My Rights, My Story.

8 child rights experiences from around **South Asia**

unicef
for every child

CRC30 YEARS
CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

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FOREWORD

For every child, every right

Thirty years ago, world leaders made a promise to every child to promote and protect their rights by adopting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This promise lives on today and it continues to be incredibly important for South Asia.

One third of the world's children and adolescents live in South Asia. If we can get it right in this region, we will have impacted a huge part of the globe's youngest generation for the better.

I am pleased to present this booklet with personal stories from around South Asia. Eight young people have shared with us how child rights have impacted their lives in a positive way – or how the lack of access to rights have made their lives more difficult.

Today, it is children who see new challenges and opportunities most clearly. Young people are speaking out for their right to an education, demanding an end to discrimination, marching against violence in schools, striking for action on climate change and calling on leaders to protect their future.

Children are telling us, loud and clear, it is time for every child to have every right.

With these stories, we want to give a platform to the young generation – to learn from their experiences and be inspired by their resilience and drive for a better future. As people of great standing within your societies, I hope that these stories will encourage you to work even harder for child rights.

We have seen powerful and positive changes in children's lives in South Asia over the past 30 years. Nevertheless, there is no time to waste if we truly care about every single child and genuinely wish to give each one the best possible start in life.

Jean Gough,
Regional Director UNICEF South Asia

BALKH, AFGHANISTAN

Article 26

The right to help from the government if poor or in need

A helping hand in a time of need

BALKH, AFGHANISTAN

Mujtaba's father was killed six years ago in northern Afghanistan. Mujtaba was still a child – but immediately, he began acting twice his age.

"I lost my father when I was ten years old," Mujtaba said. "I had no choice but to search for a job."

Mujtaba lives with his family in Balkh Province, Afghanistan. Anti-government groups control his village, placing children like Mujtaba at a continued risk of violence. Insecurity has aggravated already-high levels of poverty, and stripped girls and boys of their childhood throughout the province.

"I wish I had not dropped out of school," said Mujtaba, now 16 years of age. "I still cannot read or write."

For four years, Mujtaba worked up to 10 hours a day to help his family survive. As a labourer, most of that work took place under terrible conditions for little pay; every day, he would bring home 200 Afghanis – the equivalent of three dollars. Even with his older brother working alongside him, it was never enough to sustain his family's needs.

"I had no choice," Mujtaba said. "But now, I want my younger brothers and sister to continue their education and fulfil their dreams."

One day, Mujtaba heard about a job opportunity with the police department. Hoping it would provide a more sustainable income for his family, Mujtaba applied for the role, forging his identity card to appear older than he was. He completed the application thinking it would go unnoticed – but officials at the police department realised that Mujtaba was too young to apply.

BALKH, AFGHANISTAN

Immediately, the department called the Child Protection Action Network (CPAN), a coalition of government organisations, non-government organisations, and community and religious leaders supported by UNICEF that works to help children in need. A CPAN coordinator reached out to Mujtaba to understand why he was trying to join the police force. Once she discovered his circumstances, she began exploring ways to help his family rebuild their lives.

Mujtaba was provided with an allowance for groceries, along with a rental subsidy to open a small shop in his village. Today, Mujtaba earns money for his family in a safe and profitable way, selling snacks, sweets and groceries to those in his community. He is also getting help to enrol in a vocational training programme.

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, every child has the right to be supported by the government in times of need. In Afghanistan, CPAN is doing precisely that: in 2018 alone, the coalition helped the Government of Afghanistan identify 500 children who were trying to join the police force.

When he is old enough, Mujtaba will use his new skills to apply for the police force once again.

"I want to become a policeman to ensure justice and fair treatment for others," Mujtaba said.

Today, Mujtaba earns money for his family in a safe and profitable way, selling snacks, sweets and groceries to those in his community. He is also getting help to enrol in a vocational training program.

BARISAL, BANGLADESH

Article 24
The right to a safe and clean environment

Raising voices on climate change in Bangladesh

BARISAL, BANGLADESH

Over the past few decades, flooding, storm surges, cyclones and droughts have ravaged Bangladesh. The country has a nearly unparalleled vulnerability to climate change – and as in any crisis, children are the most at-risk.

In Bangladesh, children are speaking up. For years, 19-year-old Smriti has advocated to adapt to climate change impacts, holding meetings to increase awareness of the problem and its implications. Smriti is particularly interested in the relationship and complexities between global warming and gender.

“I’ve been having these conversations ever since I was young,” Smriti said. “I try to help people understand the impact of global warming and how the changing climate affects all aspects of our lives.”

Smriti lives with her parents, younger brother and younger sister.

The family works together to help one another: her father moved to another town to work as a farmer, her mother runs a small tea shop, and Smriti has been tutoring for extra money since she was in the sixth grade.

With her parents’ encouragement, Smriti has spoken up regardless of her age and gender. Smriti is particularly passionate about empowering others to understand how global warming is changing our lives.

Today, Smriti works with YouthNet for Climate Justice, a UNICEF-supported network of more than 1,000 young people committed to fighting climate change, and they are demanding a safe, clean environment – one of the many rights outlined 30 years prior in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

“Global warming cannot be fixed in a few days,” Smriti said. “But one day, we can bring change that will help everyone.”

Bangladesh’s flat landscape and dense population leaves communities uniquely susceptible to the effects of global warming. Nearly 12 million children live in communities that revolve around rivers, which in recent years, have regularly burst through their banks.

> **Most people are reluctant to talk about these things. It is hard to gather people to talk about this, but so often, I'll stop in a tea shop, or stop a group of people, and engage them that way."**

BARISAL, BANGLADESH

Another 4.5 million Bangladeshi children live on the country's coasts, including nearly half a million Rohingya refugee children. Even in the country's interior, climate change has sparked widespread drought, a crisis now affecting another three million girls and boys.

Such circumstances make awareness, behaviour change and stronger infrastructure paramount – aims that Smriti pushes for every day. She travels within and outside of her community to do so; she recently discussed global warming in front of a room of 2,000 participants from six districts.

In her discussions, Smriti talks about the ways climate change increases rates of child marriage. When crises occur, poverty spikes, leading some families to marry off their children in the hope that they find a better life elsewhere. Such practices can be devastating to young girls, and set them up for a lifetime of inequality, inopportunity and violence.

"Most people are reluctant to talk about these things," Smriti said. "It is hard to gather people to talk about this, but so often, I'll stop in a tea shop, or stop a group of people, and engage them that way."

By talking about these issues on a broader level, Smriti hopes to deter families from forcing their daughters into marriage.

She speaks to parents, students and children throughout the region, often visiting schools to make sure children are aware of their rights. Smriti also speaks with people who themselves were married as a child and asks them to share their stories. This can help others realise the dangers of the practice.

Smriti also pushes for change at the highest levels of society. By speaking with key decision-makers in the Barisal government, YouthNet members are standing up for children who can't stand up for themselves, even bringing the stories of child brides to those who need to hear them.

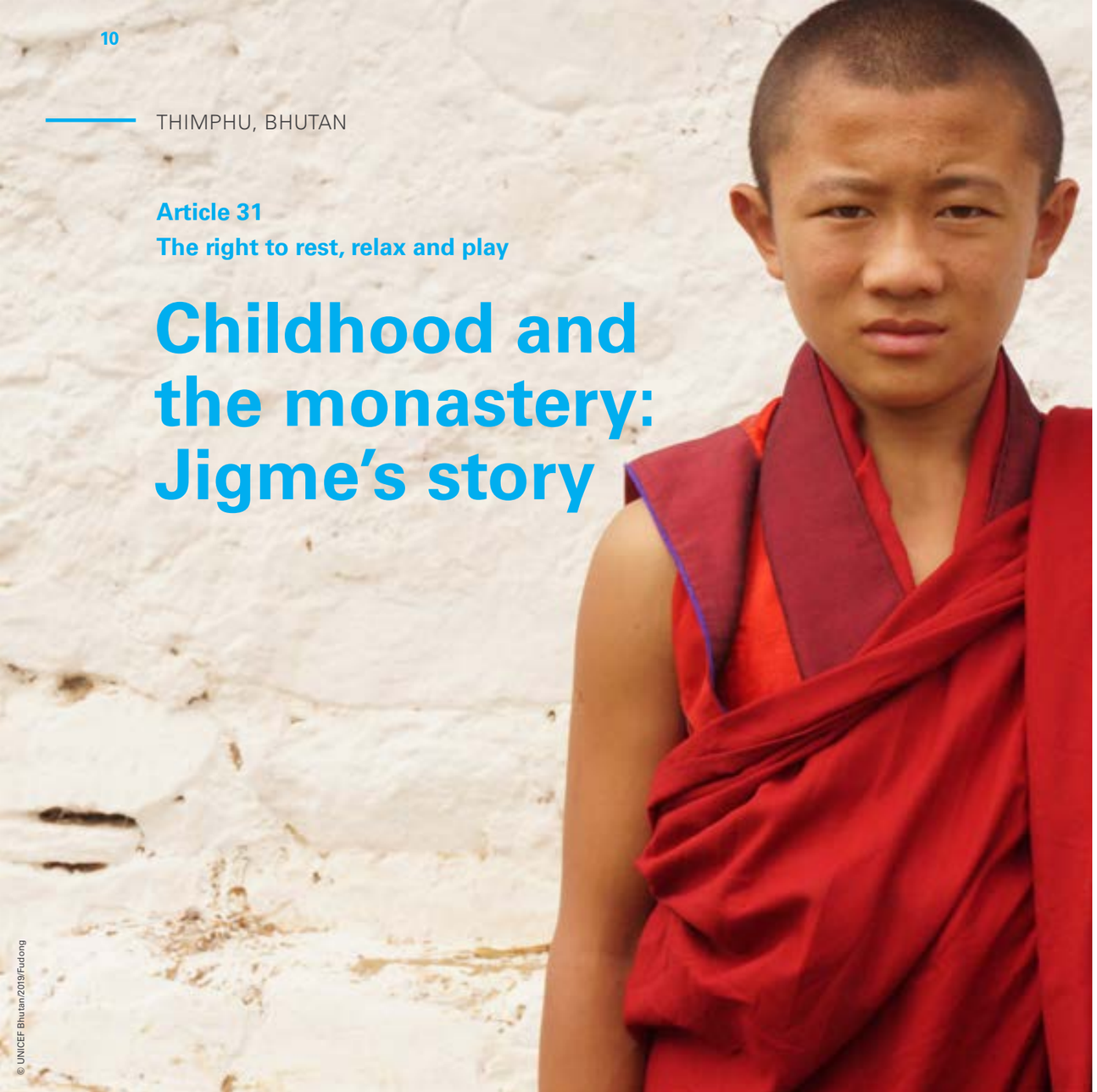
"These people play a crucial part in all of this," Smriti said. "Change won't occur if they do not acknowledge or understand climate change and its effects."

Smriti is far from finished fighting for children's rights: after graduating from college, she dreams of being an activist and continue raising awareness of climate change.

THIMPHU, BHUTAN

Article 31
The right to rest, relax and play

Childhood and the monastery: Jigme's story



THIMPHU, BHUTAN

Growing up, Jigme lived with his family in Haa Valley, a district in the west of Bhutan. Jigme loved playing games – especially football – with his older brother and two younger sisters. His parents are divorced, and his mother spends a great deal of time working at the shop she runs in her neighbourhood.

At the age of 12, Jigme joined the monastery because of his faith, above all else – but he also hoped his new monastic life would make things easier for his family.

"I thought I would be better able to take care of my parents if I became a monk," Jigme said. "I don't know if I can help my parents when they are alive. But when they die, I will be able to conduct all the funeral rituals, so they can be reborn and have a good life. Also, when we go to school, parents must keep spending a lot of money – but here, my parents paid only once. At least with me becoming a monk, I have secured a future and I'm set for life. I also feel that becoming a monk will help me in a spiritual way."

Like Jigme, now 16, many young boys feel that by joining a monastery they become less of a burden to their families. The monks are looked after by the monasteries, where they are provided food, religious education and health services, and because of that, those who are drawn to monastic life are often those from Bhutan's poorest families. But even after entering their new environment, many young monks lose out on the chance to play regularly.

Every day, Jigme wakes up at 4.30 am. After praying for an hour and a half, he turns to his studies from 6 to 9 am and attends other classes until noon. After a quick meal, Jigme returns to the classroom to study from 1 to 5 pm in the afternoon. Then, he prays, attending a session from 6 to 8 pm at night. Apart from Jigme's mealtimes, the young monk's days are completely booked.

Though Jigme loves his life in the monastery and has a passion for his studies, by 9 in the evening, Jigme falls asleep exhausted.

THIMPHU, BHUTAN

Jigme has grown used to his busy schedule, but he still feels play and rest are important. Play, Jigme says, provides both children and adults with the break they need to start fresh the following week.

I think children should have the right to play," Jigme said. "It keeps you healthy and fit, and it gives you a chance to interact with other people. I especially love football and I like to play as a striker."

Over the past few years, Jigme and his peers have come to understand their right to play, rest and enjoy their childhoods, regardless of their studies or obligations. They have even attended talks on child rights and the responsibilities of adults to ensure they get access to those rights.

"If everyone was educated on rights, I think that children would not be discriminated against," Jigme said. "When people don't know about children's rights, the voices of young people are sometimes ignored."

Because of these sessions, children in Jigme's monastery are more aware of their right to play, rest and relax. Even so, there is still room to grow to make play more attainable for all. Today, play and rest is mostly reserved for Jigme's weekends. During the weekdays, he sometimes skips dinner to play football, hoping to squeeze a game in before evening prayers, as the elder monks have allowed children to play around that time.

"Here, children below 15 years of age weren't allowed to play football because they are considered too young," Jigme said. "But after the child rights sessions in our monastery, we asked the older monks to let them play."

Now, children play together – not just around dinnertime, but on their free weekend days as well.

If everyone was educated on rights, I think that children would not be discriminated against. When people don't know about children's rights, the voices of young people are sometimes ignored."

CHENNAI, INDIA

Article 32
The right to be protected from harmful work

Pushing back against child labour in Chennai

CHENNAI, INDIA

Every day, 15-year-old Althaf wakes up the same way: he sees his father, mother and brother sleeping beside him in a small, dark room. He smells the air, salty and thick, drifting in from the sea nearby. He hears the chaos from north Chennai's streets as noise seeps through the walls. He blinks a few times, stretches. Then, Althaf gets ready for school.

Althaf's family find it difficult to make ends meet, and he often feels the pressure to bring in money to help support them.

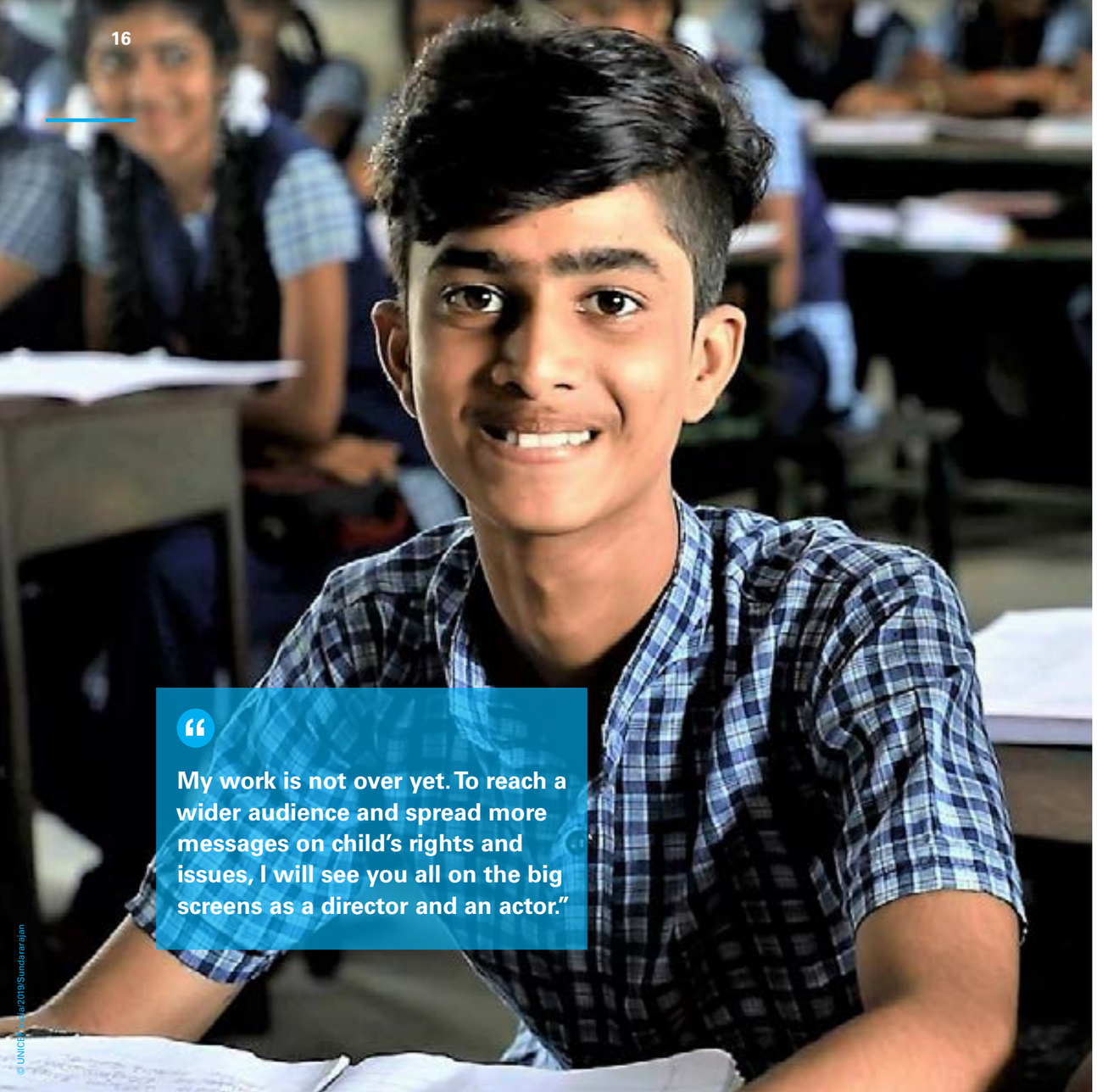
"As the eldest son, I'm often asked to bring in more income for my family. But education is my right. I refuse to work instead of study."

In north Chennai, many children never get the education they deserve. The city is one of the largest in India and many young people see their education, health and overall well-being being put on the line.

"So often, I've seen the lights and power be switched off late at night," Althaf said. "Shops would hurry to pull their shutters down. Just like the movies, I'd hear sounds engulfed in pitch darkness – I'd hear bottles whizzing and crashing. When the lights came back on, the only evidence that something had happened would be broken glass, and occasionally, a puddle of blood."

Despite the violence on the streets of Chennai, Althaf refuses to believe that education and survival are mutually exclusive. Ever since he was young, Althaf constantly spoke out about the value of education – not just for himself, but for all those around him.

"When I began 11th grade, I did so without many of my friends," Althaf said. "They went to work as delivery boys over vacation, and when it was over, they continued to work as daily wage earners to support their families."



> **My work is not over yet. To reach a wider audience and spread more messages on child's rights and issues, I will see you all on the big screens as a director and an actor."**

CHENNAI, INDIA

Althaf knew that every child has the right to be protected from harmful work. For years, he has been involved with a children's club in Chennai, one that pushes for ending child labour, protecting child workers and street children, and supporting victims of abuse and exploitation. Althaf has even attended trainings on child rights and the challenges children face.

"After being trained, I conducted street plays to raise awareness on child labour, menstrual health and the repercussions of early marriage," Althaf said.

Althaf also spoke to his friends and their families directly, telling them about the importance of education and about how child labour can ruin lifelong earning capacity. Since becoming involved with the club, Althaf has learned to play *parai*, traditional drums used in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Historically, the instrument is used as a way to convey messages to people.

"By playing parai, I spread messages about the issues facing children in my school and community," he said.

Althaf refuses to stop talking about these issues. He has even seen two of his classmates return to school, along with many others in different schools. He hopes that local companies stop hiring children as day labourers and children in Chennai become more aware of their right to protection from harmful work.

In the future, Althaf hopes to work in the South Indian film industry. He wants to make meaningful movies as a film director, raising awareness of every child's right to protection from work that harms them and their childhood.

"My work is not over yet," Althaf said. "To reach a wider audience and spread more messages on child's rights and issues, I will see you all on the big screen as a director and an actor."

MALÉ, MALDIVES

Article 40

The right to be treated fairly under the law

For every child, a second chance

MALÉ, MALDIVES

Seven years ago, Ahmed*stood frozen in a Maldivian courtroom.

"I was given a jail sentence of 16 years and eight months," Ahmed said. "I was so sad. All I was thinking about was my family and how ashamed they would feel because of me."

At 17 years of age, Ahmed was facing a jail sentence almost as long as he had been alive. He had been caught with drugs by undercover police. He started using them after he left home, relocating from the island where he lived to Malé, the Maldives' bustling capital city, to complete his education.

"When I first moved, I was a very good student," he said. "I was living with my dad's friend as my parents remained on our island. Within a few months, though, I made friends with people who used drugs."

Ahmed's story mirrors the experience of countless other adolescents in the Maldives, many of whom are forced to relocate to Malé to continue their education because of a lack of tertiary education programmes in their home area. Often without adult supervision and support, they are at risk of falling into crime, gang violence and drug use, a situation contributing to rising drug offences among minors in the Maldives.

"Eventually, I got addicted to drugs," Ahmed said. "But I didn't have money. I started helping some of my friends sell them so I could earn enough to buy more."

For months, Ahmed struggled to balance the diverging parts of his life: his addiction, his schoolwork, and family on his home island. Though he lived far from his home, he knew there were problems in the family – and he couldn't stop thinking about how they were struggling. By the time he was sentenced, everything caught up to him in the most jolting, jarring way.

*Name has been changed to protect the identity of the subject.

MALÉ, MALDIVES

"I was stunned," Ahmed said. "I couldn't move a muscle."

Luckily for Ahmed, however, the court appealed his case. His 16 years and eight months in prison were slashed; as a minor, the court gave him a second chance. He entered the Juvenile Court's Diversion Programme, which seeks to help children accused of crime rebuild their lives and re-integrate into society.

"If I didn't get this chance, I still would have remained on the same bad path," Ahmed said. "I would have been angry. I would have been broken. Instead, I got a chance to change."

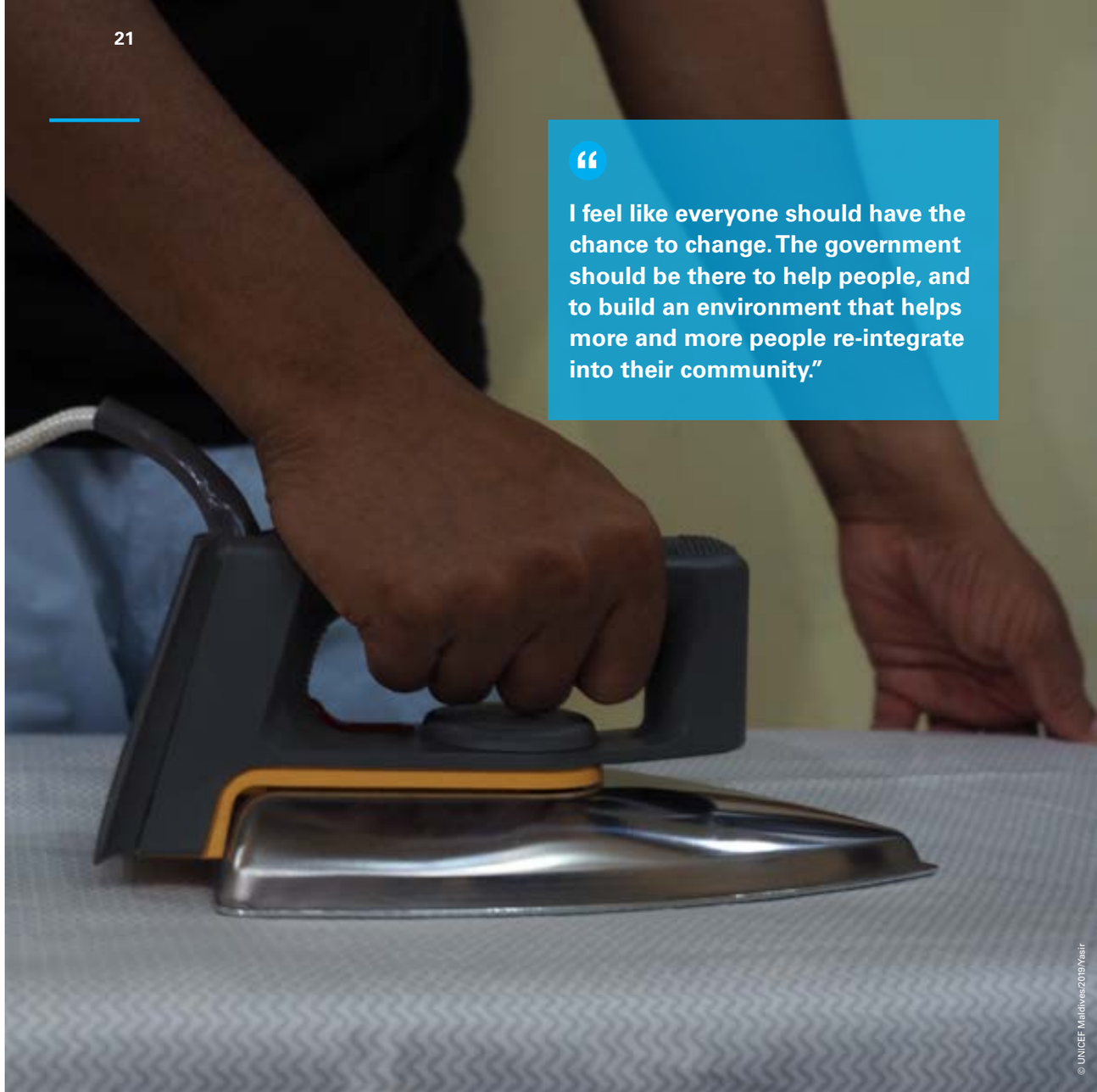
Immediately, Ahmed refocused. He stopped seeing his friends – the ones who had introduced him to drugs in the first place – and made new ones. He got a new job as a laundry attendant at a resort, a role that gave him security and a sustainable income. He reconnected with his parents. He got married.

Now, at 24, Ahmed is looking toward what's next: making sure his future children never repeat his own mistakes.

"I have such a happy life now," he said. "My family motivates me to stay on this good path. I've changed, and I feel fulfilled as a person again. I'll do whatever I can to help those who want to change for the better."

In recent years, the Government of the Maldives has restructured the way it treats juvenile offenders. The new Diversion Programme is one example of how the Maldives is aiming to ensure children accused of breaking the law have access to fair treatment within the legal system.

"I feel like everyone should have the chance to change," he said. "The government should be there to help people, and to build an environment that helps more and more people re-integrate into their community. People should also look out for children and help those who have gone down the wrong path before it's too late. I am so thankful to the Juvenile Court, and to all the people who gave me this chance."



"I feel like everyone should have the chance to change. The government should be there to help people, and to build an environment that helps more and more people re-integrate into their community."

BIRGUNJ, NEPAL

Article 19
The right to be protected from violence and abuse

Fighting violence with awareness: Nisha's story

BIRGUNJ, NEPAL

Ever since she was a child, 19-year-old Nisha has been standing up for those around her. From an early age, Nisha knew that young people had the right to live a life free from violence and abuse. But again and again, she saw that right being violated.

"A lot of girls were forced to leave school and stay home because of discriminatory attitudes in society," Nisha said. "I was really troubled by the various problems children around me were facing."

Nisha's uncle had been a member of a Child Club in their neighbourhood, the goal of which was to help communities understand and advocate for children's rights. Nisha watched her uncle actively engage with children, adults and caregivers, raising awareness about the need to create safer environments for children, including within their own families.

Nisha's uncle explained his goals to his niece, and she realised that she could do more to help solve the challenges around her.

At age 12, Nisha began attending the Child Club meetings herself. As a club member, she talked through the issues she was passionate about while standing up for her peers, tackling challenges like child marriage, child labour, and high dropout rates in school.

Within a few years, Nisha became the club president. The involvement opened her up to a whole new world, and as she attended trainings, conferences and meetings on children's rights, she steadily deepened her knowledge of child protection issues.

"Since my school days, I advocated for rights at every opportunity. Gender-based discrimination and violence were and are common problems in my community, and I was involved in raising awareness around those issues in the classroom."

BIRGUNJ, NEPAL

If children learn about their rights, they will be able to fight for them," Nisha said. "And if their rights are being denied, they can raise their voices to secure them."

As part of the Child Club, Nisha visits schools around her community to raise awareness of violence and its implications. She has helped children understand how they should respond if they come across violence – either in their own life or in the lives of their peers.

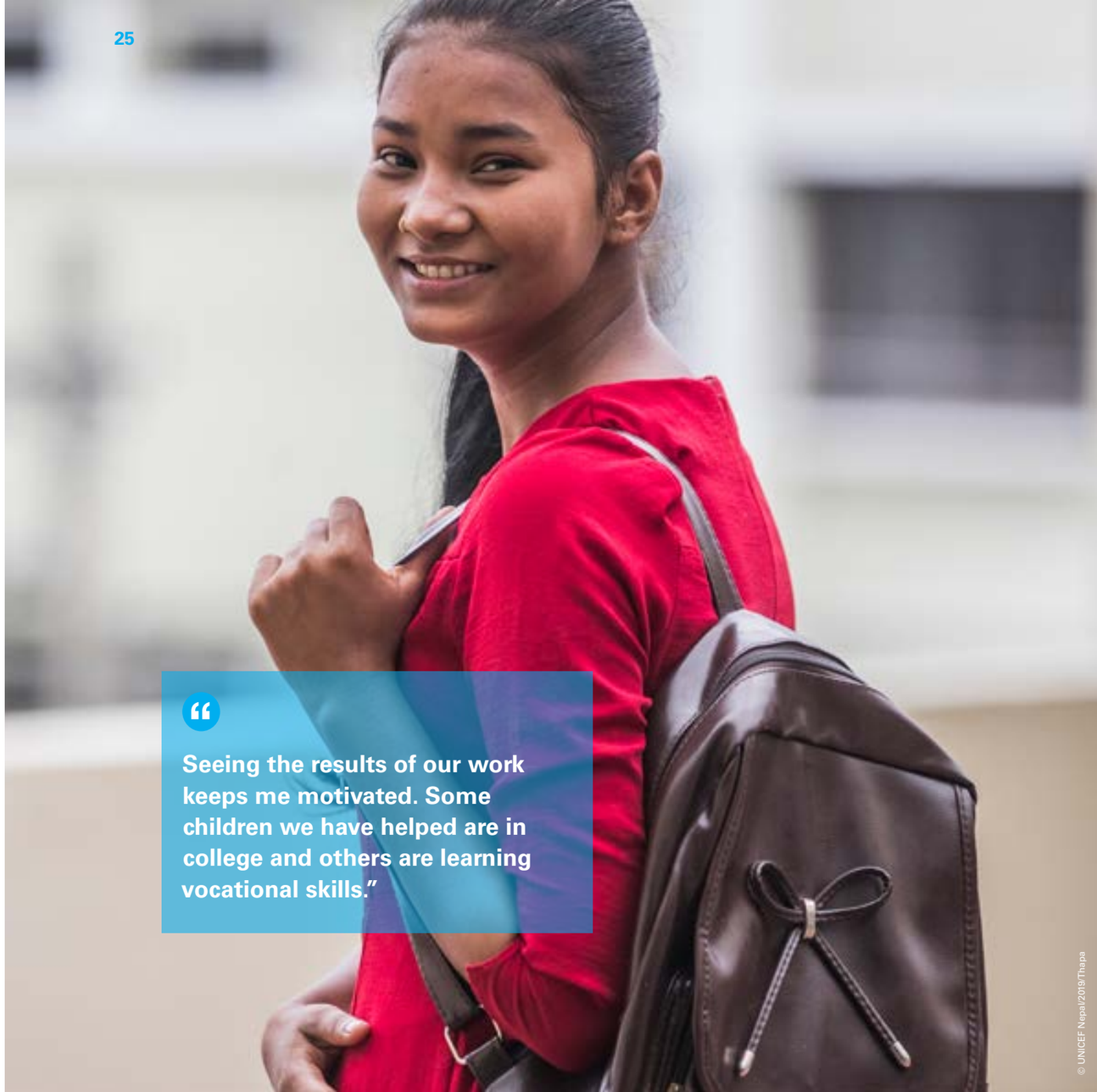
In one of these sessions, a student approached Nisha after she had finished speaking. One of her friends, the girl said, had stopped coming to class. Her stepmother regularly beat her, and the girl had been forced to drop out of school to help with household chores. Nisha went to her house immediately.

Nisha spoke with the stepmother about the way she was treating the girl and the impact such violence would have on her future. Nisha also told her about the legal consequences she would face if the violence didn't stop. Days later, the girl was back in school.

"Seeing the results of our work keeps me motivated," Nisha said. "Some children we have helped are in college and others are learning vocational skills."

Today, Nisha is completing her first year of law school. One day, she hopes to become a legal expert on children's rights.

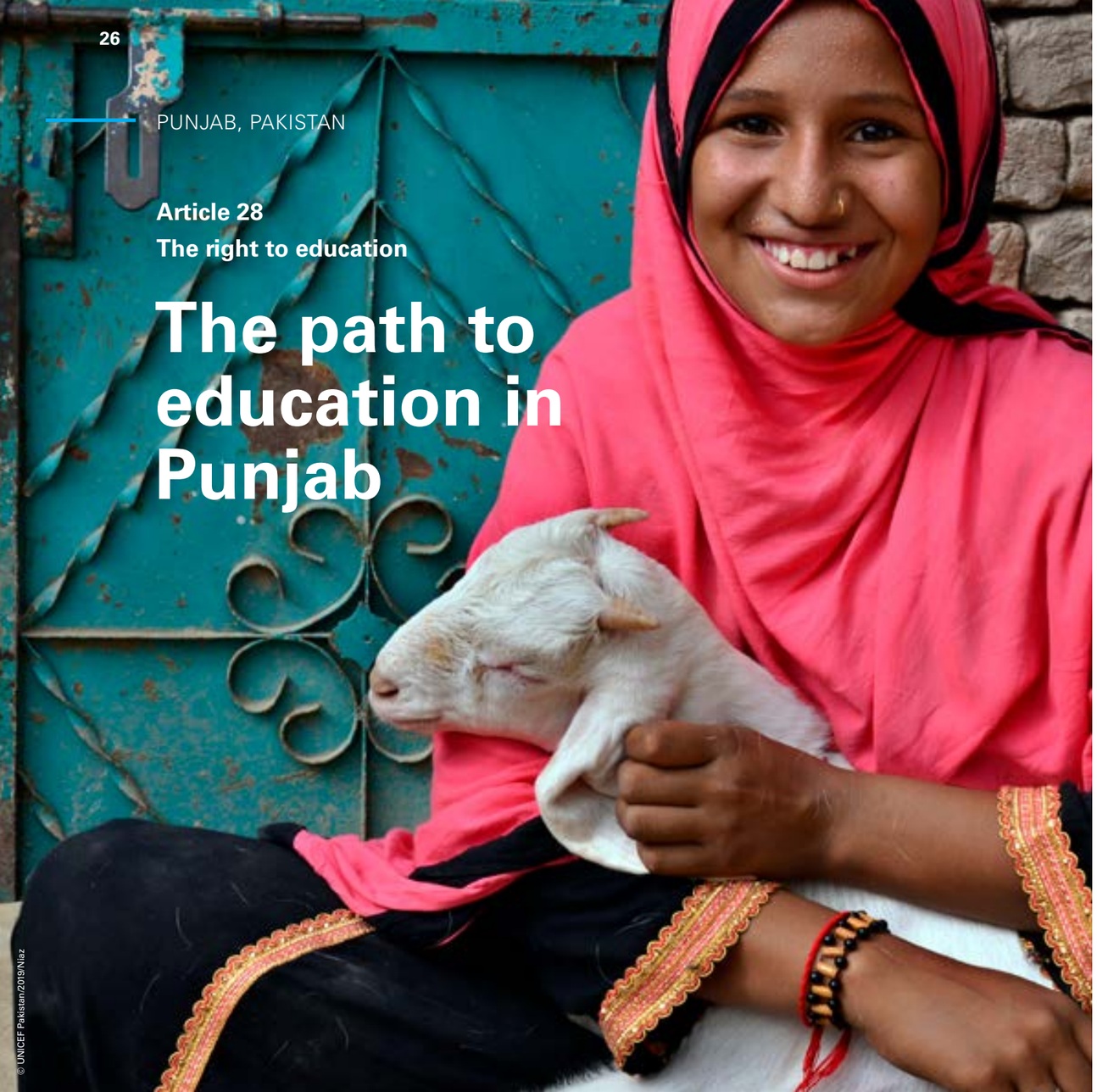
"Only when everyone in Nepal knows about children's rights can our country be truly child-friendly," Nisha said.



PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

Article 28
The right to education

The path to education in Punjab



PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

Farah's childhood took place inside her home. Farah would watch her brothers leave the house, play outside and make friends, all behind latched doors and closed windows. The only time she left the house was with her mother, as Farah's father was convinced the world wasn't safe for young girls.

"We live in a conservative society," Farah said. "People here do not approve of girls going out and playing. The world outside was strange and unknown to me, and no one talked to me or my older sister.

For 11 years, Farah's days would start and end the same: she woke up early to help her mother with household chores. She took care of the family's goats. She worked alongside her older sister. The only interactions she had with those outside her family were people who inquired for her mother's services; as a birth attendant, Farah's mother helped women throughout their community survive childbirth.

"We are the poorest of all the villagers," Farah said. "No girl wanted to be my friend. They would tell me that I have no manners, that I don't belong in their circle. After a while, I stopped trying to make friends.

Like many Pakistani girls, especially those living in poverty, Farah's days were monotonous. For most of her childhood, Farah was one of the 22.8 million children in Pakistan left out of school. Most of those children are girls, leading to a void of educated Pakistani women: in some parts of the country, up to 75 percent of women have not completed primary school.

Late last year, however, Farah's uncle visited her parents. The first-ever girls' school was opening in their village, he told them. Farah listened from another room as her uncle said something unprecedented: he wanted Farah's parents to add her to the list.

"I didn't know what a school was," Farah said. "And I didn't know what the word education even meant. My mother told me school was a place to learn, write, calculate and become a better human being. She told me that come what may, she would find a way to send me to school."

PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

Farah's father held a different opinion, telling her he didn't want her to attend school. Unfortunately, his perspective is shared in many families throughout Pakistan. This situation is particularly dire in Punjab, Farah's childhood home, where more than five million girls are currently not in school.

Regardless of such statistics, Farah – and her mother, Basheeran – knew she needed to be in the classroom. Basheeran ignored her husband's wishes and enrolled Farah in school. In communities like Farah's, schools can often be scarce and overcrowded, and Basheeran knew this opportunity was a once-in-a-lifetime chance to change her daughter's life. If she could, Basheeran said, she would send all her children to school.

"My mother said that I am the only one lucky enough to go, and because of that, I must work hard," Farah said.

Once at school, she finally began making friends – and today, she walks to and from school with them. The girls study and play together, and Farah often goes to their houses, or invites her friends to her house to pass the time.

"We talk about everything, our problems and our joys," Farah said.

The Convention of the Rights of the Child outlined children's right to a quality education. In communities like Farah's, however, that right is far from universal.

On the 30th anniversary of the Convention, the commitment to children throughout the world needs to be reaffirmed so that girls like Farah can go to school and live life to their fullest potential.

"After I started school, I finally had friends," Farah said. "My uncle says I should not be scared of anyone anymore."

Whether it's increasing the number of schools, improving girls' access to the classroom, or changing women's roles in society, more must be done to help children like Farah get what they deserve: their right to a quality education.

"My mother said that I am the only one lucky enough to go, and because of that, I must work hard."

KOTMALE, SRI LANKA

Article 12

The right to give opinions freely and be taken seriously by adults

Listening to children's views in the classroom: Yashasvi's story

UNICEF Sri Lanka/2019/Jayawardena

KOTMALE, SRI LANKA

In Kotmale, Sri Lanka, 12-year-old Yashasvi is finally getting the space she needs to learn, grow and speak up in the classroom.

"Discipline used to be a big part of our school life and keeping us quiet was central to this," said Yashasvi. "For a long time, we were afraid to speak out about anything that affected us. Punishment was a word we heard – and experienced – a lot."

However, in 2017, everything changed for Yashasvi and her classmates, when a new way of teaching called positive classroom management was introduced into her school.

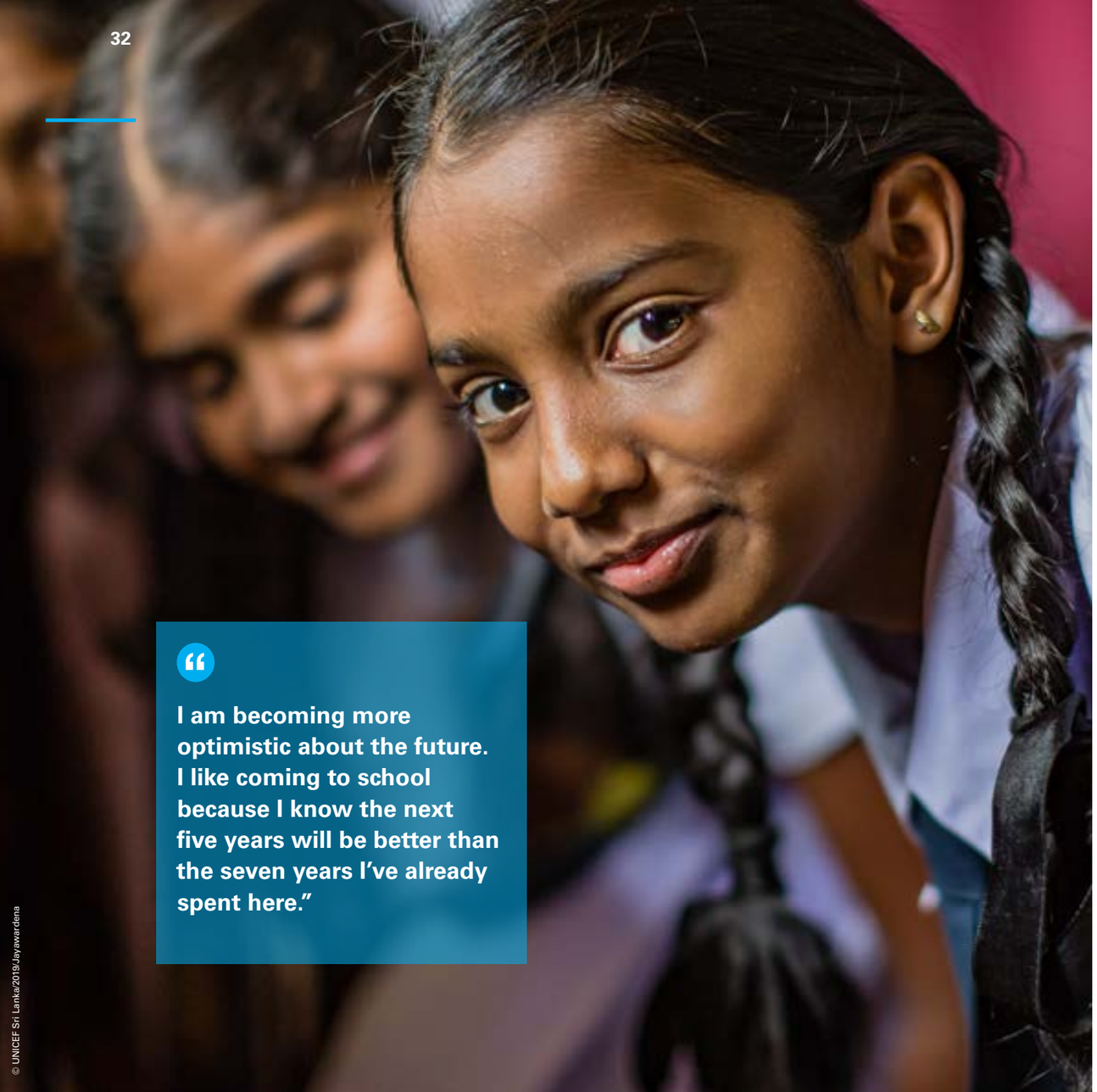
"The principals and teachers started talking to us differently," she says. "They began to encourage us to say what we felt, and not just about our lessons. The school is also showing more concern about the mental and emotional well-being of children – and as a result, the staff and the students are growing closer.

Teachers are more patient and listen to us more. They no longer use the cane to submit us to good behaviour."

At first, this new way of teaching took time to get used to. Many children were not comfortable speaking up, Yashasvi said, and were afraid of the repercussions of doing so. Realising this, her school created a recommendation book for students. In this book, students were invited to write their suggestions on making the school a safer, more productive learning environment. Almost immediately, the recommendations began pouring in.

"Our first request was for a physical education teacher. We convinced the principal that physical exercise and activity was something that would be good for us – and within weeks, we had a new teacher."

Today, Yashasvi and her classmates have stopped using the suggestion book. Instead, they speak to their teachers or principals directly. They listen to the students' input, and if appropriate, incorporate feedback into the school system.



> **I am becoming more optimistic about the future. I like coming to school because I know the next five years will be better than the seven years I've already spent here."**

KOTMALE, SRI LANKA

"It's good to see our school progressing, as the classroom has become a better place for learning," Yashasvi says. "The way we are taught certain subjects is changing. In our civic education class, for example, we use games to learn the material. I used to find civic education a boring subject, but it's different now. There is teamwork involved, with all of us working together and helping each other. A few of us may find it difficult working in a group, but even they are beginning to understand that all students should be given an opportunity to contribute their points of view."

Of course, children's lives revolve around more than just the classroom. In Yashasvi's school, students are also given the chance to speak about everything else affecting them.

"In a recent classroom exercise, we were asked to form into groups and discuss the challenges we face as young members of society. Our concerns included environmental issues, substance abuse, the inability to access and use new technologies, and being marginalised in society. Then, we had to list out the capacities we needed to meet these challenges."

"I am becoming more optimistic about the future," Yashasvi says. "I like coming to school because I know the next five years will be better than the seven years I've already spent here."

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child is the most ratified treaty in history. It recognises the fundamental human dignity of all children and the urgency of ensuring their well-being and development.

The Convention explains who children are, their rights, and the responsibilities of governments. All the rights are connected, they are equally important, and they cannot be taken away from children.

The rights enshrined within the Convention must be realised for children to develop to their full potential.

A child is any person under the age of 18.

All children have all these rights, no matter who they are, where they live, what language they speak, what their religion is, what they think, what they look like, if they are a boy or girl, if they have a disability, if they are rich or poor, and no matter who their parents or families are or what their parents or families believe or do. No child should be treated unfairly for any reason.

When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children. All adults should do what is best for children. Governments should make sure children are protected and looked after by their parents, or by other people when this is needed. Governments should make sure that people and places responsible for looking after children are doing a good job.

Governments must do all they can to make sure that every child in their countries can enjoy all the rights in this Convention.

Governments should let families and communities guide their children so that, as they grow up, they learn to use their rights in the best way. The more children grow, the less guidance they will need.

Every child has the right to be alive. Governments must make sure that children survive and develop in the best possible way.

Children must be registered when they are born and given a name which is officially recognized by the government. Children must have a nationality (belong to a country). Whenever possible, children should know their parents and be looked after by them.

Children have the right to their own identity – an official record of who they are which includes their name, nationality and family relations. No one should take this away from them, but if this happens, governments must help children to quickly get their identity back.

Children should not be separated from their parents unless they are not being properly looked after – for example, if a parent hurts or does not take care of a child. Children whose parents don't live together should stay in contact with both parents unless this might harm the child.

If a child lives in a different country than their parents, governments must let the child and parents travel so that they can stay in contact and be together.

Governments must stop children being taken out of the country when this is against the law – for example, being kidnapped by someone or held abroad by a parent when the other parent does not agree.

Children have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them. Adults should listen and take children seriously.

Children have the right to share freely with others what they learn, think and feel, by talking, drawing, writing or in any other way unless it harms other people.

Children can choose their own thoughts, opinions and religion, but this should not stop other people from enjoying their rights. Parents can guide children so that as they grow up, they learn to properly use this right.

Children can join or set up groups or organisations, and they can meet with others, as long as this does not harm other people.

Every child has the right to privacy. The law must protect children's privacy, family, home, communications and reputation (or good name) from any attack.

Children have the right to get information from the Internet, radio, television, newspapers, books and other sources. Adults should make sure the information they are getting is not harmful. Governments should encourage the media to share information from lots of different sources, in languages that all children can understand.

Parents are the main people responsible for bringing up a child. When the child does not have any parents, another adult will have this responsibility and they are called a "guardian." Parents and guardians should always consider what is best for that child. Governments should help them. Where a child has both parents, both of them should be responsible for bringing up the child.

Governments must protect children from violence, abuse and being neglected by anyone who looks after them.

Every child who cannot be looked after by their own family has the right to be looked after properly by people who respect the child's religion, culture, language and other aspects of their life.

When children are adopted, the most important thing is to do what is best for them. If a child cannot be properly looked after in their own country – for example by living with another family – then they might be adopted in another country.

Children who move from their home country to another country as refugees (because it was not safe for them to stay there) should get help and protection and have the same rights as children born in that country.

Every child with a disability should enjoy the best possible life in society. Governments should remove all obstacles for children with disabilities to become independent and to participate actively in the community.

Children have the right to the best health care possible, clean water to drink, healthy food and a clean and safe environment to live in. All adults and children should have information about how to stay safe and healthy.

Every child who has been placed somewhere away from home - for their care, protection or health – should have their situation checked regularly to see if everything is going well and if this is still the best place for the child to be.

Governments should provide money or other support to help children from poor families.

Children have the right to food, clothing and a safe place to live so they can develop in the best possible way. The government should help families and children who cannot afford this.

Every child has the right to an education. Primary education should be free. Secondary and higher education should be available to every child. Children should be encouraged to go to school to the highest level possible. Discipline in schools should respect children's rights and never use violence.

Children's education should help them fully develop their personalities, talents and abilities. It should teach them to understand their own rights, and to respect other people's rights, cultures and differences. It should help them to live peacefully and protect the environment.

Children have the right to use their own language, culture and religion - even if these are not shared by most people in the country where they live.

Every child has the right to rest, relax, play and to take part in cultural and creative activities.

Children have the right to be protected from doing work that is dangerous or bad for their education, health or development. If children work, they have the right to be safe and paid fairly.

Governments must protect children from taking, making, carrying or selling harmful drugs.

The government should protect children from sexual exploitation (being taken advantage of) and sexual abuse, including by people forcing children to have sex for money, or making sexual pictures or films of them.

Governments must make sure that children are not kidnapped or sold, or taken to other countries or places to be exploited (taken advantage of).

Children have the right to be protected from all other kinds of exploitation (being taken advantage of), even if these are not specifically mentioned in this Convention.

Children who are accused of breaking the law should not be killed, tortured, treated cruelly, put in prison forever, or put in prison with adults. Prison should always be the last choice and only for the shortest possible time. Children in prison should have legal help and be able to stay in contact with their family.

Children have the right to be protected during war. No child under 15 can join the army or take part in war.

Children have the right to get help if they have been hurt, neglected, treated badly or affected by war, so they can get back their health and dignity.

Children accused of breaking the law have the right to legal help and fair treatment. There should be lots of solutions to help these children become good members of their communities. Prison should only be the last choice.

If the laws of a country protect children's rights better than this Convention, then those laws should be used.

Governments should actively tell children and adults about this Convention so that everyone knows about children's rights.

These articles explain how governments, the United Nations – including the Committee on the Rights of Child and UNICEF - and other organisations work to make sure all children enjoy all their rights.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for every child