



## Principles of Child Participation and Protection

The right of children to be protected from exploitation and to receive education has been recognised as fundamental to a child's dignity and growth as a well-informed individual to build just and fair society. Child labour and failing education systems are matters that directly affect the daily lives of hundreds of millions of children around the world. Actions we take to end such exploitation mean the difference between a life of hope or a life of deprivation for these children.

Children are not the cause of poverty, they are not responsible for widespread child labour, nor are they the reason for failing education systems. It has been adults who have created these problems. And it continues to be. Adults make decisions about government policies, resource allocation, and social priorities that perpetuate these problems. But things have changed.

During the Global March Against Child Labour in 1998, children, especially former child labourers and child activists, spoke directly to the delegates at the International Labour Conference in Geneva, they managed to move the world. It marks the first time in the history that children have had such a direct and visible role in the establishment of international law. The result was the unanimous adoption by the world's governments, trade unions, and employers of a new Convention to end the worst forms of child labour.

Global March Against Child Labour believes that children are subjects of rights, rather than merely recipients of adult protection, and that those rights demand that children themselves are entitled to be heard. It is requested to listen to what children say and to take them seriously, to recognize the value of their own experience, views and concerns.

The right of children to speak and be listened to is now, in fact, a fundamental part of international law. Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that:

*States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.*

*For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.*

This is further reinforced by ILO Recommendation 190 on the implementation of ILO Convention 182 (concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour) which states:

*The programmes of action referred to in Article 6 of the Convention should be designed and implemented as a matter of urgency, in consultation with relevant government institutions and employers' and workers' organizations, taking into consideration the views of the children directly affected by the worst forms of child labour, their families and, as appropriate, other concerned groups...*

But these are mere words on paper, if they are not matched by genuine efforts to give children a chance to be heard.

Exclusion from participation imposes a two-fold discrimination on children. It represents a denial of the fundamental right to be listened to and taken seriously in decisions that affect them in legislation, policy, resource allocation, as required by Article 12 of the CRC. As a result of this exclusion, they are denied the right to influence the exercise of other rights.

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The best way the children can truly learn that they have rights and come to believe in them through the process of acting on them. Having a voice about their rights is therefore essential to push for their fulfilment.

Children who are encouraged to talk are empowered to challenge abuses of their rights and are not simply reliant on adults to protect them. Furthermore, adults can only act to protect children if they know what is happening in children's lives and only children can provide that information.

Children, who feel valued, feel that there are systems for dealing with injustices. Consulting children, specially who are involved in child labour and in child rights and drawing on their perceptions, knowledge and ideas are essential to achieve the overall goal of Global March: "to mobilise worldwide efforts to protect and promote the rights of all children, especially the right to receive a free, meaningful education and to be free from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be harmful to the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development."

### **Global March Principles of Child Participation**

Global March Principles of Child Participation seek to ensure that former child labourers and child activists have an opportunity to organise themselves, learn from each other, and make the world listen to what they have to say.

It's provided that if children are given appropriate support, adequate information and allowed to express themselves in ways that are meaningful to them –pictures, poems, drama, photographs, as well as conventional discussions, interviews and group work- all children can participate in issues that are important to them and affect their lives.

One of the more effective ways of encouraging children to participate and believe in the society is to first respect their rights. If children are given the chance to share their ideas with others and to have them taken seriously, then they will be able to defend their own rights and they will see a democracy principle, that others too, have a right to be heard that must also be respected.

The fundamental principles that are suggested to underpin the whole process of the Global March Principles of Child Participation are that:

- All children should be given due respect. They should be treated with equal respect regardless of their age, situation, ethnicity, abilities or other factors.
- The involvement of children must be completely voluntary.

- The opportunity to participate should be given to all children, especially current and former child labourers.
- Children are entitled to respect for their views and experience.
- The involvement of children should be based on a participatory process.
- Children should be free to interact with each other.
- Child representatives at the public activities should be free to speak on their own without adult direction.
- Children's views and inputs should be listened to and acted upon by the adults.
- Children should be made aware of their rights and empowered to understand and take leadership charges in promoting their rights.
- Children's skills to communicate should be enhanced for them to speak on issues that they find important.
- Children should have access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources; especially those aimed at promoting children's rights, to enable children formulate their independent views.
- Children should be fully informed about the issues to be discussed including the pros and cons of different viewpoints.
- Children should believe in the issues and principles of the deliberations.
- Children should be encouraged and assisted in seeking out additional and alternative information on the issues being discussed.
- Child representatives should be encouraged to get involved in the planning, coordination and decision-making process in all matters that affect them.
- Any other orientation and assistance needed by the children to enable their full participation should be provided.
- The activities and the experience thereof should be interesting, enjoyable and educational for the participating children.
- No child should be asked to support or advocate for any specific proposals of any organisation or movement unless they independently and personally agree with the proposals.
- Children should not be asked or expected to continue participating in programs or activities if they are no longer interested.
- Ground rules should be established, negotiated and agreed with the children at the beginning.
- The responsible adult guardians should be with the children at all possible times to ensure safety of children and to see that all needs of the children are met.

- Follow-up activities should be organised for the children, including the opportunity to collectively analyse and process their experiences.
- Children should not be further exploited or made vulnerable upon return from the events, conference, meetings, etc as the result of their participation.
- Children should not be used by adults for the attainment of their own goals, such as political, ideological or economic advancement.
- The participation of children should be beneficial in preparing them for a responsible life for themselves and others in the spirit of freedom, understanding, equality and friendship among all people.
- During capacity-building and advocacy activities, GMACL shall make sure that children are prepared for the activity; that they know the objectives and what the organizers expect from them. Proper briefing and debriefing should be conducted to all children who participate in these activities.
- GMACL should make sure that children are not exposed to undue stress and hazards during the learning activities. They should be given ample time for rest and recreation.
- The organizers of the learning activity should make sure that the medium for instruction and the methods are appropriate to the level of development of children. There should also be a translator, if needed.
- GMACL will only send children in national and international conferences that have instituted child participation and protection mechanisms. It will also make sure that children are prepared for the conference and the representatives are chosen according to democratic procedures decided by the children themselves. GMACL must also ensure that the children delegate are given equal importance as adult delegates and children delegates should be taken seriously particularly in decision-making.
- No child shall be subjected to media exposure without his/her expressed consent and without the expressed approval of the social worker/parent/legal guardian of the child. A media consent form must be properly signed by the child and the social worker/parent/legal guardian.
- Children who participate in any international conferences must be covered by insurance.
- GMACL will ensure proper mechanisms for children to air their complaints, grievances and feedbacks about the activities that they have participated and towards any staff, volunteers and fellow children.

## **Global March Principles on Child Protection**

*“States Parties shall protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.” (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 19)*

The Global March Against Child Labour also adheres that children should be protected from all kinds of physical, mental, spiritual and economic abuse, and the rights and dignities of all children should be maintained at all times. Global March has formulated the following guidelines for the protection of children. Children have the right to be completely secure from the fear or reality of abuse (either physical or emotional) resulting from an inappropriate contact with any person responsible for their safety and security.

We do this by:

- **Non discrimination:** Children will be protected from any form of discrimination
  - The caste/ communal/ gender sensitivities must be maintained and the feeling of children on these issues must not be hurt in any manner
- **Privacy:** The right to privacy of the children should be upheld at all times and in all situations, especially of the girl child.
  - Children will not be asked to disclose any personal information against their wish
  - There should be separate sleeping arrangements and toilets for girls, in case of overnight stay or in residential complexes.
  - Sheltered toilets
- **Physical Protection:** Children should be given all forms of physical safety (including protection from sexual abuse) and security.
  - They should be protected from nature’s extremes- heat and cold.
  - They should be protected from snake bites, poisonous insects, etc, by providing them with adequate protective gear.
  - Children should be given healthy, nutritious and filling diets and safe drinking water.
  - Children should be provided regular medical check-ups and necessary medication (if required).
  - The staff/ chaperon should have adequate knowledge of first-aid.
- **Mental Protection:** The psychological health of a child should be maintained in all conditions and efforts should be made to enhance the mental well being of a child, especially those that have undergone any form of exploitation, mental, physical, or economical.
  - The staff/ chaperons/ warden/ teachers and all responsible for and interacting with children should maintain dignity and respect in their behaviour (verbal and non-verbal) towards both boys and girls.
  - Care must be taken to use proper language (non-abusive, non-defamatory and non-hurting)
- **Moral Protection:** Moral rights and dignity of the children should be protected
  - Children should not be humiliated and caused pain because of their background
  - Children should not be compelled to narrate their personal stories of abuse and exploitation against their wish.
  - Self esteem and dignity of the children should be upheld at all times and children should not be pitied because of their conditions.

- **Children with Special Needs:** Children should not be discriminated or humiliated because of any physical disabilities.
  - Special attention should be paid to child with special (physical) needs particularly during their travel and stay.
  
- **Travel Related:**
  - Orientation of Chaperon to the special needs of the children will be conducted in advance.
  - Girl Child: Due to the special needs of the girls female chaperon should be available with girls
  - Chaperon Children Ratio: For every 6 children there should be at least one chaperon.
  - Written Parent (or guardian) consent should be taken before travel
  - In case of longer stay of children for meeting/ conferences/ trainings/ educational activities, an affidavit from the parent/ guardian or a written consent in presence of 2 legitimate witnesses will be taken.
  - If a child does not have parents or legal guardian's police authorities (nearest) would be intimated about his/her longer stay.
  
- All GMACL Board of Directors, Officers, Staff, Volunteers and Social Partners will sign up to and abide by the attached principles.
  
- Recruitment of Staff and tapping of partners and volunteers will include checks on suitability for working with children and briefing on child participation and protection issues.
  
- This policy will be translated to local languages, published in primer form and posted in GMACL website, for easy access to all.
  
- GMACL Secretariat will ensure proper recording and monitoring of the implementation of this policy, including complaints, grievances and feedbacks made by children, and actions taken by the responsible officer.
  
- Appropriate training and learning opportunities will be provided by GMACL management to ensure adherence to the policy.

## **Media Related Child Protection**

- The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice;
- The exercise of this right to expression may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:
  1. For respect of the rights or reputations of others;
  2. For the protection of national security or of public order, or of public health or morals. Children can anticipate an environment in which these principles will be adhered to.
- Journalists will acknowledge that freedom of speech can be maintained while taking into account the rights of children.
- Journalists will respect the sensitive nature of the child labour issue and avoid sensationalizing their coverage of any event and its participants. Particularly in cases where the worst forms of child labour are being discussed, journalists will exercise discretion when reporting on the sexual and economic exploitation of children.
- Press will allow children to express their thoughts without coercion, payment or manipulation of their statements in any way.
- Fact checking done in conjunction with stories about child labourers will be done in such a way that children will not suffer repercussions for voicing their opinions.

## **Complaints and Redressal Procedure**

- The children should be informed about their rights of participation and protection regularly for them to make informed choices.
- The democratic elected children's groups will have an ongoing task to observe and maintain child protection and participation at all levels.
- Children should be empowered and encouraged to express themselves fearlessly without any interference from adults.
- Children should be given space and opportunities to share their views and concerns regarding their safety, security and dignity with authorities who are responsible for them.
- Adequate avenues should be provided to children to air their grievances, and the advice of child specialist / psychologist would be sought (if required). Further, necessary counselling would be provided to children
- The Team Leader, Project Head, management committee or the organisation board may take cognisance and adequate action would be taken according to the gravity and urgency of the issue.