

DELHI NGOS' ALLIANCE FOR  
STREET AND WORKING CHILDREN

*NGO Forum for Street & Working Children, Delhi*

*Our Experience*

RITA PANICKER  
Convenor, Delhi NGO Forum for  
Street & Working Children

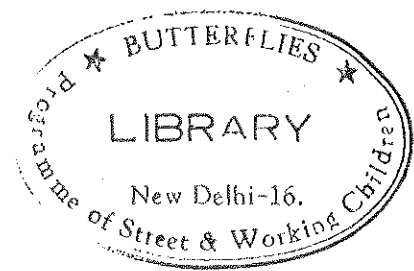
Paper Presented At The  
South-Asian Workshop on  
*STREET CHILDREN :*  
*A CHALLENGE TO SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION*

Tata Institute of Social Sciences  
Bombay, INDIA

April 21-25, 1992



589  
12/8/96



DELHI NGOS' ALLIANCE FOR  
STREET AND WORKING CHILDREN

*NGO Forum for Street & Working Children, Delhi*

*Our Experience*

RITA PANICKER  
Convenor, Delhi NGO Forum for  
Street & Working Children

Paper Presented At The  
South-Asian Workshop on  
*STREET CHILDREN :*  
*A CHALLENGE TO SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION*

Tata Institute of Social Sciences  
Bombay, INDIA

April 21-25, 1992



DELHI NGOS' ALLIANCE FOR STREET AND WORKING CHILDREN

*NGO Forum for Street and Working Children  
Delhi - Our Experience*

RITA PANICKER

How it all Began

In August 1987, the Indian Council for Child Welfare (ICCW) organized a two day Workshop on Street Children, sponsored by UNICEF. Thirty five NGOs from Delhi participated in the workshop. Interestingly enough, at that time, there was not a single NGO working with street children in Delhi. The participants were generally interested in the subject and were quite moved by the experiences shared by Fr.George Kollanshany of BOSCO and Mr. Anselm Rosario of REDS - two NGOs working with street children in Bangalore. Both Fr.George and Mr.Rosario were the resource persons for the workshop. At the end of the workshop, the participants felt quite concerned about the issue and decided that the urgent need was to assemble on a common platform and collectively work out an action plan to initiate programme interventions for street children in Delhi.

The Delhi NGO Forum was thus born as a direct outcome of this Workshop. This was one recommendation that was immediately implemented. Initially, there were 35 members who had participated in the workshop.

The NGO Forum grows in Strength

Within the first year of forming the Forum, there were a number of drop-outs. The membership decreased from 35 to 28 and from 28 to 22. This was understandable as, at the time of forming the Forum,

there were no grass-root organizations working with street children. Therefore, the membership was open to any interested individuals, NGOs or institutions. We had schools of social work - both Delhi School and Jamia Millia faculty as members, an Assistant Professor from the Department of Regional Development of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), NGOs working with the urban poor children, National Training Institutes like NIPCCD, Vishwa Yuvak Kendra, funding agencies such as Indo-German Social Service Society, Catholic Relief Services, Christian Children's Fund and Caritas India. We also had a police officer representing the Delhi Crime Branch. UNICEF, who have been the prime movers of the Forum, continue to have an advisor-consultative status with the Forum.

At the very First meeting, we elected a Convenor and discussed the objectives of the Forum. The broad objectives agreed in the beginning are as follows:

1. To function as an interest group for working with street children, for initiating action in this area, for sharing experiences and providing mutual guidance to each other;
2. To promote co-operation and co-ordination among NGOs, individuals and Government Departments having programmes for working and street children;
3. To initiate a joint and co-operative action plan for programmes for street and working children in Delhi with NGOs actively involved in service delivery activities;
4. To create awareness about issues which need to be addressed relating to working and street children, possible interventions, and the problems related to work in this area amongst Government Departments, NGOs and the public;

5. To publish a quarterly Newsletter for information sharing and networking; and
6. To initiate action on the recommendations of the workshop as a starting point for initiating further action.

Within the first eight months of coming together, the first objective was translated into action when five organizations started working with street children. They were Nukkad, Prabhatara, Asha Project - YWCA-India, Prayas and Butterflies. These organizations, along with Development Justice and Peace (a community development organization working in one of the largest re-settlement colonies of Delhi and also has a project with a community of 600 rag pickers) became the core group of the Forum. The other members extended support to the actions taken by the Group.

In 1988, we organized two major events i.e. on 7th April, World Health Day and 30th April, Child Workers' Rally. On the World Health Day, a NGO gave us space to hold health check-up and was even instrumental in getting a team of doctors to conduct the check-up. UNICEF gave some grant, with which we bought colour pencils, crayons, drawing paper and gifts for all. We were left with some money with which we invited a Theatre Group to stage a children's play. The responsibility of bringing the children to the venue and the organization of this day was done by the core group.

Similarly, for the Child Workers' Rally, at the first meeting, the members discussed the objectives of the rally. Once all the issues were resolved, the core group met and discussed the points that could be highlighted at the rally, the orientation to be given to the children on the importance of the march, the press release, chalking out the route of the march etc. We consciously chose 30th April as it is the eve of May Day (Workers Day) so that child workers could be given the

prime focus. At that time, we did not know that we were creating history. It was the first ever rally of child workers in the country. The rally got extensive coverage - both in the national and the regional print media, as well as television and radio. Children also gave impromptu interviews to journalists. About 300 children participated in the rally under the banner of NGO Forum for Street and Working Children. All the members marched under the same banner and identified themselves with the Forum rather than their own respective organizations.

Ministry of Welfare, Government of India along with UNICEF (India Office) organized a National Workshop on Street Children in August 1988. Fifteen NGOs from different cities were invited to share their knowledge and experience with Central and State Government officials dealing with the subject and to discuss the possible strategies to address this issue. One of the recommendations was to have State-level Task Force comprising all related Government Departments, police and the NGOs to plan State level programmes as well as to implement, monitor and evaluate them. It was also recommended that NGOs should implement these programmes. The major outcome of the workshop was that on the invitation of the Delhi NGO Forum Convenor, the representatives of other city Fora agreed to meet immediately after the workshop (on the last day of the workshop) to discuss the forming of a National NGO Forum. The decision was supported unanimously and the Delhi Forum was requested to be its first Convenor.

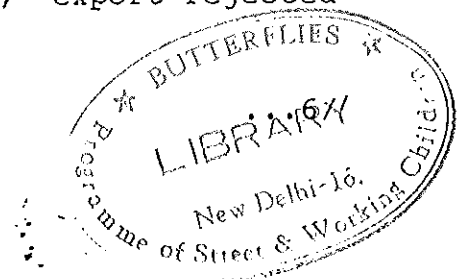
Within six months of forming the National NGO Forum (NNF), we met at Bangalore. One of the member organization - Concern For Child Workers - hosted the meeting. The NNF, not having funds of its own, requested each member to arrange for their travel, boarding and lodging expenses. The response to the meeting was excellent, even though each one of us had to chip in our own money to travel for the meeting. Meanwhile, the NNF Secretariat applied to UNICEF for a



small grant to cover the travel, boarding and lodging of the participants which was approved. The NNF was thus able to reimburse the expenses incurred by each member. It was a great relief, as we all know how most NGOs manage - on a shoe-string budget - and if one has to take money out for something that is not budgeted for, it is quite difficult. Therefore, when the members responded, it only showed the motivation and commitment of the members for the cause. At the Bangalore meeting, the objectives of the NNF were discussed and criteria for membership of the NNF was also decided. A decision was also taken that the Secretariat should be on a rotation basis and would be only for one year.

The first meeting saw us discussing in detail, whether or not the Delhi NGO Forum should be registered as a separate entity or agency. It took us nine months to resolve the issue and also in framing the Memorandum of Association, Rules and Regulations. Nevertheless, when the Memorandum of Association was circulated among the members for their concurrence and approval, the issue of whether we should or not register the Forum was raised once again. Finally, it was decided to keep it in abeyance for some time while we go through the experience of working together. Moreover, as one member put it, "by being a Forum there is freedom and flexibility to work and we would keep the philosophy of an interest and pressure group alive."

The year 1989 was also quite an eventful one. Once again, Delhi Forum organized a first ever Children's Fair in February. It was called *Apna Mela* (Our Fair). The core group met and discussed the details of the Mela. It was interesting to note that each time we met there were very good suggestions from the children such as having an elephant and camel for joy rides as well as a stage for disco dancing. Each member-organization were given stalls (the numbers depending on how many the NGO wanted). The venue was in the heart of the city. There were stalls managed by children selling tea, coffee, snacks, export-rejected



clothes, games and amusement corners, two magicians and a stage to do break-dance. I will quote from a news-item in Indian Express dated 19th February 1989 -

"The fair-ground swarmed with them (children), buying or selling food stuffs, playing games, manning stalls, watching a magic show, applauding acrobats, enjoying animal rides and above all, break-dancing. It was a sight to watch hundreds of children thoroughly enjoying a day off from work. Kids normally encountered on pavements or in dhabas and tea stalls, selling papers at level crossings or lifting loads in bus stations, or romanticized in films and plays."

The Forum organized the second Child Workers Rally on 30th April 1989. This time there were 600 children as compared to 300 the previous year. The *quarterly Newsletter* was published regularly and the response to it was very encouraging. We tried keeping it broad based and not a "local" newsletter. Every issue carried profiles of two NGOs from different cities. The inaugural issue featured Bangalore, the next Calcutta and later Bombay. In the years 1990 and 1991, the newsletter was not published as we were requested by NNF to convert the newsletter into a national newsletter and have an editorial board with representatives from all the city fora. This did not prove feasible as much time was spent in communicating with the NNF Secretariat and the city fora regarding editorial board members for the newsletter. Therefore, in 1992, the Forum members decided that we resume publishing our newsletter. The first issue came out in February. It remains a quarterly, but now we also bring a Hindi translation of the newsletter.

In 1990, apart from holding a *Child Workers' Rally*, we also held a *Children's Rights* rally on 10th December 1990. 600 child workers marched down the streets of Delhi holding torch lights, placards, banners and raised slogans demanding their rights which are

truly theirs. This was significant as the Government of India hosted World Conference on Human Rights in the same year and 10th December was the inaugural day. After having assembled at the Boat Club, the children sang songs about their situation, put up a skit and a couple of them spoke about the exploitation in their daily lives. A group of forty children then assembled at the Siri Fort Auditorium, the venue for the inaugural function of the Human Rights Conference, to protest against the Government's portrayal of it having a good track record on Human Rights.

A *sports meet* was organized in October 1991 at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, Delhi. Officials of the Sports Authority of India were invited to watch the heats and identify children with potentials who could be given further training in various fields.

As December 10th was approaching, we again planned for a rally. But this time the children were adamant that they were not interested in just marching, but wanted to meet the Prime Minister and explain to him their problems. Although we were unable to get an appointment with the Prime Minister, we managed to meet the President of India. 800 street and working children and 100 high school children from the Delhi Public School, in solidarity with the street and working children, marched to Rashtrapati Bhavan. They carried placards, banners and raised slogans. Children had also learnt the popular Hindi song : *Insaaf ke dagar pe bache dikhao chalke; yeh desh hai tumhara, neta tumhi ho kal ke.* (Children, walk on the path of justice, this country is yours and you are yourself the leaders of tomorrow). One of the child worker read out the memorandum aloud and asked the group if they agreed with the demands and, if so, to repeat after him three times "we agree". 900 children, on the top of their voices, approved the memorandum. In response, the President assured the children that he would pass on the memorandum to the Prime Minister for necessary further action.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

Right from the beginning, the Delhi NGO Forum did not have any regularly employed staff to do the co-ordination and administrative work. The members voluntarily put in time and efforts to accomplish the tasks. Funds were sought for specific activities from various funding agencies. In some instances, such as the first Non-Formal Education Workshop, each participant contributed Rs.200/- towards food and material expenses. It was a five day Workshop and it cost us just Rs.1600/-Members also share space and materials to conduct an activity. Initially, for three years, the member-convenor took on the whole burden of administration i.e. in terms of using their office space for conducting meetings, secretarial services, as well as other expenditure, such as postage, stationery etc. From the fourth year onwards, it was decided that each member should contribute Rs.50/- at every meeting towards administrative expenses, which works out to Rs.600/- annually, per member (we meet once in a month).

Four years after coming together to form the Forum, the membership has stabilized to the core group. The Forum has six grass-root organizations as its members. Being small in number, has resulted in us meeting once a month.

Non-formal education (NFE) is an area we felt where we needed expert guidance to critically review our NFE projects. Therefore, we planned a series of workshops on this subject.

Non-Formal Education (NFE)

Majority of the children we work with have never been to school. The existing formal (school) education

is beyond the reach of a majority of the children, as these are children who are working and have to work for their survival.

Working children is a phenomenon which is as old as human society. Work was seen as essential to socialization that gave dignity, meaning and understanding to children's lives. Today it is not so. Children are pushed and divided into two currents: those who are channelled into the formal system of education and those who are kept out. Both groups lost the value given through work - the first group by being isolated from environment and work, and the second group i.e. the majority by being forced to labour under dehumanizing conditions, thus having no access to even basic form of education.

Under current trends and conditions, it is both impossible and undesirable to universalize formal education as it exists in the present form. Thus, the challenge we face is to think, produce and propose alternative ways of dealing with knowledge, work and change. In fact, the Ministry of Education, Government of India, has recently reviewed its National Education Policy and the emphasis seems to be shifting towards non-formalizing formal education rather than developing a parallel non-formal system i.e. for the poor and working children which is often seen as second best or sub-standard.

#### Some Characteristics of Alternative Education

- \* Working children possess a lot of knowledge and experience that should form the basis for education geared to their needs and interests.
- \* Alternative education starts by knowing and analyzing people's realities and needs with the purpose of addressing these.

- \* Since change is the goal of alternative education, then a flexible curriculum is a must. It is crucial that teachers and learners collectively participate in constructing knowledge and finding solutions. The emphasis in alternative education is thus on the process rather than the content.
- \* The modalities of non-formal education emphasizes play methods, games and activities. It also believes in excursions, thus capitalizing on childrens' curiosity to learn about things around and environment.
- \* Networking and communication among various groups working (locally and nationally) in the field of alternative education is an essential element in the process of change.
- \* For street and working children, who are out of the formal education system and form a majority in most developing countries, alternative ways of education is going to be the "norm" in the near future.

Moreover, if we have to work collectively to facilitate a movement of street and working children, then we have to first begin with the process of democratization and participation within our own organization. There must be participation of not only the team members in the organization, but also of the children in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the activities/projects.

Education plays a very important role in conscientizing people. Therefore, by reviewing and critiquing our non-formal education activity, we get a better understanding of the problem as well as our organization's ideology. The Delhi NGO Forum has taken this first step.

Last year we had two workshops for street educators. The first one was introductory. We had a Dutch Educationist as resource person, who is also a Consultant to Mother's (Aurobindo) International school in Pondicherry. The second workshop was conducted by Ms. Gloria D'Souza of Parishar Asha, Bombay. Ms. D'Souza would remain as our resource person for the NFE workshop series.

These two workshops have already started the process of reflection. In the workshops to come, we are confident that the climate will be conducive to discuss our organizational goals, objectives, approaches and strategies. Through the opening up of our own doors to children to participate, we hope this will result in a workshop for children, by children and of children. We would have to discuss this idea with children, and based on their reactions, we will facilitate a workshop. We are consciously not imposing this workshop on children until the children themselves arrive at an understanding of this process. One of the strengths of the Delhi Forum is that we are quite eager to learn from others and share our ideas with everyone. This is so because all of us are quite young in this field and we need support from each other.

One of the direct outcomes of our participatory relationship (among NGOs) is the rapidly growing unity and solidarity in addressing issues that universally oppress street children. Our NGOs' joint agitation against the police, joint rallies and similar activities have contributed to our oneness and meaningful working together. This has given us strength too and confidence, and demonstrated clearly that what one NGO singly cannot achieve, several NGOs jointly have succeeded on crucial issues. An example is the joint protest march against Delhi Police's atrocities on street-working children, which was organized on 2nd April 1992 when a memorandum was presented to the Lt. Governor of Delhi.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN NGOS AND SCHOOLS OF SOCIAL WORK

The subject of street children is new in the teaching curriculum of schools of social work. Street Children is a group, for various reasons, different from the traditional beneficiary groups addressed by professional social work interventions. In our experience, we have found that a few social work institutions have been more sensitive than others in responding to street children. Some schools of social work have already initiated field projects for street children and are trying to respond to their needs. These projects, quite often, are considered more as a simulated situation for new field work placements. Hence, these projects, quite frequently, are closely guided by social work faculty who incidentally have their first exposure to street children while guiding social work students to understand the problems of street children and developing interventions for them. In such situations, quite often, the irony is that the faculty learns only while teaching.

In our view, the induction of schools of social work could have followed a slightly different pattern. Perhaps an illustration from our experience would demonstrate the point. One school of social work made a quick survey of NGOs who were working with street children, held lengthy discussions with the persons in-charge of these NGOs and requested them to write a paper giving their views on the programmes for street children. Then the school of social work invited grass-root NGOs working with street children to attend a training programme to impart skills for working with street children. Interestingly, none of the NGOs were involved in the planning of the training workshop. Perhaps a desirable modality would have been to invite them to participate in the formulation of the training content and to use the grass-root NGOs as resource persons. This could have been the beginning of a long term partnership between schools of social work and NGOs.



A question arises as to what can be a mutually satisfying and a mutually learning relationship between schools of social work and NGOs. An example comes to my mind of Brazil. The severe situation of street children, particularly their abuse, became a serious concern not only to grass-root NGOs, but also to the faculty of local Universities. Benedicto, a faculty member, was motivated for learning more about street children and also contributing in some way to their cause. Initially, he established contacts with NGOs working with street children. Then he took a sabbatical and devoted his entire time to working with grass-root NGOs. Because of his growing sensitivity, interest and commitment in learning, he was accepted warmly by the NGOs. Soon he became part of the network and participated in the activities of NGOs. Interestingly, he never presented himself as a co-ordinator, consultant, advisor or any of those traditional leadership positions. In fact, he remained in the background and extended support to NGOs particularly the street educators and street children themselves. One of his important contributions was in helping the NGOs reflect on the issues of street children and link them to larger social issues such as peasants, women and workers movement. This helped the NGOs to do an analytical reflection of their work. He then returned to resume his position as a teaching faculty. There could not have been a more effective way for the University to introduce itself to the new subject of street children and be equipped with perceptions and sensitivities required to teach the subject to students. Incidentally, he continues to be involved in the street children movement in Brazil.

The NGOs who are involved in work for street children face a serious problem, quite frequently, in finding persons to work at the grass-root level who have the right perceptions of the problems of street children, have related knowledge, are equipped with skills and possess a committed interest to understand street children, their peculiar conditions and their psychic get up.

Our experience of working with street children has challenged the traditional methods learnt in schools of social work. This does not mean that everything that has been learnt is entirely in-applicable. It has brought out very clearly the need for different approaches and strategies. The problem of finding the right staff becomes a little more difficult because of the ideas the present day social workers come with regarding "jobs". Field work/grass-root level work does not attract them. Lack of proper office space, disorganized work schedule, the "indiscipline" of the client community etc. do not become attractive incentives. Even those social workers who have had opportunities of field work during training in street children projects, even when they join street children NGOs, survive in the job, generally, for a very short period. This kind of situation, I am aware, can disrupt any NGO. It becomes very sensitively disruptable when it happens to NGOs whose main asset is rapport with street children. One social worker who had resigned from a NGO was confronted by a group of street children who asked "why have you played this act on us of being interested in our lives? You could have told us at the very beginning that you are here for a short time till you get a more satisfying job. We would have still accepted you."

Masters of Social Work (MSWs), who join NGOs working with street children, query just after six months' service "whether I will always be a street educator, and what is the upward mobility possible?" Generally, this is a fair query. Stagnation can never be an attractive prospect. However, work with street children, in its most critical form, is on the streets, and directly with the street children themselves. It is almost a vocation one needs to have. To begin with, one should work at that level, and thereby grow more and more effective to address the issues sensitively and expand ones concern from initial issues to larger ones that cause exploitation and abuse to large numbers of street children. Mr. Mario Volpi, a street educator in

Brazil, a good friend and teacher of mine, who after working for six years as a street educator, became the co-ordinator of the national movement of street children, said to me "this is not where I want to be. I am waiting for the election so that I could go back to being a street educator and be with the children." Perhaps, MSWs, might not be the right level of professionals that should be sought for working with street children. Unless, of course, if their orientation is radically changed and street children issues are presented to them as one of the newer challenges of urban society and social development of the country.

Some of the traditional tools of working with social work target groups namely case-work, group work, community organization etc. might have to be reviewed and considerably re-tooled if these have to be effective with street children. The biggest strength and the encouragement of working with street children is their ready willingness to the traditional concept of community participation and sharing of responsibilities. The street children like to be respected as equals and are always prepared to take on responsibilities in decisions and activities, and thereby be involved in a meaningful participatory process for their growth and development.

#### Issues for Consideration

- \* Schools of social work must have clear priorities while addressing solutions to socio-political issues. Must we emphasize only institutional and family service care or tackle current issues like street children, child labour etc. in innovative ways?
- \* Placement of students for field work, therefore, must be reviewed so that they could be placed in un-structured, non-traditional and community oriented organizations/social work fields.

- \* What is the process and preparation through which the faculty assumes a specialist's role?
- \* Schools of social work could tie up with an innovative-effective NGOs for faculty learning. Faculty, specializing in street and working children, should take sabbatical and work as a street educator in an NGO. Perhaps it should be made mandatory that teaching faculty must, on rotation basis, take sabbatical and get relevant field experience.
- \* Recent trends have been to hire faculty who are very young, with no experience or barely two years of experience. It is unfortunate that these teachers are then given the responsibility to teach subjects of which they have very little field experience. It then brings to one's mind the thought - are we guilty of making more academicians of social work graduates rather than motivating them to being field workers and supporting field organization?
- \* Students of social work must be taught the ground realities of working at the grass-root level. Trained social workers should be equipped to face the challenges of working in an organization that has barely started. Their skills will be required to work with its team members in making it an effective organization. The acid test of a social worker's commitment is when she/he chooses to work in such insecure, unstructured organizations, particularly in their initial years of professional work.
- \* What is the contribution of schools of social work to national issues? In the socio-economic and politically important Bills that get debated and passed in the Parliament such as Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986, Juvenile Justice Act 1986, National Policy on Child Labour and Children etc., what has been the contribution of schools of social work?

\* It is a matter of concern that subsequent to the enactment of above legislations, various specialists (particularly concerning Child Labour legislation) - economists, industrialists, psychologists, sociologists and activists have critically analyzed the above legislations and arrived at a point of view. I am not aware of any social work institution or faculty who have presented their view point in any important forum. All that one knows is that social work institutions have only organized workshops, seminars and meetings to discuss these issues - touching the issue somewhat, but not in depth and much less in terms of effecting policies and programmes.

\* A review of the current situation globally and nationally, indicates that because of the policies pursued for development, growth and modernization, more and more newer vulnerable groups result. The deprivations of these groups is quite often a denial to them of social justice. Even in these situations, the social work professionals, because of their training, limit themselves only to service and welfare initiatives. Their commitment to understanding the social dynamics, an intervening to bring about structural changes is beyond their terms of reference. One could look at the recent situation when a new economic policy is being pursued in our country, supposedly for the benefit of the country. The impact of these policies on the poor, development and welfare programmes has been widely debated. These policies, needless to say, have a direct impact on target groups that concern schools of social work. I have yet to see a stand taken by either social work institutions or by faculty of social work or professional social workers. Should we not then reflect on the content of social training, in terms of, whether it equips

social workers with knowledge, attitude and skills necessary for social action and strategies to ensure a better deal of social justice to our target groups.

Interestingly, the activists for the cause and the leadership of such groups is never a professional social worker. Even when socio-political movements are initiated and led by a qualified social worker, it is not necessarily because of the social work training, but because of personal charisma and commitment of the individual. Such people are quite honest in admitting that the inspirations they got and the skills they acquired were because of other factors and not because of their training. Is our training limited in its relevance to the Indian context (or any developing country) because our curriculum still continues to depend on western models? We therefore need to look at successful indigenous models, study these and use them to strengthen our curriculum in order to equip social work students with knowledge and skills that are relevant to pursue the approaches of these models.

In a democracy, one cannot wish away the role of Parliament and people's elected representatives. All kinds of groups, when it affects their self interest, have rallied around for questions to be raised and debates to be initiated in the Parliament. Has the professional social worker's lobby even used people's elected representatives and the Parliament to discuss issues seriously which concern our target groups?

\* Curriculum development should be done in consultation with NGOs. Social problems such as drug abuse, prostitution, AIDS, child labour, street children should not be seen in isolation of the larger socio-economic and political context.

- \* More relevant course must be designed at the Bachelor of Social Work and para-professional level. On regular basis and as part of schools of social work's teaching commitment, courses must be designed for orientation, refresher and beginners courses for non-professional social workers heading voluntary organizations and also for its non-trained staff.

#### FORUM FOR FUTURE CHALLENGES AND FOR COLLECTIVE ACTIONS

The first step towards collective action for the cause of street children is for grass root NGOs working in the field, to come together to form a pressure group. The forum must have clear and specific objectives which must also spell out membership criteria. If the group is homogeneous, the activities would also be focussed.

We have an unanimously decided that only a functioning grass-root NGO will be the convener of the Forum and the term being for one year in rotation. This is explicitly with the rationale that directions for actions in the field should be the responsibility of the NGO and not any other person or institution which does not have a direct concern for street children.

At the Delhi Forum, the members discussed at length the advantages and disadvantages in having a paid staff to do the day-to-day administration as well as co-ordinating the activities. After much deliberations, we agreed that the co-ordinator will be appointed by the Forum - a MSW. He/she will be only an executive secretary assigned the task of implementing decisions of the NGO Forum. He/she, on no occasion, would represent either the NGO Forum or any of the other participating NGOs. At any meeting/seminar/workshop on the subject of street children for which the NGO Forum or NGOs are invited, it is one of the member NGOs who will participate and not the co-ordinator.

The Forum to be effective must also include street educators in its deliberations, as they are the key persons in street work. At some point, Forum must have increased number of street educators as its members. If the ultimate aim of the forum is also to have children participate in the forum, then we would have to make a beginning in the city fora.

I would like to refer to a point made earlier in the paper about the beginning of the process of democratization and participation within one's own organization and then working towards children organizing their own forum - first at the city level, later nationally and perhaps some time in the future, regionally. It is important that street-working children have their own forum because the danger would be that if they join the NGO forum, they might remain only as token members. Children need space for self expression and to analyze their situations and work out collective actions for their empowerment. This would, of course, require patience, time and strong commitment to the ultimate cause. We cannot skip the process. It might take eight to ten years, but then we are sure that it is not token participation but active participation of the children. It is not an impossibility as experiments elsewhere in the world such as Brazil and Peru in Latin America have shown us the way.

Presently, there is also a similar initiation of the process in the African continent. It has begun with NGOs networking in East and West Africa. It is a slow process, but a beginning has been made and they are moving ahead with organizing workshops, training programmes and dialoguing with one another on programme approaches, strategies, national children's laws etc. We must start this process within our own countries and at some point in the near future network within South Asian Region. We adults have responsibility towards these children who are on the margins of our society, but nevertheless contribute through their hard labour to the national income of our country.

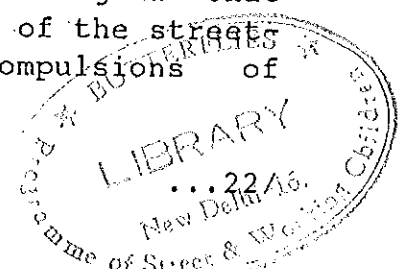


TOWARDS JUSTICE FOR STREET AND WORKING CHILDREN

While needs of street-working children are required to be addressed through effective and innovative approaches based on meaningful partnership between service delivery NGOs and schools of social work, a larger challenge calls for a more committed struggle with street children for justice. Service interventions, I see them as initiatives in the realm of entry points to the issues. The level that needs to be addressed are the national policy makers including the Planning Commission. There has never been in the history of any democratic developing country that recognition and justice has been handed over in a platter to the vulnerable groups, who struggle for their share of justice. The implications are clear. The partnership between NGOs and schools of social work has to be forged so that it emerges as an alliance with the street children. This joint struggle has to be directed towards national planning and policy interventions, for only then formulations of national policy and programmes will ensure the facilitation of priorities that address "at risk families" aimed at preventing family disintegration and consequent phenomenon of street children.

Urban planners of twentieth century can no more afford to concentrate their efforts only on physical planning and facilities but have to respond to newer dimensions of urbanization and should be committed to people component of urban areas, especially those who cannot participate in social development, particularly the children and especially the street-working children who continue to be marginalized.

NGOs and social work institutions are required then to partner with street children in a struggle that not only aims for services, but which has a goal that ensures an environment wherein the Rights of the street working children are given not as compulsions of



philanthropic service but as something that the street-working children always deserved, as Rights that are truly theirs.

It should not be said by future generations that children were not given their Rights because they were not organized, not strong enough to demand it from a society which failed them in their primary duty towards the most vulnerable, voiceless and weakest members of the society.

---

New Delhi: 19th April 1992.