

TRANSFORMING LIVES

CAL IN ACTION



"A future of well-being, value and equality for every child, everywhere."

CAL Newsletter- Special Edition

Inside this Issue:

*This newsletter consists of updates
on the Child Rights Council, initiated by Child Action Lanka.*

Addressing a Crisis

The Right to Participate

Advocates' Appeals

Bringing Advocates Together

Lessons from the Child
Rights Council

Advocates' Resolutions

The Delegates' Voices

The Impact

Using Art for Advocacy

The Way Forward

Championing
Young Advocates



ADDRESSING A CRISIS

In Sri Lanka, over 50,000 children drop out of school annually. Dire circumstances force families to prioritise sustenance over education, resulting in children sacrificing their rights to education in order to contribute towards their family's survival. Child labor has, consequently, surged in Sri Lanka since 2022, resulting from the devastating economic crisis that had crashed onto its shores.

These children have had little to no say in the outcome of their lives, with parents and guardians taking sole responsibility over the direction of their futures. While children represent almost 20% of the nation's overall population, and are the designated bearers of long-term consequences of existing policies, their perspectives have remained largely unheard.

Recognising this crisis, Child Action Lanka (CAL) designed the Child Rights Council (CRC), a platform through which children from marginalized communities can have a formal voice in the matters that directly affect them. Moving away from traditional top-down interventions, the CRC closes a significant gap in the child rights landscape of Sri Lanka - the absence of children's perspectives in public discourse - providing children with a structured forum to articulate their experiences, propose solutions and appeal to parties with the authority to implement change.



“ ... the CRC closes a significant gap in the child rights landscape of Sri Lanka... ”

THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE

In July 2024, the Child Rights Awareness Programme was launched at CAL's Batticaloa Child Development Centre (CDC). The successful implementation of the programme in Batticaloa inspired the launch of the program at nine different locations across Sri Lanka, amplifying the voices of many more young advocates.

This pilot initiative aimed to empower children to understand, advocate for and protect their rights, mainly their right to participate in changing the outcome of their lives. They were also taught to recognise the value of their life experiences and how these experiences are a part of growth.

“... empower children to understand, advocate for and protect their rights...”



The ideas that children need to reflect on their own lives & develop strategies to overcome challenges that they face on a day-to-day basis, and the need to resiliently work towards attaining the opportunities & rights that they rightfully deserve were emphasised during these programmes.

The program included creative activities, interactive workshops and lively discussions that empowered young ones to step up as advocates, inspiring them to formulate community-specific declarations which outlined their daily challenges and showcased practical & child-led solutions. The children further emphasised their appeals through captivating posters that articulated their petitions.



ADVOCATES' APPEALS

The Child Rights Awareness Programme, held at 9 locations across Sri Lanka, culminated in the formulation of 9 unique, passionate and dynamic declarations by our young advocates.

Akkarayan

“Our community's health directly impacts our ability to learn, grow and dream for a better future.”

Batticaloa

“We call on the government to increase secure and reliable modes of transport in poor & isolated communities...”

Bogawantalawa

“We also urge the government to provide fair wages for workers and financial assistance to struggling families.”

Colombo

“...and call on authorities to take decisive steps to curb drug use and provide support for prevention and rehabilitation programs...”

Galle

“We call for increased security measures, especially for girls, when travelling to and from school and in public spaces.”

Kandy

“We call upon our parents, teachers and community leaders to recognize the value of diverse interests and talents.”

Kilinochchi

“...we kindly request your support in reducing the cost of essential goods and increasing the daily wage rate.”

Mullaitivu

“We need someone to help us learn and give us a chance to explore technology, that seems so far away from us right now.”

Nuwara Eliya

“We need policies that enable our parents to work with dignity in our own communities, so families can stay together...”

Click on the links below to read the declarations made by the children:

Click on these links:

				
Akkarayan	Batticaloa	Bogawantalawa	Colombo	
				
Galle	Kandy	Kilinochchi	Mullaitivu	Nuwara Eliya



BRINGING ADVOCATES TOGETHER

Following the successful and impactful launch of the Child Rights Awareness Programme at nine locations across Sri Lanka - Akkarayan, Batticaloa, Bogawantalawa, Colombo, Galle, Kandy, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu & Nuwara Eliya - it was evident that gathering 27 young advocates to discuss, compare solutions to challenges that they face and collaborate led to the initiation of the Child Rights Council (CRC).

To create a structured environment where children could effectively articulate their concerns, CAL partnered with Sri Lanka Model United Nations (SLMUN). This collaboration helped us adopt formal UN protocol to create a parliamentary setting where the young delegates served as ambassadors for their own communities, and brought lived experiences to the discussion. Experienced SLMUN delegates acted as mentors, co-representing each location, while guiding children through the formal procedures and helping them present their ideas confidently in both Tamil and Sinhala languages. The delegates worked together in specialized committees which discussed The Right to Education, Fundamental Rights and The Right to Participation.

These collaborations resulted in fostering mutual empathy and understanding, challenging preconceptions on both sides. As mentors and mentees worked together, they developed relationships, demonstrating how collaborative problem-solving can unite young people from diverse backgrounds.



LESSONS FROM THE CHILD RIGHTS COUNCIL

The Council uncovered unique challenges that children face in different regions. Many critical issues emerged through the children's testimonies, such as the lack of access to clean water, transportation difficulties that hindered school attendance, and vulnerability in neighborhoods where alcohol and drug abuse is prevalent. These first-hand accounts provided insights that statistical research alone cannot capture.

With regards to education, students from Batticaloa, Bogawantalawa and Nuwara Eliya highlighted critical teacher shortages lasting over two years, while, in contrast, children from urban schools in Talpe and Colombo described how teachers often focused only on high-performing students, neglecting slower learners and, thereby, inhibiting children's right to education.

Systemic challenges that prevent equitable access to children's rights across Sri Lanka were highlighted by children in various communities through their declarations and resolutions. These challenges encompass issues related to teachers, resources, infrastructure, curriculum, student treatment, health & wellbeing and socio-economic barriers. Their comprehensive resolutions painted a vivid picture of the challenges children face and their proactive vision for a brighter future.



ADVOCATES' RESOLUTIONS

Children share a key understanding that there is evident inequity that currently exists in the social systems. Therefore, they believe that, as advocates for their own rights, they have the ability to raise awareness of existing injustices and the need for empowerment, access to resources, and fulfillment of rights of children from their communities.

“ Create an enhanced job market that matches available skill sets... ”

“ Transform estate worker communities by improving quality of life standards... ”

“ Launch comprehensive drug prevention programs in all schools, establish rehabilitation centers nationwide... ”

“ Build functional healthcare systems with availability in rural areas to ensure all children receive proper medical care. ”

“ Eliminate educational inequity by providing ICT labs, sports equipment, and essential facilities to all schools... ”

“ Eliminate harassment, gender-based violence, and bullying within educational institutions... ”

“ Include disabled children in all social and volunteerism initiatives... ”

“ ...provide proper rehabilitation mechanisms for war-affected individuals, with special emphasis on children... ”

“ Eliminate harassment, gender-based violence, and bullying within educational institutions... ”

Click on the links to read our advocates' full resolutions.



[Right to Education](#)



[Fundamental Rights](#)



[Right to Participation](#)

THE DELEGATES' VOICES

“

I realized that children in other regions faced the same challenges as we did. The solutions discussed for their areas were also useful to us. We could share our problems directly with government officials who attended the program.

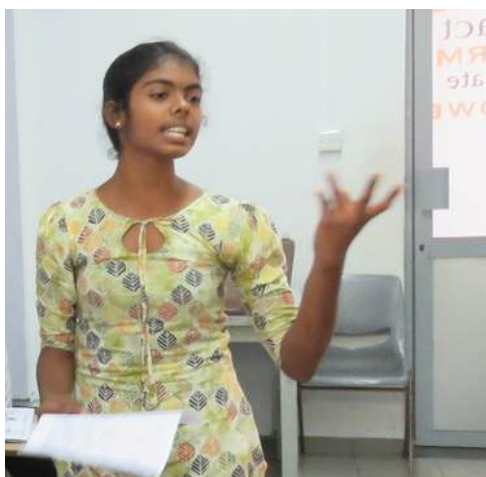
Sarojini
- Mentee Delegate from Mullaitivu



“

I felt that children from other locations were facing many more challenges than us. We discussed solutions to their problems, and they helped us with ours. As a result, we are currently seeing some progress in our region."

Sulochana
- Mentee Delegate from Nuwara Eliya



“

Issues, such as lack of nutritious food and unsafe environments, were presented at the Child Rights Council. Children from different regions participated, and we could present our daily challenges, as well as discuss practical solutions to these issues.

Sandun
- Mentee Delegate from Batticaloa



Collaboration with SLMUN

“

This was the first time I truly felt that I made an actual impact in a conference. The 2 days I spent with my mentee is something I'll be always proud of.

Prasudi Addithya
- Mentor Delegate from the Committee on the
Right to Fundamental Rights



“

It was a truly enriching experience to mentor and engage with underprivileged delegates, gaining valuable insight into their challenges, while working collectively to advocate for their rights.

Nithiksha Elankeeran
- Mentor Delegate from the Committee on the
Right to Participation

“

When I heard of the true experiences of our mentee delegates and the struggle they have in securing their rights, that's when I could draw parallels between the research and reality. Listening to their grievances and struggles really made me feel that we all should advocate for better child rights.

Aditha Geeganage
- Mentor Delegate from the Committee on the
Right to Participation



THE IMPACT

The Impact

Over the course of 2 days, the young advocates at the Child Rights Council made use of the ideal platform to uncover the unique challenges they face in their regions.

Advocates from Bogawantalawa, Batticaloa and Nuwara Eliya highlighted teacher shortages in their schools, especially for core subjects such as English, Mathematics and Science, which affect their chances of progressing beyond basic education and qualifying for national examinations.

Delegates from Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu expressed the challenges that deep poverty has brought upon their families.



“...first-hand accounts of the delegates provided insight that statistical research alone cannot capture.”

Children from Colombo called attention to the vulnerabilities they face from exposure to violence, drugs and alcohol in their neighbourhoods

The first-hand accounts of the delegates provided insight that statistical research alone cannot capture.

At the conclusion of the two-day forum, the children also presented a series of resolutions, which were experience-driven proposals, reflecting the changes they hope to see and their call to action. Nine powerful declarations, compelling visuals and captivating performances strongly accentuated their heartfelt petitions for change.

USING ART FOR ADVOCACY

At the end of the Child Rights Council, a vibrant closing ceremony showcased the work that the children had done to advocate for their rights. This included 9 declarations and vibrant posters which were created by children from each community, bringing attention to issues that inhibit their rights. One group of advocates also featured a short movie that spoke about the injustices of bullying in their environment.

Along with these, theatrical performances also brought attention to the challenges that children faced. Children from Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu and Akkarayan performed a 'Villu Paatu', a traditional Tamil art form featuring poetry and music, to reflect the challenges faced by their communities. Children from Colombo, Bogawanthalawa and Galle each performed a play that highlighted their interpretation of the importance of Child Rights.

Offering children the freedom to use art forms to communicate their views is a pertinent aspect of advocating for child rights as, in instances where they are unable to articulate and speak about their experiences, art forms can be utilised to help them understand their feelings and be imaginative about their reflections and understanding of lives. This also creates a safe environment for vulnerable children to express their feelings, emotions and thoughts.



THE WAY FORWARD

This is just the beginning; CAL carries great hope that the CRC will reach more children from diverse backgrounds in Sri Lanka and encourage them to work together at future councils. Through the declarations and resolutions made by our children, we now have insight into the challenges that they face on a day-to-day basis. Knowing the daily circumstances of these children might just move us to prioritize social change that can help them prosper.

The Assistant Commissioner from Probations & Child Care Services, Ms N D Perera, who attended the CRC, highlighted the need for their office to work with initiatives such as these to create opportunities for children to “participate” and influence change. Other invitees from the Open University of Sri Lanka, UNICEF and FISD were also among those that pledged allegiance to the notion that opportunities need to be created for children to step up and take leadership in creating change in Sri Lanka.



“This is just the beginning....”

It is now our responsibility to use the material we have received from our brave advocates to encourage authorities to influence change at all levels of Sri Lanka’s structures and systems that have been created for the social welfare of children.

What emerged from this initiative was a movement of young voices, united by the shared belief that change is possible when those most affected are at the center of the conversation.

CHAMPIONING YOUNG ADVOCATES

Event Partners

The success and impact of the Child Rights Council would not have been possible without the significant support of partners, sponsors and donors who were keen to champion our young advocates.

Child Action Lanka extends its deepest gratitude to the dedicated organisations and esteemed individuals who contributed towards the thriving outcome of the CRC.

Apurva Garden – Platinum Sponsor

Apurva Garden, a family business spanning over 80 years and 4 generations, with demonstrated commitment towards future generations through its generous sponsorship.



CMPL Stephen

CMPL Stephen's made a generous contribution towards the support of the Child Rights Council which has contributed to its success.



SLMUN

The SLMUN partnered with Child Action Lanka, to support us through its contribution of Chairpersons, administrative and logistical staff and mentor delegates from the MUN Circuit.



Gateway College

Gateway College, partnered with us by hosting the inaugural CRC at its premises, which was an integral support to CAL in its endeavors.



Gateway College

Oscar McDonald & Samuel Nash

Oscar and Samuel, students from Tonbridge School, UK, demonstrated their allegiance to child rights in Sri Lanka by raising money in the UK for the Child Rights Council.



Join us and **SHARE A MEAL**

Scan the QR code to donate



06, Power Station Road, Kandy (20000)

Sri Lanka.

Phone: +94812234144

Email: childaction@sltnet.lk

The Impact of Donations

Your donation gives our children hope for the future and ensures that their nutritional & health requirements are met, and their primary and higher educational journeys are supported. It also enables protection from violence & abuse and the empowerment of girls & women. Children are the starting point in breaking the cycle of poverty and your donation will help make this a reality.

Donate through the CAL charity page by scanning the QR code below.

Scan the QR code to donate.

Help us reach the target of providing 10,000 meals.

Join us and **SHARE A MEAL**



Donate through Star Points



Support us by donating your Star Points directly via the MyDialog app or text #141*6*10# CAL

