Country Strategy India

2024 - 2029

The Situation of Children in India

Our country strategy is based on an analysis of the child rights situation in India as well as the integration of key global trends which we take from KNH's global strategic planning. The present version of the strategy is an update in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and new global strategies. It strongly builds upon the existing CRSA. Updated analysis is based mostly on secondary data.

The situation of children is analysed in three steps. Firstly it focuses on root causes which describe underlying, long term challenges specific to India. Secondly, global trends are integrated into the analysis with a focus on their manifestations there. Finally it describes the manifested child rights violations which are most prominent in India.

Root Causes

Poverty. India is a country of extreme contrasts: there are economically booming centres like Mumbai, Delhi and Bangalore, but India also has the world's highest number of people living in extreme poverty. Some 15 per cent of Indians are undernourished. While India's economic development has brought improvements for many, approximately 180 million people still live on the equivalent of less than 2.15 US dollars a day. The COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences have caused a renewed increase in unemployment and poverty, especially among disadvantaged groups. Such extreme poverty creates pressures which often result in a range of child rights violations.

Discrimination. Despite some improvements, the situation of children in India remains marked by a multitude of attitudes and practices of discrimination. These are prominently based on gender, caste, ethnicity and religion but include aspects such as disability and health. While such discrimination is in itself a child rights violation, it also lies at the root of many other violations as described below.

Views of the Child. Children find themselves at the bottom of India's hierarchical society. This is compounded by the aforementioned forms of discrimination. Children are often considered the property of their parents, and they are expected to obey what adults tell them to do without considering their views and opinions. As a consequence services for children are often not responsive to their needs.

Political priorities. The attitudes described above are reflected in the low priority the realisation of child rights is assigned in India. This is evidenced in a lack of social auditing and coordination as well as low budget allocations e.g. for the education sector compounded by equally poor access of the available schemes and utilisation of the budgets leading to a struggle to fulfil the duties as described in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Climate change. While climate change is a global trend, its effects are unevenly spread. India remains one of the most affected countries of climate change. This is manifest in the loss of life, livelihood and property as a result of climate related extreme weather events. It is also seen in long term effects on the Indian economy. Climate change therefore presents a direct violation of children's right to life. It also increases the challenge of addressing other root causes such as poverty. It is a global threat with particular relevance in India.

Migration. The root causes described above create pressures on children and their families. A common coping strategy is to migrate. However, migration itself brings the risk of further child rights violations. These range from violence against children and economic exploitation to limited access to quality education. Like climate change, migration is a global phenomenon with a particular manifestation in India.

Manifest Child Rights Violations

Root causes and global trends seem abstract and theoretical. They do translate into concrete child right violations though which we seek to address in this strategy. Economic pressures on families force them to adopt coping strategies which can be harmful to children especially if they are combined with discriminatory attitudes as described above. In India such coping strategies include but are not limited to:

1. The forced marriage of children to relieve families of the economic and protection duty to care for them. Child marriage is also a social norm in many pockets of India, leading to girl children dropping out of schools and getting married at an early age.
2. Forcing children to work so as to contribute to family income often at the expense of quality education. This includes domestic duties as well where elder siblings are required to take care of the younger ones.
3. In extreme cases of economic duress children are trafficked, exposing them to violence and sexual abuse.
4. Families often seek to cope with pressures by migrating to urban areas in search of work. This is often at the expense of quality education and exposes children to risks of violence and discrimination.

While violence against children is often the result of coping strategies, it is also a result of harmful attitudes towards children. This is reflected in violent parenting and teaching practices both at home and at school. A lack of respect for the views of children also means that children are not consulted on delicate matters such as sexual abuse, making it much harder to address them. Finally, practices of violence and discrimination lead to problems of both the physical and mental health of children.

The underfunding of services for children and not making child rights a political priority in turn leads to children, especially from marginalised groups facing poor quality education systems from which drop out rates are high.

It is the aim of our programme in India to address concrete child rights violations as described above as well as their root causes. We have translated this into six programme objectives as described further below.

A look at the previous strategy and current programme

Our country programme finds itself in a state of transition. The previous strategy paper described the goals of shifting from institutional forms of child care to rural community development and urban social work as well as shifting the geographical focus from the south to the north-east. Since financial volumes and sponsorship quotas needed to be maintained at the same time, these goals were relatively broadly defined in order to keep them realistic.

In keeping with our global approach, we have also started developing our country programme in a rights based way. Most notably CRSAs were introduced both at project and at country programme levels.

We have taken huge steps towards our goals. Our analysis described above does not indicate any major or structural change. The present strategy therefore largely reaffirms our existing goals and describes a continuation of developments we are already pursuing. Rather than questioning or abandoning our goals, we aim to sharpen their focus both geographically and programmatically.

Key developments are therefore found in the description of our objectives as outlined in the following.

Objectives

Introduction and cross cutting issues

Our country programme is part of our global mission to realize the rights of children. Objectives we support will therefore be in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We promote the application of the principles of non-discrimination, best interest of the child, survival and development as well as child participation in designing projects.

We promote and support the development of project designs towards holistic child rights programming throughout the project cycle.

Partners are free to propose any approach they want to follow. We promote following the self-help approach as a qualified and suitable approach in pursuit of community development as well as many objectives stated herein.

The programmatic objectives we support under this strategy are broad in scope. They are therefore accompanied by lists of possible initiatives to describe their holistic understanding. In doing so we have drawn from internationally established standards. Partners remain free to propose their own approach but are encouraged to engage with these standards in designing their projects.

Where possible we seek projects to coordinate and integrate with others to tackle child rights violations from a variety of angles and to ensure a holistic approach to the issues we want to address.

Wherever possible we would like to facilitate our partners to be part of strategic conversations and or policy discussions at national and state capitals, to be able to work with the government towards systemic change to ensure sustainable development.

Programme Objectives

We have analysed the situation of children and youth in India as well as trends of global relevance to children's' rights. In light of our own mandate and resources we have identified a number of topics as the most relevant for us in India. We will focus our resources in support of partners working towards these. In doing so we place special emphasis on the child rights violations described above as well as the target groups listed below.

We stress the interconnections of the topics listed below. The Initiatives listed under a given topic often directly relate to another. This is most prominently so in the case of the core topic of eduction which is a topic in its own right as well as a component of most of the other topics. Partners are encouraged to engage with these connections and intersections in the design of their projects.

1. Education

We aim to maintain and develop our core topic of education as a key component of our country programme. We therefore seek and support:

1. Initiatives to make education services more available to marginalised children
2. Initiatives to make education services more accessible to marginalised children
3. Initiatives to improve the acceptability of education services to children and local communities
4. Initiatives to make education services more adaptable to children and their communities.
5. Initiatives in support of community engagement with education systems

6. Initiatives supporting the alignment of education services with the aims of education as stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These include the support of developing respect for the natural environment as well as promoting understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin

2. Violence against Children

We aim to maintain and develop our core topic of child protection as a key component of our country programme. We therefore seek and support:

1. Initiatives to ensure the implementation and enforcement of laws to prevent violent behaviours, reduce excessive alcohol use, and limit youth access to firearms and other weapons
2. Initiatives to strengthen norms and values that support non-violent, respectful, nurturing, positive and gender equitable relationships for all children and adolescents
3. Initiatives to create and sustain safe streets and other environments where children and youth gather and spend time
4. Initiatives to reduce harsh parenting practices and create positive parent-child relationships
5. Initiatives to improve families' economic security and stability, reduce child maltreatment and intimate partner violence
6. Initiatives to improve access to good-quality health, social welfare and criminal justice support services for all children who need them – including for reporting violence – to reduce the long-term impact of violence
7. Initiatives to increase children's access to more effective, gender-equitable education and social-emotional learning and life-skills training, and ensure that schools environments are safe and enabling

3. Economic Exploitation

We aim to maintain and develop our core topic of economic exploitation as a key component of our country programme. We therefore seek and support:

1. Initiatives to make education, health and other essential services available, accessible, adaptable and acceptable to working children
2. Initiatives to improve families' economic security and stability, reducing the need for children to work
3. Initiatives to empower children to improve their working conditions
4. Initiatives to ensure that laws concerning working children are implemented and enforced in the best interest of the children
5. Initiatives to raise the awareness of the dangers of child labour

4. Climate Change

We aim to develop our country programme to include projects in response to climate change. We therefore seek and support:

1. Initiatives that help reduce greenhouse gas emissions
2. Initiatives which support local communities in adapting to the effects of climate change
3. Initiatives in support of natural carbon sinks / REDD+
4. Initiatives in support of biodiversity

5. Migration

We aim to develop our country programme to include projects in response to flight and migration. We therefore seek and support:

1. Initiatives to protect trafficked children, displaced children, child refugees and migrants, particularly unaccompanied children, from exploitation and violence
2. Initiatives to end the detention of children seeking refugee status or migrating
3. Initiatives to keep families together as the best way to protect children and give children legal status
4. Initiatives to provide access of refugee and migrant children to education, health and other quality services
5. Initiatives to address the underlying causes of trafficking and large scale movements of refugees and migrants
6. Initiatives to combat xenophobia, discrimination and marginalization in areas of transit and destination

6. Disaster Management

We aim to develop our country programme to include projects and project components in preparedness and response to disasters. We therefore seek and support:

1. Initiatives in preparation for disasters seeking to:
   a. link marginalised groups to state and other disaster management structures.
   b. make disaster management structures and policies responsive to children's views.
   c. make partners' projects more resilient to extreme weather events.
2. Initiatives in response to disasters seeking to:
   a. ensure child protection in disaster situations
   b. ensure education services in disaster situations
   c. link marginalised groups to state and other relief efforts

Other/framework Objectives

Target Groups

Our programme objectives are relatively broad in scope. In light of our analysis of root causes and child rights violations though, we maintain our strategic focus on especially vulnerable target groups.

We place a general focus on children living in poverty, especially if they suffer from discrimination based on caste or gender or the other aspects described in our root cause analysis above.

We place an additional focus on children who are victims or at risk of becoming victims of specific child rights violations. These include working children, children on the move, trafficked children and children forced into marriage.

Geographical focus

The sheer size of India in terms of population and geography compels us to focus our limited resources. We therefore seek to cluster the projects we support both programmatically and geographically in order to increase their impact in focus areas and topics.

Drawing both from the analysis of aspirational districts in India and from our partners' CRSAs, we will focus on the states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Odisha. Within these we will focus on aspirational districts geographically and on topics and aspects currently not covered by others.

By 2028 we aim to provide 90% of our resources to projects located in these focus areas.

The geographical focus will not be strictly applied to projects or project components engaging with state structures. We will also maintain geographical flexibility to address child rights violations such as trafficking which are not contained by fixed locations.

Budget development (financial programme volume)

We seek to maintain a stable financial volume of our country programme of close to € 3.5 million annually. This requires us to maintain a corresponding project portfolio.

Current funding lines

Sponsorship

Child sponsorship will remain our most important funding option in India. We seek to maintain a child sponsorship quota of 8.500.

The vast majority of projects we seek and support will therefore be compatible with sponsorship funding. This goal is subject to KNH global planning and may be adjusted.

Project sponsorship funding remains an option insofar as it does not conflict with quotas mandated by KNH globally.

Co-financing

We seek to establish co-funded projects as a part of our country programme. In doing so we will focus on the topic of climate change as described above. Implementation will therefore be mainly in response to calls and funding lines of and by German government agencies.

Other

Other funding opportunities may arise that are difficult to plan for. Where these match partners' ideas we will seek to support them.

The types of partners we seek

Projects and partnerships can fail: We seek to reduce the impact of this risk by maintaining a diverse partner field and project portfolio. Partners will be awarded one project each with exceptions requiring special justification.

We have limited resources to support and accompany partners. We therefore prefer to partner with organisations which have prior experience with international funding and cooperation. Organisations lacking this experience shall be the exception of not more than 10% of our partner field.

Capacity and Quality Development

We offer a range of capacity and quality development options for interested partners. These include:

1. Building on capacities of partner organisations to analyse and respond to climate change and its effects

2. Building on capacities of partner organisations to analyse, prepare for and respond to disaster situations

3. Building on capacities of partner organisations to apply the principles and tools of Child Rights Programming to their projects

4. Building on capacities of partner organisations to focus their work on its impact

5. Building on capacities of partner organisations to promote and implement the Self Help Approach

6. Building on capacities of partner organisations to develop and implement Child Protection systems in the context of their work

7. Building on capacities of partner organisations to reduce the risk of and respond to Corruption

Partners are invited to share their needs and interests with us. We will seek to accommodate these as much as possible.

Premises

As is any strategy so is this one designed in an environment we have very limited control over. We therefore operate on a set of premises which need to be fulfilled in order to implement the strategy successfully. These premises include:

1. The continued availability of funding and the continued commitment of KNH to the India programme in the described financial volume.
2. The existence of capable local organisations and their willingness to partner with us, including for work in challenging contexts.
3. The compliance of our partners with our policies to the extent that allows us to continue and develop our partnerships.
4. The Indian government's permission of the international funding of Indian civil society in general and particularly in the areas and towards the objectives described herein.
5. Local communities acceptance of civil society engagement with the topics described herein.
6. A security situation stable enough to enable our partners' project implementation as well as our accompaniment of the same.

We will contribute to fulfilling these premises notably by managing our security and our compliance in reducing the risk of corruption. We acknowledge though that the premises of this strategy are largely beyond our control. We will therefore monitor these to see if adjustments need to be made to the strategy.