

CRC-PROJECTS in VIETNAM - BACKGROUND INFORMATION

General about children and children's rights in Vietnam

Children are highly valued in Vietnam and the wish for children to grow up safe and healthy is genuine and universal. Education is accepted as an avenue for a better future. Parents and communities are well aware of what children need to thrive: shelter, a caring environment, health, good nutrition and psycho-social stimulation. However, the critical importance of play in promoting children's cognitive, emotional and social development is not generally recognized¹.

Confucian values, which are the backbone of the Vietnamese society, inform the conceptualization of children and their families. Gender defines the roles of parents - father as an active subject/agent in the public sphere and the mother in the domestic sphere, which are then transferred to children. Discipline and obedience, common concepts in Vietnamese society, are considered important both by adults and children. The expectations of both society and family towards the child are based on these values, which are critical components in the education of a child and the overall education system. The social and cultural environment strongly affects the child to adapt to the prevailing concepts and to be socialized into the system. The concepts are internalized, they become a part of the child's consciousness. The children themselves express the importance of obedience without little questioning and the Confucian structure is reproduced.

Vietnam was, however, the first Asian state and second in the world to ratify the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990. The implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Vietnam has been legalised by law. The law of 'Protection and Care and Education of the Child' was ratified by the National Assembly on August 12, 1991. The Government on November 14, 1991 issued an implementation decree.

In October 1996, SCS approached Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) to discuss potential collaboration concerning child rights training in primary school. The response was positive. In 1996-1997 school year, 'Week of Education on Children's rights', were launched in four districts of Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) and gradually expanded to other districts in the following years. By the end of school year 1999-2000, all primary schools in 22 districts in HCMC were involved in child rights education activities.

Project Area and context

Ho Chi Minh City is in the South of Vietnam. It is the biggest centre of culture, economy and education of the country. Administratively, Ho Chi Minh City is currently divided into 24 districts and with a population of over 6 million.

District 1, HCMC is one among four first district in HCMC selected for implementing the pilot project “ Week of Education on children’s rights” – the first collaboration between SCS and the provincial department of education and training. There are in the district 17 primary and 13 secondary schools. .

Rationale for CRC pilot project

Although primary schools in HCMC have been involved in child rights education activities for a number of years and most teachers are aware of the fact that children have rights, it is felt that teachers’ understanding of children's rights is limited. The assumption is based on results of a number of observation/assessment conducted by SCS during the last year and is confirmed by the school vice principal.

- The cascade training model widely applied in Vietnam does not guarantee that all school teachers get quality training
- Teachers are trained during short courses to organize activities around children's rights, following MOET’s guidebooks, as such they do not have opportunities for discussion, reflection and feedback.

In addition, other school officers (care givers) have not been trained on CRC and there have not been many occasions for school staff to discuss child rights issues and relate them to education in general and their school situation in particular.

Brief introduction and reasons for selecting Le Ngoc Han Primary school.

Le Ngoc Han Primary School, when first established in 1992, had 2 branches with 14 classes, 516 pupils, 18 teachers and 19 officers. In 2002, Le Ngoc Han school merged with Van Hien Primary School and currently has 3 sub-schools with 71 teachers, 60 officers and 1612 pupils of 6 to 11 years of age. This school not only enrolls children from the catchment areas but from all districts of the city. As many government offices are located in this district, parents choose this school that is near their workplace to facilitate fetching their children.

Le Ngoc Han School is selected for this pilot project for one most important reason: one team member is the school vice principal which is makes it easy for project activities and follow-up. The other team member, though living far from this place, travels to this part of the country quite often for work and this helps save resources.

Due to limited time and human resources, it was decided to start the pilot project in one sub-school to experience the process and see if full school implementation is possible in the later stage.

Support from local supervisors

Upon returning from Lund in October 2004, we reported to our respective supervisors on the training course in Lund and presented plan for the pilot CRC project. Although there

is not remarkable financial commitment, the project is fully endorsed by SCS and HCMC Department of Education and Training.

Aim of the pilot project

Activities conducted during November-February

1. Survey on staff's knowledge and understanding about children's rights

In order to find out how much school staff know and understand about children's rights, we design a questionnaire and sent to XX teachers and XX care givers.

Responses from the questionnaire reveals that these teachers/ has basic knowledge and understanding of CRC and show positive attitude to basic child rights principles. However there is limited interpretation and ability to analyze CRC implementation. It is difficult for teachers to relate children's rights with school situation.

2. Survey on children's knowledge about children's rights

A questionnaire was also developed and sent to 750 children grades 2-5 to find out how much they know about children's rights and changes they have noticed in their schools since they are involved in child rights education activities. Due to time limitation it has not been possible to produce a decent report on this undertaking. General observations are:

- All these children are aware that they have rights and they enjoy child rights education activities at school.
- Most children talk to their family members about their rights. There are some who do not talk about their rights in their families because they don't think they can/should do that
- 15% children say they see no changes at school/family. Other report on positive changes as better relationship among friends, teachers and parents, less bullying, less punishment, more support etc.,

Children's knowledge on their rights reflect their teachers' knowledge on CRC. Although all of them know that they have rights, most of them think they have four rights: rights to survival, right to development, right to protection and right to participation.

3. Training workshop on children's rights

Based on the result of the survey, we design training content and organize training workshops for all staff of one sub-school. Due to school timetable, the training workshops had to be split into short sessions: 10 two hour sessions for care givers and two one-day sessions for teachers. The content of these workshops vary to fit with their needs. Training for care givers provides them with basic principle of CRC and the content of the four categories of rights. After each session, time is allocated so that

participants can reflect on their role, situation and discuss measures to promote child rights implementation in their schools.

Workshop for teachers cover four main issues:

- The child and his/her rights
- Local laws and children's rights
- Right violations in schools- case studies
- Child participation

Main outcomes

The training workshops contribute to consolidate school staff's knowledge on children rights. School staff are better aware of their roles and responsibilities to promote CRC implementation. They realize that there is still a lot to be done to ensure that children's rights are respected and this is not an easy task. They also enjoy the working method which encourage everyone to participate and everybody's idea is respected. Care givers in particular come up in concrete measures to ensure better implementation (clean food, safe toilet etc.)

Challenges/constraints

It is difficult to organize training due to school timetable. Split training sessions affect training quality and outcome. This also makes it difficult for both team members to take part, get hands- on experience and feed back.

It is found very difficult to do some expansion at this stage. Schools takes two months more to close this school year and soon comes time for examination. If any plan is made now, it can hardly be followed until the next school year.

The fact that the team are only two means increased workload for team members.

Plans ahead

Joint workshops to develop action plans to improve children's rights implementation at school level to be organized for staff of this sub-school. However, implementation and follow-up will continue.

Activities during April – August

Survey on knowledge about child rights

Questionnaire was distributed to 40 teachers to cover all teachers of Le Ngoc Han school to learn about their knowledge on children's rights. Based on the findings , relevant training course was organized for the rest of the staff.

Training on child rights and development of action plan

A two day training on child rights was organized for those teachers who did not participate in the course during the first phase of the project. The training was then followed by development of action plan to promote child rights implementation in the school.

Results

Increased knowledge about children's rights among school staff. Teachers and care-takers have a chance to discuss in-depth which help to improve their understanding and interpreting of child rights. This results in concrete plan of action to promote child rights implementation at school.

Children's forum

A group of 26 children - aged 12-16 from Trung Nguyen lower secondary school - receive training on child rights, life skills, child participation, journalism and facilitation skills. Back to their locality, the children work together to prepare for their own forum which address their concern over the rising negative behaviours of their peers. These children, representing all classes in the school collected information from their classmates and organize discussion on the causes and effect of these behaviour namely peer fighting, smoking, gambling, alcohol drinking and stealing etc., Each class then develop a mural of their own where concerns and messages are expressed and shared.

A forum was organized in September 2005, participated by 720 schools and 100 invited guests including representatives from provincial education services, district authorities, parents, teachers and headmasters from other schools in the district. During the forum, children perform drama which talked about the cause, effect and messages. Children come up with the following messages which were loud read and listened to by their peers, parents, teacher and heads of local authorities:

To their peers:

Say no to social evils
Learn about and claim for child rights
Be resilient and listen to good advice
Be supportive to those who are trapped in social evils

To their parents

Know about and respect child rights
Be good examples for your own children
Respect your children's views

To the local authorities

Pay more attention to children issues
Create opportunities for children to voice their opinions

Strictly handle cases of social evils
Enhance preventive measures, strengthen monitoring to prevent social evils
Organize local campaign to raise awareness among community members and children around the negative effects of social evils.

To the School

Pay more attention to school children
Be knowledgeable about social evils and help children to prevent them
Create good, stimulating learning environment for children.

At the end of the forum, decision-makers at local levels stated that this was a very good initiative and they would like it be spread to other schools in the district. “ This activity is the first of its kind ever organized. What I see and hear this morning confirm my thought that children can do a lot if they are given opportunities” (Mr. Pham Viet Bang, Deputy Chairman of the District People’s Committee.)

Future plan:

To put in function a child right clubs to monitor child rights implementation at school level.
Continued support for children group to make them advocates for children’s rights in their localities.

Annex 1
Questionnaire for teachers

What do you know about UN CRC?
 You know about this through:

Provincial training District training School training
 Mass media Other channels (please specify)

Questionnaires for children

Evaluation on the training workshops (main points)

What do you remember after the training workshops?

Rights children are entitled to enjoy
 CRC and Vietnam Law on children's rights
 What do you find most useful

What do you find most interesting? Why?

What do you find most useful? Why?

What need clarification?

What else do you want to learn if there is more training opportunities?

How do you plan to apply learnt knowledge in your work?

Other suggestions/comments