

THE CHILD PROTECTION POLICY



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1. Introduction

1.1. India is home to the largest child population in the world. The Constitution of India guarantees Fundamental Rights to all children in the country and empowers the State to make special provisions for children. The Directive Principles of State Policy specifically guide the State in securing the tender age of children from abuse and ensuring that children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner in conditions of freedom and dignity. The State is responsible for ensuring that childhood is protected from exploitation and moral and material abandonment.

1.2 Declaring its children as the nation's "supremely important asset" in the National Policy for Children, 1974, the Government of India reiterated its commitment to secure the rights of its children by ratifying related international conventions and treaties. These include the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its Covenants, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two Optional Protocols, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Women and Children, the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Inter-Country Adoption, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

1.3 The National Policy for Children, 1974 recognised that programmes for children should find prominent place in national plans for the development of human resources, so that children grow up to become robust citizens, physically fit, mentally alert and morally healthy, endowed with the skills and motivations provided by society. The Policy also laid emphasis on equal opportunities for the development of all children during the period of growth.

1.4 The National Charter for Children, 2003 adopted on 9th February 2004, underlined the intent to secure for every child its inherent right to be a child and enjoy a healthy and happy childhood, to address the root causes that negate the healthy growth and development of children, and to awaken the conscience of the community in the wider societal context to protect children from all forms of abuse, while strengthening the family, society and the Nation.

1.5 To affirm the Government's commitment to the rights based approach in addressing the continuing and emerging challenges in the situation of children, DSP hereby adopts this Resolution on the Policy for Children.

2. DSP - Preamble

2.1 Recognising that:

- A child is any person below the age of eighteen years;
- Childhood is an integral part of life with a value of its own;

- Children are not a homogenous group and their different needs need different responses, especially the multi-dimensional vulnerabilities experienced by children in different circumstances;
- A long term, sustainable, multi-sectoral, integrated and inclusive approach is necessary for the overall and harmonious development and protection of children;

2.2 Reaffirming that:

- Every child is unique and a supremely important national asset;
- Special measures and affirmative action are required to diminish or eliminate conditions that cause discrimination,
- All children have the right to grow in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding;
- Families are to be supported by a strong social safety net in caring for and nurturing their children;

Development Society for Poor reiterates its commitment to safeguard, inform, include, support and empower all children within its territory and jurisdiction, both in their individual situation and as a national asset. It is committed to take affirmative measures – legislative, policy or otherwise – to promote and safeguard the right of all children to live and grow with equity, dignity, security and freedom, especially those marginalised or disadvantaged; to ensure that all children have equal opportunities; and that no custom, tradition, cultural or religious practice is allowed to violate or restrict or prevent children from enjoying their rights.

2.3 This Policy is to guide and inform all laws, policies, plans and programmes affecting children. All actions and initiatives of the DSP must respect and uphold the principles and provisions of this Policy.

3. Guiding Principles

- (i) Every child has universal, inalienable and indivisible human rights
- (ii) The rights of children are interrelated and interdependent, and each one of them is equally important and fundamental to the well-being and dignity of the child
- (iii) Every child has the right to life, survival, development, education, protection and participation
- (iv) Right to life, survival and development goes beyond the physical existence of the child and also encompasses the right to identity and nationality
- (v) Mental, emotional, cognitive, social and cultural development of the child is to be addressed in totality

(vi) All children have equal rights and no child shall be discriminated against on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, class, language, and disability, social, economic or any other status

(vii) The best interest of the child is a primary concern in all decisions and actions affecting the child, whether taken by legislative bodies, courts of law, administrative authorities, public, private, social, religious or cultural institutions

(viii) Family or family environment is most conducive for the all-round development of children and they are not to be separated from their parents, except where such separation is necessary in their best interest;

(ix) Every child has the right to a dignified life, free from exploitation

(x) Safety and security of all children is integral to their well-being and children are to be protected from all forms of harm, abuse, neglect, violence, maltreatment and exploitation in all settings including care institutions, schools, hospitals, crèches, families and communities

(xi) Children are capable of forming views and must be provided a conducive environment and the opportunity to express their views in any way they are able to communicate, in matters affecting them

(xii) Children's views, especially those of girls, children from disadvantaged groups and marginalised communities, are to be heard in all matters affecting them, in particular judicial and administrative proceedings and interactions, and their views given due consideration in accordance with their age, maturity and evolving capacities

4. Key Priorities

Survival, health, nutrition, development, education, protection and participation are the undeniable rights of every child and are the key priorities of this Policy.

Survival, Health and Nutrition

4.1 The right to life, survival, health and nutrition is an inalienable right of every child and will receive the highest priority.

4.2 The DSP stands committed to ensure equitable access to comprehensive, and essential, preventive, promotive, curative and rehabilitative health care, of the highest standard, for all children before, during and after birth, and throughout the period of their growth and development.

4.3 Every child has a right to adequate nutrition and to be safeguarded against hunger, deprivation and malnutrition. The Organization commits to securing this right for all children through access, provision and promotion of required services and supports for holistic nurturing, wellbeing with nutritive attainment of all children, keeping in view their individual needs at different stages of life in a life cycle approach.

4.4 The DSP shall take all necessary measures to:

- (i) Improve maternal health care, including antenatal care, safe delivery by skilled health personnel, post natal care and nutritional support
- (ii) Provide universal access to information and services for making informed choices related to birth and spacing of children
- (iii) Secure the right of the girl child to life, survival, health and nutrition
- (iv) Address key causes and determinants of child mortality through interventions based on continuum of care, with emphasis on nutrition, safe drinking water, sanitation and health education
- (v) Encourage focused behaviour change communication efforts to improve new born and childcare practices at the household and community level
- (vi) Provide universal and affordable access to services for prevention, treatment, care and management of neo-natal and childhood illnesses and protect children from all water borne, vector borne, blood borne, communicable and other childhood diseases
- (vii) Prevent disabilities, both mental and physical, through timely measures for pre-natal, peri-natal and post-natal health and nutrition care of mother and child, provide services for early detection, treatment and management, including interventions to minimise and prevent further disabilities, prevent discrimination faced by children with disabilities (mental and physical), and provide services for rehabilitation and social support
- (viii) Ensure availability of essential services, supports and provisions for nutritive attainment in a life cycle approach, including infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices, special focus on adolescent girls and other vulnerable groups, and special measures for the health, care and nutrition, including nutrition education, of expectant and nursing mothers
- (ix) Provide adolescents access to information, support and services essential for their health and development, including information and support on appropriate life style and healthy choices and awareness on the ill effects of alcohol and substance abuse
- (x) Prevent HIV infections at birth and ensure infected children receive medical treatment, adequate nutrition and after-care, and are not discriminated against in accessing their rights
- (xi) Ensure that only child safe products and services are available in the country and put in place mechanisms to enforce safety standards for products and services designed for children
- (xii) Provide adequate safeguards and measures against false claims relating to growth, development and nutrition

Education and Development

4.5 Every child has equal right to learning, knowledge and education. The DSP recognises its responsibility to secure this right for every child, with due regard for special needs, through access, provision and promotion of required environment, information, infrastructure, services and supports, towards the development of the child's fullest potential.

4.6 The DSP shall take all necessary measures to:

- (i) Provide universal and equitable access to quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) for optimal development and active learning capacity of all children below six years of age
- (ii) Ensure that every child in the age group of 6-14 years is in school and enjoys the fundamental right to education as enshrined in the Constitution
- (iii) Promote affordable and accessible quality education up to intermediate level for all children
- (iv) Foster and support inter sectoral networks and linkages to provide vocational training options including comprehensively addressing age-specific and gender-specific issues of childrens' career choices through career counselling and vocational guidance
- (v) Ensure that all out of school children such as child labourers, migrant children, trafficked children, children of migrant labour, street children, child victims of alcohol and substance abuse, children in areas of civil unrest, orphans, children with disability (mental and physical), children with chronic ailments, married children, children of manual scavengers, children of sex workers, children of prisoners, etc. are tracked, rescued, rehabilitated and have access to their right to education
- (vi) Address discrimination of all forms in schools and foster equal opportunity, treatment and participation irrespective of place of birth, sex, religion, disability, language, region, caste, health, social, economic or any other status
- (vii) Prioritise education for disadvantaged groups by creating enabling environment through necessary legislative measures, policy and provisions
- (viii) Ensure physical safety of the child and provide safe and secure learning environment
- (ix) Ensure that all processes of teaching and learning are child friendly
- (x) Ensure formulation and practice of pedagogy that engages and delights children, with a special focus on mental health, from a social and gender just, life skills and age appropriate perspective
- (xi) Provide access to Information & Communication Technologies in Education (ICT) tools for equitable, inclusive and affordable education for all children especially in remote, tribal and hard to reach areas
- (xii) Promote safe and enjoyable engagement of children's experiences with new technology in accordance with their age and level of maturity, even as there is respect for their own culture and roots
- (xiii) Review, develop and sustain age-specific initiatives, services and programmes for safe spaces for play, sports, recreation, leisure, cultural and scientific activities for children in neighbourhoods, schools and other institutions

(xiv) Enable children to develop holistically, bringing out their aspirations, with focus on their strengths, empowering them to take control of their lives, bodies and behaviours

(xv) Ensure no child is subjected to any physical punishment or mental harassment. Promote positive engagement to impart discipline so as to provide children with a good learning experience

(xvi) Ensure that children's health is regularly monitored through the school health programme and arrangements are made for health and emergency care of children

(xvii) Provide services to children with special needs in regular schools and ensure that these are inclusive and have all facilities such as trained teachers and special educators, appropriate pedagogy and education material, barrier-free access for mobility, function

(xviii) Promote engagement of families and communities with schools for all round development of children, with emphasis on good health, hygiene and sanitation practices, including sensitization on ill-effects of alcohol and substance abuse

(xix) Facilitate concerted efforts by local governments, non-governmental organisations/community based organisations to map gaps in availability of educational services, especially in backward, child labour intensive areas, areas of civil unrest, and in situations of emergency, and efforts for addressing them

(xx) Identify, encourage and assist gifted children, particularly those belonging to the disadvantaged groups, through special programmes

(xxi) Provide and promote crèche and day care facilities for children of working mothers, mothers belonging to poor families, ailing mothers and single parents

(xxii) Promote appropriate baby feeding facilities in public places and at workplaces for working mothers in public, private and unorganized sector

Protection

4.7 A safe, secure and protective environment is a precondition for the realisation of all other rights of children. Children have the right to be protected wherever they are.

4.8 The DSP shall create a caring, protective and safe environment for all children, to reduce their vulnerability in all situations and to keep them safe at all places, especially public spaces.

4.9 The DSP shall protect all children from all forms of violence and abuse, harm, neglect, stigma, discrimination, deprivation, exploitation including economic exploitation and sexual exploitation, abandonment, separation, abduction, sale or trafficking for any purpose or in any form, pornography, alcohol and substance abuse, or any other activity that takes undue advantage of them, or harms their personhood or affects their development.

4.10 To secure the rights of children temporarily or permanently deprived of parental care, the DSP shall endeavour to ensure family and community-based care arrangements including sponsorship, kinship, foster care and adoption, with institutionalisation as a measure of last

resort, with due regard to the best interests of the child and guaranteeing quality standards of care and protection.

4.11 The DSP commits to taking special protection measures to secure the rights and entitlements of children in need of special protection, characterised by their specific social, economic and geo-political situations, including their need for rehabilitation and reintegration, in particular but not limited to, children affected by migration, displacement, communal or sectarian violence, civil unrest, disasters and calamities, street children, children of sex workers, children forced into commercial sexual exploitation, abused and exploited children, children forced into begging, children in conflict and contact with the law, children in situations of labour, children of prisoners, children infected/affected by HIV/AIDS, children with disabilities, children affected by alcohol and substance abuse, children of manual scavengers

5. Advocacy and Partnerships

5.1 The DSP shall encourage the active involvement, participation and collective action of stakeholders such as individuals, families, local communities, non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations, media and private sector including government in securing the rights of the child.

5.2 The DSP shall make planned, coordinated and concerted efforts to raise public awareness on child rights and entitlements amongst the parents and caregivers/guardians as well as functionaries and duty bearers. All stakeholders are to promote the use of rights-based and equity-focused strategies, platforms, programmes, communications and other tools to generate awareness on child rights and the commitment to their achievement.

5.3 This Policy is to be given wide publicity and supported by focused advocacy measures to ensure that children's best interests and rights are accorded the highest priority in areas of policy, planning, resource allocation, governance, monitoring and evaluation, and children's voices and views are heard in all matters and actions which impact their lives.

5.4 The DSP shall ensure that service delivery and justice delivery mechanisms and structures are participatory, responsive and child-sensitive, thereby enhancing transparency and ensuring public accountability. Synergistic linkages will be created with other progressive and successful experiments to learn from best practices across regions.

6. Coordination, Action and Monitoring

6.1 Addressing the rights and needs of children requires programming across different sectors and integrating their impact on the child in a synergistic way. Rights based approach to survival, development and protection calls for conscious, convergent and collateral linkages among different sectors and settings, with indicators for tracking progress.

6.2 DSP along with Community and local governance will play a significant role in ensuring the child's optimum development and social integration. It also ensures coordination among Central and State Government Ministries/Departments, between Central and State Governments, between different levels of governance and between government and civil society is crucial for effective implementation of this Policy.

6.3. The DSP will work with the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) as the nodal agency for overseeing and coordinating the implementation of this Policy.

6.4 The DSP will ensure the Protection of Child Rights and the principles of this Policy are respected in all sectors at all levels in formulating laws, policies and programmes affecting children.

7. Research, Documentation and Capacity Building

7.1 The implementation of this Policy will be supported by a comprehensive and reliable knowledge base on all aspects of the status and condition of children. Establishing such a knowledge base would be enabled through child focused research and documentation, both quantitative as well as qualitative. A continuous process of indicator-based child impact assessment and evaluation will be developed by GDSS&WS, and assessment and evaluation will be carried out on the situation of children in the diocese, which will inform policies and programmes for children.

7.2 Professional and technical competence and capability in all aspects of programming, managing, working and caring for children at all levels in all sectors will be ensured through appropriate selection and well planned capacity development initiatives. All duty bearers working with children will be sensitised and oriented on child rights and held accountable for their acts of omission and commission.

8. Resource Allocation

8.1 The DSP commits to allocate the required financial, material and human resources, and their efficient and effective use, with transparency and accountability, to implement this Policy.

8.2 Child budgeting will track allocation and utilisation of resources and their impact on outcomes for children with regard to budgets and expenditures on children.

9. Review of Policy

9.1 A comprehensive review of this Policy will be taken up once in five years in consultation with all stakeholders, including children. The DSP team will lead the review process.

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