

# WHAT CHILDREN WANT

Children's Charter of Demands

**Maharashtra 2019**



# Dear Future Government of Maharashtra

The elections of 2019 are just a few months away. There is a great sense of excitement in our homes, schools, wards and villages. Almost as if an international cricket match, a wedding celebration and an important religious festival are all taking place on the very same day.

We children are excited as well. Seeing this the grown-ups are bewildered and ask, "Why are you excited when you don't have the right to vote?" That's true but we do have the right to participate as per Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). And therefore, we intend to be a part of the upcoming election process. "But what do you children know about politics and nation-building?", our parents dismiss us. "Focus on your studies. Don't meddle in elections. Leave that to us grown-ups," our teachers say.

And therein lies the problem. We can't leave it to our parents, teachers and all the other well-meaning grown-ups to raise matters that concern us children. None of them has bothered to find out what we want. We are tired of being neglected, and at their mercy. So now we are taking matters into our own hands by writing directly to you. You, the political party of today, the ruling party that will govern the state of Maharashtra tomorrow, on our behalf.

Who are we? 100 children from Raigad, Mumbai and Jalna, speaking on behalf of over 13 million of our young brothers and sisters across Maharashtra. And why should you listen to us? Because we are not just India's tomorrow; we are it's today as well. We are active and engaged citizens of this beautiful country and state – TODAY!!



June 2018



# OUR BUCKET LIST: 4 RIGHTS, 6 KINDS

“There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children.”

- Nelson Mandela



These words were uttered by anti-apartheid hero Nelson Mandela, whom many Indians hold in high regard. Truer words have not been spoken. When we look at ourselves in the Indian context, there is a lot left to be desired. That is why we have decided to share with you our 'Wishlist' through this charter of demands by using the landmark international treaty as our reference point: the UNCRC. We were thrilled to find out that India has signed and ratified it in 1992. This UNCRC, guarantees us not one but four rights!

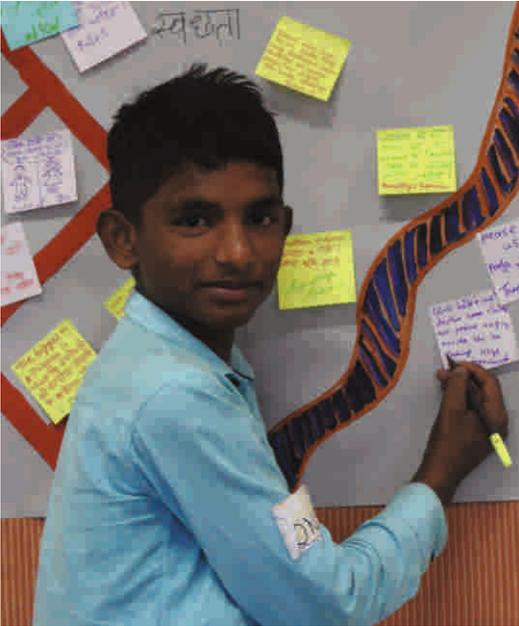
They are:

- 1** Right to Survival: includes a child's right to life and the needs that are most basic to existence, such as nutrition, shelter, an adequate living standard, and access to medical services.
- 2** Right to Development: includes the right to education, play, leisure, cultural activities, access to information, and freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
- 3** Right to Protection: ensures children are safeguarded against all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation, including special care for migrant children; safeguards for children in the criminal justice system; protection for children in employment; protection and rehabilitation for children who have suffered exploitation or abuse of any kind.
- 4** Right to Participation: encompasses a child's freedom to express opinions, to have a say in matters affecting his/her own life, to join associations and to assemble peacefully.



# 1

## Our Survival Demands: Health & Nutrition



### 1 Medicines

- Medicines are very expensive and out of the reach of most of our families. The government must give us medicines free of cost, without compromising on quality.
- All Government hospitals should provide free food and medicines.
- All types of medicines should be available in BMC-run hospitals in Mumbai for free.

### 2 Hospitals

- Most villages are cut-off from hospitals. There should be health centres within a 1-kilometre radius in rural areas.

### 3 Child-Friendly Doctors and ASHAs

- Specialists are not available in most rural health centres. Make them available to us.
- We want doctors who are trained to handle children's cases (paediatricians). Hospital staff must also be trained on how to behave with children.
- Doctors treating children must politely explain their diagnosis and prescription to us in easy language.
- Doctors should be child-friendly so that we are not scared to go to the hospital for treatment.
- Government doctors should be given strict instructions to talk politely with the patients and also treat emergency patients first without insisting on any formalities.
- ASHA workers should have the contact details of the ambulance services and should also be able to call the ambulance in emergency.
- ASHA workers should be trained in giving first aid and basic medicines

### 4 Menstrual Health and Life Skills Education

- The government should provide information on maasik paali (menstruation) available and conduct trainings on this topic for girls and women in every village.
- Make life skills education for boys and girls mandatory in secondary school. We must know about our bodily changes during adolescence.

### 5 Pollution Control

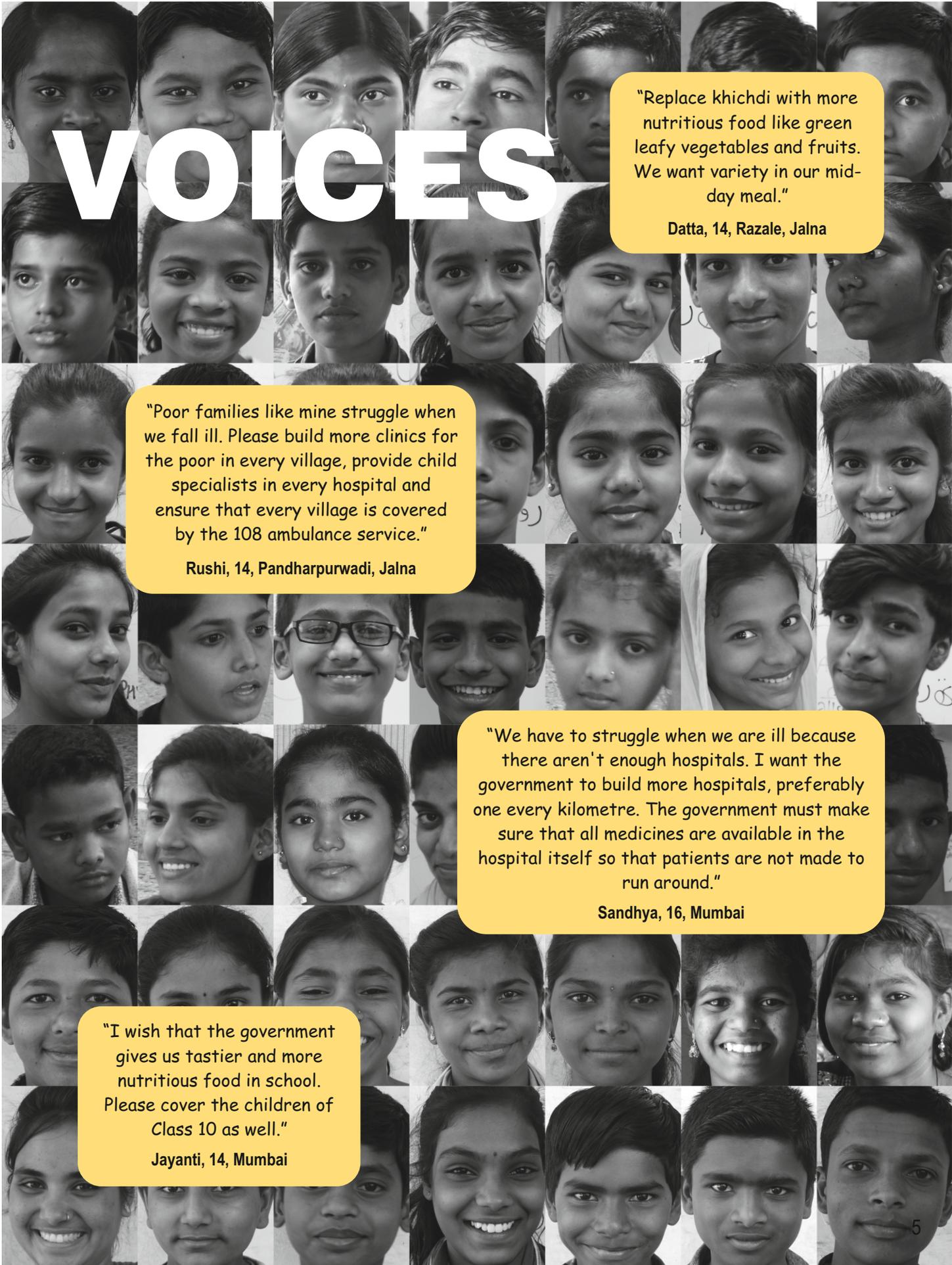
- Factories near our villages cause air pollution and are causing many of us to have breathing problems. Move them away from places where people live.

## 6 Nutrition

- Women in our villages do not get nutritious food during pregnancy. Make this available to them.
- Dalits do not get good quality food rations. We want the new government to ensure that what they receive is at par with those of other communities.
- Set up more ration shops where food is stored hygienically. Provide rations to the poor for free or at subsidised rates.
- Appoint food inspectors to conduct surprise checks at ration shops every three months to ensure that good quality, affordable food is being sold to the needy and on time.
- Ensure that good quality food is provided to all children during the mid-day meal. We have seen how the cook often serves well-prepared rice to the teachers and gives us the semi-cooked rice. Sometimes the cooks even takes home the raw rice provided by the government for us children.
- The kitchen shed where the mid-day meal is provided is small, dark and unclean. Make sure it is thoroughly washed at least once a week.



- Why are we children made to wash the vessels used to prepare the mid-day meal? The cooks and helpers hired by the school should be asked to do that.
- We want wholesome, nutritious balanced meals to be served during mid-day meals. We want more variety. Rice alone is not nutritious.
- The government should provide us two meals a day: breakfast and lunch.
- Provide gas cylinders in all schools for the preparation of the mid-day meal.



# VOICES

"Replace khichdi with more nutritious food like green leafy vegetables and fruits. We want variety in our mid-day meal."

Datta, 14, Razale, Jalna

"Poor families like mine struggle when we fall ill. Please build more clinics for the poor in every village, provide child specialists in every hospital and ensure that every village is covered by the 108 ambulance service."

Rushi, 14, Pandharpurwadi, Jalna

"We have to struggle when we are ill because there aren't enough hospitals. I want the government to build more hospitals, preferably one every kilometre. The government must make sure that all medicines are available in the hospital itself so that patients are not made to run around."

Sandhya, 16, Mumbai

"I wish that the government gives us tastier and more nutritious food in school. Please cover the children of Class 10 as well."

Jayanti, 14, Mumbai

# 2

## Our Development Demands: Education & Wash

### 1 Facilities in Schools

- We want proper compound walls and gates to be installed in all schools.
- We want playgrounds in all schools. We also want equipment for all sports and games to be provided in every school.
- Hire more teachers. In our schools, we see that posts are vacant and just 3 teachers are made to teach Classes 1 to 8.
- Upgrade our schools to Class 10 as many of us are forced to drop out after the 8th grade because middle school is too far.



### 2 Quality Education

- Make government schools provide high quality facilities that private schools have.
- Every school should have e-learning medium to teach children.

### 3 Girls Education

- Girls are less educated as they are not allowed to pursue higher education.
- The Government must focus on changing social mind sets so that girls are allowed to choose subjects and careers of their choice, to pursue their dreams.

### 4 Children With Disabilities (CWD)

- We want children with disabilities to be made a part of mainstream schooling. Teachers must encourage all children to play together.
- Provide wheelchairs and aids to children with motor disability so that they can move around school freely.
- Provide disability-friendly transport facilities for children with disabilities to bring them to school and take them home.
- Train teachers on how to teach and care for children with disabilities.
- All schools - public and private should compulsorily give admission to the poor and children with disabilities..
- Provide scholarships and fellowships to all children with disabilities.

### 5 Children of Seasonal Migrants

- Children who migrate for labour work with their parents should be compulsorily enrolled in the nearby schools at the destination sites.
- Children of seasonal migrants who stay back in their villages should be provided hostel facilities in their community.



## 6 Tribal Students

- Set up more schools in tribal areas so that tribal children have a right to quality education. Ensure that more schools are located near adivasi bastis.

## 7 Student Welfare

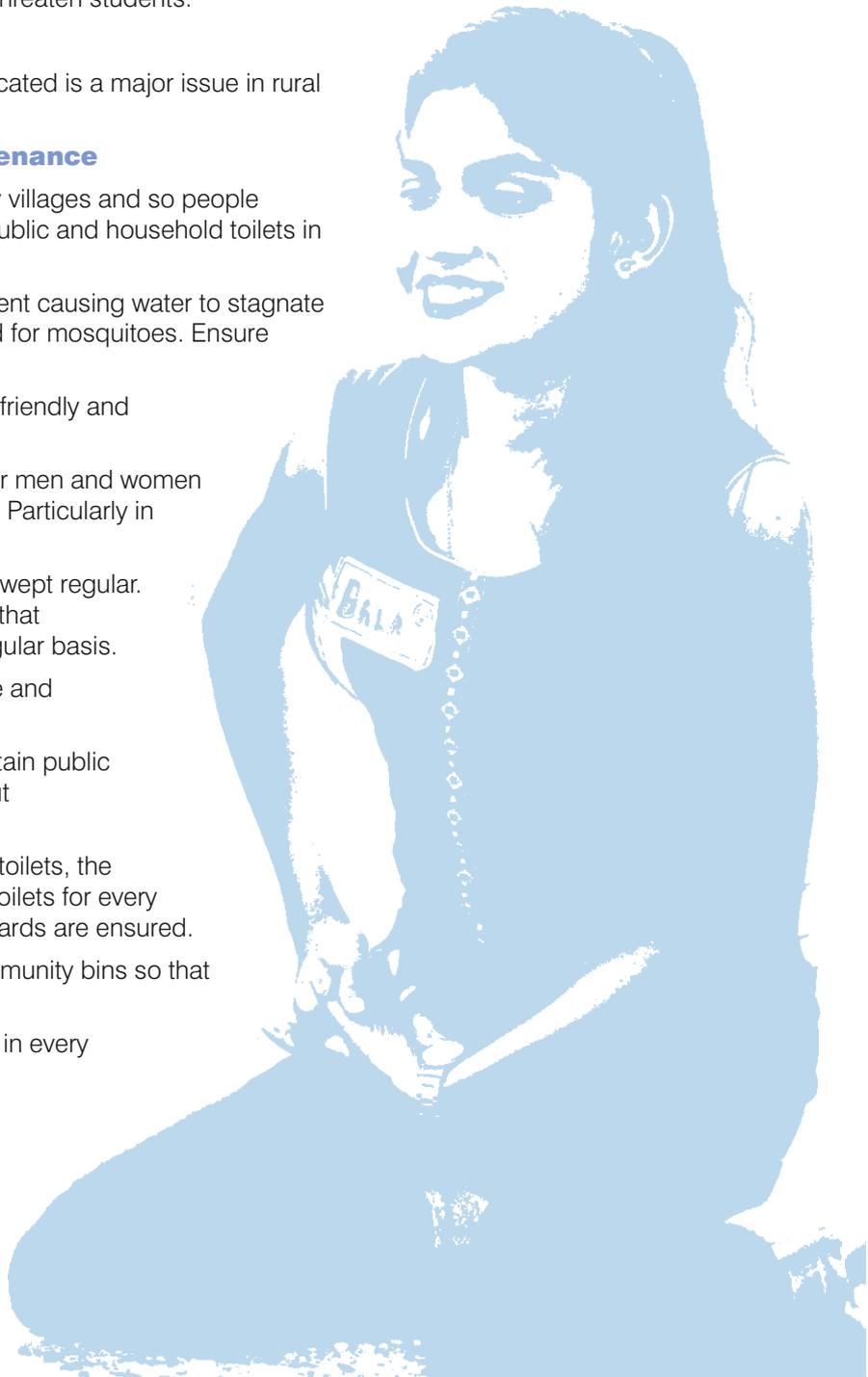
- We face a lot of pressure from our parents and teachers to study and get good grades. Make the system less marks-oriented.
- Discipline and cleanliness must be enforced in schools everyday. Currently these are ensured only when higher authorities come to our schools for inspection.
- Teachers should be told not to threaten students.

## 8 Unemployment

- Unemployment among the educated is a major issue in rural areas.

## 9 Sanitation and Toilet Maintenance

- There is no toilet facility in many villages and so people defecate in the open. Provide public and household toilets in every village.
- Drainage facilities are non-existent causing water to stagnate and become a breeding ground for mosquitoes. Ensure that all drains are covered.
- Make all public toilets disability-friendly and accessible.
- Ensure gender-friendly toilets for men and women in public places on every street. Particularly in schools.
- Ensure that public spaces are swept regular. The biggest problem we find is that sweepers do not come on a regular basis.
- Ensure the regular maintenance and cleanliness of all toilets.
- Appoint staff to clean and maintain public toilets of all communities without discrimination.
- Instead of giving funds to build toilets, the government itself should build toilets for every household so that quality standards are ensured.
- Install CCTV cameras near community bins so that nobody vandalises them.
- Provide proper lighting facilities in every toilet.
- Ensure that toilets are not be constructed near kitchens.
- Impose fines on people who defecate in the open.
- Cover open drains and ensure that they are cleaned on a regular basis.



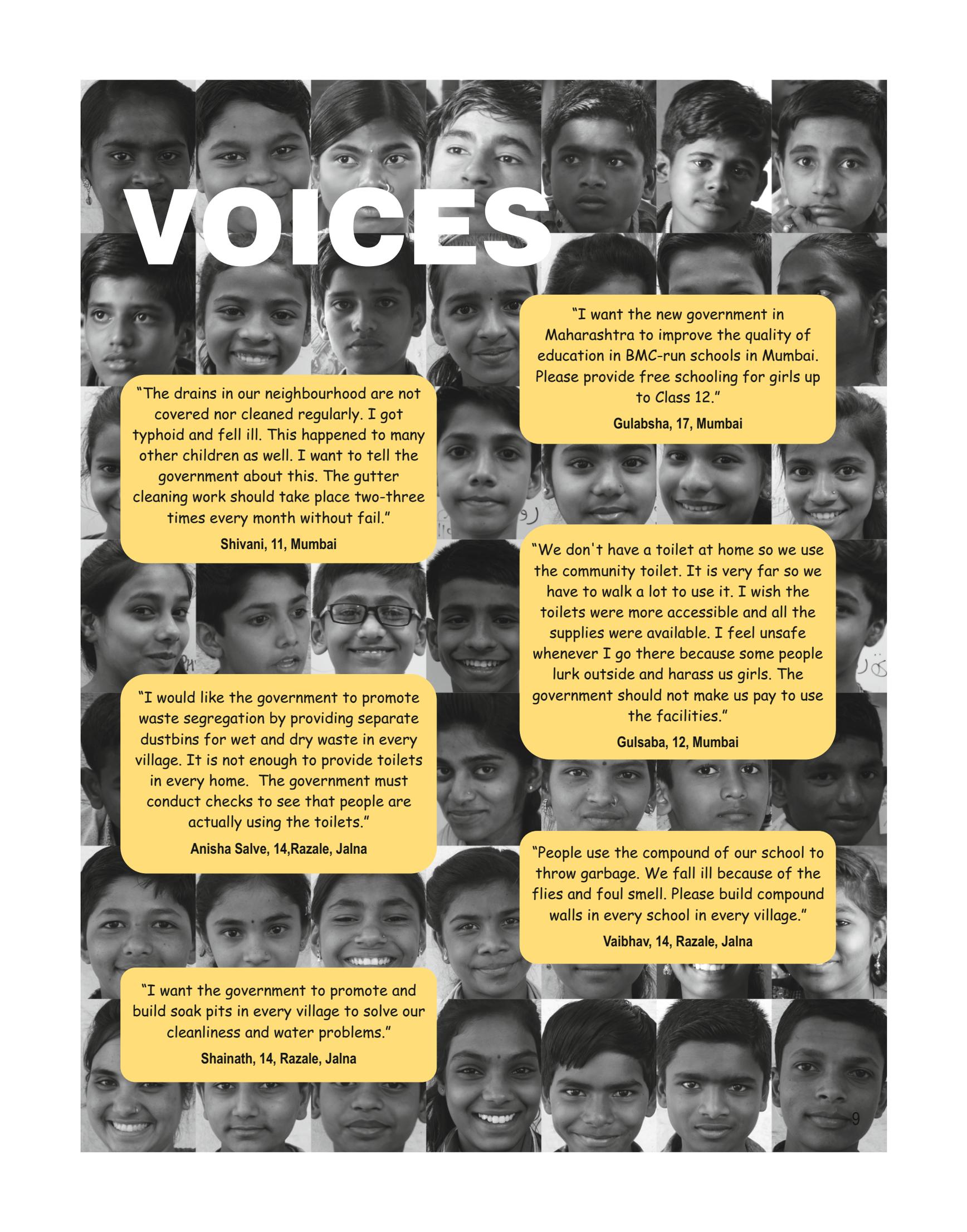
## 10 Water

- We need drinking water with a tap facility in our villages.
- Each toilet must have a 24-hours running water supply.
- Provide water to every village.
- Start a tree-plantation drive on a massive scale.
- Every school should have toilet and regular water supply.
- Provide water filters to purify water in each village. Appoint security staff to guard the filter.
- Provide taps in all homes.

## 11 Waste Disposal

- Install sanitary napkin vending machines and dustbins for disposal in all girl's toilets.
- Provide community dustbins for wet and dry waste in all villages.
- Ensure that garbage clearance vans come regularly and have separate compartment for wet and dry waste.





# VOICES

"The drains in our neighbourhood are not covered nor cleaned regularly. I got typhoid and fell ill. This happened to many other children as well. I want to tell the government about this. The gutter cleaning work should take place two-three times every month without fail."

Shivani, 11, Mumbai

"I want the new government in Maharashtra to improve the quality of education in BMC-run schools in Mumbai. Please provide free schooling for girls up to Class 12."

Gulabsha, 17, Mumbai

"I would like the government to promote waste segregation by providing separate dustbins for wet and dry waste in every village. It is not enough to provide toilets in every home. The government must conduct checks to see that people are actually using the toilets."

Anisha Salve, 14, Razale, Jalna

"We don't have a toilet at home so we use the community toilet. It is very far so we have to walk a lot to use it. I wish the toilets were more accessible and all the supplies were available. I feel unsafe whenever I go there because some people lurk outside and harass us girls. The government should not make us pay to use the facilities."

Gulsaba, 12, Mumbai

"People use the compound of our school to throw garbage. We fall ill because of the flies and foul smell. Please build compound walls in every school in every village."

Vaibhav, 14, Razale, Jalna

"I want the government to promote and build soak pits in every village to solve our cleanliness and water problems."

Shainath, 14, Razale, Jalna

# 3 | Our Protection Demands

- 1 Alcoholics roam freely in villages. Ban the consumption and sale of alcohol completely. Ban liquor shops in and around community areas.
- 2 Put in place proper parking allotments in public spaces to maintain the safety of children while walking on the road.
- 3 School bus drivers should be properly supervised to keep the children safe while they travel in school buses.
- 4 Take strict action against all forms of violence. Government should take strict actions against any kind of violence
- 5 Appoint an adequate number of traffic police so that they are always visible on roads.
- 6 Teachers should be told not to make children buy cigarettes for them as this encourages the habit of smoking among children.
- 7 Promote secularism as a prime responsibility.
- 8 Install CCTV cameras on all roads for better surveillance
- 9 Announce a blanket ban on smoking, tobacco and alcohol consumption in all schools
- 10 Ensure strict implementation of the law on child marriage especially with regard to punishing those who break the law.
- 11 People who attend a child marriage should also be punished.
- 12 Train the teachers to conduct sessions with children in schools and with their parents on preventing child marriage.



# VOICES

"My friends and I worked with an NGO to make our neighbourhood Rafiq Nagar safe for children. I want the Maharashtra government to make all of Mumbai and the rest of Maharashtra safe for every child. Give us all our rights."

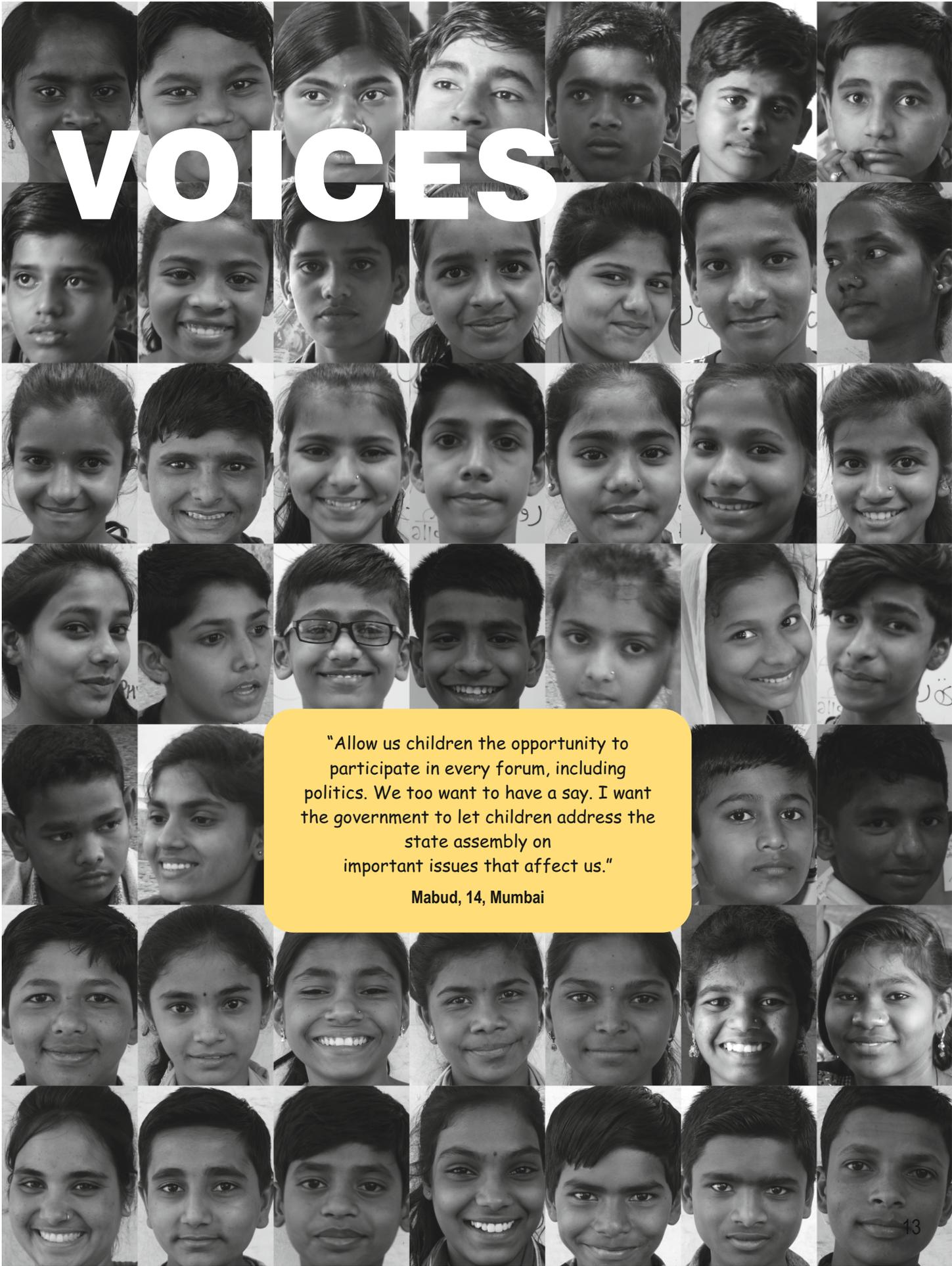
Kaif, 14, Mumbai

# 4

## Our Participation Demands

- 1 Allow us the right to change our religion.
- 2 Grant us the opportunity to participate in everything we wish for.
- 3 Children's Parliaments should be held in villages. Panchayats should take the concerns of children seriously and try to solve them.
- 4 Allow us access to more platforms to speak our minds in front of different stakeholders like the Sarpanch and our teachers.
- 5 The Government should secure the right of each citizen to voice their opinions. The Government should listen to these opinions.





# VOICES

"Allow us children the opportunity to participate in every forum, including politics. We too want to have a say. I want the government to let children address the state assembly on important issues that affect us."

Mabud, 14, Mumbai

# PROCESS OF FRAMING

## The Charter Of Demands

The process of creating the charter of demands was a three step process, which included an activity/ game; interacting with children requires us as professionals to use child friendly methods.

The first step was conducting an activity for each priority area. For instance, for the priority area of health, a balloon activity was used. Each child was given a balloon each which had a chit in it with a question on the health conditions and systems in their communities. The children were asked to blow the balloons and then the game was all about saving their balloons from each other. Whoever's balloon burst they had to read out their question and give an answer to the same. This was followed by a discussion during which the facilitator may require to give the children some information; this is the second step, so that they can think about recommendations accordingly. The third step involved helping children frame recommendations by deciding on what they want from the Government.

For the priority area of Water, Sanitation and Health (WASH), the game of Snakes and Ladders was used. In this game, the entire group was divided into six sub – groups. Each group sent one representative to play the game. Each representative had to answer a question related to WASH to go forward in the game. The group member could help their representative answer the question and they had to then give recommendations for the same. Only if the group is unable to provide an answer, the question was opened up to the rest of the children and they could give the answer and recommendations.

Nutrition was approached through an activity called Khichdi Masala. Each child was given a poster of a food item that could possible become a thali or a food group. The children were asked to form groups of five, based on what food goes together and accordingly prepare a thali. Once they prepared their thali, they were asked to share the nutrients that each food item provided along with how often one should be eating food like that. The role of the facilitator is to get the children thinking about the kind of food provided by the government and seek recommendations from the children.

The element of Protection was dealt with through the 'Play the Rights Cards', which is a set of Cards that explains the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The six sub – groups were each given a card that deals with a right on protection. Each group were asked to prepare a small play which depicts the issue along with a solution. Each presentation was followed by a discussion in the larger group during which it was open to them to suggest recommendations.

An Airplane game was played to discuss the issue of Education. From the larger group, some children were asked to make airplanes from waste sheets. The ones with airplanes were asked to stand in an outer circle and those without airplanes had to make a smaller circle in the inside. The children with airplanes had to try and hit their airplanes on children in the inner circle, who had to avoid being hit. Whoever got hit had to answer questions asked by the facilitator on varied aspects and entitlements related to protection.. This would be followed by a discussion which would lead to children suggesting recommendations.

Play the Rights Cards were used again to address the issue of Participation of children. Ten children were asked to volunteer for this activity. Each volunteer was given a card that depicted a participation right. The volunteers had to become a wax statue and others in the larger group had to guess what the card depicted. This was followed by a discussion and then children suggested recommendations.



## Acknowledgments

*We acknowledge and appreciate the participation of the 100 children from Raigad, Jalna and Mumbai for sharing their issues and giving us their inputs to develop this Charter of Demands.*

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Technical Partner:

