

A Study on NGO Services for Children in Mumbai, India

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Abstract: *The present research was conducted to study NGOs services for children in Mumbai through a child rights perspective. The study was exploratory in nature and aimed to assess the implementation of child rights by the NGOs. 35 NGOs working for children in the city of Mumbai comprised the sample and were studied using a questionnaire and rating scale as tools. Findings revealed that education (74 percent) and health (54 percent) were the most common concerns of the organizations. Only 17 percent of the NGOs considered child rights to be a concern. The NGOs implemented the right to participation better than any other right. The right to survival was, however, grossly neglected. It was concluded that there are several gaps and areas of lack in the services offered to children. There is also an urgent need to spread awareness amongst the NGO workers themselves to make child rights a part of organizational mandates.*

Key words : *NGO service, children, implementation of child rights*

A few decades after Mahatma Gandhi said these words, the Indian government created a National Policy for Children (1974). The Policy made it the responsibility of the state to provide children with adequate services to ensure their full physical, mental and social development. It declared, “The nation’s children are a supremely important asset. Their nurture and solicitude are our responsibility”. Yet, these noble intentions have remained just that. The Indian child still remains one of the most

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disadvantaged sections of our society and the various policies and programmes have proved inadequate.

It is often a case of misplaced priorities. As the Alternate Report – India (1998) was being published by the Working Group on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the government was engaged in exploding nuclear devices. While they worked at generating a shallow sense of national pride, the Indian child was sidelined. As stated in the Alternate Report, “Attention is deflected away from the more pressing need for the amelioration of the plight of the vast majority of India’s children who continue to suffer illiteracy, hunger, disease, bondage and abuse, and dignified childhood remains a distant dream. So the goals are likely to remain mere goals, the policies little more than promises, the programmes starved of funds. The true priorities of the government can be summed up in one sentence: Blackcat commandos over blackboards, cheap child labour over childhood, nuclear bombs over nutrition and incarceration and coercion over care.”

There has been a gradual realization that social development is, perhaps, too complex a sphere to be handled by the government alone. The government requires the support of voluntary agencies or Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

According to the World Bank (1990), “the diversity of NGOs strains any simple definition. They include many groups and institutions that are entirely or largely independent of the government and that have primarily humanitarian or cooperative rather than commercial objectives.”

Several researchers believe that desired results are better achieved with NGOs. This is due to a combination of factors including greater flexibility, readiness for change and improvisation, close relations with client groups, networking, sensitivity and commitment (Srivenkataramana & Raj, 1997, Sundaram, 2000). These traits have made the NGOs a force to reckon with. There have, in fact, been several occasions in the past where the NGO sector has influenced government policies and programmes. The NGOs have forced the governments to pay attention to the neglected sections of society. They have been instrumental in preventing the state from becoming a tyrannical power. In a way, NGOs influence the path, course and direction of development.

One instance where the NGOs of the world have influenced the path of development is in the creation of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 (CRC). This landmark Convention promises numerous rights to the children of the world including economic rights, social rights, cultural rights, civil rights and political rights. All these rights may be understood in terms of the four basic rights - the right to survival, the right to development, the right to protection and the right to participation. *The right to survival* includes the right to life, the highest attainable standards of health, nutrition and adequate standards of living. It also includes the right to a name and a nationality. *The right to development* includes the right to education, support for early childhood development and care, social security and the right to leisure, recreation and cultural activities. *The right to protection* includes freedom from all forms of exploitation, abuse, inhuman or degrading treatment and neglect, including the right to special protection in situations of emergency and armed conflicts. *The right to participation* includes respect for the views of the child, freedom of expression, access to appropriate information and freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

According to Price-Cohen (1990), when one looks at the completed draft of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the imprint of the NGO group can be found in almost every article. It is evident that the NGOs have played an active role in the drafting of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Their involvement in the entire process of its creation has been significant to say the least. It would be only natural to expect these organizations to be active in the implementation of the Convention as well. Yet there is very little research and data to elaborate on the implementation of child rights by the NGOs.

The NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child (2001) has suggested some possible roles for local NGOs to participate in securing children's rights. They believe that NGOs must engage in the following activities: Mobilizing support for change, Lobby governments directly, Promote implementation among institutions providing services to children, Promote opportunities for children and young people to contribute to advocacy for change, Promote training on the Convention, Child rights awareness raising activities, Dissemination of the Convention, Promote information about and in line with the Convention, Develop a resource

data base

There have been organizations in India that have taken their role in child rights activism quite seriously. Bajpai (2003) found that NGOs in India have developed several strategies based on the child rights perspective to intervene on behalf of the children. Some of the interventions conducted by them have been in the areas of Research & documentation, Advocacy of all levels to bring about structural and policy changes, Preparing alternative reports on the status of child rights, Promoting networking and coordination among NGOs to jointly advocate on issues which affect the rights of the child, Awareness building, Mobilization of public opinion, Intervening in special cases of violation, Providing a platform for expression of children's concerns, Direct action like raids and liberation of children in servitude, Building pressure groups, capacity building (building in necessary skills, structures, attitudes and knowledge) required to work better, Lobbying with government to review existing schemes towards being more child oriented, Running field action projects to reach out for children and Direct work with children and their communities.

There remains, however, a need to better understand the implementation of child rights by the NGOs, to ascertain which rights of the child are adequately addressed by them and which rights need greater attention.

METHOD

1. Participants

Senior members of 35 NGOs (working for children in Mumbai) were the participants for the study. To begin with a comprehensive list of 224 NGOs was prepared using the online NGO portal - "www.karmayog.org". A sample of 50 NGOs was selected through the Simple Random Sampling method. Of the 50 NGOs selected, 15 did not wish to participate in the study. They cited reasons such as lack of time or lack of interest in the study. These organizations were thus eliminated and the final sample comprised of 35 NGOs. The sample ranged from relatively new organizations to older, more established ones. It also included organizations with residential as well as non-residential facilities.

The study was exploratory in nature. It aimed to ascertain the relationship between the long term and short term objectives of NGOs and the rights of the child. It also aimed to identify the rights of the child adequately and inadequately addressed by the NGOs. Reading material to aid the organizations' understanding of the CRC was also to be created.

The selected NGOs were approached and invited to be a part of the study. Meetings were arranged with senior members of the organizations and they were asked to complete a questionnaire & rating scale for the study. It was believed that knowledge of the rights-based approach to this research would influence the participant's responses. This awareness could have led to manipulated or modified answers, aimed at presenting the organization in a better light. Hence any queries or questions that emerged were addressed honestly, *without* mention of this facet of the research. At the same time, utmost care was taken to ensure that the participants were not misled or lied to at any stage.

The participants were asked to complete a questionnaire and rating scale. The Questionnaire was designed to gather background information on the NGOs. It comprised of open-ended questions to study the major concerns, short-term and long-term objectives of the organizations. It also inquired about any additional facilities the organization would like to offer to the children in the future. The Rating Scale consisted of thirty statements designed to cover all the rights of the child (as stated in the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child). The statements were framed simply and clearly, and the participants were asked to evaluate their organizations for the implementation of that statement. A 5-point rating scale was used with options ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree' with a neutral response of 'Can't Say'. Scores were assigned to each response ranging from -2 to +2. Brochures, pamphlets and website details of the organizations were also collected to gather background information and enhance the researcher's understanding of the organization.

2. Data Analysis

The data was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The information gathered from the questionnaire, brochures/pamphlets and websites was tabulated across various variables such as age of the organization, target groups, age of the beneficiaries, etc. The responses of

the rating scale were scored and coded for each of the thirty statements. The total score of the NGOs for each statement was determined. The NGOs as a group were thus evaluated for their implementation of each of the rights. The statements were then divided into four groups on the basis of the basic rights. Scores for each group were totaled and mean scores were calculated.

The coded data was presented in the form of tables and graphs and analyzed subsequently. The understanding gained from the study was used to create reading material on child rights for child care workers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Background Information of the NGOs

All the organizations studied were child focused NGOs and were situated in various locations across the city of Mumbai. They included organizations with small as well as large numbers of personnel. The number of personnel ranged from 1 to 175. The smaller organizations were run with mostly voluntary support. 24 were local NGOs while 9 had national networks and 2 had international networks. 40 percent of the NGOs were between 16 and 30 years of age. 31 percent were 1 - 15 years old and 29 percent were established at least 31 years ago. A greater percentage (57 percent) of the organizations offered non-residential services while the smaller number included residential facilities as well. Majority of the NGOs (68 percent) catered solely to children while 17 percent included services for the community as well. Relatively fewer NGOs offered facilities to the elderly, women and youth. Most of the organizations catered to the school going population (4 – 15 years) while less than half of them (43 percent) offered services to children below 3 years of age.

2. Concerns and Objectives Stated by the NGOs

The objectives that an NGO claims to have are of great importance. The objectives determine the organization's approach, programs and policies. They act as motivators for the staff and help others understand the work of the organization. In spite of this obvious importance, it was observed that several of the NGO representatives were not very clear about the objectives of their organizations. Several of them needed to refer to a brochure or report listing the objectives while completing the questionnaire.

This was seen even though the participants were senior members of the organizations and would be expected to know the objectives clearly. This gave the impression that the staff in the NGOs may work hard but without a clear-cut goal or aim in mind.

The organizations were free to list their major concerns and objectives as they liked, as the questions were open ended. There was a lot of similarity in the objectives listed by the various NGOs. There were some basic themes and the objectives were common. These objectives are listed in Table 1 along with the percentage of NGOs that listed them.

Table 1. Concerns and objectives of the NGOs

N = 35

| OBJECTIVE LISTED | PERCENTAGE OF NGOS | OBJECTIVE LISTED | PERCENTAGE OF NGOS |
|------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Education | 74 | Protection and Rehabilitation | 11 |
| Health | 54 | Judiciary | 9 |
| Shelter | 34 | Addiction/HIV | 9 |
| Holistic Development | 34 | Adoption | 9 |
| Vocational Training | 31 | Recreation | 6 |
| Advocacy and Awareness | 20 | Counseling | 6 |
| Child Rights | 17 | Child Labor | 6 |
| Special Children | 11 | Creating Children's Books, etc. | 3 |

The objectives in themselves give a picture as to which rights of the child the NGOs largely focus upon. Education was the most common with 26 of the 35 (74 percent) NGOs listing it as one of their prime objectives. Clearly then, the right to education is one of the best addressed rights by the NGOs. The CRC has given special emphasis to education. It has also become a priority in national planning. There is a growing realization of the importance of education in building a nation. This importance is perhaps understood by the NGO community as well. Education is also a relatively

easy service to offer as compared to other facilities. The NGOs thus devote a large chunk of their resources to educating children.

More than half the NGOs consider providing health services as an objective. There is an understanding that an unhealthy or physically weak child cannot enjoy other facilities offered to him or her. Thus the organizations pay special attention to the health of their beneficiaries. Offering shelter, working towards the holistic development of the child and giving vocational training are other common objectives. Only 6 NGOs (17 percent) mentioned child rights in their objectives or brochures. This is in spite of the fact that India has ratified the Convention almost 15 years ago and it should have become a part of organizational mandates by now. The NGOs that listed child rights were not necessarily the highest scoring organizations. But their mention of the term showed some awareness about the Convention. Most of the NGO brochures and websites still have a welfare based approach rather than a rights based one. The emphasis is on 'providing' or 'giving' to the children, rather than on securing for them what is truly theirs. One of the principle thoughts behind the creation of the CRC was that children's services should not be viewed as something that stems from charity, generosity or political will. It should be viewed as a RIGHT of the child (David, 2002). Taking a rights based approach rather than a welfare approach creates a sense of duty upon those involved with children. They must see this work as their responsibility towards children rather than something they can do as per their convenience. And this was not seen in majority of the brochures.

The least number of organizations listed creating children's books or other literature as one of their objectives. Certain objectives like recreation were not listed very commonly, but were part of the programs of many NGOs. For example, only 6 percent of the organizations listed recreation as an objective but most others mentioned it somewhere else as part of another programs. This confirmed the researcher's expectation that several of the activities conducted by the organizations may not be part of their original program. The organizations may simply be engaging in these activities as and when the need and opportunity arises. Another reason for leaving recreation out of the objectives may be that offering recreational services does not excite donors. The layperson perhaps does not see this to be an immediate need of children and would refrain from contributing to

such a program. Many people fail to realize the importance of leisure time in child development. They perceive it as being frivolous and secondary and would give more importance to concerns that “sound” serious such as education or shelter. The NGOs may thus be compelled to leave out such objectives from their literature. Hence it is necessary to consider the responses of the rating scale, in addition to the objectives, to gain a true understanding of the work of NGOs.

Implementation of rights of the child

The Convention has categorized children’s rights into four basic rights – the right to survival, the right to development, the right to protection and the right to participation. These rights are indivisible and interdependent. Failure to secure any one right would undoubtedly hamper the fulfillment of other rights. It is thus essential that each of these rights be secured for children in totality.

In keeping with the rights based approach to this research, the results of the rating scale have also been divided into these four categories. The NGOs fared differently in their implementation of these four rights.

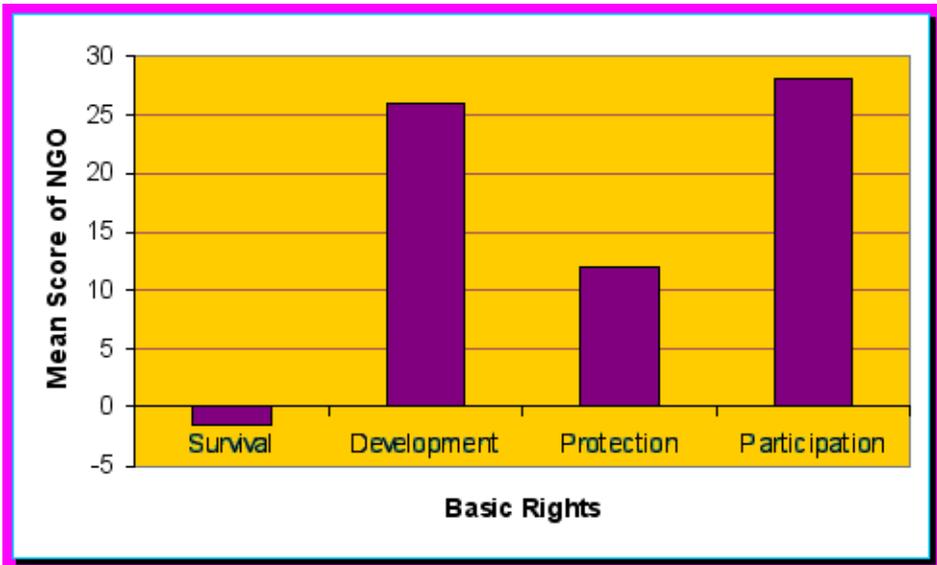


Figure 1.- Implementation of four basic rights by NGOs

The highest possible score for any right is 70 while the lowest possible score is -70. As evident in Fig. 1., there was a vast difference in the attention given to the four basic rights. The NGOs scored the highest on the right to participation (28.12) followed by the right to development (26). The score for the right to protection (12.15) was comparatively lower. The right to survival (-1.40) is clearly far less addressed than the other rights. The rights in this category are then in great need of attention.

RIGHT TO SURVIVAL

The right to survival includes the right to life, the highest attainable standards of health, nutrition and adequate standards of living. Table 2. elucidates the statements given to judge the implementation of this right.

Table 2. Mean scores of NGOs for the right to survival.

| Statement No. | Statement | Mean Score of NGOs |
|----------------------|--|---------------------------|
| 3 | Initiatives are taken at least once in six months to ensure the survival of the child to the maximum extent possible. | 27 |
| 14 | The organization is actively involved with promoting and facilitating authorized adoption of children in need. | -24 |
| 17 | Need based health care services are made available to the children. | 38 |
| 18 | Special measures are taken to diminish infant and child mortality | -14 |
| 19 | Pre and postnatal care is provided to mothers along with knowledge of appropriate health, nutrition and child rearing practices. | -34 |

Statements 3 and 17 are closely related. Both focus on the health and survival of the child. Both these statements have received above average scores. Several NGOs have health services for their beneficiaries. This was seen in the objectives mentioned by them as well. One organization, for example, conducts monthly medical checks at all its centers. The organization also has a mobile dispensary which goes to the slums and streets to serve children in need. In addition to this, monthly camps are conducted for skin, eye, dental and gynecological ailments. Life enhancing awareness is given through health education and empowerment initiatives. Such initiatives are taken in other NGOs as well.

The NGOs have not fared as well on Statement 14. The score obtained is very low (-24). The statement says ‘The organization is actively involved with promoting and facilitating authorized adoption of children in need.’ It speaks of promotion of adoption as well, not just involvement in the actual process. While it is difficult to expect every organization to facilitate adoption, it should not be difficult for them to promote it and generate awareness. Yet, the NGOs are clearly not doing so.

Statements 18 and 19 have also received very low scores. In fact, the score of statement 19 is the lowest of all the 30 statements. The three statements with negative scores in this category are all related to infants or young children. As seen earlier, this is one of the sorely lacking areas in the work of the NGOs. The awareness levels for these rights were also seen to be low. This is illustrated clearly by the case of ‘H’ (Names of organizations are withheld to protect confidentiality). ‘H’ claims to be a ‘child rights organization’. Yet when the researcher spoke with a senior member of the NGO, he stated that these two statements were ‘not applicable’ to his organization. Clearly he did not believe that providing pre and postnatal care and knowledge to mothers, or working to diminish infant mortality, was the work of a so-called child rights organization. Similar responses were obtained from other NGOs as well. Some NGO representatives made comments such as “We work only for children, we are not a women’s organization. This is the work of women’s organizations.” Perhaps these NGO representatives did not realize that their involvement with young children, or their responsibility to infants can be fulfilled only through their mothers. Through providing mothers with knowledge and care, the NGOs can empower the child with good health even before s/he is born.

Too few organizations understand this need and work for the infant population. Infants are perhaps harder to work with than older children. Infants may be at high risk and the NGOs seem to be refraining from getting involved. There are however some organizations that have stepped into this area. NGO 'Son' states on its website, "We strongly believe that if a mother's health is attended to, if she receives basic nutrition, health care and education in her formative years as well as during pregnancy, then newborn babies would not have to die." The organization conducts programs for women along with children and provides the necessary services to them.

The result that emerges most clearly is that the right to survival is grossly neglected by the NGOs. This is especially so in the case of infants. The organizations have ignored the most basic right of the child while working for other rights. Implementation of this is right is the need of the hour.

RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

The right to development includes the right to education, social security and the right to leisure, recreation and cultural activities. As depicted in Table 3, the NGOs have scored comparatively well on this category of rights.

Table 3. Mean scores of NGOs for the right to development.

| Statement No. | Statement | Mean Score of NGOs |
|----------------------|--|---------------------------|
| 16 | Special facilities and programs are provided to mentally and physically challenged children | -8 |
| 20 | The organization provides basic primary education for all children. | 37 |
| 21 | Vocational training and guidance is provided to children in areas that suit their interest and aptitude. | 25 |
| 23 | The organization regularly provides recreational facilities to children and gives them opportunities to engage in leisure and play activities. | 50 |

The highest score amongst the rights in this category is of Statement 23 which speaks of providing recreation and leisure to children. The score obtained (50) shows that NGOs understand the importance of this right and implement it to a great extent. In fact, there are two NGOs in the sample that are devoted mainly to play and recreation. The kind of activities facilitated include distribution of toys, organizing competitions, meals and games, educational visits, picnics and camps, etc.

Relatively high scores are also obtained by for Statements 20 and 21 which refer to primary education and vocational training. As seen in the objectives specified by the NGOs, these are some of the primary functions of many organizations. Though the organizations are offering vocational training, the training is rarely in a vocation of the child's choice. It may be difficult for the NGOs to offer individualized training to each child and thus the children are grouped into 2 - 3 vocations that the organization chooses. The training also focuses largely on the technical aspect and doesn't necessarily train the child to manage or market his/her abilities. The children are then often left with technical knowledge but without the skills required to sustain themselves in the community.

Education has been widely recognized as an instrument for empowerment and change and the NGOs are especially active in this area. They offer facilities like ballades, non formal education, enrollment in schools, etc. NGO 'P', for example has the mission statement of "Every child in school and learning well". They aim to universalize primary education in India. They have created a low cost replicable model to provide education. It consists of an accelerated learning method in which an unlettered child starts reading and computing basic mathematics in three weeks. They make use of computer based learning and have designed a Bridge Course program to socially and academically prepare out-of-school child to enter or re-enter the formal school system. The organization has served two lakh children through direct programs and over 3 million children through indirect programs.

Though several NGOs are working to provide education, very few of them offer the same facilities to special children. This is seen by the poor score of Statement 16 (-8). There are some organizations devoted specifically to special children. These organizations are doing a lot of work to educate these children and make them self sufficient and independent. However, other NGOs rarely integrate special children into their programs. Thus, special children lose out on many facilities and rights that are due to them. Mainstreaming and integration of these children by all NGOs would combat this problem.

RIGHT TO PROTECTION

The right to protection includes freedom from all forms of exploitation, abuse, inhuman or degrading treatment and neglect, including the right to special protection in situations of emergency and armed conflicts. This category of rights has been better addressed than the right to survival but still has low scores as compared to the other two rights.

Table 4: Mean scores of NGOs for the right to protection.

| Statement No. | Statement | Mean Score of NGOs |
|----------------------|---|---------------------------|
| 1 | The services offered by us are the same for all children, irrespective of caste, sex or religious background. | 61 |
| 2 | Adequate measures are taken to ensure that every child is protected from discrimination of any kind. | 57 |
| 11 | Substantial measures are taken to protect every child from any form of physical or mental violence, abuse, neglect or maltreatment while in the care of parents or guardians. | 18 |
| 12 | Programs are initiated to ensure the prevention, identification, reporting, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment. | 4 |
| 13 | Foster care or alternative care arrangements are made for children who cannot be allowed to remain in the regular family environment. | -4 |
| 15 | Special measures are taken to ensure the protection and development of refugee or displaced children. | -16 |
| 24 | The organization actively makes efforts to prevent child labor. | 23 |
| 25 | Special measures are regularly taken to protect children from substance abuse and rehabilitate child victims of substance abuse. | 8 |
| 26 | Special measures are regularly undertaken to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse. | 13 |
| 27 | Special measures are taken to prevent and punish the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose. | -14 |
| 28 | The organization provides special counseling, support, care and legal assistance to juvenile delinquents or children in conflict with the law. | -6 |
| 29 | Special efforts are made to promote the physical recovery and integration of children who are victims of any form of abuse or neglect. | 2 |
| 30 | Special efforts are made to promote the psychological recovery and rehabilitation of children who are victims of abuse, exploitation or maltreatment of any kind. | 12 |

Amongst the rights mentioned in Table 4, those related to protection against discrimination have a high score. Statements 1 and 2 have the highest scores of all the 30 statements in the rating scale. Most of then NGOs claim that they do not discriminate against the children that they care for. A full score of 70 could have been expected for Statement 1, but there were some organizations that were created only for the girl child, or for children from a particular community. In spite of this, the NGOs have scored well on protection against discrimination.

It can be seen that the NGOs are involved in preventing child labor. They do this through direct involvement with working children as well as indirectly through preventing dropouts from school, etc. Similar work is done to protect children from substance abuse and sexual exploitation and rehabilitate victims. The goals of one of the organizations studied include de-addiction, education and repatriation. The organization works to provide substance using children and/or HIV affected street children with a recovery process that integrates them into the mainstream of society. Other NGOs run rescue operations and offer rehabilitation to victims of sexual abuse. Though there is some work in this area, other organizations can also participate by spreading awareness on these issues and networking with rehabilitation centers.

It can also be seen that organizations take few measures to protect children from maltreatment, as seen in Statement 11, but are not involved in reporting or following up on cases of maltreatment as seen in Statement 12. They are lacking in providing foster care or alternate care arrangements for children in need. There is also a severe lack in services provided to refugee or displaced children. The scores are similarly low for measures taken to prevent and punish trafficking in children and in the care provided to juvenile delinquents.

A trend may be observed with these rights. All these rights are connected in a way to judiciary and law involving children – arranging foster care, reporting and investigating maltreatment cases, punishing trafficking and services for refugee children and juvenile delinquents. The NGOs seem to be abstaining from involvement in any kind of legal systems. Judiciary in India is commonly perceived as a long, tiresome and complicated process. This may be the reason why the NGOs are not involving themselves with rights related to the law. This disconnection

with the judiciary however, broadens the gap between the law and its implementation. And unfortunately, it is the children in need, who fall through the crevices in this entire process. Rights related to the judiciary are clearly poorly addressed by the NGOs and need greater attention.

The few organizations that have entered this area have done good work. An example may be given of the NGO 'Sa'. This NGO works to train and sensitize professionals from different sectors such as police, judiciary, doctors etc towards combating trafficking of children for sexual exploitation. They sensitize judiciary so as to ensure the prosecution of the perpetrators of child related crimes takes place in a speedy and empathetic manner. They are also involved in policy making for children.

The scores obtained for Statements 29 and 30 seem to be ironical. The scores show that the NGOs are doing more to promote the psychological recovery of child victims than they do for the physical recovery. Yet, the brochures and websites of many of these NGOs do not mention the facilities of a counselor for their children. Counseling is also not one of the main objectives listed by the organizations. It is possible, that the score is a representation of their ignorance about counseling. Perhaps the NGOs provide guidance and emotional support to these children, and believe that it is adequate for their psychological recovery. Cases of abuse and exploitation, however, require professional counseling services and that is perhaps not provided by the NGOs.

RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION

The right to participation includes respect for the views of the child, freedom of expression, access to appropriate information and freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The NGOs are implementing this right to the greatest extent.

Table 5. Mean scores of NGOs for the right to participation.

| Statement No. | Statement | Mean Score of NGOs |
|----------------------|--|---------------------------|
| 4 | The children are encouraged to seek information and knowledge about issues that concern them. | 42 |
| 5 | The children are encouraged to express their views on issues concerning them without fear or hesitation. | 43 |
| 6 | The views expressed by them are taken seriously and given due consideration. | 41 |
| 7 | The organization takes active part in judiciary concerning the child and ensures that the child's voice is heard. | 2 |
| 8 | Children are given access to information and material that would enhance their social and moral well being. | 41 |
| 9 | Children are given access to material that would enhance their mental health. | 42 |
| 10 | The organization is actively involved in the production and dissemination of children's books and television programs | -14 |
| 22 | The organization encourages all children to understand, appreciate, and freely participate in their own cultural and religious activities. | 28 |

The score that is low is for Statement 7, which is once again, related to the judiciary. The NGOs have scored the highest on this category of rights. Statements 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9 show high scores. These are rights related to respecting the views of the child and giving them adequate resources to enhance their mental, social and moral well being. NGO 'O' asserts, "It is not just enough providing children with food and shelter. Their creativity needs to be tapped. They need to be appreciated and applauded. These children should be made self sufficient and confident so that they are poised to approach the world in a right manner". This organization, like

many others, creates opportunities for children to explore their world and understand issues that concern them. They conduct a program where the children meet once a month to discuss topics like 'math can be fun' and 'women in society'. Several NGOs organize educational visits, workshops and competitions for the children where they get to voice their opinions.

The organization 'D' publishes a unique children's newspaper every month. The newspaper is written in the handwriting of the children and is photocopied and bound for distribution. The children choose their own editor, writers and creative designers. They write short articles on issues that are of concern to them such as the Mumbai floods, school, festivals and competitions, etc. They illustrate their articles with drawings and pictures and the newspaper is then distributed to other children in the organization's many centers. This NGO also runs libraries and computer centers for children. Books on various issues of their interest are made available. Such programs have made a strong impact with the number of children in the NGO taking books home increasing from 525 in 2001-02 to 2713 in 2004-05.

The NGOs seem to provide children with information and material that enhances their social, moral and mental well being. They also claim to encourage children to participate in their own religious and cultural activities. They are not however, involved in the production and dissemination of children's books and television programs. This is often a costly procedure and this may be the reason why NGOs do not actively participate in it. It is however, certainly not impossible. This was illustrated by the NGO 'As' which created an animated film on children's rights. This film is appealing to children and has been screened on several occasions. Less costly options would be creating simple books or stories for children. Such activities are already being done in many preschools and balwadis. The next step would then be to channelize these efforts so that they can benefit a greater number of children.

Future Plans of the NGOs for Implementation of Children's Rights

The organizations were also asked to elaborate on any additional facilities they would like to offer to the children in the future. A large percentage of the organizations (29 percent) had no response to this

question. This gives an impression of complacency and would perhaps lead to stagnation. The responses given by the NGOs to this question exhibit their understanding of the unmet needs of children. Their future goals and programs show an acknowledgement of areas of lack and their willingness and desire to fill those gaps. Blank responses are thus clearly indicative of ignorant and uninformed organizations.

Vocational training, shelter, medical, recreational and counseling facilities were common responses. Only 3 percent of the NGOs wished to give their children awareness and knowledge on child rights. This is perhaps a reflection of the lack of awareness amongst the NGO representatives themselves.

CONCLUSION

It may be concluded that though the NGOs are doing exemplary work there are clear gaps in the services they offer. Their programs focus on a few essential areas and groups but many others are neglected. Child rights is still not an integral part of the organizational mandates. Most NGO brochures and programs do not depict a rights based approach and child rights does not figure high on the priority lists of the organizations. There is an immediate need to educate child care workers to enable understanding of children's rights. They may then become channels to spread awareness amongst the masses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Researchers

This study was limited by the duration of the research. It would have undoubtedly been enhanced if the researcher had been able to study each organization in greater depth rather than relying on the views of the organization's representatives alone. Future researchers could perhaps devote more time to each NGO and include a systematic observation of the organization's programs. Research could also be done on NGOs that have successfully adapted their programs to adopt a child rights approach. The results obtained could act as guidelines to other organizations.

2. Schools

Child rights is clearly a topic that not many people are informed about. The lack of awareness amongst child care workers gives a picture of how poor the understanding must be amongst the general public. Schools can help combat this by incorporating child rights education into their curriculums. Children and their parents must be made aware of the rights guaranteed to them and the various mechanisms available to secure those rights.

3. NGOs

The NGOs are all catering to the vulnerable and deprived sections of the society. They are grappling with the same issues and challenges. It would thus be very beneficial if the organizations were to engage in greater networking amongst themselves. A lot of the problems faced by NGOs could be better handled if they shared their resources and expertise. Duplication of services could be avoided and a greater impact could be created. The NGOs must thus let go of any pettiness and secrecy that they attach to their programs and must recommit themselves to the well being of the children.

They must also step into the more challenging areas of child care that they have neglected so far. These include caring for infants, involvement with the judiciary and policy making for children. They could also collaborate with the media to spread greater awareness on children's issues. NGOs may act as advisors to television channels, production houses and publishing companies. They can provide their expertise and monitor programs to ensure that the media benefits children through their services and does not exploit or harm them in any way.

There is also a greater need for research and documentation by the NGOs themselves. Most organizations do not study their population before designing programs. The ones that do, usually depend on unscientific research or unauthentic data to provide them with information. There are too few organizations that have research units as well. Scientific research would enable the NGOs to design more effective programs and help educate the public about the true status of the Indian child. The NGOs must thus conduct honest research wherever possible. They could also collaborate

with University departments that conduct research and use their services.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the NGOs need to spruce up their administration and enrich their staff. Each organization must conduct systematic programs to enhance the work skills and knowledge of their employees. The staff must be made aware of current trends and developments in the field as well as the objectives behind each program that they implement. The staff can in turn generate awareness amongst the children and the community. With greater knowledge, they can undoubtedly do greater good.

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