

Caring the Uncared-for

A.C.Mohapatra
Loma Nora Jyrwa

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State Support to the Destitute Children
in Meghalaya

Social Science Monograph Series -1

A.C.Mohapatra
Loma Nora Jyrwa



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PREFACE

Child poverty, destitution and exploitation remains a major area of concern in the country. There is approximately 20-30 million child labours in the country. Child destitution, perhaps, is even larger; since the poor and desperate parents can only turn in their ten-year-olds to work, even in adverse or hazardous environments. India, as a signatory to the World Convention on the Rights of the Child (New York, 1991) and its subsequent adoption on the policy document on the Rights of the Child (MHRD, 1993) has shown her willingness, though with some hesitation that as a civilised, modern nation it cannot discard the claims of the child on the state and society, at a stage in life they cannot look after their own well-being. It is in this light that the programme of CNCP as started by the Government of India during the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-75) was perhaps, a step in the right direction.

The present report is the outcome of the study on the functioning of the programme of Children in Need of Care and Protection (CNCP) operated by the Social Welfare Department, Government of Meghalaya as a State Sector Scheme to address the problems of destitute children and to gainfully rehabilitate them as useful citizens. The *project* was sanctioned towards the end of 1994, but became operational only during 1995 when detailed surveys were carried out for each of the twenty-four institutions under the programme regarding their financial standing, infrastructure and facilities, type of education and training imparted, nature and extent of rehabilitative measures adopted, staffing pattern, etc. A separate schedule was prepared for assessing the actual background and situation of the children in the institutions.

The main objective was to evaluate the programme and suggest measures to tone up the programme to make it more relevant, cost effective and efficient. In a general way, one

finds no hesitation in noting that compared to the experiences in many other states, the track record of the programme in Meghalaya is quite good. This is largely because, majority of the institutions are run by established Christian Charities, with enough of motivation, experience and commitment to the cause of children. However, there are areas of concern, like accentuating programme costs (per child), the extent of rehabilitation of the child after reaching adulthood (age 18 years), etc.

The report illustrates at great lengths, the details of various circumstances of the programme as studied through the survey objectively and recommends a large number measures, policies and methods which could be adopted to improve upon the good foundation already laid.

It is hoped that the findings of the study and the recommendations receive due attention from the Government, the institutions and the public in general to generate a larger participation and appropriate social action programmes to address the problem of child destitution and the ultimate rehabilitation of the child in the civil society. Child destitution is a social malaise deeply inter-linked with larger economic and social issues. The society and the state have a *duty* to address to this problem. The attitude of the society is to graduate from a 'charity vantage' to that of an angle of *duty, responsibility and commitment*. Whereas state support is a crucial starting point, its success hinges on the recognition and commitment of the society at large, taking both preventive measures, developing appropriate mechanisms of addressing the problem and finally reaching the ultimate of discovering a group of fine citizens, once exploited and considered social discards.

A. C. Mohapatra
and Loma Nora Jyrwa

Shillong, September 2000

Chapter I

Introduction

Child destitution in India has a long and painful history. A country that prides herself in worshipping childhood in *Lord Krishna* is also a country with enormous poverty and consequent child poverty and a record of long bondage of child and child labour. To quote Weiner (1991), "Primary education in India is not compulsory. The result is that less than half of India's children between age six and fourteen --82.2 million- are not in school. They stay at home to care for cattle, tend younger children, collect firewood, and work in the fields. They find employment in cottage industries, tea stalls, restaurants, or as household workers in middle-class homes. They become prostitutes or live as street children, begging or picking rags and bottles from trash for resale. Many are bonded labourers, tending cattle and working as agricultural labourers for local landowners."¹ With the overall poverty level hovering at one third of the population of 900 million, i.e., 300 million below the poverty line, the child population (up to 14 yr.) approximates to 40 % or 120 million. This approximates to between 25 to 50 million as working children, i.e. roughly 50% of the child poverty segment. This would include the street children and the children in homes (orphanages or *Anathalayas*) and other destitute children.

To deal with this enormous problem of child poverty and destitution, the Ministry of Welfare (now merged with M/o Human Resource Development, as Department of Women and Child Welfare) launched the target oriented scheme of Children

¹ Myron Weiner (1991), *The Child and the State in India*, OUP, Delhi, p.3

in Need of Care and Protection (CNCP) in 1974-75 as a Central Sector Project. The scheme had two programmes, i.e., (a) Scheme for Institutional Services and (b) Scheme for Foster Care Services.² The scheme was implemented through a network of voluntary organisations who had infrastructure and capacity and had track record of child care activities in rural and urban areas. The conventional approach had been those of operating the orphanages under management of trained government functionaries. This scheme approached the problem with a view that the problem of child destitution is so large that the government system has neither the infrastructure nor resources to address it. Therefore, listing the partnership of credible NGOs with a concept of "cottage system" of groups of 25 children to be managed, educated and rehabilitated by the NGOs themselves with specific assistance from the government³ is necessary. An organisation can have more than one cottage or home at a point of time. Every cottage will have one house-mother, a cook & a helper. There will be a part-time supervisor-cum-case worker for every two cottages. For a combination of four cottages a full time supervisor could be appointed.⁴ Of course, subsequently, the scheme allowed suitable organisational modifications depending on the ground requirements.

Primarily the scheme includes ameliorative services of food, shelter, clothing, medical attention and curative services of educational, pre-vocational and vocational training, vocational guidance, recreational and cultural development and citizenship education for the children under 5-18 yr. age group. To the children under 12, services like physical and social care, school education and recreational activities were to be provided in "near family atmosphere". They will avail of nursery and primary education in the community so that they get the opportunity of interacting with other children as part of their

² B.B.Mandal(1990), *Child and Action Plan for Development*, Mittal Pub., New Delhi p.48.

³ *ibid*, p.48

⁴ *ibid*, p.49

development, so that they do not develop a psyche of being different or "excluded". They must get general education up to the middle school and thereafter, they may get vocational training and guidance towards the goal of rehabilitation.⁵

Table -1.1
Estimate of Expenditure under the Scheme

No.	Heads of Expenditure	Amount required per cottage (Rs.)
A.	Recurring	
(i)	Maintenance (food, clothing, soap, oil etc. @ Rs60.00 per child per month	18,000
(ii)	Contingencies (Water, electricity, postage, stationery etc.) Rs.100 per month per cottage	1,200
(iii)	Bed and bedding @ Rs.30.00 per child	750
(iv)	Part-time vocational service @ Rs.10.00 per month per day	3,000
(v)	Salary of house mother @Rs.200 per month per cottage	2,400
(vi)	Remuneration to supervisory & administrative staff of parent organisation @Rs.200.00 per month per two cottages	1,200
(vii)	Salary of one cook/ helper @ Rs.100.00 per month	1,200
(viii)	Building rent @Rs16.00 per child per month	4,800
	Sub Total Recurring	32,550
B.	Non-Recurring Expenditure	

⁵ *ibid*, p.49

	Furniture, equipments, utensils etc. @Rs.3000.00 per cottage	3,000
C	Total Expenditure	
	Recurring	32,550
	Non-Recurring	3,000
	GRAND TOTAL	35,550

The scheme provided for grants up to 90% of the actual expenditure, the balance being the contribution of the concerned NGO. The detailed initial funding pattern is given in table 1.1.

The eligibility of the child for admission into the home must fulfil the following:

- (i) Children who do not have either parents or any near relatives;
- (ii) Children of single parent families where the husband is dead or where they have to be looked after by the mother, due to long imprisonment of husband or desertion or vice versa and where the income of the family is less than Rs.250.00 per month (below the poverty line).
- (iii) Children whose parents are unable to take care of them due to leprosy or mental illness.

The expenditure pattern has been changed from time to time keeping inflation in view and suitable adjustments done as per condition varying from state to state.

In Meghalaya, with the overall poverty level being around 40% (more than double that of 1990-91 estimates of the P.C., GOI) by Lakadwala Committee (1993)⁶, the condition being much severe in 1974-75, the scheme was launched to address the problem of child destitution in the state, though the acute problems of bigger states and metro-cities are not encountered in the state like street children, child prostitution etc. It may also be noted that many Christian Missionary organisation, in any case, were already active in this field and had creditable track records, unlike in many major states where vested interests jumped into the fray as NGOs to exploit the little

⁶ Planning Commission, GOI (1993), *Report of the Expert Group on Poverty*, New Delhi.

money the government was willing to spend on these hapless children.⁷ Compared to the initial stages many more organisations have come forward in this field with varied degrees of successes. It is in this light, the current evaluative study is timely, not only to look into the functioning of the NGOs, but also to suggest measures for fine-tuning the programme, since it has become a state sector scheme, to optimise resources of the state in this direction. To quote Weiner again,

“The shift from rights to duties is a profound one in the history of the relationship between the children and the state. “Rights” implies access and choice. Education is free and widely available. Parents are free to choose or not to choose to send their children to school. The notion of duty denies parents the right to choose. Parents are told by the state that no matter how great is the need for the labour or income of their children they must nonetheless relinquish their child to school for the part of the day.....The notion of duty applies to the state. The state has a duty to make education obligatory, and in turn the central authority imposes this duty on local authorities as well as on parents and guardians of the children.”⁸

⁷ Mandal, *Op.Cit.* p.61

⁸ Myron Weiner, *Op.Cit.*, p.181

About the Book

This monograph is the outcome of a study carried out by the authors to evaluate the *Scheme of Children in Need of Care and Protection* that was operational in the State of Meghalaya for over twenty years. The scheme was to support essentially the poor, needy and destitute children of the state through a network of homes run by a variety of voluntary agencies and Christian charities.

In developing countries there is little money for welfare schemes and much less for children, especially those who have lost their parents, social moorings. State support is essential to their protection and ultimate rehabilitation back to the community. This is one scheme that was conceived and implemented by the Central Government long before India became a signatory to the UN Children's Convention.

The monograph is an in-depth study of various issues that beset programmes for children based on actual field data and also attempts to highlight areas that needs reworking for greater effectiveness of the programme.

About the Authors

A.C.Mohapatra (born 1952 -) was educated at Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, JNU, New Delhi, the Central School of Planning and Statistics, Warsaw, Poland and NEHU, Shillong and has put in about 25 years of research and teaching with distinction. He has several international and national publications and authored several books. He was formerly the *Dean* of School of Human and Environmental Sciences and is currently *Professor* and *Head* of the Department of Geography, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong.

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