, classrooms and school atmosphere changed a lot in accordance with CRC. This Project is a continuation these activities.

2. Purpose

This project aims to transform schools in Kasaragod district in to Child friendly to a desirable level. It is also targeted to strengthen the structures and systems in the schools and in the department to make the transformation easy and smooth.

The purpose of this change project is *“To provide children with Equity based Quality Education by empowering them in participation and decision making in classroom, school and home environment in the targeted schools of Kasaragod district”*.

3. Methodology & Activities

We had joint and individual assignments under this change project. The following are the Institutions and areas of work shared by the Team members.

Sl.No	Name of Team Member	Institution/Area of work done for the change project.
1.	P. Bhaskaran	DIET Kasaragod – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher Trainees of DIET Kasaragod. • District level initiatives such as orientation, training and base line studies. • Strengthening of school parliament in selected schools.
2.	Anil Kumar	DIET Lab School, Kasaragod <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening of School Parliament • Life skill training • Empowering students in participation.
3.	Carmaly	Holy Family School Kumbala – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening of school parliament • Life skill training • Promoting the creativity of children

Activities

The following were the major activities undertaken under this change project.

ACTIVITY-1: Empowering Teacher Trainees of DIET Kasaragod on the relevance and practice of child rights and school management.

The programme is to create awareness among teacher trainees about the relevance and practice of Child Rights in school context. As part of this one day training was given to the Trainees. Experience of participants was shared to sensitise child right issues. A film was screened for discussion. In addition to this, worksheets, group work, brain storming sessions, Power point presentation on CRC etc were there.

ACTIVITY-2: A Study by Teacher Trainees on the practice of Child Rights in schools.

A study was conducted by Teacher Trainees of DIET Kasaragod to understand whether the schools are child friendly. Trainees had gone for Internship in these schools.

The following were the areas focused in the study.

1. Whether the schools provide a friendly, rewarding and supportive school environment for the children?
2. Whether children's cooperation and active learning is promoted?
3. The involvement of students, parents and the community in school activities.
4. Promoting equal opportunities and participation of children in decision making.

8 schools were selected for the study. The tool was designed by the Trainees. The data was collected during the time of their Internship in the month of January, 2011. A team of 5 trainees were placed in each school for 8 days.

ACTIVITY-3: Training for Empowering Headmasters on Child Rights in schools.

Training was given to 536 Headmasters (Primary and Secondary Schools) to sensitize them on child rights and related issues and empower them to make their schools child friendly. The Training was mainly based on UNCRC. A presentation on the findings of a study by DIET Kasaragod on Child Rights in Schools was also discussed in the training.

ACTIVITY-4: District level Seminar on Child Rights.

A district level Seminar on *“Current and Emerging Issues on Child Rights and School Management Practices* was organized in DIET on 29th March 2011. The Seminar was to popularize the concept of Child Rights and the need for creating child friendly atmosphere in schools.

The participants of the Seminar were Representatives of Local Self Government, HMs, Principals, Teachers, student leaders, Parent Teacher Association, Teacher educators, Teacher Trainees, DIET Staff, NGOs, Child Line workers and Teacher's unions. The Seminar was inaugurated by Dr. MA Khader, Director, SCERT. Kerala.

The major presentations in the Seminar were;

1. Child Rights-Protection and Practice in Kerala context by Advocate Mani.G. Nair, Chair Person, Child Welfare Commission, Kasaragod.
2. UN Convention on the Rights of Child by Mr.Sreekumar, Of Kozhikode DIET.
3. Issues and challenges faced by our children in schools, at home and in the society by Dr. Krishna Kumar, Director IMHANS Kozhikode.
4. A Study Report on Child Rights and School Management Practices in High Schools of Kasaragod District” by P. Bhaskaran, Lecturer, DIET Kasaragod.

ACTIVITY-5: Training to Headmasters/Teachers on School Parliament activities

School Parliament has been visualized as an effective strategy for promoting student's participation in schools over all management and functioning. As part of strengthening and popularizing School Parliament in schools, a special programme was launched in the month of October 2011. For this purpose 20 schools were selected. Training was given to Headmasters and one teacher from each school.



The focus in the Training was on the following;

1. Sensitizing the concept of Child Rights
2. Ensuring Child Rights through student's participation
3. School Parliament & Student's participation

Schools were visited and field support was given to all these schools for organising Student Parliament in these schools.

ACTIVITY-6: District Student Parliament-Leader Ship Training

A District level Leadership training for Upper Primary students was conducted. Selected Student Parliament Members of the 23 schools were given leader ship training for the formation of District parliament. The theme of the training was **Child Rights and Schools**. Sri. KV Kunhiraman, Member of Kerala Legislative Assembly (Ex) had handled classes for the students.

ACTIVITY-7: District Student Parliament

A District level Student Parliament was held on 04/01/2012 at DIET Kasaragod. Upper Primary students from 23 schools were participated in the programme. The programme was to help students to take an active role as decision makers in solving issues related to their own rights in schools.

The President, Prime Minister, Speaker and the Ministers were selected among the students. They held a special session on that day; the theme was *Child Rights and schools*. The various issues related to the rights of children in schools were raised in the Parliament. Students were engaged in serious discussions on the various aspects of these issues and come out with a way forward to make schools child friendly.

ACTIVITY-8: Strengthening of School Parliament in Project Schools.

A programme for strengthening School Parliament in DIET Lab School and Holy Family School was started in the beginning of the present (2011-12) academic year. A Core Team was formed in these schools for planning and monitoring School Parliament activities. The team sat regularly and planned the activities at each level. The Port folios of the Ministers were decided-cleanliness, safe drinking water, discipline, cultural activities, sports and games, health care and Reading Circle.

The Parliament has under taken so many activities with the participation of all students. Some of the activities were;

1. Effective use of Library. Promoted reading habits among students. Encouraged student's visiting of school Library.
2. Conducted Sports meet and Arts meet.
3. Campus cleaning work
4. Strengthening of Heritage Museum in DIET (by DIET Parliament).

ACTIVITY-9: Formation of Class Councils

Class Councils were formed in DIET Lab school and in Holy family school. A Chairman and a Secretary were elected for each class. Students discussed matters pertaining to their class and school. The Class Teachers gave guidance to the students for convening the meeting. Class Councils were convened once in a fortnight.

ACTIVITY-10: Formation of a Code of Conduct in the class and school with involvement of students.

The Class councils and the School Parliament of DIET Lab School and Holy Family School have prepared a **Code of Conduct** for the class and for the school in consultation with the teachers. It is displayed in the classes and in the school. It was actually an agreement among students, teachers and the parents for making school effective and child friendly.

ACTIVITY-11: Student Box and timely follow-up

To help students to come up with their issues and voice grievances Student Box was kept in both the schools. In Holy Family School students were given special orientation to develop self esteem and confidence. A Team was formed in the two schools for the timely follow up based on student's suggestions and grievances.

ACTIVITY-12: Setting of Board in schools to display norms of Child friendly Schools.

Norms of a Child friendly school was framed with the active involvement of students. It was discussed in the School Parliament, in the Staff Council and in the PTA meeting. The norms of a '*Child friendly school*' were displayed prominently in DIET lab school and in Holy Family School.

ACTIVITY-13: Parental Orientation

A parental orientation programme was organized in DIET for making parents aware of many of the aspects of child rights. More than 80% of the parents attended the meeting. The importance was given for empowering them to create a conducive learning atmosphere at home.

In Holy Family School awareness was created among parents about child rights and its practice in school and at home. For this awareness classes, home visits etc were organized.

ACTIVITY-14: Life skill Training to students

The Student Parliament has initiated major activities for developing life skills among students. They are,

- **Training in Chess game**

All the Upper Primary students DIET Lab school and Holy Family School were given training in Chess game. It is a fact that Chess game would help students in developing certain life skills such as concentration, self discipline and team spirit. Trained Resource Teachers were invited for training the students. Every day from 3.30 pm to 4.00pm children in batches practice the Game. Master Trainers were identified among the students to train other students.

- **Training in Swimming**

In DIET Lab School, every week students were given special training in swimming. A nearby pond is used for this purpose. Usually Saturdays were engaged for this. Students of Upper Primary classes were almost covered in this programme.

- **Stitching, Book binding, planting of trees**

In Holy Family School students were given training and exposure in different life skill areas -Stitching, Book binding, planting of trees, Badminton net making etc. Usually children are given training every day at 3.30pm and on Saturdays.



ACTIVITY-15: Residential camp for students

Residential camp for students of Upper Primary classes was conducted in Holy Family School with the active support of parents. It was a leadership camp for both boys and girls.

ACTIVITY-16: Preparation of Individual Development Plan for children

Individual Development Plan was prepared for the total development of the children. This activity was seriously undertaken in Holy family School. As a beginning it was attempted in one class and prepared Individual Development Plan of all the children in the class. In this activity the involvement of parents and the students was ensured. Children were individually treated on the basis of Individual Development Plan. Individual Port-folio was also developed on the basis of Individual Development Plan.

ACTIVITY-17: Reading Circle for enhancing the habit of referencing and reading

To promote the habit of reading and referencing different strategies were adopted in the two schools In Holy Family School, Reading Circles were formed. Children in groups and as individual assigned reading task. Group Leaders monitored the distribution and the reading of books. In DIET Lab School Reading Corners were set up in all the classes. Children's reading habit was promoted through reading competitions, quiz programme etc. The Kannada language medium teachers collected large number of Kannada books for the children.

ACTIVITY-18: "Kaumarya Deepika" - a programme for empowering girl children

Girl empowerment programme called 'Kaumarya Deepika' was strengthened in Holy family School with the support of SSA (A Govt. of India Project for education) The programme aimed to develop confidence among girl children to lead a healthy and successful life. A Counseling centre was started in the school especially for the girl children. Orientation for mothers and girl children, training in socially useful products, leadership training etc were also organized.

ACTIVITY-19: Strengthening of Club activities

To ensure students participation in various activities through team work various Club activities were organized in DIET Lab School and in Holy Family School. The important Clubs were Social Science Club, Maths Club, Science Club, Road Safety Club, Eco Club and Literary Club. It was ensured that all students were members in one or the other Club. Students were actively involved in club activities and worked in teams and shared their ideas. Day celebrations, field trips, creative works etc were organized.

ACTIVITY-20: Road safety programme

Road safety programme was successfully implemented in Holy Family School. Every day, at 4 pm when the students leave school, the trained 'Students Police' would help other children to cross the road and get into their Bus. Awareness class on Road safety was conducted for the students and parents.

Participation of students in Road Safety Programmes is honoured with two Awards- The best school and the best Road Safety Programme Guide teacher award for the year 2010.

4 Results

The various activities implemented under the change project has resulted short term, medium term and long term achievement in the target group. All the activities implemented in this change project had resulted in empowering students for participation and decision making in their schools.

The training and the continuous support given to Teacher Trainees of DIET Kasaragod had resulted in creating awareness about child rights and its relevance in schools. Trainees were able to analyse the Kerala context based on the 3 Ps. And it was concluded that the **Participation** aspects need to be given more importance in our context. They had developed a plan of action for implementing CRC activities in schools.

The study conducted by the trainees helped them to sensitise and analyse the situations of child rights in schools. They had come up with suitable activities for changing the school environment in favor of the child.

The Training given to Headmasters of 536 schools had positive results. Headmasters were sensitized on the present situation of Child Rights in their schools. They regularly assessed and reported the child right situations in their schools based on the Tool designed for this purpose.

The training given to Headmasters of selected schools for strengthening School Parliament was another major attempt in this project. School Parliament was activated in 23 Upper Primary schools. In these schools children were given opportunities for participation in almost all the activities of the school. In improving Noon Meal, maintaining cleanliness, participation of all children in the class room activities, special care to physically and mentally challenged children and girl children were the major areas focused.

The leadership Training given to children from 23 schools helped them to organize various activities in their schools with the active involvement of other children.

In DIET Lab School, Parliament provided a good opportunity for the children to perform as leaders. The girl children were more active than boys. The Parliament organized cultural fests, camps etc, where in every one has give a chance to participate. Children were given easy access to the library and promoted reading habits for self development. Children developed the habit of using their spare times for reading in the reading corner.

In Holy Family School Kumbbla, the involvement of students in the class room teaching-learning process was very high. Students and teachers followed a self imposed discipline in their work. The school recognised good practices of students in the morning assembly. Students framed code of conduct in their classes and for the school. It was observed that students followed the norms they had collectively decided.

The orientation given to parents on Child rights was resulted in their active participation in school level programme. The suggestions and issues raised by parents were discussed in the staff meeting and follow up activities were under taken. For eg. Teachers took extra classes for the backward children in hard subjects like Maths and English. A Radio Station called “Rainbow” was set up in DIET Lab School with the support of parents, which helped the students to expose their talents in different areas. Parents now support their children in their learning too.

- The reading habits of student were also improved. Those who came first and second in reading competition were participated at the district level. Two of the students were placed 8th and 10th position in the district. Children use their spare times for reading in the reading corner. Some of the children took membership in other leading Library of the locality.
- The importance of unity in diversity was seen in School Assembly. Without any compulsion students are now maintain discipline and order in the school. They help each other and started following values of democracy in life.

The Student Box helped to reduce the grievances of children. Every week the Team in charge opened the box and attended student’s complaints and suggestions. Timely follow up action encouraged children to come up with their genuine problems. They are now more confident and dared to share their feelings and problems with the teachers.

The life skill training given to students – Chess game and Swimming had improved the level of confidence mainly among girl children. Now they started training the younger ones of the school. This leader ship quality was resulted in their class room study also. Now they are more active in the class room activities.

- Various club activities were organised in schools. Students were associated at least in any of the clubs. Club activities empowered students to take decisions in planning various activities. It improved the talents and learning performance of students.

In Holy Family school also students actively involved in life skill related activities. It resulted in products of different varieties. The training in life skills developed a sense of self esteem among students through self initiative in their learning and in other areas of life. The learning achievement of students also improved by applying the skills and attitude (they got from the life skills) in their learning.

The *Kaumara Deepika programme* helped children to get awareness about health care. Girl children are more benefitted from this. School environment is made hygienic and conducive for learning. Children are now getting healthy and active. Cases of student illness minimized. School environment is clean and hygienic. The positive feedback and support given to students on the basis of Individual Development Plan and Individual Portfolio helped students to actively participate in the classroom teaching, learning process.

The *Road Safety Programme* brought two awards for Holy Family School. The best school and the best Road Safety Programmes Guide teacher for the year 2010. The programme helped to develop a sense of confidence among students to take decisions of their own in matters pertaining to them.

5. Discussion and Reflection

The main purpose of this Change Project was to provide children with Equity based Quality Education *by empowering them in participation and decision making in classroom, and school*. All the activities implemented in this project were aimed to empower students to be an active member in the school in all matters relating to them. For this students, teachers, Headmasters and Parents were targeted in this project.

The result was rather encouraging. Students in the project schools got new opportunities for participation through *School Parliament and Club activities*. In matters like planning of important school festivals, club activities, deciding the menu of noon meal, study tour programme, redressing of their grievances, School uniform, maintaining the cleanliness of campus and the classroom students had voices. Teachers and the Headmasters stated listening to the children. This was a great change.

As a team we had worked coherently for the change project. The collective thinking and sharing helped us a lot to plan specific and needy activities. Thanks to our mentor Per Wickenberg for the freedom we were given for planning and implementing specific activities. In the initial stage of the project we didn't give much importance

to activities like school Parliament. But later on we found that School Parliament was an important strategy to promote students participation in school activities and then onwards we focused more on strengthening school parliament activities.

We could see observable changes in some of the classes where students and teachers have developed good relations. Teachers have developed an attitude to care the uncared children in the class. Students are seen free to tell their problems to the teachers. These changes are more evident in the schools where we often visited and supported. We know that teachers need continuous support and back up at least for some time to go with their new vision.

Though the change project has brought good results, we are not free from **challenges**. The present curriculum and the system compel teachers to cover the text book portions with least consideration to quality and individual student's needs and rights. Lack of sufficient infrastructure facilities in schools poses serious threat on students and teachers to make their schools child friendly.

The concept of Child Friendly School is still a theoretical exercise among some of the teachers, Headmasters and educational Officers. The frequent transfer of educational officers, teachers and Headmasters is a real block on our way. They could not work with long term vision to make their school a second home to the children. This challenge could be seriously taken up.

The role of educational administrators is very crucial. At present they are not committed to support schools in this area. The concept of child rights and the need for its practice should be popularized among all the stake holders.

6. Way Forward

We know that Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) is a means of transporting the concept of Child Rights into classroom practice and school management. As a result of the interventions in the last few years, the concept of child right has been popularized among stake holders of school education in the district. The change projects implemented by the earlier team and the present team resulted substantial changes in the attitude of a group of teachers in the district. More serious attempts should be made to upscale the present initiatives so as to reach the benefits to a larger number of children.

While framing future projects in the district in this area the following basic dimensions of Child Friendly School (as conceived by UNICEF) should be focused.

1. Our school programmes and activities should enable the *participation of all kinds of children*. (Social, linguistic, physically and mentally challenged and in terms of ability).
2. The school activities should be *academically effective and relevant to children's needs for life and livelihood knowledge and skills*. Teachers should be given more freedom to design and implement innovative activities.
3. The School environment should be *Healthy and safe for, and protective of, children's emotional, psychological, and physical well-being*. Clean and accessible drinking water, sanitation facilities, and hygiene education should be ensured. Focus should be given on creating girl-friendly characteristics in most of these.
4. The schools are made *Gender-responsive in creating environments* and capacities fostering equality.
5. We know that community partnership is the 'key building block' to realizing CFS goals. *Ensure active participation of students, parents, and community* in all aspects of school policy, management and support to children.

The future projects in the district should be made ambitious but realistic; where all the above five elements are to be addressed. There should be a strong team of educational officers at the district level to plan, monitor and support activities at different levels.