

WORLD HUMANITARIAN DAY 2022 BLOG: CHILD PROTECTION ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS RAISING DURING COVID-19 BY SWATANTRATA ABHIYAN NEPAL (SAN)

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About SAN: A child protection advocacy and campaigning organisation in Nepal

[Swatantrata Abhiyan Nepal \(SAN\)](#) is a Nepalese Human Rights Organisation that advocates for rights-based interventions and response from the government, non-government agencies, and private sector. SAN is engaged in child protection particularly working against slavery, trafficking and labour exploitation by collaborating with local governments, non-governmental organisations and civil society networks. During the COVID-19 pandemic, SAN campaigned together with civil society networks, government bodies and health practitioners to protect children.

Context during COVID-19: Advocating for child-friendly services and child protection response plans in government health institutions

The Swatantrata Abhiyan team coordinated with child rights networks and the health practitioners' association (Nepal Paediatric Society and Paediatric Nurses Association) and advocated with public hospitals and government authorities to ensure child-friendly services and child protection response plans in health institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The major challenge was protecting and preventing COVID-19 infection among SAN volunteers and employees. Due to the mobility control, SAN employees had less opportunities to engage in person while in the field. However, the use of virtual mode and technologies, coordination with government agencies and support provided by members of child rights networks and health professionals remained beneficial.

What did SAN do in response to the COVID-19 crisis? Awareness-raising, training and national advocacy

The SAN Team published and distributed 500 flyers targeting health care practitioners (doctors, nurses and hospital managers) on how to ensure children have access to protective services, referral mechanisms and help-providing institutions. Together with Nepal Paediatric Society and Paediatric Nurses Association, SAN hosted a virtual training program that reached 50 paediatrics doctors, 600 nurses.

SAN collaborated with child rights networks in Nepal to organise a virtual webinar with child rights NGOs and local government officials that reached 500 participants. The webinar highlighted guidance on

making child friendly health services and ensuring the availability of child protection services. During these training sessions and webinars, SAN informed participants about the COVID-19 virus, risk behaviours, myths and facts, vulnerabilities of children, possible negligence and local measures for child rights and child protection.

SAN, NEPAS and PNAN also raised the agenda of child friendly and child protective health services in high level ministerial meetings with the government. As a result, the government of Nepal (Central Committee for COVID -19 management), which was decentralised across Nepal, allocated 10% of beds for children in the holding centre, medical insinuation and hospitals along with a child friendly environment response mechanism.

During these events, through SAN's request, the child rights apex body of government, National Child Rights Council (NCRC), provided human resources, coordinated the event and followed-up on the status of children in the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of these efforts, 421 children received psychosocial care and support, medical facilities and health services from trained health professionals.

What are the remaining challenges? The need for continuous advocacy on the centrality of children and their protection

The major challenge SAN faced was identifying the priority settings, as COVID-19 was and continues to be a serious health pandemic, and government officials and communities have been overburdened by health service demands at the community level. The issues of child protection and child friendly services have also been seen as less of a priority over time. However, with the significant advocacy work done by SAN and SAN partners on the need for child protection and child friendly services during the pandemic, the local and high-level officials became more attentive to this issue.

What still needs to be done? Gathering and communicating evidence on child protection risks - including climate risks - as part of disaster preparedness planning

In Nepal, the Climate Crisis and climate change related disasters have been observed significantly in recent months, but have been disproportionately considered in the response system. Though there is less urgency for the COVID-19 response, Nepal now has several other disaster-related risks, but children and their protection have been deprioritised by policy makers and service providers. Therefore, we suggest that it is essential for evidence building of disasters, and child protection risks and vulnerabilities, to be continuously communicated with local governments, civil societies and service providers; also that climate informed care plans are implemented in response to a disaster.

Conclusion: Children's voices should be heard at all levels!

SAN is proud to promote the agenda of child protection during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite a lack of resources and no external funding. Children's voices are little heard in disaster response; therefore

we advocate for the need of children to participate in disaster summits at various levels to ensure children's voices are heard at the policy making and service levels.