Report of the Consultative Meet of South Asia Forum for Safe and Secure Education

25 June 2018

India International Centre Annexe, Lodi Estate, New Delhi, India

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# AGENDA

## South Asia Forum for Safe and Secure Education

**Agenda of the Consultative Meet**

**25 June 2018**

**India International Centre Annexe**

**Monday, 9:30 AM to 5:30 PM**

**Lecture Room 2, 11, Lodi Gardens, Lodi Estate, New Delhi, 110003**

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<td>9:30 -</td>
<td><strong>Tea and Registration</strong></td>
<td><strong>CHAIR: Prof. Muchkund Dubey</strong></td>
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<td>10:00 -</td>
<td><strong>INAUGURAL SESSION</strong></td>
<td><strong>President, Council for Social Development</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>10:00</td>
<td><strong>Welcome and Introduction to the Consultative Meet</strong></td>
<td>Mr Ambarish Rai</td>
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<td>10:05</td>
<td><strong>Journey and Achievements of the Forum in India and Nepal: Snapshots</strong></td>
<td>Mr Kumar Bhattarai</td>
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<td>10:20</td>
<td><strong>Inaugural Speech</strong></td>
<td>Mr Eric Falt</td>
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<td>10:35</td>
<td><strong>Global and South Asian Perspective on Safe and Secure Education, especially for girls from marginalized and oppressed groups</strong></td>
<td>Ms Stuti Kacker</td>
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<td>11:00</td>
<td><strong>ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND EFFORTS IN SAFE AND SECURE EDUCATION</strong></td>
<td><strong>CHAIR: Prof. Venita Kaul</strong></td>
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<td>11:00</td>
<td><strong>Sharing of issues, challenges, and efforts taken by Networks and/or Governments - related to safe and secure education, especially for girls from marginalized and oppressed communities in South Asian countries</strong></td>
<td>Ms Alka Singh</td>
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<td><strong>Q&amp;A and Open Discussion</strong></td>
<td><strong>CHAIR: Prof. Venita Kaul</strong></td>
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<td>12:45</td>
<td><strong>Concluding Remarks by Chair</strong></td>
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**2:00 - 2:30** **Lunch**
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<td>1:00 - 2:00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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| 2:00-4:00    | VOICES OF REGIONAL NETWORKS/ BODIES/ INGOS                               | CHAIR: Mr Amitabh Behar  
CEO, Oxfam India  
3.1 2:00-2:10 Hearing the voices of regional networks/ bodies/ INGOS working for children especially girls from marginalised/ oppressed groups:  
Mr George Abraham  
CEO, SCORE Foundation  
3.2 2:10-2:20 Hearing the voices of regional networks/ bodies/ INGOS working for children especially girls from marginalised/ oppressed groups:  
Mr Sivaprasad Behera  
Steering Committee Member, Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood  
3.3 2:20-2:30 Hearing the voices of regional networks/ bodies/ INGOS working for children especially girls from marginalised/ oppressed groups:  
Mr N. Paul Divakar  
Chairperson, Asia Dalit Rights Forum (ADRF), c/o National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, India  
3.4 2:30-2:40 Hearing the voices of regional networks/ bodies/ INGOS working for children especially girls from marginalised/ oppressed groups:  
Mr. Vikrant Mahajan  
CEO, Sphere India, and Representative of South Asia Together for the Humanitarian Imperative (SATHI) network  
3.5 2:40-2:50 Hearing the voices of regional networks/ bodies/ INGOS working for children especially girls from marginalised/ oppressed groups:  
Dr Colin Gonsalves  
Founder, Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), and Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India  
3.6 2:50-3:00 Hearing the voices of regional networks/ bodies/ INGOS working for children especially girls from marginalised/ oppressed groups:  
Ms Razia Ismail  
Co-founder and Convener, Indian Alliance for Child Rights (IACR)  
3.7 3:00-3:10 Hearing the voices of regional networks/ bodies/ INGOS working for children especially girls from marginalised/ oppressed groups:  
Dr Jyotsna Jha  
Director, Centre for Budget and Policy Studies, and Gulmakai Champion, Malala Fund  
3.8 3:10-3:20 Hearing the voices of regional networks/ bodies/ INGOS working for children especially girls from marginalised/ oppressed groups:  
Ms Kamal Gaur  
Technical Advisor for Education, Save the Children, India  
And Child Champions, Save the Children, India  
3:20-3:50  | Q&A and Open Discussion                                                  |                                                                                                                                        |
| 3:50-4:00    | Concluding Remarks by Chair                                            |                                                                                                                                        |
| 4:00-5:30    | STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN THE FORUM                                       | CHAIR: Ms Anjela Taneja  
Technical Director- Education, CARE India, and Steering Committee Member, South Asia Regional Forum on Safe and Secure Education  
Co-CHAIR: Ms Urmila Simkhada  
Program Coordinator - Lead, CARE Nepal, and Steering Committee Member, South Asia Regional Forum on Safe and Secure Education  
4.1 4:00-4:10 Strategies to strengthen the Forum to advocate for safe and secure education for all especially girls:  
Mr Sudarshan Ghimire  
Editor & Senior Education Journalist, Sikai Samuh, Nepal, and Steering Committee Member, South Asia Regional Forum on Safe and Secure Education  
4.2 4:10-4:20 Strategies to strengthen the Forum to advocate for safe and secure education for all especially girls:  
Mr Rahmatullah Arman  
Gulmakai Champion, Malala Fund, Afghanistan  
4.3 4:20-4:30 Strategies to strengthen the Forum to advocate for safe and secure education for all especially girls:  
Ms Chandrakanta Bharti  
National Youth Equity Forum, Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion  
4.4 4:30-4:40 Strategies to strengthen the Forum to advocate for safe and secure education for all especially girls:  
Mr P. Joseph Victor Raj  
National Convener, Campaign Against Child Labour (CACL)  
4.5 4:40-4:50 Strategies to strengthen the Forum to advocate for safe and secure education for all especially girls:  
Mr Gautam Bandopadhyay  
Convener, Right to Education Forum, Chhattisgarh, India  
4.6 4:50-5:00 Strategies to strengthen the Forum to advocate for safe and secure education for all especially girls:  
Mr Raghu Tewari  
Right to Education Forum, Uttarakhand, India  
4.7 5:00-5:10 Strategies to strengthen the Forum to advocate for safe and secure education for all especially girls:  
Mr Dharmendra Kumar  
Executive Director, Dalit Vikas Abhiyan Samiti, Bihar, India  
4.8 5:10-5:30 Strategies to strengthen the Forum to advocate for safe and secure education for all especially girls:  
Open Discussion  
Concluding Remarks by Chair  
5:30 onwards  | High Tea                                                                 |                                                                                                                                        |
**INAUGURAL SESSION**

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Convener, South Asia Regional Forum on Safe and Secure Education, &  
National Convener, Right to Education Forum, India |
| 10:05-10:20| Journey and Achievements of the Forum in India and Nepal: Snapshots | Mr Kumar Bhattarai  
Chairperson, National Campaign for Education, Nepal, and  
Steering Committee Member, South Asia Regional Forum on Safe and Secure Education  
Ms Radhika Alkazi  
Steering Committee Member, South Asia Regional Forum on Safe and Secure Education |
Minister of State (Independent Charge),  
Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India |
| 10:35-10:45| Global and South Asian Perspective on Safe and Secure Education, especially for girls from marginalized and oppressed groups | Mr. Eric Falt  
Director and UNESCO Representative to Bhutan, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka |
| 10:45-10:55|                                                                                     | Ms Stuti Kacker  
Chairperson, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, India |
| 10:55-11:00| Concluding Remarks by Chair                 |                                                                                                                                         |
The Consultative Meet of the South Asia Forum for Safe and Secure Education (SAFSSE) was held on June 25, 2018 at the India International Centre Annexe in New Delhi, India. The Meet was organised by the Right to Education Forum being the Regional Secretariat of the SAFSSE. Hon’ble Minister of State (Independent Charge), Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India, Mr Hardeep Singh Puri was the Chief Guest of the Meet.

Distinguished dignitaries including Prof. Muchkund Dubey, Mentor of RTE Forum and President of Council for Social Development, Ms Stuti Kacker, Chairperson of National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, Mr Eric Falt, Director and UNESCO Representative to Bhutan, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka, Mr Kumar Bhattarai, Chairperson, National Campaign for Education, Nepal and Steering Committee Member of the Forum, Ms Radhika Alkazi, Steering Committee Member of the Forum, Mr Aminulhaq Mayel, Deputy Director of Programmes (Programme Development), Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, Ms Papia Ferdousei, Programme Manager, BRAC Education Program, Bangladesh, Mr Rahmatullah Arman, Gulmakai Champion, Malala Fund, Afghanistan and other important leaders from different social movements and renowned educationists from across the country also attended the Meet.

The Consultative Meet was consisted of four different sessions and discussed a wide range of issues.

The Meet started with a welcome address by Mr Ambarish Rai, National Convener, Right to Education Forum, who extended his warm greetings to all the guests and participants. In his address, Mr Rai said, “Educational scenario in India and other South Asian countries is quite similar. There are many important and common areas like the universalisation of school education, adequate resources, equity and inclusion, teacher issues and increasing commercialisation of education which provide us opportunities to work together in South Asia region.”

“The RTE Act, which came into effect in 2010 and was the cornerstone for improving the education scenario in the country, however, eight years since its inception is unable to see less than 10% schools complying with its provisions. There still exists a huge vacancy in the teacher’s post. Around 5 lakh teachers’ posts are lying vacant. Around 9 lakh teachers are still untrained. Total 8% schools are single teacher schools. Poor infrastructure, issue of timely disbursement of teaching-learning materials and lack of adequate resources are some of the persistent problems that affect the learning environment in Schools,” Mr Rai added.

He also said, “We have recently seen that a large number of schools, more than two lakhs indeed, are being shut down in the name of rationalization and private entities are coming in education space leading to the mushrooming of low cost for-profit private schools. After the enactment of the RTE Act, we have achieved an increase in enrollment but still millions of children who are either out of school or dropping out from the school before completing their elementary education. As a result of these challenges, all children are not able to enjoy their right to free and compulsory education even after eight years of enactment of the RTE Act. Those who are deprived of this right mostly belong to the marginalized groups, children with disability and especially girls.”

Talking about a Safe and Secure environment for Education, Mr Rai further said, “The RTE Act guarantees the Protection of Right of Children. Needless to say, every child deserves a safe and secure environment for education. However, the reality gives a different picture. Data reveals that several girls drop out of school due to poor safety condition within the school environment, lack of separate toilets for girls and boys, a distance of travel between their homes and school. Other factors also play a role like engagement in domestic chores, taking care of a younger sibling, early marriages and in general the patriarchal mindset that does not prioritize girl’s education.”

Mr Rai, underlining the relevance of South Asia Forum for Safe and Secure Education, said, “It was envisioned to form a collective voice on the similar issues, provide an opportunity for cross-learning and influence policy discourse in the South Asian region. The Forum was formed after several deliberations with representatives from neighbouring countries. In 2017, during the National Stocktaking Convention of RTE Forum, the Forum for Safe and Secure Education was finally launched in India and after that in Nepal. Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan have given their consent to
join us. The Forum is unified with the goal of ensuring Safe and Secure Education to all children across South Asia as a legal right.”

Concluding his address, Mr Rai reminded the gathering that we are gathered here to express our solidarity with the issue and strategize our collective working on Safe and Secure Right to Education for all children. “I hope this Consultative Meet will show us the path to take forward this issue in a holistic and comprehensive manner in the upcoming year,” he said.

Delivering the Inaugural Speech, Mr Hardeep Singh Puri, Hon’ble Minister of State (Independent Charge), Housing and Urban Affairs, Govt. of India, said, “The government, private sector and civil society organisations have to come together for ensuring safe and secure education to all, particularly the girls. Educating girls is an anchor of all kind of progress.”

“Girls’ education is a prerequisite of all-round development of a country. India can truly achieve sustainable and inclusive development only through a proper and compatible education system for girls in the safe and secure atmosphere. All stakeholders have to join hands and work in tandem to achieve this goal,” Mr Puri added.

Elaborating his views, the Minister said, “Educated girls and women are key to the realization of Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs). Without the participation of half of the population, no country including India can ensure inclusive development. And education, particularly girls’ education, is the critical element to this participation.”

He also said that if you want to address the development issues of a country, education is the most worthy option. India is no exception to it. Indeed, India is a remarkable success in postcolonial transformation and reconstruction endeavour. It has made its mark in every field on a global platform. It has a robust economy of 2.8 trillion dollars and is steadily heading to become a strong economy of five trillion dollars with a remarkable growth rate. “To continue this remarkable success, India has to work more vigorously on gender empowerment, which can be ensured only through girls’ education. Educating a girl has multiple benefits. It helps in eradicating many dangerous social evils like child marriage and dowry etc. Moreover, an educated girl is the key to changing the traditional mindset of the society,” added Mr Puri.

Pointing out several challenges, Mr Puri said that only quality infrastructure, safe and conducive atmosphere and quality curriculum can motivate girls and their family towards education. It is a hard reality that a large number of girls are still deprived of the education system. Dropout rate among girls is very high. There are various reasons which compel girls to leave their education midway and safety is the foremost factor. “The Annual Survey of Education Report (ASER), 2017 has found that the predominant reason for this high dropout rate among girls is family constraints. It is clear that the patriarchal social structure finds educated girls and women as a threat to the culture and tradition of male dominance. It’s really a major constraint to India’s shining glory,” the Minister added.

Talking about the Prime Minister, Mr Narendra Modi’s flagship campaign of “Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao”, Mr Puri said that our Prime Minister has rightly linked girls’ existence with their education. This campaign is aimed at creating a mass movement to protect the basic human rights and right to education of a girl child.

Mr Hardeep Singh Puri summed up his address with a reminder that Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s “Swachh Bharat Abhiyan” has ensured the dignity to girls and women. This campaign, according to Mr Puri, is capable of dealing with one of the pressing issues that compel young girls to leave their education midway.

In the first session, chaired by Prof. Muchkund Dubey, Mentor of RTE Forum and President of Council for Social Development, the Meet analyzed the journey and achievements of the SAFSSE in India and Nepal. Presenting this analysis, Mr Kumar Bhattarai, Chairperson, National Campaign for Education, Nepal and Steering Committee Member, South Asia Forum for Safe and Secure Education informed the gathering that the National Campaign for Education is one of the large civil society movements in Nepal. Like other South Asian countries, Nepal faces almost similar kind of
problems and challenges in the field of safe and secure education. He said, “Currently, a three-tier system of governance – local government, provincial government and federal government – is in place in Nepal. To ensure quality education to children, our prime focus is on local governments because they are the implementing body of governance at the grass – root level. Local bodies are responsible for ensuring basic and secondary education. We are focusing on capacity building, evidence-based advocacy and creating awareness among masses.”

Mr Bhattarai also informed that there are total 339 organisations associated with the National Campaign for Education and it has 49 district chapters all over Nepal. Right from the very beginning, the prime focus of the National Campaign for Education is to ensure safe and secure education for girls, particularly those belonging to marginalized section. In this regard, a national stocktaking programme was accomplished successfully where representatives from different walks of life came together to discuss the need and dimensions of safe and secure education. Policy dialogue, consultation and public hearings were also held at the local level and sincere attempts were made to convince local governments for formulating appropriate policies for safe and secure education.

In this context, Mr Bhattarai said, awareness programmes have been organised with local governments, security agencies, civil society organisations, teachers’ federations and parents’ organisations to raise a voice for a national level policy regarding safe and secure education. To take this endeavour further, political parties have also been contacted and strong pleas were made for a concrete policy on safe and secure education at national level.

Mr Bhattarai also talked about media partnerships that have been developed for highlighting and communicating the issue of safe and secure education. He enlightened the gathering about sensitization of member – organisations on this issue. Sensitization of the heads of urban civic bodies like Deputy Mayors etc. has also been done. In addition to this, strong and concerted lobbying has been made with the parliamentarians to make a solid case for multidimensional policies for overall education system keeping in view safe and secure education in this hilly nation of South Asia.

Underlining the importance of research works, Mr Bhattarai informed the gathering about a Status Report on Safe and Secure Education in Lumbini and Kapilvastu districts of the country.

Talking about challenges, Mr Bhattarai said that government policies are the major stumbling block as they are not very much friendly with civil society organisations. In recent times, according to Mr Bhattarai, the federal government in Nepal has issued several circulars and notifications just to put a control on civil society initiatives.

Giving a quick update on the actions and achievements of South Asia Regional Forum in last one and a half years, Ms Radhika Alkazi, Steering Committee Member, South Asia Forum for Safe and Secure Education informed that the National Secretariat of Right to Education Forum (RTE Forum) situated in New Delhi also functions as the National Secretariat of South Asia Forum for Safe and Secure Education. So, it would be imperative to have a quick look at the activities of RTE Forum. The annual Stocktaking Convention of RTE Forum takes place every year in New Delhi where a Status Report on education scenario is released. The last year’s Report, released in the presence of representatives from 20 states and renowned academicians and activists from across the country, clearly points out the importance of safety and security issues. These issues, said Ms Alkazi, are the foremost factors not only in India but globally as well. That’s the reason why it was taken very seriously during the Stocktaking. The Report also points out that even after eight years of its passage RTE compliance is still less than 10% nationally. In other words, the ambitious Act is not totally compliant in this country and has miles to go.

Ms Alkazi also informed about a Stocktaking Convention of School Management Committees (SMCs). It’s a well-known fact that there is a provision of SMCs in the Right to Education Act. SMCs consist of local bodies’ representatives, principals, teachers, parents and academicians and play a significant role in the field of education by making plans for enrollment, retention, safety and security etc. along with other important issues. Since the last two years, the RTE
Forum has been regularly conducting the Stocktaking Convention of SMCs where representatives from over 19 states have been discussing various issues related to schools and School Management Committees.

In the last SMC Stocktaking Convention, Ms Alkazi informed, there was a clear understanding among the members of SMCs about who are marginalized in our country. Conditions of many sets of children including those who are suffering from different kind of disabilities were talked about in that Convention.

Underlining another major activity of the Forum, Ms Alkazi mentioned about the Meetings with Parliamentarians. She also informed that in the last few meetings with parliamentarians a lot of focus has been on the allocation of budget for education. It’s a well-known fact that budget for education has been slashed in recent years. Even the RTE Act itself is facing barriers as some of its key policies and provisions like No – detention Policy and Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) are being rolled back. Parliamentarians, during these meetings, have been apprised about the possibilities where such steps of rolling back may hugely affect the safety and security of children.

Ms Alkazi also informed about Forum’s interaction with teachers’ unions. She underlined a two – day meeting of teachers’ unions, held in April 2018, where a variety of issues including problems and grievances of teachers were discussed in detail.

Awareness to the media was Forum’s another major activity that was fairly highlighted by Ms Alkazi. She informed that the forum intends to build a group of journalists and media personalities to bring back education-related issues to fore so that an intensive debate can be initiated at national as well global level.

Presenting global and South Asian Perspective on Safe and Secure Education, Mr Eric Falt, Director and UNESCO Representative to Bhutan, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka said that Hon’ble Minister of State (Independent Charge), Housing and Urban Affairs Mr Hardeep Singh Puri, in his speech, has rightly laid emphasis on girls’ education. This noble aim can be achieved only if we end violence against girls, particularly in schools. We must find ways to eliminate violence against girls in schools. Gender-based violence is the new scourge at a global level which must be tackled effectively.

Referring a UN data, Mr Falt informed the gathering that every year around 246 million girls and boys across the globe are subjected to some form of school-related violence which includes mistreatment, bullying (particularly cyberbullying), psychological abuse and sexual harassment. An unsafe learning environment that has been created as a result of such violence has reduced the quality of education for all learners. And it might have triggered dropouts in some cases. This kind of violence is carried out either by students or educational/ non – educational staffs.

Mr Falt emphasized that we must weed out Gender-based violence. According to him, several countries in Asia lack a comprehensive and legislative framework against violence in and around schools. He informed that a couple of years ago, the UNESCO Executive Board had adopted a historic resolution of ‘Learning without Fear’, which recognises that violence against children has devastating effects on the dignity of children and it creates obstacles in their path of enjoying basic human rights and the right to education.

Mr Falt further suggested that it’s imperative to design and implement appropriate and effective policies to end gender-based inequalities and violence. We must have to pay keen attention towards eradicating school-related violence. He also opined that ensuring safety and security in and around schools should be a compulsory component of policy making of every government, particularly in Asia – Pacific region.

Talking about the plights of girls from marginalized and oppressed groups, Ms Stuti Kacker, Chairperson of National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, India said that most of our children are facing a lot of violence in and outside their Homes. It’s not quite tough to understand the violence against them outside their homes. But the most intriguing
question is why children are facing violence inside their homes? It’s very tragic that in most of the cases they are subjected to violence at the hands of their loved ones. Childhood violence leaves deep-rooted repercussions on a person. So, it’s very necessary to start a dialogue on violence against children and extend it to different corners of the society. Undoubtedly, it’s very easy to have this dialogue with schools, particularly the government schools where the RTE Act is automatically invoked. The government schools have to follow safety and security-related provisions of the RTE Act and Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses (POCSO) Act without fail. But the scene with private schools is quite different. Most of the states are scared of talking to private schools for POCSO Act compliance. An irony in this regard is that many of them haven’t heard about the POCSO Act, forget about its compliance.

Talking about suicides in coaching hubs like Kota (Rajasthan) where teenage boys and girls go to prepare for a bright career in the field of engineering and medical, Ms Kacker said that children need a safe and secure environment for their progress and development. We need to sensitize parents, teachers and police personnel about the safety and security of children and way of tackling and behaving with children. We all have to deeply think about children safety by shunning the brutal habits of corporal punishment and bullying etc.
# ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND EFFORTS IN SAFE AND SECURE EDUCATION

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<td>Steering Committee Member from Nepal South Asia Regional Forum on Safe and Secure Education</td>
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<td>Mr Aminulhaq Mayel Deputy Director of Programmes (Programme Development), Swedish Committee for Afghanistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:30-11:45</td>
<td>Ms Papia Ferdousei Programme Manager, BRAC Education Program, Bangladesh</td>
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<td>11:45-12:00</td>
<td>Ms K. Zehra Arshad (Video message) National Coordinator, Pakistan Coalition for Education, Pakistan</td>
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### CHAIR: Prof. Venita Kaul
Professor Emeritus Education, Ambedkar University, Delhi, and Steering Committee Member, South Asia Regional Forum on Safe and Secure Education
In the second session, issues, challenges and efforts in safe and secure education was discussed. Chairing this session, Prof. Venita Kaul, Professor Emeritus Education, Ambedkar University Delhi and Steering Committee Member, South Asia Forum for Safe and Secure Education, in her opening remarks, said that we have to look into the issues of education holistically. Not only physical and psychological or emotional safety, but overall security has to be taken care of.

Participating in the session, Mr Aminulhaq Mayel, Deputy Director of Programmes (Programme Development), Swedish Committee of Afghanistan said that while going to school and coming back home, a child should feel safe and secured. He or she should learn together in a free and safe environment. He further informed that due to a lack of security, total 3.7 million children are out of schools in Afghanistan. Not only this, around 1000 schools have been shut down due to a threat received from Armed Opposition Groups. Girls, too, have been forced to shun education because of the pressure from Armed Opposition Groups. There is a complete lack of safe and secured infrastructure in the educational institutions. As many as 10 thousand schools don’t have their own building.

Sharing her experiences, Ms Papia Ferdousei, Programme Manager, BRAC Education Program, Bangladesh said that BRAC is aimed at spreading education among people from the marginalized section and has several policies for safe and secure education. BRAC is also running 7 thousand plus non – formal schools. It’s running formal schools called “Shishu Niketan” for those who are deprived of quality education. Despite ambitious and concerted educational efforts by BRAC, around 2.3 million children are still out of school in Bangladesh. This is the reason why BRAC seeks to increase enrollment in schools. It also runs empowerment classes for girls and boys.

Ms Ferdousei also told the gathering that there has been an intense debate about having an RTE-like Act in Bangladesh.

Participating in this session, Alka Singh, Head – Policy and Advocacy, Save the Children, India emphasized to have a comprehensive school safety framework in the country. She asked whether we are equipped enough for ensuring safe and secure education in schools, particularly during natural disaster incidents. She also underlined the gaps for safe school by pointing out institutional disconnect and limited understanding of school safety concepts.

Ms K. Zehra Arshad, National Coordinator, Pakistan Coalition for Education, Pakistan participated in this session through a video message. In her message, she enlightened the gathering about a poor educational scenario in Pakistan. According to her, terror incidents have severely hampered the functioning of schools. She also said that Pakistan is yet to make its educational institutions safe and secured. She expressed her disappointment that around six billion children are out of school in Pakistan.

In her concluding remarks, Prof. Venita Kaul said that there are many commonalities between South Asian countries. Violence and dropout rates are a few examples. Safety is the major challenge for girls’ education. It’s imperative for South Asian countries to equip themselves with a gender empowerment concept.
## VOICES OF REGIONAL NETWORKS/ BODIES/ INGOS

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<td>2:30-2:40</td>
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<td>Mr. Vikrant Mahajan&lt;br&gt;CEO, Sphere India, and Representative of South Asia Together for the Humanitarian Imperative (SATHI) network</td>
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<td>2:40-2:50</td>
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<td>Dr Colin Gonsalves&lt;br&gt;Founder, Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), and Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India</td>
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<td>2:50-3:00</td>
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<td>Ms Razia Ismail&lt;br&gt;Co-founder and Convener, Indian Alliance for Child Rights (IACR)</td>
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<td>3:00-3:10</td>
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<td>Dr Jyotsna Jha&lt;br&gt;Director, Centre for Budget and Policy Studies, and Gulmakai Champion, Malala Fund</td>
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<td>3:10-3:20</td>
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<td>Ms Kamal Gaur&lt;br&gt;Technical Advisor for Education, Save the Children, India&lt;br&gt;And Child Champions, Save the Children, India</td>
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<td>3:20-3:50</td>
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<td>Q&amp;A and Open Discussion</td>
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<td>3:50-4:00</td>
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<td>Concluding Remarks by Chair</td>
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Voices of Regional Networks also were heard in the third session, chaired by Amitabh Behar, CEO, Oxfam India. Participating in this session, Mr George Abraham, CEO, SCORE Foundation expressed that the majority of people are not trained to respond or deal with persons having disabilities. Moreover, persons with disabilities are not part of schemes of policy-making and development process. In other words, it can be said that persons with disabilities are out of the process of inclusive growth.

Addressing the session, Mr N. Paul Diwakar, Chairperson, Asia Dalit Rights Forum (ADRF) said that Majority of people belonging to South Asian countries face discriminations. But none of the actors of education look at those discriminations. It is imperative for us to make education inclusive.

Mr Vikrant Mahajan, CEO, Sphere India, and Representative of South Asia Together for the Humanitarian Imperative (SATHI) network, deliberated upon the various issues of children vulnerability. He strongly advocated safe and secure education for children. Talking about various dimensions of the natural disaster, he said that schools are the first place for relief camps during emergency situations. He was of the view that one disaster can drag you 10 years back.

Eminent legal luminary Dr Colin Gonsalves, founder, Human Rights Law Network and senior advocate, Supreme Court of India also participated in this session and elaborated upon the legal route to ensure implementation of the RTE Act, 2009 as well as safe and secure educational environment.

Ms Razia Ismail, Co-founder and Convener, Indian Alliance for Child Rights (IACR) also enlightened the gathering with her insights on child rights. She also extended her support for safe and secure education for all with a prime focus on girls.

Dr Jyotsna Jha, Director, Centre for Budget and Policy Studies, and Gulmakai Champion, Mala Fund also made a meaningful contribution to the discussion by sharing her expertise on budget and policies.

Ms Kamal Gaur, Technical Advisor for Education, Save the Children enriched the gathering with her valuable inputs on the educational scenario, particularly safe and secure education. She stressed on violence-free schools. She dwelt upon the relationship between children, teachers and the community. She said that we shouldn’t just confine ourselves to the guidelines related to violence, we should go beyond that. She and her colleague, Lakshmi, also talked about how they worked on ‘Safe Schools’ in Delhi.

Before the end of the session, an interaction with eminent panellists and audience took place where they exchanged their views and comments with a great zeal and vigour. Participating in this session Mr Gautam Bandopadhyay asked can schools be violence free if a society is engulfed with violence. Can there be an inclusive atmosphere inside the school, if steep inequality prevails in the society? He suggested that an intensive discussion is required on these questions if we really want safe, secure and quality education.

Concluding the session, Mr Amitabh Behar, CEO, Oxfam India appreciated the multidimensional spirit that enriched the session. He opined that we must figure out whether education is meant for market only or it’s an apparatus for creating a new kind of pragmatic society. Without this debate, said Mr Behar, we can’t reach anywhere.
### STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN THE FORUM

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
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<tr>
<td>4:00-</td>
<td><strong>Strategies to strengthen the Forum</strong></td>
<td>Mr Sudarshan Ghimire&lt;br&gt;Editor &amp; Senior Education Journalist, Sikai Samuh, Nepal, and Steering Committee Member, South Asia Regional Forum on Safe and Secure Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:00-</td>
<td>to advocate for safe and secure education</td>
<td>Mr Rahmatullah Arman&lt;br&gt;Gulmakai Champion, Malala Fund, Afghanistan</td>
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<td>4:20-</td>
<td>for all, especially girls</td>
<td>Ms Chandrakanta Bharti&lt;br&gt;National Youth Equity Forum, Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion</td>
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<td>4:30-</td>
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<td>Mr P. Joseph Victor Raj&lt;br&gt;National Convener, Campaign Against Child Labour (CACL)</td>
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<td>4:40-</td>
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<td>Mr Gautam Bandopadhyay&lt;br&gt;Convener, Right to Education Forum, Chhattisgarh, India</td>
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<td>4:50-</td>
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<td>Mr Raghu Tewari&lt;br&gt;Right to Education Forum, Uttarakhand, India</td>
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<td>5:00-</td>
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<td>Mr Dharmendra Kumar&lt;br&gt;Executive Director, Dalit Vikas Abhiyan Samiti, Bihar, India</td>
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<tr>
<td>5:10-</td>
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<td>Open Discussion Concluding Remarks by Chair</td>
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The fourth session, chaired by Ms Anjela Taneja, Technical Director – Education, CARE INDIA and Steering Committee Member, South Asia Forum for Safe and Secure Education, discussed various strategies to strengthen the Forum to advocate for safe and secure education for all, especially girls. Ms Urmila Simkhada, Program Coordinator – Lead, CARE Nepal, and Steering Committee Member, South Asia Forum for Safe and Secure Education Co-chaired this session.

Eminent personalities and activists including Mr Sudarshan Ghimire, Editor and Senior Education Journalist, Sikai Samuh, Nepal and Steering Committee Member, South Asia Forum for Safe and Secure Education, Mr Rahmatullah Arman, Gulmakai Champion, Mala Fund, Afghanistan, Dr. Anupam Pachauri, Assistant Professor, Centre for Policy Research in Higher Education, National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), Ms Chandrakanta Bharti, National Youth Equity Forum, Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion, Mr P Joseph Victor Raj, National Convener, Campaign Against Child Labour (CACL), Mr Gautam Bandopadhyay, Convener, Right to Education Forum, Chhattisgarh, India, Mr Raghu Tiwari, Right to Education Forum, Uttarakhand, India and Mr Dharmendra Kumar, Executive Director, Dalit Vikas Abhiyan Samiti, Bihar, India shared their views on future strategies to strengthen the Forum.

Co-chairing the session Ms Anjela mentioned that the last session on Strategies to Strengthen the Forum was the culmination of the full-day discussion, where important person's views on the issue were shared. Regional perspective was also shared in terms of issues and opinions of people in different South Asian countries. Views of different networks were also shared. As it is a South Asia regional forum, it meant that not only work is to be done within the countries, but also that steps are to be taken to strengthen regional cooperation among countries. Work will have to be done for influencing what happens on the ground not just in India, but also making sure that the regional frameworks and institutions that bind the countries together as a region, are influenced. It is about getting political commitments, winning minds and hearts of people on a sensitive issue. It is about closing the perennial policy implementation gap that exists on the ground. All the countries have legal frameworks and policies, which do not necessarily result automatically in implementation. Given those reality, this is a platform and commitment from four or five countries to work together in this issue, this Consultation and the session delved on the strategies to strengthen the Forum for taking the work forward.

Co-chairing the session, Ms Urmila Simkhada from Care, Nepal, also said that this Forum provided a platform where the countries can come together to make the region free from violence in schools that the children, especially girls are facing.

Mr Sudarshan Ghimire, a member of the Regional Steering Committee of the South Asia Forum for Safe and Secure Education, from Nepal, also a Senior Education Journalist, and Editor of Sikai Samuh, in Nepal, emphasised the need to act on the discussions. He opined that the Charter that was discussed on the previous day (24th June 2018) provides the guiding principles of the Forum and should be used for moving ahead. He also recommended that a national level social movement needed to be created, which had not yet begun. He emphasised the need to raise the issue of safe and secure education in South Asia level institutions as well. In the SAARC level Forum, called 'Education for All' (where Mr Ghimire had also participated), the SAARC Education Minister needs to be approached, as it is an issue at SAARC policy level. Using Twitter to interact with politicians and policymakers is one of the options to keep in mind, Mr Ghimire pointed out. He also opined that there was a need to introduce success stories as well. Media needs to give adequate space and serious attention to issues of education. Mr Ghimire pointed out that this was a major issue in South Asia. Quoting Mr P. Sainath, who spoke at Kathmandu about investigating Journalism in Indian Media, he reminded that the media needs to remain not co-opted by corporate/ business vested interests and perform the role of public watchdog responsibilities. He recommended that high priority be allocated, in the strategic plans of the Forum, to the local and the national media of the countries. Mr Ghimire also advised that the teams in each country needs to collaborate with and expand its reach to many more organisations in their respective country. He also opined that while Teachers' Unions talk about the rights of teachers, they also need to take up the discussions on their duties and responsibilities more and more. This was another challenge, Mr Ghimire informed. Working with teachers to transform their teaching learning
approach, attitude and mentality could not be over emphasized, said Mr Ghimire. Among the three-tiers of government in Nepal (central, provincial, and local), the local governments have been given absolute right and responsibility on/for education. Hence working with them was also imperative. The school reforms have also changed the curriculum in Nepal. Earlier, *Gurukul* like system, the ancient system was more pragmatic, he opined. Now, the new global discourse system is meant to make 'clerks'/ 'office person', and not an independent or critical thinker, said Mr Ghimire. Hence, there needs to be discussion on curriculum, instructions/ teaching-learning approach. Now the approach is more 'teacher-centric' rather than child-centric. Children learn by doing, observing, feeling rather than listening and hence teaching learning should focus on activities. A book *'Asafal School'* (in Hindi by Eklavya) was translated two-years back from *'How Children Fail'* (Classics in Child Development) by John Holt, into Nepali and is becoming very popular, Mr Ghimire informed. The assessment system needs to be reviewed. The balanced curriculum having knowledge, skills, attitude and values needs to be devised, instead of the current focus on knowledge, that too lower level knowledge rather than higher level thinking, recommended Mr Ghimire. Parenting is also another major issue. School governance can also be addressed in various ways. Action research projects, learning exchange programmes among the four member countries will help them to collaborate for cross-learning, Mr Ghimire recommended.

Addressing the gathering, Ms Chandrakanta Bharti, National Youth Equity Forum, Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion said that we must have to take care of issues of the marginalized section, particularly discrimination issues. We also have to bring youth together or this endeavour.

Mr P Joseph Victor Raj, National Convener, Campaign Against Child Labour (CACL), in his address, said that it is imperative for us to talk about the plight of out of school children, particularly child labourers who are mostly deprived of education. According to Census data, there are 25 lakh workers in the age group of 5 – 9 years. In addition to that, there are 76 lakh workers in the age group of 10 -14 years. There are 3 crore child labourers in the age group of 15 – 18 years. If we want to give them a safe and secure education, then they have to be fully rehabilitated first. For this, there has to be a stringent legislation banning all kind of child labour till the age of 18 years. But we must not forget that only legislation will not serve the purpose. The whole approach has to be changed.

Addressing the gathering, Mr Gautam Bandopadhyay, Convener, Right to Education Forum, Chhattisgarh said that the region, which he belongs to, is the largest land of tribal people. But this same region witnesses worst kind of hunger, displacement, migration and state repression etc. He also said that it’s very necessary to conduct mapping of child trafficking and migration if we are really interested in ensuring safe and secure education.

Mr Raghu Tiwari, Right to Education Forum, Uttrakhand, said that we can strengthen the Forum at two levels. First is at the organizational level and another is at the program level. Our organization should essentially be based on the principle of equality, inclusiveness and decentralization. On programme level, we have to formulate a collective programme taking different situations in SAARC nations in view.

Mr Dharmendra Kumar, Executive Director, Dalit Vikas Abhiyan Samiti, Bihar, in his address, highlighted the issue of discrimination even in the menace of sexual violence against children. He said that it’s very tragic to see that the degree and intensity of sexual violence against children vary as per the social, cultural and language background. There is an urgent need to address this discrimination.

Mr Rahmatullah Arman, the Gulmakai Champion, Malala Fund, Afghanistan (and CEO and Founder of Teach for Afghanistan) introduced the work of Teach for Afghanistan’s work. He also talked about the Gulmakai Champion network. He hoped that such Forums and consultative meets will be conducted in various south Asian countries, facilitating cross-learning.

The session concluded after an open discussion and summary of the recommendations by the Chair.
SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Summarizing the recommendations of the day, Ms Anjela pointed out the following:

1. Starting of the process is having a Vision, a Mission, a Charter and a set of principles, the efforts for which had been initiated.
2. The Forum has expanded faster than anticipated and in so doing it has to be decentralized while retaining a common agenda, given that the contexts are different in various countries.
3. It has to expand, it as to collaborate, it has to become a movement.
4. It is seeking to expand, it is seeking new members, not only in new geographies but also nationally.
5. It has to reach out to more people, to unusual suspects, to middle class (as it is influential).
6. Youth is obviously a critical stakeholder.
7. It has to ensure that the voice and leadership of the marginalized is brought into the process, so that it does not remain just people speaking on behalf of the marginalized.
8. Communication has to be strengthened. There is a Facebook page there is a Twitter account.
9. Existing networks and movements have to be brought on board.
10. It has to recognize various realities while simultaneously pressing for action.
11. Being a regional forum it needs to engage with institutions like SAARC, which includes official processes as well as shadowing the official processes. National frameworks and policy framework ultimately are critical.
12. Many of the countries in the region are undergoing policy change or legislative change with respect to right to education. It is a period of policy change as new laws of right to education are being drafted in Nepal and Bangladesh. It is also known that once passed, the implementation of the law also needs monitoring, and the nitty-gritties of rules and regulations through which the government works, also have to be looked into.
13. The legal route has not been used adequately, but should be.
14. Budget also have to be monitored as allocation for safe and secure education would reflect the actual priorities of the government. One of the recommendations was to make sure that legal violations are recognized and are taken to human rights forums.
15. Ultimately political processes are critical and in a country like India we are expecting big policy announcements just before the Model Code of Conduct starts before the next general election. It is also about individual and not just government action. Hence, recognizing success stories, strengthening documentation and presence in media, and partnership with the media are critical.
16. While we talk about media and advocacy, ultimately we are practitioners, therefore tracking changes from early childhood, strengthening Child Protection Committees, and other forms of local action like undertaking safety audits, and checks of the extent to which schools are actually safe, fall very much within what we can and should be doing as educational practitioners.
17. Textbook and curriculum revisions are also important for those who work in pedagogy issues.
18. While we work on larger social change and as we recognize that education is embedded in the larger social processes of transformation, therefore the process of strengthening education systems and making schools safe is part of the largest political alternative building. While we work on the larger issues, we have to make sure that we do our small bit as well to make education safe and secure.
PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Apart from the speakers (in the Agenda) about 80-100 participants were present: from:

CARE India
Caritas India
Centre for Budget and Policy Studies- Gulmakai Champion
Centre for Policy Research
Child Fund
Child Rights and You
Gulmakai Champions, Malal Fund, Afghanistan and India
Lokmitra
Member, CWC-V
Mobile Creches
National Association of the Deaf
National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, India
National Federation for Indian Women
National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA)
National Platform for the Rights of the Disabled
NEG-FIRE
Oxfam India
Save the Children, India
State RTE Forums- 19 states of India
Welthungerhilfe
World Vision
NGOs, CSOs, Teacher Association representatives, teachers from various states in India