



Module 9

Participation and Right to Information

Time: 2 hours

Introduction

Everyone has the right to participate in issues related to one's life. It is therefore wrong to deny this right to children. The ninth module of this series under Safe Childhood Programme puts light on rights of children to have information related to the matters concerning them and right to participate in these matters. The objective of child participation is to be aware of all the issues related to their lives and make them capable of taking active part in development of their communities as well as villages.

Session Objectives

At the end of the session, participants will be able to tell:

- why is it necessary for children to get information on matters related to them
- what role does participation of children play in their own development and protection
- why it is necessary to have constant touch between village panchayat and groups of children
- why it is important to provide facilities for sports and recreation to children

Session Process

Step 1

Begin the session by welcoming all the participants and thank them for participating in it. Introduce yourself and ask them to introduce themselves. Start the session with a motivational song.

Step 2

Discuss with participants important steps to ensure participation of children:

- ➔ Ensure registration of all children from 2.5 to five years of age at anganwadi centre so that they can play together and participate in recreational activities right from a very young age.

- ➔ Ensure registration of all children between 6-14 age group with support from school administration, and ensure that teachers have information on education status of children and also information on their development and life.
- ➔ Create such forums at school so that middle school children can express themselves and interact with each other. Give special attention to creating forums where girls, children from other Scheduled Tribes, castes, minorities, disabled, HIV/AIDS affected are able to participate.
- ➔ Allocate separate budget for children at the panchayat level
- ➔ Maintain constant touch with children's organisations and groups and support them to be capable of informing panchayat about incidents in village where rights of children are violated (child labour, child marriage, child abuse, denial of food, nutrition and education)
- ➔ Train *bal panchayats* on child rights topics and organise competitions such as debates, plays, skits and role plays etc
- ➔ Ensure facilities at village panchayat bhawan or at village, keeping above objectives in mind
- ➔ Participants should also ensure that above mentioned steps should be taken and followed upon.

Step 3

Share with participants that in order to ensure participation of children and giving them right to information, cooperation of village community, school teachers, village level functionaries, local organisations such as self-help groups, women's and youth groups is necessary. For example, anganwadi worker and sevika can organise entertainment programmes for children, which instill feeling of cooperation and participation in them. Local community based organisations can help *bal panchayats* in preparation of plays, and organising competitions on issues related to children. In addition, children should also be motivated to take part and organise social and cultural activities such as Ram Leela, Eid fair etc.

Discuss with participants that during their interactions with *bal panchayats*, they can share information related to violation of child rights with members so that they get support and ideas to organise programmes. They can allocate special funds for participation by children in these activities. These funds should be used only to motivate participation of children. Which also means that they try to play an active role in village development work.

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Read out the following case studies related to the issue to the participants

Case Study 1

Role of *bal panchayat* member in developing playground

There was no playground in the village. Whenever children wanted to play cricket or football, they would go to the nearby jungle and play on the vacant land there. The land was uneven and there was risk of children getting hurt.

Once panchayat called for meeting between members of *bal panchayat* and village panchayat.

Sarpanch Kishori Lal ji proposed, "I have been thinking for last few days that there should be separate ground for organising entertainment activities for children and also for playing." Panchayat member Sharda Devi suggested, "sarpanch ji, the land belongs to panchayat. Why don't we use it." Sarpanch ji replied, "you are giving right suggestion, that land is full of garbage and is rocky. People keep throwing garbage despite being asked not to do so."



The *bal panchayat* members got excited and said, "Kaka ji we need only land, we will get together and clean up the place."

First step was to ensure that villagers do not throw garbage in it. Members of *bal panchayat* divided themselves into smaller groups and went around door to door to make people aware about not throwing garbage in the ground. Next question was how to clean up the area. Sarpanch ji found out the solution for this too. He sanctioned some amount from the budget earmarked for children at the panchayat level. Budget was limited so too many workers could not be hired. But children volunteered to do 'shram daan' or service of labour.

This is how work of cleaning and levelling of ground started. Children participated with full zeal and enthusiasm. They not only helped in cleaning up the ground but also helped the workers in making fencing.

Today children not only play together in this ground behind the panchayat building, but also organise meetings and other activities. What example could be better than this that children made a waste ground ideal for playing with contribution of their own labour.

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Ask the participants – what main points can be highlighted related to children's participation from the above case study. Also ask them what other means can be used to ensure participation of children in village development. Initiate a discussion on these questions and add any left out points.

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Case Study 2

Result of initiative of *bal panchayat* member Sushma

Sushma, student of class 7 is an active member of *bal panchayat*. Information on many topics that are related to development, rights and protection of children is given to them during meetings between *bal* and village panchayat members. Sushma tries to understand such information in her own way and tries to participate in discussions with interest. This has resulted in Sushma becoming a thoughtful girl who knows what all village panchayat is doing in making her village develop under Safe Childhood Programme.



Sonu's family lives in Sushma's neighbourhood. Sonu studies with Sushma in class 7 only. He is very irregular in attending school. May be because his parents do not give importance to studies. One day Sushma got to know from her mother that Sonu's family is leaving for some city and his name has been struck off from the school rolls. For some reason, Sushma felt that this information should be shared with *bal panchayat*. Children had discussion on this matter and all of them decided to share this news with sarpanch kaka as the matter was directly related to Sonu and his studies.

Children met sarpanch kaka and narrated the whole incident to him. Sarpanch kaka verified from school headmaster whether Sonu's name had indeed been struck off from the school rolls. Sarpanch even told headmaster that he should have been informed about the matter. The headmaster told sarpanch kaka that he tried to convince Sonu's parents but they did not pay any heed. Thereafter the matter was referred to village child protection samiti. The members of panchayat and child protection samiti met Sonu's parents and tried to convince them not to make Sonu discontinue his studies. Sonu's father told sarpanch, "look, I am a poor man." I am not able to meet both ends meet by doing farming. So we are going to the city to work there."

Sarpanch and other panchayat members persuaded Sonu's father saying, "see, making the child discontinue studies results in hindrance in development. Children who are not able to get education remain incapable of being independent economically. . . . Its better you all live in village itself. In a few days MNREGA work will come up and both you and your wife will get work. As far as Sonu's education is concerned, we will get him readmitted in school."

At last, Sonu's parents agreed. With the efforts of *bal panchayat* members, Sonu could start his studies again.

Step 4

Read out the case study to participants and ask the following questions:

- ➔ What could have happened to Sonu had Sushma not shown wisdom?
- ➔ Why was Sonu's father keen on Sonu discontinuing his studies?
- ➔ In what way can aware children contribute in progress of village community?
- ➔ Why is it important for members of *bal panchayat* to be active and be in constant touch with members of panchayat?

- How did Sushma's presence of mind save Sonu's name from being struck off from school rolls?
- What steps can *bal panchayat* and village panchayat take to ensure 'participation of children'?
- Ask the participants to answer the questions and add any left out points.

Step 5

Points to be kept in mind by the participants. (write the points on a chart and display them)

- Panchayat members should activate groups like *bal panchayats* at village level and motivate children to participate in their development
- They should ensure participation of children's groups and organisations and ensure that there is also sufficient participation from girls, children from backward classes, minorities, disabled and other children with special needs.
- Panchayat members can monitor which children are not actively participating in activities meant for children. It is also panchayat's role to motivate such children to participate actively.
- Panchayat members should also ensure participation of children in extra curricular activities with help from teachers, school management committees.
- Village panchayat members along with cooperation of child protection committee should organise entertainment and educational programmes like plays, debates, essay and painting competitions and motivate children to make them aware about their rights.
- Organising special sessions to discuss issues related to children in gram sabha meetings.

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Ask the participants to have a discussion on above points and ask them if they agree or not, and whether they want to add, amend or delete any point. Add the suggestions given by them on a chart and display them.

Step 6

Monitoring mechanism and data collection

Tell the participants that so far no method has been developed in the country which collects information on children's participation, budget earmarked for children at panchayat level and activities carried out by *bal panchayat*. Suggest to them that if they want, they can collect figures related to this at panchayat level. Few indicators related to this can be as below:

- Number of children registered at anganwadi centre
- Number of meetings between panchayat and *bal panchayat* where some information was shared with children
- Number of programmes organised by *bal panchayat* on rights and protection related issues of children.

- ➔ Number of programmes organised by schools related to child protection and had active participation by children.
- ➔ Number of such incidents where members of *bal panchayat* have intervened in stopping child marriages and child labour
- ➔ Number of such incidents where members of *bal panchayat* have contributed towards development of village

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Ask the participants to have a discussion on above points and ask if they want to add any left out point. Add points suggested by them in the list.

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Summarise the discussion as below:

These figures help in providing monitoring mechanism related to status of participation of children at the village level and help in making plans to ensure further participation of children in the village.

Repeat the key messages and end the session after thanking the participants.

