ACTIVITIES AND FUNCTIONS OF CHILDREN PARLIAMENT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THIRUVALLUR DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to evaluate the influence of different activities and functions of children joining children parliament (CP). The primary information was collected from 450 students studying between classes 8 and 12 in different schools. The 450 samples belong to 30 CPs formed and effectively organized by the Bon Secours Social Service Society in Thriuvallur district, Tamil Nadu. They are collected and analysed through SPSS version 20.0. The descriptive research design and simple random sampling strategy were employed for this research project. The findings of the study reveal the various impacts effectively created among the children in their positive, health, social maturity and growth, problem solving attitude, character formational, skills, educational and developmental growth and well-being for their integral formation and well-being not only at present but also in the future. This paper also proposes recommendations for all CPs for their effective efficient management, administration and activities.

Keywords: Activities, Functions, Children Parliament, Development of Children.

1. INTRODUCTION

Children Parliament (CP) is a joint venture to lead them being part of their own developmental process and to play a vital role in the progress of their communities while improving their strong active participation and providing a meaningful growth at all aspects. It caters to children from the age group of 6 to 18 including adolescents providing more space for equality, friendly interaction, active participation of all the activities and functions. In the international level, the developed countries such as Ireland, Finland and Scotland with the help of their governments do have their children's and young people's participation in the form of youth parliaments, youth councils, children forum, school parliament etc. Delphin M. and Sivagami, A. (2022) writing of the Asian context, point out that various states of India, do have similar structures in order to bring out the best growth and well-being of their children. The various activities and functions brings out the significant as well as effective integral growth, holistic empowerment along with positive and constructive developmental well-being of children particularly of children who belong to the socio-economically marginalized and excluded communities. Tisdall (2021) defines CP as a formal structure for young people and children's participation and commitment in the activities and functions that fulfil the needs, expectations, solve their issues, hear their views, achieve their rights and give them resources in a democratically and participatory manner.

1.1 Literature Review

Children parliament activities and functions promote the growth and development of all children who joined it in all aspects of life directly or indirectly. Beers, Invernizzi and Milne (2006) claim that the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989 gave impetus for the international interests on the participation and communicating the rights of children particularly on the need to be seen and heard in every society. In all the democratic countries, it is understood that the word "Parliament" is originated from the Latin word "*parlare*" which means 'to speak' in English language and thus children parliament is meant to be a place the children speak. Lansdown (2011) mentions that governments statutorily need to assure that children's rights are communicated freely. IPU and UNICEF (2011) present that the major implication is that CP could hold the elders and the decision makers to account for recognizing and realizing the rights of children and addressing child right violations in any sector leading to a better participatory experiences and promoting the voice and the accessibility together with the visibility of young people and Children. Mary and Arun kumar (2014) reveal in their article that it is the highest form of decision making body and to assert themselves to express their views, growth, interest, politics, learning, skills training, social empowerment, peer group dynamics and their future oriented life UNCRC (1989) established the following in various articles: in article 12 of UNCRC, children have the basic right to express concerning all matters of their life, the accessibility to have a good life; in Article 19, the right to be protected from violence; in Article 28, the right to free and compulsory primary education; Article 29, through education they should learn to respect their rights and the rights of others; finally in Article 31, the Right to have rest and leisure.

Many social research scholars in their researches have brought out the impact of children parliament activities and functions not only in India but also across the world. Sarkar and Mendoza (2005) bringsout out the impact of children leading to participation in the national congress, national politics, the public life for a good governance, citizenship, better governance and recognizing their capacities in the states and countries (Austin, 2010). Gandhi and Arunkumar (2014) portray that functions and activities of the parliament give the children the platform to speak as well as develop their leadership, analytical skills, team spirit, and ability to handle their responsibility with maturity. Ford and Martin (2016) highlight that these children improve their personalities and benefit in terms of civic engagements (Patrikios and Shephard, 2013). Cushing and Van Vliet (2017) explain that children from vulnerable and racial minorities feel happy and fulfilled in their desires and needs in civic engagements and in local governance, while Tisdal (2021) reports that children's voices are heard and considered in the decision making process and pattern.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology of this study proposes descriptive research design and uses simple random probability and sampling technique for the data collection. For this reason the researcher selected Thiruvalluvur district, Tamil Nadu where NGOs have plenty of children involved in the CP activities. The notable NGO known as Bon Secours Social Service Society (BSSSS) has selected 30 CPs out of 45 fulfilling certain requirements and criteria of selection. Finally, 450 respondents have been chosen by giving equal representation to 15 members in each CP from five community development blocks of the district, namely, Gummidipoondi, Poonamallee, Kadambattur and Sholavaram.

2.1 Data Collection Tool and Analytical Procedures

The researcher had collected the data from 450 respondents from 30 children parliaments of five blocks through self-prepared semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire had the following domains and sections: socio-demographic details, persons who initiated the children to join the CP, the main reasons and motivating factors for the participation. The data collection period was from August to September 2021. The entire data was analysed in terms of frequency percentage tables and graphs by using IBM-SPSS Version 20.0 software.

3. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

3.1 Activities and Functioning of Children Parliaments

Information about the various activities carried out by the CPs in which respondents are members, besides the functioning of CPs also were collected and interpreted the same in this sub-section. This information is analysed with frequency tables, i.e., percentages and frequencies and also with suitable charts (graphs).

3.2 Ministers / Members of CP

Generally as in the parliament (of Governments), the CPs too have certain ministers. They will be entrusted with certain roles and responsibilities through which they will work for the welfare of the people / community. In the case of sample respondents (Table 01), it is understood that about 6.7 per cent from each (as the sample CPs are 30) are elected / nominated as ministers viz., Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Finance Minister, Education Minister, Health Minister, Communication Minister and Sports Minister. Some respondents serve as Minister for Parliament Affairs (5.6%) and Minister of Environment (5.3%). Only few respondents serve as Home Minister (1.8%). A little over two-fifth of the respondents (41%) are serve as members in the concerned CPs. Of course, these members too will be assigned with some responsibilities to look after (for details see Table 02).

Table 01: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Type of Ministry and Method of Electing Ministers in CPs

Details of Ministers / Method of Electing		Percentage	Frequency
1. Type of Ministry	Member	40.7	183
	Prime Minister	6.7	30
	Dy. Prime Minister	6.7	30
	Finance Minister	6.7	30
	Education Minister	6.7	30
	Health Minister	6.7	30
	Communication Min.	6.7	30
	Sports Minister	6.7	30
	Minister of Parliamentary Affairs	5.6	25
	Minister of Environment	5.3	24
	Home Minister	1.8	8
2. Method of Electing Ministers	Sociocracy	76.9	345
	Election	16.7	75
	Volunteers	5.1	23
	Appointment	1.3	6
Total		**100**	**450**

3.3 Method of Electing Ministers in CPs: In general, the ministers to look after various concerns in CPs used to be elected though sociocratic method. However, in certain cases, other methods are followed depending upon the necessity / demand at a particular CP. When enquired about the same among the respondents (Table 01), slightly more than three-quarter of them (77%) reported as sociocracy method is followed in electing the ministers needed for their CP. On the other hand, some of the respondents stated that 'election method' used has been followed for choosing the ministers, whereas few of them (5%) are appointed for the same and very few of them (1.3%) volunteered to serve as ministers.

3.4 Roles and Responsibilities of the Members and Ministers in CPs: As stated earlier, all the ministers as well as the members of CPs have to look after certain roles and responsibilities for the well-being of their neighbourhood. Though such responsibilities are mostly common across the CPs, minor differences too would be there depending upon the need or demand at the community they live in. Keeping this in mind, all the respondents have been asked to state the major functions used to be taken up by themselves in the capacity of members and or ministers in their respective CPs. These are presented in Table 02. As most of the information presented here is largely self-explanatory, further interpretation on this matter is not done here.

Table 02: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by their Roles and Responsibilities in CP

Role / Responsibilities of the Respondents in CP		Percentage	Frequency
1. Member	To know the Rights of Children	37.1	68
	To Assist the Ministers of CP	26.8	49
	To Identify the Issues of Children and Report to CP	22.4	41
	Others	13.7	25
2. Prime Minister	Responsible for Leading and Successful Functioning of CP	66.7	20
	Heading Delegation to Meet Authorities	23.3	7
	Signs all resolutions, petitions & documents	10.0	3
3. Dy. Prime Minister	To Assist the Prime Minister	90.0	27
	In the Absence of PM, Lead and Conduct of CP	10.0	3
4. Finance Minister	To Look after the Financial Needs of CP including Accounts Keeping	86.7	26
	Work to receive the donations	13.3	4
5. Sports Minister	Try to Get Playground / Children Park	76.7	23
	Intervene in obtaining games' articles	10.0	3
	Participate in Personality Development Program.	13.3	4
6. Education Minister	Encourage all children in the area to attend school regularly and study well	70.0	21
	Help the children to prepare Timetable and to follow it faithfully	13.3	4
	Encourage parents to admit their children to schools	10.0	3
	Keep the data of Drop-outs	6.7	2
7. Communication Minister	Encourage members to read newspapers	60.0	18
	Filing of News items	30.0	9

	Take care of the Bulletin Board of CP	10.0	3
8. Health Minister	Procure statistics regarding health needs of the neighbourhood and village people	100.0	30
9. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs	Act as Secretary & Convene meeting of CP / Taking attendance of meetings	72.0	18
	Proposes the name of the Speaker for each Session	28.0	7
10. Minister of Environment	Take steps to keep village green by planting trees and take care of / protect them	79.2	19
	Ensure children to have clean drinking water for themselves and others	12.5	3
	Take steps to create herbal garden and encourage people to raise trees	8.3	2
11. Home Minister	Prepare the Minutes of the CP meetings and present in the following meeting	75.0	6
	To develop CP	25	2
Total		**100**	**450**

Note: Percentages for each Role / Responsibility are computed taking the total of frequencies of each Minister and Members; @ = to have contacts / relationship with neighbourhood, to develop CP and in the absence of other ministers assume and perform their duties.

3.5 Issues Identified in CP: In order to take care of the welfare of the people at neighbourhood, the members / ministers of each CP will identify the basic requirements at the place wherein they live and serve. When enquired about the issues identified (Chart 01), it is noted that majority of the respondents (64%) stated 'Providing Basic Amenities' at their community as the major issue identified followed by 'Issues related to Children' (52%) and 'School Dropouts' (49%). About 17 per cent of them specifically identified the issue of 'Lack of Electricity' at their place of living.

Chart 01: Distribution of Respondents by Issues Identified in CPs
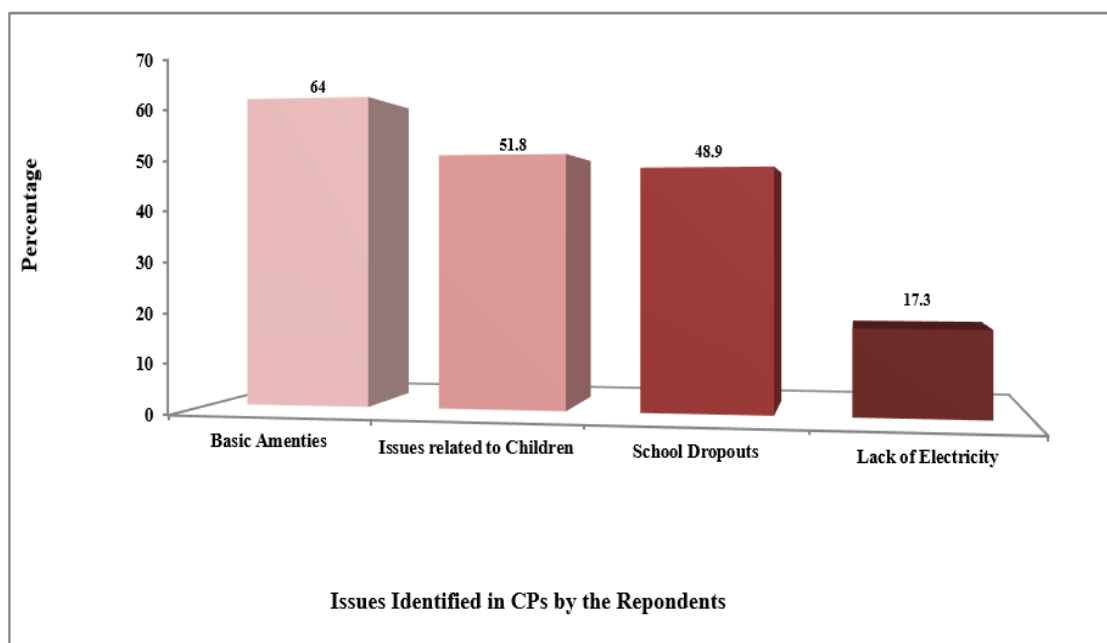
3.6 Method Used to Identify Problems (Issues): Though several issues (or problems) exist in the community wherein the respondents live and CPs are functioning, different methods will be followed to identify the same. Of all such methods of identifying issues (Chart 01), 'Social Mapping' found to be the major one (77%) followed by PRA Techniques (57%). While a sizeable percentage of the respondents (39%) stated to follow 'Venn Diagram' method to identify such issues, about one-tenth of them (10%) adopted 'Time Management' method for the same.

Chart 02: Distribution of Respondents by Methods Used to Identify Problems
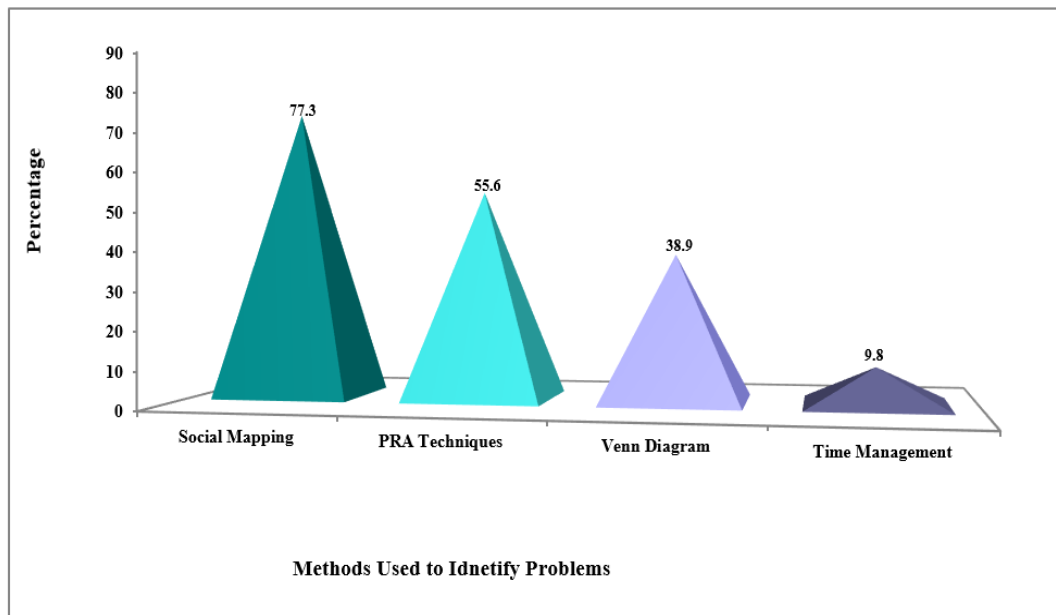
3.7 Time Taken to Solve the Problems: As noted earlier, though issues or problems are identified by the CPs, it takes some time to solve the same as each and every problem is different in its perspective. When enquired about the same (03), a greater majority of the respondents told that generally the identified problems will be solved in about a month or so, whereas the remaining ones (29%) perceived that it takes for about two months or more to rectify such problems. In fact, this is at the most the earliest time the respondents felt. However, in reality, it takes a lot of time in the case of some of the problems.

Table: 03 - Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Aspects Related to Solutions Provided

Aspects Related to Solutions Provided		Percentage	Frequency
1. To What Extent will Problems be Addressed?	Always	32.2	145
	Seldom	42.7	192
	Occasionally	24	108
	Never	1.1	5
2. Time Taken to Solve the Problems	1 Month	71.1	320
	2 + Months	28.9	130
3. Type of Feel when Solutions are Fond	Highly Satisfied	41.6	187
	Satisfied	58	261
	Unsatisfied	0.4	2
Total		**100**	**450**

3.8 Type of Feel when Solutions are Fond: Generally, the respondents bring the issues to the knowledge of concerned authorities and request or put pressure on them so as to provide appropriate solutions. Once such issues are solved, it is natural that the respondents (being young children) feel very happy as they do not have any stake or authority to solve such issues. When the respondents are asked to state their feeling after solving the problems (Table 03), majority (58%) reported as 'satisfied', whereas as slightly more than two-fifth (42%) felt 'highly satisfied'. On the other hand, hardly two respondents stated that they are 'not satisfied' the way the solution is given to the problems raised by them.

3.9 Evaluation of the Activities of CPs: In the present research work, all the respondents have been asked to evaluate the activities of their CPs and the elicited information on this is illustrated in Chart 03. From this, one can observe that an overwhelming percentage of the respondents perceived that the activities of their CPs used to be evaluated as 'transparent' (93%) and 'accountable' is maintained closely followed by 'training' (89%) and 'voluntary' (83%). The next in that are: 'respectful' (80%) and 'equality' (68%). On the other hand, while some of them felt that such evaluation is 'relevant' (35%), only one-tenth (10%) said that it as 'inclusiveness'.

Chart 03: Distribution of Respondents by their Evaluation of CP Activities
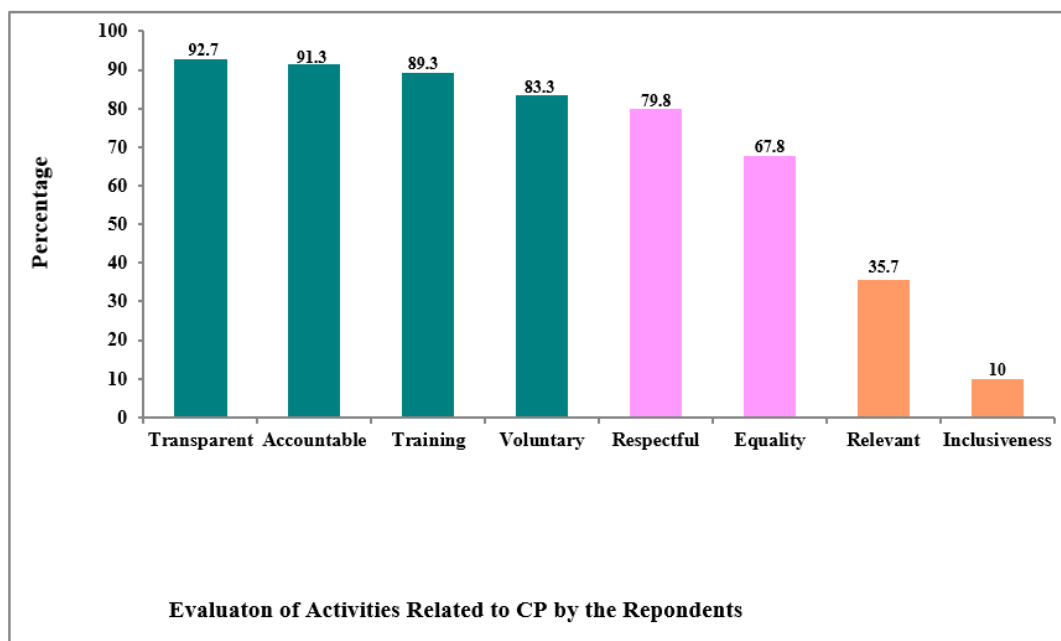
3.10 Frequency of Responding to People's Requests / Concerns: In general, when people represent their concerns to the CP, the members of the CP have to respond to the same at the earliest. However, on behalf of the CP, the respondents will respond to their requests / concerns depending upon the nature and severity of the issues / problems. Keeping this in mind, all the respondents of the present study have been asked to give response to 'how frequently they would respond to people's concerns' (Table 03). Nearly two-fifth (39%) mentioned that they used to respond to such requests / concerns 'all times' and slightly more than three-tenth (31%) have done so 'sometimes'. Conversely, another three-tenth (30%) used to respond 'rarely'. Based on these figures, one can conclude that respondents being the member of CPs, on the whole, respond to people's request / concerns mostly in a smooth manner.

3.11 Causes of Conflict among Members of CP: As stated earlier, while managing the CPs, conflicts do arise among the members. Information provided in Chart 4.14 highlights that 'misunderstanding' is the major cause for the reported conflicts (42%). Next in that order are: 'Lack of Co-operation' (23%), 'Financial Problem' (19%) and 'Disagreement' (17%). Thus, misunderstanding appears to be the root cause for conflicts among members of CP, which can be naturally rectified in due course of time.

Chart 04: Distribution of Respondents by Causes of Conflicts in CP
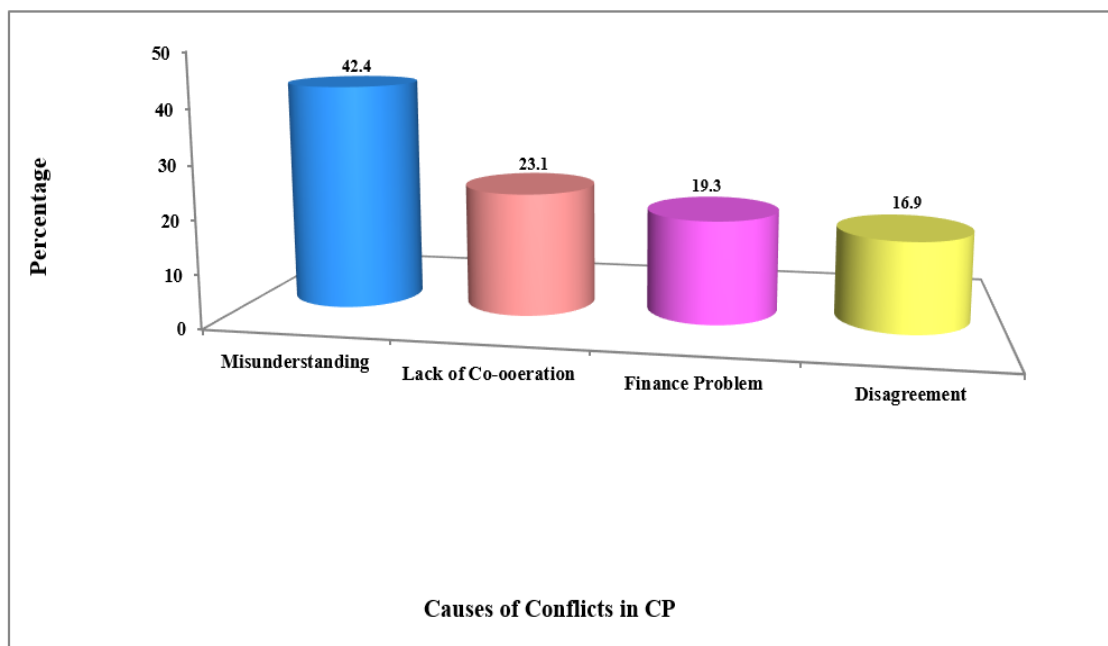
3.12 Procedures Followed to Resolve Conflicts: Once conflicts arise among some of the members of CP, it is natural to see that the other members try to resolve the same with the help of non-members or elders so as to amicably settle down and work further together for the betterment of CP as well as people's welfare. Among the sample respondents (panel 2 of Table 4.2.6), a simple majority (46%) stated that they received the guidance from elderly persons to resolve the conflicts among themselves in the CPs, whereas a little less than one-third (32%) have done so by discussing among the members of CPs. On the other hand, while about 11 per cent informed that they sought help from supporting staff so as to resolve among themselves in the CPs. Another 11 per cent mentioned other procedures for the same.

3.13 Results and Discussion

From the above data analysis, it is evident that the impact of the CP activities and its functions bring out better growth possibilities among children involved those who are involved are from the age group of 6 to 18. The children get opportunities to grow up in an inclusive environment and in a multi-tier forum responding to different causes, challenges and issues in their life. Another impact is to respond in terms of taking actions and advocacy process as they are involved in various ministries such as health, education, law, environment, culture, sports, communication, home and prime minister …etc... The dynamic group therapies, activities conducted lead to find their influences not only in their own parliament but also in their neighborhood parliaments, inter-village governances, finding solutions in their communities and so on. Their effectiveness of the activities can lead them to play a vital role in the politics of their

sub-district level, district level, and state level and enable them to be good leaders with leadership skills.

The swearing in ceremonies of various ministerial roles in their parliaments at the neighborhood level will create a positive influence and impetus to get them commit themselves publically, to take up their roles and responsibilities in a serious manner and help in the development of their communities. Children of differently abled, poor, weak, those from various marginalized communities and their active participation enabled them to present their views, issues, opinions, needs and concerns affecting them and their surroundings to the parliament for further interventions and find a solutions within their scope of life.

In the field of education, CP education minister has become effective in encouraging surrounding schools for inclusive education, contribute for the development of their co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, goal setting and time table planning, helping for the enrollment of children in schools, and monitoring their schooling together with their performances. Some of the activities of the CPs are promoting and campaigning the education of girls and differently abled Concern the school drop outs and organizing tuition centers for the weaker students, providing libraries and organizing networking are some of the salient services.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Another impact is that the children are prepared to play future oriented activities such as becoming channels of promoting primary inclusive education through their advocacy and lobbying, organizing the local administration to do inclusive educational drive at the primary level, and influencing the state as well as central governments to appoint well qualified teachers in the primary schools. Apart from these, the other committed activities are enabling all schools to be the Centre for women Developmental Studies (CWDS), Promoting policy resolutions to make the CWDS as a happy and enjoyable centre for children's growth and development, advocating the state cum central civil societies to have the acceptance attitude for the children and to build as well as facilitate partnerships and collaborations to establish inclusive primary education at all levels.

4.1 Way Forward

- Every children parliament needs to ensure that all children get equal and fair opportunities for a joyous growth-intended interaction, multi-sided awareness and achievement and growth in all aspects of life, leadership growth, civic participation, experiences of advocacy and lobbying for their own issues, equal opportunities and chances for benefiting the government schemes and privileges.

- All the children parliamentarians in the state as well as in the country are urged to be graduated in order to be part of and take up roles in youth parliaments, youth councils, and adult parliaments for better leadership development qualities and skills leading to facilitate a good politics and governance to the States, Centre and the society at large.

- All existing children parliaments all over the districts as well as the state need to be accessible and available for the marginalized and differently abled children in providing new hopes, scopes, opportunities, challenges and to provide them

inclusive educational growth and empowerment irrespective of caste, creed, region and abilities.

- All NGOs, educational institutions and state administrations should provide vision and future plan to every child in aspiring and looking forward to be part of national, international and world parliaments in view of uplifting human society form its problems and to provide good governance for better well-being of the whole human society.

5. CONCLUSION

Children parliament in general not only contributes to the academic growth of the children involved in the parliaments but also helps in the integral formation of disciplining themselves, taking up social cum civic responsibilities and fulfilling their duties well. It also creates awareness and increases the enrollment of children providing opportunities for the inclusive and multi-tiered thinking abilities and capacities to solve their own issues and confront challenges in a matured manner. Children parliament also influences children to bring out policies and regulations for the well-being of every child, school student, and promoting happy and positive growth of every teenage adult. It also helps them participate in the local administrative meetings such as *grama sabha*, sub-district and district and state level and prepare them for better political leadership with required skills. Parliament has been a good platform for exercising children's rights, duties, and playing a significant role in the future. It has helped the children to gain recognition, self-confidence, self-esteem, self-respect and the ability to collaborate with government leaders, teachers, parents and peer group members in an effective manner. This also gives them longer goal and vision of becoming a members in the national, international parliament and play their roles responsibly.

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