

Look, learn, listen: How children's voices are being heard in India's national policy consultations



YOUNG LIVES IMPACT AND LEARNING • CASE STUDY 3

April 2011

In preparation for the country's twelfth Five Year Plan for economic growth, the National Planning Commission of the Government of India solicited input from a large number of civil society organisations to the XII Plan Approach Paper. The Planning Commission held a meeting with key stakeholders, and presented 12 key challenges which were shared with a number of different groups, including those working with children.

In response to these challenges, an informal consortium of organisations named Plan4children was created with the aim of formulating priorities for the Approach and to see that these challenges were addressed from the perspective of children. The consortium has proved to be an extremely useful exercise involving collaboration across organisations and constituencies of children. By combining their efforts, members of the network, including Young Lives, have worked together to ensure that the needs of children are represented in the consultation process and have so far gained a level of success which none of them could have achieved alone.

In preparation for the country's twelfth Five Year Plan for economic growth, the National Planning Commission of the Government of India solicited input from a large number of organisations to the XII Plan Approach Paper. How did Young Lives ensure that the voices of children were heard so that targets on education and child welfare could be shaped according to their needs? And how did Young Lives draw attention to their contribution in such a crowded space?

Young Lives aims to contribute to a reduction in child poverty by strengthening the links between international and national policies and children's day-to-day lives. The relationships between national government departments and the project are therefore seen as integral to the successful intersection between research into child poverty and policy.

In 2010, the National Planning Commission of the Government of India approached a number of civil society organisations and academics in order to coordinate their inputs into the XII Plan Approach Paper. The original contact was made through *Wada Na Todo*, a national coalition of more than 3,750 civil society and community-based organisations set up to hold the Indian Government accountable to its promise to end poverty, social exclusion and discrimination.

A meeting was held at which the Planning Commission presented 12 key challenges to a number of different groups, including those working with children such as Save the Children and the Indian Alliance for Child Rights (of which Young Lives is a member).

These 12 challenges were: (1) Enhancing the capacity for growth, (2) Enhancing skills and faster generation of employment, (3) Managing the environment, (4) Markets for efficiency and inclusion, (5) Decentralisation, empowerment and information, (6) Technology and innovation, (7) Securing the energy future for India, (8) Accelerated development of transport infrastructure, (9) Rural transformation and sustained growth of agriculture, (10) Managing urbanisation, (11) Improved access to quality education, and (12) Better preventative and curative health care.

Formulating priorities, consolidating challenges

In response to the challenges posed during the meeting, Plan4children, an informal consortium of organisations working with children was set up with the aim to formulate child-centred priorities for the Approach Plan. With the secretariat for Plan4children housed at Indian Alliance for Child Rights (IACR), Young Lives was one of the key partners and helped write and consolidate the challenges and recommendations that would emerge from consortium discussions. Other consortium members included ActionAid, the Centre for Dalit Studies, Child Rights and You, the Haq Centre for Child Rights, Mobile Creches, Plan International, and Save the Children.

Twelve constituencies for children (for example children with disabilities, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children, street, working and migrant children) were formed. This was based on previous work by the Indian Alliance for Child Rights to review the National Policy for Children in 2010, which involved consultations with different groups of experts and across India. The Young Lives India team was involved in this process, leading the consultations for Andhra Pradesh.



Papers addressing these constituencies were written by various groups representing disadvantaged and children (including Dalits and adolescents) from within the network and beyond. Based on the 12 challenges identified by the Planning Commission, members of Plan4children wrote papers on each issue and made recommendations for children, for example, improved access to quality education for all disadvantaged children including Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Dr Renu Singh, Country Director for Young Lives in India, addressed and wrote papers on the challenges faced by street and working children, children with disabilities and children in emergencies.

Once papers were received, further documentation was prepared for the Approach Paper addressing each of the 12 challenges previously identified by the Planning Commission. Plan4children presented their recommendations on each of the 12 challenges from the perspective of the children to the Planning Commission in a national workshop held in New Delhi on 13 December 2010. The meeting was facilitated Renu Singh, and Vijay Kumar (Policy Coordinator) and Piyali Sarkar (Communications Coordinator) also attended.

Conclusion

While India awaits the final approach paper, Young Lives has been reflecting on the effectiveness of the Plan4children network in incorporating the needs of children into major government policy decisions.

The Plan4children network has been an extremely useful exercise involving collaboration across organisations and constituencies of children. By combining their efforts, members of the network, including Young Lives, have worked together to ensure that the needs of children are represented in the consultation process and have so far gained a level of success which none of them could have achieved alone.

The network has allowed us to discover new ways of working collegiately and supportively with each other to achieve a common goal.

