

## Leaving Care - A South Asia Perspective

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### Background

- The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), is a contiguous block of countries, started in 1985 with seven members: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Maldives and Sri Lanka; Afghanistan, as the eighth member, joined in 2007
- Regional bodies such as SAIEVAC (South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children), exist as an inter-governmental body, with a vision that all children, throughout South Asia, enjoy their right to an environment free from all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation, neglect and discrimination
  - Their **focus areas** are child marriage, sexual abuse and exploitation, child labour and corporal punishment
  - **Alternative Care** is still to become their priority work area



### Background

- Home to 1.7 billion people, it is the world's fastest-growing, but least-integrated region
- An estimated **39 million vulnerable children live in South Asia** (2013 UNICEF data)
- 30% of the entire world's youth live in South Asia
- The construct of **Family** is unique to South Asia as even 'normal' families do not expect their children to become independent at 18 years, but for children without families and living in childcare institutions, this is the legal prescription
- Smooth transitioning from childcare to independence, in the face of inadequate **Aftercare services**, for most young people in South Asia is fraught with challenges – multiple placements in childcare (largely in institutions), ruptured education, and above all - lack of secure attachments
- Out of home care was traditionally been organized within **kinship and community based care**; and largely institutional care; hence foster care and Aftercare are still at a nascent stage



(This presentation is based on desk research and inputs from key contacts from different regions acknowledged in the last slide)

### Commonalities Across South Asia

- **History of military conflict and natural disasters**
- Lack of political will to recognise the agency of the child, women and youth, leading to **lower priority for child welfare issues** such as health and education, **lack of social welfare structures for children out of Home care**, and **underfunding**, that have hindered the individual countries to develop strong systems of childcare, let alone aftercare services for young people, transitioning out of care
- **Both policies and practice are unable to address the large volume of children in care and lack systemic and systematic processes that help them transition into independent life**
- **Lack of data on children in child care institutions and youth in Aftercare**; no tracking mechanisms to track youth progress; nor any monitoring and evaluation
- **Lack of systematic research on services and their efficacy**



### Childcare / Juvenile Laws in SA

Country	Name of the Act/Code
• Afghanistan	The Juvenile Code, 2005
• Bangladesh	The Children Act, 2013
• Bhutan	The Child Care and Protection Act of Bhutan 2011
• India	The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, Rules of 2016, ICPS
• Maldives	The Protection of Children's Rights Act, 1991 (Child Rights and Protection Bill and Juvenile Justice bill pending in parliament)



### Childcare / Juvenile laws in South Asia

Country	Name of the Act/Code
• Nepal	The Children's Act, 1992 and the Minimum Standards of Operations of Child Care Homes, 2003
• Pakistan	The Juvenile Justice System Ordinance, 2000 (is limited to children in conflict with law)
• Sri Lanka	Orphanages Ordinance, 1941 (amended 1946), Children and Young Persons Ordinance, No. 48 of 1939 and the Houses of Detention Ordinance, No. 5 of 1907 (as amended by Act No. 26 of 1955)



## Legal Prescriptions on Aftercare in South Asia

- Afghanistan, Maldives  
Nepal, Pakistan Not specified
- India Definition, services and budgets are specified that allow various kinds of support after 18 years, till 21 years and in certain cases till 23 years
- Bhutan The Child Care and Protection Act has a strong focus on rehabilitation & reintegration, to make them 'productive members of the community'



## Legal prescriptions on Aftercare in South Asia

- Sri Lanka The National Child Protection Authority has drafted the **Guidelines and Standards for Child Care Institutions** (in draft since 2013) that provides for promotion of independence and leaving care...  
When a young adult leaves the care facility without support from their parents or relatives, necessary arrangements should be made to safeguard their future and a monitoring process should be in place until at least one year after exit
- Bangladesh The **Children's Act** provides for guidelines on rehabilitation and reintegration into family and social life for welfare and development of youth...  
The Strategic Goals exist that focus on the rehabilitation of orphans in Government homes, including the use of training and specialized care but there is **nothing specific to Aftercare**



## The Challenges in Aftercare in South Asia

- Regional or country specific research, evidence, historical data and documentation absent
- No tracking mechanisms on the numbers that exit care every year in any country, hampering planning and resulting in low commitments on resources and budgets
- Most countries do not have a clear policy and legal mandate for reintegration & rehabilitation of young persons after leaving care. Definitions of these words remain unarticulated
- Most care leavers experience ruptured relationships and lack trust and life skills to be able to live independently because of multiple placements during childcare and lack of focus on mental health and trauma informed care
- Understanding amongst stakeholders on the need for aftercare is still very low; implementation of existing mechanisms and allocation of budgets for Aftercare still lacking in almost all countries. Resultantly, services for youth transitioning out of care are yet to be organized as an official response



## Promising Practices from South Asia



## Sri Lanka

- The **18+ Alliance** is an independent coalition comprised of civil society and corporate sector partners to build support systems for youth leaving care in different areas like employment, education, financial support and health services, housing, legal services, mentoring, psychosocial support, skill development (e.g. life skills, vocational training, language training)
- Generation Never Give-up (GNG)**: Network started with four care leavers from Sri Lanka – now a network of 45 youth who had grown up in CCIs and other alternative care facilities like SOS, in the Western Province and expanding to other provinces. Launched in October 2017.
- Emerge Centre** and **SOSCV** also have good models on Aftercare



## Bangladesh

A case study focused on youth transitioning - Moanghar project on HELP

- Moanghar, an NGO in Bangladesh has a model of Aftercare called HELP - Higher Education Loan Program for careleavers, established in mid 1980's to develop skilled human resources
- They support young persons from college to a tertiary education level with interest free loans (20-50 euro/month). The loan can be refunded when they enter jobs
- Refunded amounts are re-cycled for further loans to future students
- Contributions from Ex-students (the Moanogharians)
- Endowment funds (e.g. specific memorial Scholarships)



## Nepal

- CWIN, an NGO in Nepal, runs interventions to protect girls at risk through the Peace Home where critical cases of girls' protection needing longer term attention are referred to the centre by the child helpline, police and other stakeholders
- Offers safe places due to persisting security threats in their respective families or communities
- Girls are enrolled in mainstream education, are engaged in various therapeutic art/music and sports programs and provided with the opportunity to explore their potential through an empowerment process
- When they move out from the centre, the girls are paired up with senior girls, who have graduated from the centre, to provide peer support for transition from the shelter home



## India

Besides a more pronounced law, India has some systems in place for Aftercare

- Some NGOs help aftercare youth to develop and run group homes; some support education and independent living
- Service delivery models at the grassroots:
  - SOS Children's Villages of India Youth Programme caters to aftercare young persons till 25 years of age
  - Udayan Care offers a continuum of care to all children who exit its homes and offers comprehensive family like support, with the help of long-term mentors
  - Prayas Juvenile Aid Centre, since 2011 has a YUVA (youth) project with focus on education/vocational training leading to employment and social re-integration



## India – Policy and Research

- Aftercare has gained some priority in India
- The Govt. of India has constituted a committee to draft **Guidelines on Aftercare**; Udayan Care serves as a member of the drafting committee
- Some university based student research has been conducted but requires greater attention
- With the help of several agencies, Udayan Care has launched a multi-state study on 'Current Aftercare Practices', the first of its kind in India, with support from Government and funders
- A few States such as Odisha, Maharashtra and Karnataka have taken affirmative action by making provisions for reservations for care leavers in employment and higher education



## Conclusion & Way Forward

## Udayan Care's Efforts towards Regional Collaboration

- **Udayan Care** has since 2014 sustained some regional good practices:
  - **BICONS**: Biennial International Conference held in India on different aspects of Alternative Care with a focus on South Asia
  - **ICEB: Institutionalised Care: Explorations and Beyond**, an academic bi-annual, peer reviewed journal on Alternative Care with a focus on South Asia –recent edition has a special focus on Aftercare
  - Besides running our own aftercare programme, we have locally steered formation of **CLAN**: Care Leavers Network and Association, with pan-region outlook; and **SYLC**: a network of like minded individuals and organisations for Smooth transition of Youth Leaving Care



## National and Regional Efforts required

**Law and Policy Prescriptions & adequate Budgetary Provisions a MUST**

- Existing promising models could be scaled up at national levels with monitoring and evaluation processes built into the frameworks
- 'Rehabilitation' and 'Reintegration' needs to be clearly defined and elaborated upon, wherever it is laid down in law and policy
- There needs to be a robust country-wise mechanism that tracks all children leaving care and support system for at least 3 years post 18
- There is a dire need for more data, evidence base, applied research and documentation on Aftercare at both the national and regional levels
- Collaborations at the national and regional level are a key development area
- Multilateral sharing of information, experience, expertise from established international care leaver models and practice is South Asia's greatest need



## The Future



- There is potential and scope to build on existing regional efforts such as the BICON and ICEB to widen the INTRAC network beyond Europe to South Asia
- There is a dire regional need to learn from the research and data practice of the INTRAC members through research collaborations



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# THANK YOU

