

Issue of Street Children: Role of Government and NGOs & Coverage by Media

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Abstract

Street Children is a global urban phenomenon and the number of these children has ever been increasing. These vulnerable street children are worldwide social reality. Most of these children are those who run away from their homes and struggle for survival on their own. The study describes the existing condition of street children in Delhi and makes an assessment of the factors associated with them. The focus is on improving the living condition of street children and protecting them from exploitation. It also underlines the involvement of voluntary agencies, NGOs and government organizations in tackling the problem of street children and doing the needful for their rescue and rehabilitation. It deals with the laws and Acts of the central and state government related to the rights and welfare of street children. The study recommends necessary steps for effective implementation on the schemes and timely release of adequate grants. It re-emphasises the need of fulfilling basic needs, and providing education and vocational training to street children. The role of media in covering and highlighting the issue of street children has also been discussed in the study. It involves analyses of the role of media in the reorientation of people by exposing them to the real issue and making them appreciate the problem of street children.

Keywords: Street Children, NGOs, Government Organizations, Education, Vocational Training, Role of Media

1. Introduction

Street Children: The Indian Scenario

Street children are a worldwide phenomenon and the number of these children has been increasing. These are the runaway children who struggle for their survival. In India, the situation is grimmer than other countries. So, there is a need of conducting study on their status, and also the role of media in this regard.

Defining Street Children

"Street children" is a term often used to describe both market children (who work in the streets and markets of cities selling or begging, and live with their families) and homeless children (who work, live and sleep in the streets, often lacking any contact with their families). At highest risk is the latter group. Murder, consistent abuse and inhumane treatment are the "norm" for these children, whose ages range from six to 18. They often resort to petty theft and prostitution for survival. They are extremely vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.

UNICEF has defined three types of street children: Street-Living, Street-Working, and Street-Family. Street Living Children: children who ran away from their families and live alone on the streets. Street Working Children: children who spend most of

their time on the streets, fending for themselves, but returning home on a regular basis. Children from Street Families: children who live on the streets with their families.

Studying Problem of Street Children

The research methodology of this paper is based on content analysis and secondary data reference has been made like news reports of the online paper The Hindu and some other news reports. The parameters of the selection of news reports are the role and responsibility of NGOs and government.

Street Children in India

India is home to the world's largest population of street children, estimated at 18 million. Street children are the one who run away from home or the one who stay with their family in the streets because of poor conditions. However, it further creates problems like child labour, prostitution and are subject to malnutrition, hunger, health problems, abuse, theft, sexual and physical exploitation and harassment by authorities.

The maximum percentage of street children are involve in works like rag picking, vending, taking care of animals, assisting in shops, hotels, restaurants and domestic labor as a common means of earning a livelihood in order to feed themselves. The street children at such a tender age, are forced to work and they never get the chance to get formal education of any kind. In India, still the male offspring is always the desired choice for parents and in some cases the girl child is forced to leave the house and they live on their own. These actions lead to prostitution and these girls are often used for trafficking as well.

Another area of concern is the poor health of the street children, as half of them in India are malnourished, and this percentage is even higher in case of street children. Because of the unhygienic conditions, poor health and improper medical facility they are prone to all kinds of life threatening diseases, which results in higher mortality rate.

Street children in India may be homeless because their family is homeless through poverty or migration, or because they have been abandoned, orphaned or have run away. The children sleeping around the railway stations, streets and near garbage areas are at high risk of suffering addiction, abuse and illness.

The government has taken initiatives in this regard to ensure the welfare of such children, and so have many NGOs. However, unless the masses start to see the problem as a serious one, all these would be rendered ineffective.

Estimates claim that Delhi's streets house between 100,000 and 500,000 of these children. Their fragile future hangs even more precariously on the edge. During the Commonwealth Games the Government identified 18 'zero-tolerance zones' for beggars, a majority of who are children.

Working street children are most vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Employers force these children to work for long hours, without food, without providing any safety equipment, and for very low wages as the children are not aware of their rights. Studies have shown that boys and girls on the street are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse by strangers, adult street dwellers and at times by the police too.

Using the statistics of Consortium of Street Children, a sample survey of street children was done to understand their living conditions. Thirty-nine per cent of the street children slept in slums, 46 per cent in open or public places and only four per cent slept in shelters provided by non-governmental organizations, or the government. Nearly 22 per cent of those surveyed said they used drugs, largely tobacco and pan masala.

Only a small percentage of children had access to some form of identity proof. Considering that most street children are from the poorest communities who have largely migrated to urbane centers as a survival strategy, they should be given some identity proof that the government accepts as an entitlement document so that they get admission in schools.

- UNICEF's estimate of 11 million street children in India is considered to be a conservative figure. According to an estimate there are 314,700 street children in metros such as Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Kanpur, Bangalore and Hyderabad and around 100,000 in Delhi alone.
- A survey among 100 street children at the New Delhi Railway Station in India revealed that 86% of boys in the age group 14 - 18 years were sexually active; however a very low number of them knew about safe sex protection and condom usage. Not one of them reported having ever used a condom.

A study in 2007 in India found the following:

- 65.9% of the street children lived with their families on the streets. Out of these children, 51.84% slept on the footpaths, 17.48% slept in night shelters and 30.67% slept in other places including under flyovers and bridges, railway platforms, bus stops, parks, market places.
- The overall incidence of physical abuse among street children, either by family members or by others or both, was 66.8% across the states. Out of this, 54.62% were boys and 45.38% were girls.
- On a study in India, out of the total number of child respondents reported being forced to touch private parts of the body, 17.73% were street children. 22.77% reported having been sexually assaulted.

The difference in their future makes the issue relevant now, it is time for society to understand what the Delhi Government's efforts are for these children, time for our Government to analyze how well they are doing what they are supposed to be doing and whether what they are doing is enough.

Street Children: Causes and Implications

Major causes for Emergence of Street Children

- Broken families / poor and large families / step parent
- Migrant / dislocated families living in slum / streets
- Migrant families suffered due to famines / natural disaster
- Family conflict
- Physically abused
- Out classed by society
- Refugees
- Orphan
- Deterioration of morals
- Out of schools
- Sexually abused

- Forced to work (in farms, factories, stalls, household and hotels etc.)

Implications on The Child

- Loss of childhood
- Sexual/ physical abuse
- Destructive mind
- May be used for unlawful activities like terrorism
- Malnutrition and unhygienic appearance
- Drug/Inhalant addict
- Deterioration of values and morals
- Pick pocketing, thefts
- Loss of personal development/No or less education background
- Health hazards, especially HIV/AIDS
- Police torture and atrocities
- Join labour market with physical, mental and psychological hazards
- Abused by criminals for trafficking of drugs, sex and other unlawful activities

Child Rights: Constitutional and Legal Status in India

Child rights as per Indian Constitution

The Constitution of India has over two hundred statutes that address the child, directly or indirectly. The fundamental right that would make the state responsible for ensuring the care and protection of street children is not intended for children only – It is the Fundamental Right to Life and Personal Liberty, applying to all people, including children. Article 21 of the Constitution, The Right to Life and Personal Liberty, states ‘No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.’

The Supreme Court has held time and again that ‘life’ implies more than just mere existence-

In 1978, the Supreme Court first found in the case of Maneka Gandhi vs. Union of India that the right to life provisions must be interpreted as the right to live with dignity.

In 1981 the Supreme Court, interpreting the Right to Life and Personal Liberty in the Francis C. Mullin vs. Administrator, Union Territory of Delhi case stated- "We think that the right to life includes the right to live with human dignity and all that goes along with it, namely, the bare necessities of life such as adequate nutrition, clothing and shelter over the head and facilities for reading, writing and expressing oneself in diverse forms, freely moving about and mixing and commingling with fellow human beings"

In the Bandhua Mukti Morcha vs. Union of India & others case the Supreme Court again stated- "It is the fundamental right of every one in this country, assured under the interpretation given to Article 21 by this Court in Francis Mullen's Case, to live with human dignity, free from exploitation. This right to live with human dignity enshrined in Article 21 derives its life breath from the Directive Principles of State Policy and particularly clauses (e) and (f) of Article 39 and Articles 41 and 42 and at the least, therefore, it must include protection of the health and strength of workers, men and women, and of the tender age of children against abuse, opportunities and facilities for children to develop

in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity, educational facilities, just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief."

The above judicial interpretations of the Right to Life and Personal Liberty by the Supreme Court imply that children on the street have a fundamental right to ask the State for shelter, food and clothing and also have a right to live without being harassed and exploited.

Article 15 of the Constitution is with regard to ‘Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth’ implying and agreeing with the text in article 14 about equality of people before the law.

But clause (3) of Article 15 states that “Nothing in this article shall prevent the State for making any special provision for women and children”; recognizing children as a category of people requiring special consideration in our laws. It allows for ‘positive discrimination’ of children allowing the government to make special laws for them.

Acts can be passed in Parliament with special reference to children, drawing relevance from Article 15, clause (3). The evolution of these Acts in India is discussed below.

Child rights as per Laws in India

The Children Act 1960 was the first major Act in India dealing with street children, initially passed for Union Territories, defined street children as ‘neglected’ children (including a child found without having any home or settled place of abode or any ostensible means of subsistence or is found destitute, whether he is an orphan or not). Although the Act seemed to concentrate more towards delinquent children it set the precedent for instruction regarding care of neglected children. The Children Act of 1960 was the first perspective the government took for rehabilitating street children- through institutionalization; setting a precedent of sorts, for the perspective has not changed majorly in the last 50 years.

The National Policy on Children was formed in 1974. The Policy, recognizing that India was a signatory to the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child 1959 lays emphasis on child welfare. The following points, would apply or street children-

- To ensure equality of opportunity, special assistance shall be provided to all children belong to the weaker sections of the society, such as children belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and those belonging to the economically weaker sections, both in urban and rural areas.
- Children who are socially handicapped, who have become delinquent or have been forced to take to begging or are otherwise in distress, shall be provided facilities of education, training and rehabilitation and will be helped to become useful citizens.
- Children shall be protected against neglect, cruelty and exploitation

The policy directed the government to give priority to programs relating to ‘maintenance, education and training of orphan and destitute children.’ The document focused on child welfare, giving no insight on work to be done on protection of child rights

as asked for in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child. Also, the policy gave directions for formulation of laws in 'suitable time', thereby implying no timeframe for their formulation.

Even with a policy in place, India still lacked a central act for uniform laws throughout the country for the rehabilitation of street children. A central act could not be created as the subject fell in the State List of the Constitution. It was brought into the Union List and the Juvenile Justice Act, 1986 was passed by Parliament.

In trying to be in accordance with the various agreements signed in the UN about children, particularly the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, India replaced the Juvenile Justice Act, 1986 with the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act in 2000.

The Act, which is applicable to the whole of India except the state of Jammu and Kashmir, includes street children in the category of 'children in need of care and protection.'

The Act lays down methods for rehabilitating street children which constitute sending them to children homes, shelter homes. It states that restoration of the child shall be the primary objective of the homes, implying that child should be restored to his/her parents or adopted parents as the case may be.

The Act also has emphasized the role of Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) in the process of care for street children.

Issue of Child Rights in Delhi

To give full effect to the provisions of the Act, Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Rules, 2007 have been framed by the Centre. Under section 68 of the Act, every State Government has been empowered to frame their own Rules, and until the same are framed by the State Government, the Rules of 2007 would apply.

The Delhi Government has not passed Juvenile Justice Rules to implement the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act specific to Delhi, so it follows the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Rules laid down by the Central Government. The Delhi Juvenile Justice Rules, 2009 are being prepared.

The duty of implementing the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act in Delhi lies with the Department of Women and Child Development of the Delhi Government. It was formed on 14th November, 2007 when the Department of Social Welfare was bifurcated into the Department of Social Welfare and the Department of Women and Child Development. The Delhi Government has divided Delhi into 4 districts to administer these rules. There are 4 Child Welfare Committees and 4 District Level Officers in Delhi.

The Child Welfare Committees are quasi-judiciary bodies that have 'the final authority to dispose of cases for the care, protection, treatment, development and the rehabilitation of the children as well as to provide for their basic needs and protection of human rights.' The Committees comprise five members (at least one woman) who function as a bench of magistrates. The Committee members are not paid; ensuring people passionate about are a part of the committee.

Street Children can be brought before the Committee by any police officer or the special juvenile police, any public servant, registered NGOs, a social worker or the child himself.

An inquiry is ordered to determine the support system/parents of the child. The inquiry, by a social worker or a child welfare officer has to be completed within 4 months of the committee ordering it. If the child is found to have 'no family or ostensible support' the child is kept in a children's home. During the period of inquiry however and for a year after if the child is found to have no family or support he/she may be kept in a temporary institution called a shelter home.

The District Level Officers are responsible for inspection of the children and various homes to ensure they conform to the various standards mentioned in the Juvenile Justice Rules.

Critical analysis of Constitutional Rights and Laws for Children in India

Article 21 (A): The state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the state may, by law, determine.

VS

Article 24: Prohibits the employment of a child below 14 years in any factory or mine or any other hazardous employment.

Arguments:

1. The Government itself restricting a child to pursue education by allowing him/her for employment after the age of 14.
2. In our Constitution, a person below 18 is not allowed to vote, as he/she is not considered to be mature enough to choose a political party but according to previous articles a child at a tender age of 14 is mature enough to choose a profession for him/her.

Suggestions:

1. Free and compulsory education to all till 18 years of age.
2. Make employing individuals below the age of 18 a punishable offence.
3. Complete prohibition on all forms of child labor.

Section 376 IPC: Punishment for rape of a girl under 12 years, gang rape, rape by staff of remand home or children institutions is more severe- rigorous imprisonment for not less than 10 years and fine.

Argument:

1. The punishment for rape, intercourse or sex with a girl who is minor shall be equal irrespective of the age 12, 14 16
2. As the minimum age of marriage for a girl is 18 years, so by law if she is not allowed for marriage before that age, so how can she bear rape, sex or intercourse.

Suggestions:

The punishment for rape of a minor irrespective of the age shall be equal to 10 years of imprisonment and fine.

Rigorous imprisonment shall be imposed.

The Apprentices Act, 1961: Prohibits a person under the age of 14 years. 1966: The Beedi and Cigar Workers prohibit employment under age of 14 years.

vs

COTPA (Cigarette and other Tobacco Product Act) ACT 2003: It is illegal to sell tobacco to anyone under the age of 18 in India.

Argument

1. Allowing a child of 14 years for employment in a Beedi and Cigarette Factory will create an inclination and will be more prone towards tobacco consumption.
2. There is no point of putting the law, smoking or using tobacco under 18 is completely banned as per law the children under 14 can work in these tobacco factories.

Suggestions:

1. For successful implementation of the laws, certain amendments need to be done to justify the other acts.
2. Severe punishments should be imposed on the manufacturers who will not abide the law.

Organisations working for Street Children

NGO's have a potential to innovate, to produce and deliver in large scale, it is the most distinctive contribution that Government and Non-Government organizations play towards the social development and child rights protection. NGO's and Government organizations play a crucial role in development of state provision for social services. Here we will discuss in detail about the various Government and NGO working for the rights, welfare and development of street children in Delhi.

Government Organisations

National Child Labour Project (NCLP): National Policy on Child Labour was formulated in 1987. The Policy seeks to adopt a gradual & sequential approach with a focus on rehabilitation of children working in hazardous occupations and processes in the first instance. The Action Plan outlined in the Policy for tackling this problem is as follows: Legislative Action Plan, Focusing of General Developmental Programmes for Benefiting Child Labour, Project Based Plan of Action.

Ministry of Women and Child Welfare: The Department of Women and Child Development was set up in the year 1985 as a part of the Ministry of Human Resource Development to give the much needed impetus to the holistic development of women and children. With effect from 30.01.2006, the Department has been upgraded to a Ministry.

National Human Rights Commission: The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of India is an autonomous statutory body established on 12 October 1993, under the provisions of The Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 (TPHRA).

National Commission for Protection of Child Rights: The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) was set up in March 2007 under the Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005, an Act of Parliament (December 2005). The Commission's Mandate is to ensure that all Laws, Policies, Programmes, and Administrative Mechanisms are in consonance with the Child Rights perspective as enshrined in the Constitution of India and also the UN Convention on the Rights

of the Child. The Child is defined as a person in the 0 to 18 years age group.

Non Government Organisation

Global March Against Child Labour: Global March Against Child Labour is an international movement dedicated to giving every child a chance to live and grow without the burden of exploitative work. Global March is a movement to mobilise worldwide efforts to protect and promote the rights of all children, especially the right to receive a free, meaningful education and to be free from economic exploitation and from performing any work. The Global March Against Child Labour is a global movement against child labour. It has partners in over 150 countries and is based in New Delhi, lobby governments and the United Nations, provide training or education on child rights, research child rights, undertake legal casework on behalf of children, work directly with children, work in partnership with organisations, work with media and press. child labour and working children, children and education, children and participation, children and the media, children in armed conflict, gender and girls, rights based programming.

Bonded Labour Liberation Front (BMM) Bandhua Mukti Morcha: The main aim is to identify adult bonded labour, child bonded labour/child labour, in the various sectors of the economy, liberate them from slavery and follow up their rehabilitation by the government under the laws of the country, lobby governments and the United Nations, undertake legal casework on behalf of children, work with media and the press, children working and living on the street, individual cases of violations, sexual exploitation of children.

Child Labour Action Network (CLAN): The Child Labour Action Network's aim is to contribute to the creation of a society in which all children have equal opportunities for development and that they grow as responsible citizens with a view of co-existence, sustainable development and social justice leading to peace for all, lobby governments and the United Nations, provide training or education on child rights, research child rights, work in partnership with organisations, work with media and press. child labour and working children, children and education, children and health, children and the media, children in armed conflict, children in conflict with the law, children working and living on the street, reporting to and monitoring the CRC, sexual exploitation of children.

Foundation for Legal Aid, Environment & Social Action (FELSA): FLESA is a non-profit organisation comprised of legal experts, students, and human right activists. The organisation works mainly for the cause of protection of rights of women, children, prisoners, and persons with disabilities. It reaches to the grass-roots movement through its legal aid and advice programmes, lobby governments and the United Nations, provide training or education on child rights, research child rights, undertake legal casework on behalf of children, work directly with children, work in partnership with organisations. child labour and working children, children and education, children and health, children without parental care, children working and living on the street, environment and habitat, sexual exploitation of children.

Grace Action India (GRACE): Grace runs programmes on education, including the street children and working children, disabled children, preparatory school for slum and street children, bible club for slum children, adult education for drop out children from school and labour children, multi religious education, vocational training and social development, provide training or education on child rights, work directly with children, work in partnership with organisations, child labour and working children, children and education, children and health, children living with HIV/AIDS, children with disabilities, children working and living on the street, rights based programming.

HAQ Centre for Child Rights: HAQ seeks to recognise, protect and promote child rights, and believes that there is a need for realisation of human rights of children through policy, law and action, in particular works with the rights to survival, childhood and equal opportunity, lobby governments and the United Nations, provide training or education on child rights, research child rights, undertake legal casework on behalf of children, work in partnership with organisations, work with media and press, child labour and working children, children and education, children and participation, children and the media, children and violence, children in armed conflict, children in conflict with the law, children without parental care, children working and living on the street, environment and habitat, gender and girls, individual cases of violations, minority or indigenous children, reporting to and monitoring the CRC, rights based programming, sexual exploitation of children. network membership - United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Plan International - India: Plan has programmes in 61 countries. It began its work in India in 1979, and it is one of the largest international NGOs working in the country. Plan India now works in 11 states in India through numerous partners. Plan reaches out to vulnerable children in remote areas and facilitates development processes that result in increased security for children, their families and communities, fund other organisations, lobby governments and the United Nations, provide training or education on child rights, research child rights, work directly with children, work in partnership with organisations, work with media and press, child labour and working children, children and education, children and health, children and participation, children and the media, children in conflict with the law, children living with HIV/AIDS, children with disabilities, children without parental care, children working and living on the street, reporting to and monitoring the CRC, sexual exploitation of children.

Salaam Baalak Trust: Salaam Baalak Trust provides support for street and working children in inner cities, providing education, basic literacy and schooling, full care facilities for the young (up to 12 years), drop-in shelters, nutrition, health care, family planning, AIDS awareness, TB prevention, counselling, banking facilities and remedial drama. The main aim is to rehabilitate the street child either by returning them home or finding an alternative means of income off the streets. Primary areas of work: Education, Nutrition, Health Care, Family Planning, AIDS Awareness, TB Prevention, Counselling, Remedial Drama.

CRY: Child Rights & You: Cry's role is that of an enabler, a

catalyst between two groups of people-development organisations and individuals working at grassroots-level with marginalised children, their families and communities. For the past 29 years, CRY has been supporting grassroots-level NGOs that work with children and communities to ensure that all Indian children get the following four basic rights guaranteed to them by the United Nations Charter of Child Rights, 1992.

Right to Survival – to life, health, nutrition, name, nationality
 Right to Protection - from exploitation, abuse, and neglect
 Right to Development - to education, care, leisure and recreation
 Right to Participation - to expression, information, thought, and religion

Working pattern between Government and NGOs

The Delhi Government gives financial assistance to recognised NGOs to run Children Homes. But the recognition of NGO Homes by the government is an issue in itself. Children Homes not recognised by the Juvenile Justice Act are illegal but NGOs claim recognition of Homes by the Government, impose upon them co-ordination with the government which involves lengthy bureaucratic procedures which are detrimental to the running of the Home. The Child Welfare Committee on the other hand claims that NGOs were 'stubborn' and had to learn to work within the ambit of the law. Besides this, there is no visible sharing of statistical information between both parties. Research seems to be conducted independently though recently, the Dil Se Campaign started in 2005 was collaboration between the NGO sector and the government.

It started in June 2005, with the objective of developing a scaleable intervention model that upholds the dignity and inclusive rights of the urban poor, specifically for children who live and work on the streets. Dil Se is not about short-term solutions; it is about building capacity in all sectors of society to help ensure that the most vulnerable urban street children have nutritious food, protection, health care, and proper education. Led by Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) Delhi, Government of Delhi, the Dil Se Campaign is a joint endeavor with the Center for Equity Studies (CES) and Aman Biradari. The state is primarily responsible for our most vulnerable citizens; therefore, Aman Biradari has tried to avoid funding-dependent projects. In partnership with the Delhi Government and the community at large, this Campaign strives to create a community that is sensitive and responsive to the needs of children who live on the streets. Policy level advocacy and coordination with concerned government departments (such as Health, Education, and Welfare) will be a priority. The Dil Se Campaign has the potential of establishing a sustainable model of care and affection – transforming the lives of our city's most vulnerable children and bringing these children into the care of their local community.

Hinderances in The Successful Implementation of The Program and Policies of Government

- Lack of Initiative and commitment on the part of public servants.
- Lack of strong political will to enforce such laws.
- Lack of social consciousness and lack of community acceptability.
- Lack of training of the personnel.
- Lack of coordination amongst the governmental agencies.

- Lack of community response due to ignorance or illiteracy.

Suggestions for Government Organizations

- To make awareness about the significance of the Right of the child with the help of school, media, state officials, political leaders and other institutions etc.
- The media should help create awareness of the education to parents and others.
- The government should provide employments to the parents to withdraw their child from child labor.
- To make general public vigilant about sexual violence against child. (like terrorism).
- To provide special help line numbers to report cases to police, NGOs and any government organizations.
- To legally involve NGOs in procedures related to violence against children.
- To launch information campaign to let people know about the effects on street children.
- Special focus should be on the social economic right of the children.
- Support programs that help the street children, exploitation recover and rebuild their lives.

Suggestions for NGO

- Creating awareness among people on existing laws, policies and government schemes.
- Creating a social environment so that the street children can be heard rather than oppressed.
- Regular NGO briefings and interventions to relevant ministries and government.
- Proper training should be given to NGO officials by the government organizations to take maximum use of different policies and programs.
- There should be critical analysis of the implementation of various policies and programs between Government and NGO

Role of Media in Revealing Life of Street Children

Media plays an important role in raising public awareness of child rights. It also plays a vital role in protection, prevention and awareness of child rights. The role of media does not end here, it also influences behavior and generates public opinion. Here we will discuss about the news reports which have mentioned the role of NGOs and government organisations in Delhi.

NEWS REPORT PUBLISHED IN THE HINDU ON APRIL 29, 2011: The report reveals that the National capital is home to over 50,000 street children – constituting 0.4 per cent of Delhi's population and one per cent of the total number of children here – a latest study has claimed. North Delhi has the highest concentration of street children at 10,091 of a total figure of 50,923 estimated to be living in the city.

The study, the first of its kind, on the census of street children in Delhi covering all nine districts of the State, considered three categories of children for their enumeration. The first street-living children, who have run away from their families and lived alone on streets; the second being street-working children, who spend most of their time on the streets but returned home on a regular basis; and the last category is children on street families who lived on the streets with their families.

The study done between July 12 and August 28, 2010 - has revealed that one out of every five (20.3 per cent) of the street children was involved in rag picking. This was followed by street vending (15.18 per cent), begging (15 per cent), working on road side repair shops (12.19 per cent), dhabas/hotels (6.24 per cent) and those employed in manufacturing units comprise a mere 1.22 per cent.

Conducted by Save the Children, a non-governmental organisation working for children's rights and the Institute for Human Development, the study is important on two counts as it determines the number of street children and details their living conditions, and also lays out clear recommendations on how to deal with the problem of such large number of children on the streets.

Report written by Madhur Tankha, in The Hindu on May 18, 2007: By all accounts the Capital's street children are vulnerable to all forms of exploitation and abuse. And their daily lives are likely to be far removed from the childhood envisaged in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

As a result, these children suffer from sexually transmitted diseases, drug abuse and crime resulting in a deep sense of insecurity and emotional conflict. These findings are based on a recent survey conducted by Plan India in association with the Indian Alliance of Child Rights, Bal Sahyog, NGO forum and YWCA as part of registration of children living in difficult circumstances.

While Delhi's official report on registration of births and deaths suggests that it has 100 per cent registration, the worrisome fact is that it is home to a number of unregistered children of sex workers, unwed or under-age mothers, Scheduled Castes and Schedules Tribes and girl children.

According to the voluminous report, 658 of the 1,065 children surveyed were born in Delhi and 407 in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Assam, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and West Bengal. Each NGO took a few children to the registration authorities and they experienced that registering children of less than one year did not face much of a problem. But proof of permanent address was demanded even though street children of older age, particularly without family, move continuously from one location to another. Police verification was asked for and there were expenses involved for registration fee including penalties. The findings present a bleak picture of the quest for an identity for these children. The moot question is how the birth registration system should operate between street children and the registration authority.

Report by Rashme Sehgal, in infochange News & Features, January 2004: Ten children's organisations, 20 photographers, 12 translators and the staff of Youthreach have worked for three years to put together a volume that records the prose, poetry, pain and desires of street children across India-in their own words Every day, all across India, an estimated 50 children escape the intolerable circumstances of their homes to begin lives on the streets. These kids become prey to all kinds of anti-social elements including drug peddlers and extortionist gangs who use them as messengers. Young girls are particularly vulnerable.

Delhi-based NGO Youthreach, founded in 1997, has been working to galvanise the private sector to reach out to these disadvantaged children. They have used publications, e-mail message, theatre and power point presentations to increase awareness about the lives of streetkids. They have just published a book titled 'If I Were Rain', in which the children speak about their own lives - in the hostile terrain of railway stations and on the streets. They discuss the survival strategies they are forced to adopt, including young girls disguising themselves as boys to escape sexual harassment.

Youthreach points out that 10 million Indian children are surviving on the streets and several million are living in the slums that have cropped up in all our urban centres. This book tries to bring home to India's upper classes the world these children occupy. It aims to show that despite their disadvantages, these kids are intuitive, compassionate, loving and creative people.

In A News report Published by News Portal www.outlookindia.com: This report with heading "Roofless childhood" gives the statistics of the street children in India. It says that there are 51,000 street children in Delhi; 20% are girls. 70% are on the street despite having a home in Delhi. 50.5% are illiterate. 87% earn a living-20% as ragpickers, 15.8% as street vendors, 15% by begging. Over 50% have suffered verbal, physical or sexual abuse. Fewer than 20% have ID cards or birth certificates, and so they miss out on government schemes.

Little boys with painted moustaches perform acrobatics and beg for a reward, kids are seen dodging between vehicles to sell their wares, girls with siblings in their arms seeking alms is a common enough vignettes at the crossroads in Delhi, as in many other cities of India. Just like the sight of innumerable children working in roadside eateries and industrial units. Between feeling upset and wanting to help these children enjoy a normal life, including going to school, many of us wonder about their hard lives. In a first-of-its-kind census, Save the Children, an NGO, in association with the Institute for Human Development, Delhi, has now tried to supplement the quantitative data with qualitative data on some 51,000 children, below 18, living and eking out a livelihood on the streets of Delhi.

The survey, 'Surviving the Streets', conducted in all nine districts of Delhi state in July-August 2010, reveals that an astonishing 70 per cent of street children have to fend for themselves though their parents, siblings or other relatives also live in the city. Only around 10 per cent were found to be totally cut off from their homes and villages. The largest chunk (61 per cent) was in the 7-14 years age group, while 23 per cent were in the 15-18 years bracket.

Most of the children are engaged in ragpicking (20.3 per cent) followed by vending (15.18 per cent), begging (15 per cent), working in roadside stalls or repair shops (12.19 per cent), dhabas (6.24 per cent) and manufacturing units (1.22 per cent). It is difficult to ascertain the number working in industrial units, as these kids are hardly able to get out of the hell-holes they work in. Earning on an average about Rs 2,240 per month, over 57 per cent of the street children visit their homes periodically and hand over about half their earnings to parents, relatives, gang leaders and even the police. Despite staying and moving about in

groups, over 50 per cent spoke of some kind of abuse-verbal, physical and even sexual, sometimes at the hands of policemen.

Delhi Govt's Initiatives, DMRC Builds Home for Street Children by Ambika Pandit, TNN Feb 15, 2010: Eight-year-old Rahul can't forget the day when his school bag, uniform and books were stolen from near the Hanuman Mandir in Connaught Place. For this street kid, it was like his only hope of a better life being snatched away. But the incident now seems just like a bad dream, as he prepares to enrol in a school again after Holi.

What changed it all for Rahul - and 89 other street children - was getting shelter at Arman, a children's home built by Delhi Metro Rail Corporation and being run by the NGO, Salaam Baalak Trust. The state-of-art shelter cum protection home, which turned functional in January, is built on DMRC land next to pillar number 65 on Metro line 1 near Tis Hazari station.

The three-storeyed red-brick 'Bal Greh' has well furnished dormitories for 120 inmates, large classrooms, an activity hall with LCD TV, an amphitheatre and a computer room, among other facilities. DMRC said the shelter is chairman E Sreedharan's way of giving homeless children a better life.

For Salaam Baalak Trust, the home has come as much needed space for qualitative development. While the building and all infrastructure was given by DMRC, the NGO is responsible for running the home for providing care and protection, education, training and extra-curricular activities. The building has been let out by DMRC on a five-year lease to begin with and Metro officials would be visiting it regularly. In fact, with the home located along the metro line, DMRC also plans to take the kids for a ride soon.

Salaam Balak Trust said the procedures relating to running a children's home were in the process of being completed.

When TOI visited the home on Saturday, a large driveway led to a spacious reception where the notice board listed the various activities underway. DMRC Arman is already home to 90 children, teenagers and youth. Rahul was playing with other children in a large dormitory on the ground floor. Bunker beds with colourful mattresses and blankets neatly lined the large room overlooking the greens outside.

The ground floor dormitory is home to children who don't live here permanently but come for short-term stay, or just for the night, through the NGO's contact centres in various areas. Honey, an inmate, feels the drop-in centre cum night shelter is a delight. "Yahaan sab kuch achchha hai. Padhai hai, TV hai, khelne ko hai or sone ke liye bhi achchhi jagah hai," she said.

The corridor along the dormitory leads to an activity hall where teenage boys were seen watching a movie on an LCD TV. A staircase along the hall leads to another dormitory and classrooms on the first and second floor with similar facilities. Many of the inmates are runaway kids, others have been rescued from extreme poverty on the streets and still others who have families but due to poverty they have been put under the care of the NGO.

If the small children are happy with the mix of play and study,

big boys like Satnam, who is doing his graduation from Delhi University and a multi-media course under the NGO, find the peace and tranquillity of the campus very encouraging.

Rajinder Kumar, a runaway child who has been associated with Salaam Baalak for 10 years now and is currently studying in class X, pointed that the facilities at Arman had given them new dreams and the will to work hard to achieve them.

Suggestons for Media

- The media should be involved in the meetings of government organizations and NGOs.
- Media should spread the awareness for the social cause:
- In hoardings
- Pop-out windows in Internet
- Audio-Visual clippings
- Awareness Advertisements
- Should focus and popularize the role of NGO and government campaigns through news so that people should know about it.
- Media to create awareness of the right of the children and about various NGO that would give them facilities, benefits, legal aids and protection against exploitation.
- The media can play a significant role in promoting their livelihood by making capacity building of the street children.

Recommendations

- Government laws should be revised
- NGO should influence Government and try to incorporate their opinions into Governments policies and programs made for children
- Media should be used to spread awareness
- School teachers need to be trained to handle misbehaving students through guidance and counselling
- Education should be imparted to the children by the Government and voluntary agencies to enlighten their minds and their growth opportunities
- Education and enrolment in formal schools should be encouraged
- Education and Vocational skills should be developed for self support
- Counselling should be held at contact points, providing basic needs like medical aid, food, shelter, washing facility and basic education
- Counselling of parents should be undertaken
- 24 hour drop in centre and shelter homes should be set up
- Stringent laws should be enacted to completely and child abuse and trafficking of children

Conclusion

NGOs and government agencies should work in rural area to prevent family breakups and migration of families due to poor economic conditions and strengthening a gender focus to reach out to girls and should work to stop child trafficking and child abuse. NGOs should also work on issue based programmes with the government to reach refugees, victims of riots and sexual abuse to ensure the full implementation of policy, legislation and child friendly services for children.

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