



**Turning disaster
into opportunity**

Mainstreaming child protection

**end child
marriage**
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Protection of “rights of children” and “protection rights” of children are theoretically two different themes with strong inter-linkages. Protection rights are well defined in the UNCRC with strong reflection of protection elements in 29 out of 54 articles. In India, child protection is still evolving as an independent sector. Further, recognition of violence in SDG (16) has added to the importance of the sector by state parties and multilateral agencies.

In 2009, the Government of India (GoI) recognised child protection as a sector with the introduction of flagship programs [Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS), now CPS] and dedicated fund allocation in central and state budgets. Subsequently, efforts have been made to create child protection structures at various levels. Since then, the sector has been making efforts to address multiple protection issues.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further increased the burden on the sector with multiple vulnerabilities at different levels. At the same time, it has created space for further exploration of strategies to combat these very challenges. Moreover, imposition of lockdown has disrupted the regular functioning of child protection institutions. Barring a few protection institutions such as CHILDLINE, CCIs and the Police, the remaining were almost dysfunctional for more than two months. However, through a Supreme Court order, some other child protection institutions such as the CWC, JJB, Children’s Court and SCPCR started taking up online cases.

Convincing policymakers about the need to address child protection concerns during COVID-19 was a tough challenge. However, the growing demand for mental health

and psychosocial services (MHPSS), addressing stigma and discrimination, and redefining vulnerabilities with the reverse migration trend has opened up space for the child protection sector to lead program interventions following ‘mainstreaming and convergence’ as key strategies.

Around 20,000 professionals across North Eastern States representing media house, teacher bodies, NSS, NYK, academicians and student from universities, CSOs, volunteers recruited by the State for COVID-19 and child protection functionaries had received customised training inputs on MHPSS. This was achieved in collaboration with C4D, CAP, DRR and Education sections.

In another attempt, convergence programming with the ISP section was explored with new partnerships. For instance, ‘Child Friendly Gram Panchayats’ and ‘Child Rights Gram Sabhas’ with PNRD Department with focus on family strengthening through access to social protection within the GPDP framework are such partnerships. Similar efforts were made to facilitate a multi-sectoral partnership with the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR) on ‘Ending violence against children’.

To bring synergy among flagship programs such as MSK, BBBP, 181 Helpline, Ujjwal, Swadhar and CPS, a discussion was held with the Social Welfare Department, GoA and UNICEF expertise was sought for strengthening the State Resource Center for Women (SRCW) to address the vulnerabilities of women and children.

Learnings from the above three exercises provide a clear direction to bring greater focus on ‘mainstreaming and convergence’ as key strategies to deal with multiple issues while having limited resources in the child protection sector. Further, sharing sectoral expertise with other key stakeholders helps to better realise the rights of children including protection rights.



For additional information please contact:

Laxminarayan Nanda, Child Protection Specialist (lnanda@unicef.org)