



NAVAJEEVAN BALA BHAVAN VIJAYAWADA

(A home for Children in need of care and Protection)

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WORKING WITH THE VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE

Introduction

- ❖ India is one of the youngest countries in the world with 60% of its population less than 24 years of age. There are two distinguishable groups among these young people: youth from stable families in urban and rural areas usually with higher social development opportunities and status and the other, the marginalized youth from poorer segments both in rural and urban areas. We are concerned with the latter category.
- ❖ In this paper, I attempt to briefly present the status of vulnerable young people of India and describe the efforts of the Government and several others along with the work of Salesians – putting the experience of Navajeevan-Vijayawada in perspective to address the needs of Young at Risk. It has to be pointed out that our outreach is minuscule when we look at the total picture of abysmal conditions of the young in the country. While institutional services can only cater to a few, they are indispensable and so many of us are providing them at the same time as we pursue several non-institutional approaches along with advocacy on behalf of young people. The contours of our experience in mobilizing people of an entire Mandal to create child-friendly communities are presented which may be replicated with appropriate situational modifications.

Navajeevan's Mission

- ❖ The option for poor youngsters abandoned and at risk, has always been at the heart and life of Don Bosco's Salesian Family from the beginning, right down to the present day. It has occasioned responses everywhere in a great variety of structures and services according to the educative choices inspired by the preventive system. Our vocation as Salesians will not allow us to remain at ease in the face of a situation like this, which we find today not only in the developing world but indeed everywhere. It prompts us to commit ourselves to providing some response to the more urgent situations of youngsters at risk (cf. GC 21:158; GC 22:6, 72; GC 23: 203-214). The new situation of today's society challenges us to find new responses. Poverty has become ever more prevalent so as to acquire a tragic dimension.
- ❖ However, as we shall see below at the magnitude of the problem, our response, however appreciable, is just a drop in the vast ocean!
- ❖ Among the Young at Risk (YaR) we include street children, child labourers, abandoned orphans, young prisoners or children in conflict with law, young substance abusers, abused or tortured children, children in war-torn and conflict areas, refugee children or children of displaced ethnic minorities, children in the sex trade, children of sex workers, child beggars and children affected by or infected with HIV/AIDS. There are also the mentally or physically challenged youngsters who suffer additional handicaps besides children of prisoners.

GROUND REALITIES

- ❖ MDGs - Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger and Reduce child Mortality vs Malnutrition
 - Despite decades of intervention, child malnutrition remains a shameful paradox in an India that aspires to occupy a larger global economic space. Children under 18 constitute 440 million, or 42% of India's population. According to India's Ministry of Women and Child Development, India has the 10 Save the child by leading him/her to Navajeevan. Sponsor the child to realize his/her dream. Highest rate of neo-natal deaths (35%) in the world, 40% of child malnutrition in the developing world and 50% of the child mortality.
 - As per India's third National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) of 2005-06, 78.9% of children between 6-35 months are anemic; 20% of children under the age of five are wasted due to acute under nutrition and 48% are stunted due to chronic under-nutrition.
 - In terms of child survival, Andhra Pradesh is lagging behind the other southern states, especially Kerala and Tamilnadu. Though freedom from hunger and malnutrition is a basic human right and a fundamental prerequisite for human and national development, according to the estimations of NFHS-3 (2005-06), in Andhra Pradesh, about 42.7, 12.2 and 32.5% of children below 5 years of age were respectively characterized as stunted, wasted and underweight while the all-India averages are 48.0, 19.8 and 42.5%. Percentage of children in the age group of 6 to 35 months suffering from Anaemia has increased from 72.3% in 1998 - 99 to 79% in 2005-06.
 - The coverage under Integrated Child Development Scheme - Anganwadi Centres (ICDS - AWC) seems to be inadequate in Andhra Pradesh both in absolute and relative terms. According to NFHS III (2005-06), only 27.5% of children below 6 received any service from an AWC in the year 2006. Andhra Pradesh was one among those states with the lowest ICDS coverage. There were around 9 million children under 6 in 2001, and they would number

around 8 million in 2006. Of these only 2 million children are covered. Hence the presence of ICDS programme in the state could not improve nutrition levels among children significantly.

- The stark contrast is that, while the country is said to be economically progressing (for a minority), on the other hand, the gap between the rich and the poor widens to extreme levels, both qualitatively and quantitatively. And, the children from the most marginalized communities – socially-economically-politically excluded – become the most vulnerable.

❖ MDG - Achieve Universal Primary Education Vs Increasing number of Child Workers

- In spite of this faster growth of literacy rate from 44.1% in 1991 to 61.1% as per 2001 Census, the literacy rate in Andhra Pradesh is still lower than the all-India average. Andhra Pradesh is regarded as a state with high drop-out and low retention rates among Indian states. 3.5 million Children (22.1% of total children between 6 to 14 years age) were out of school as per 2001 Census. Out of these out-of-school children, 18.76% are boys and 25.7% are girls. The percentage of out-of-school children in the age group 6-14 years in rural Andhra Pradesh is 23.85 and 17.24 in urban areas.
- Census reports clearly point to an increase in the number of child labourers in the country, from 11.28 million in 1991 to 12.59 million in 2001 (number which figure also in “United Nations World Population Prospects Report, for the period 2005-2010”). Out of all the States, Andhra Pradesh still accounts for the highest number of child workers in the country – with 1.2 million.
- According to a global report of the International Labour Organization (ILO) titled ‘Accelerating action against child labour’, India has still not ratified conventions on the ‘Worst form of child labour’ (182) and the ‘Minimum age for employment’ (138). According to the stated ILO Report, investments in education are still dismal in India with a meager 3.3% of Gross National Product. This is smaller than the median for sub-Saharan Africa, even though incomes in India are one-third more than that in the latter, the report observes.

❖ Child Abuse

- Ministry of Women and Child Development’s (MWCD) “Working Group Report on Women and Children Save the child by leading him/her to Navajeevan. Sponsor the child to realise his/her dream. 11 for the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012)” states, while on the one hand girls are being killed even before they are born, on the other hand children who are born and survive suffer from a number of violations. The world’s highest number of working children is in India. To add to this, India has the world’s largest number of sexually abused children, with a child below 16 years raped every 155th minute, a child below 10, every 13th hour and one in every 10 children sexually abused at any point of time. The 13-State study in 2007 by MWCD and UNICEF highlights the following:

❖ Child Trafficking in the State of AP

- Sale and prostitution of girl children has become a major problem in the state especially in Coastal Andhra. About 17 districts have been identified as high incidence districts for child trafficking, including Krishna, the home district of Navajeevan. As per National Human Rights Report 2001 and USAID Report, Coastal Andhra Pradesh, with the district of Krishna as one of the main one, particularly has become a high supply zone for trafficking in children. Women, girls and boys are supplied for prostitution, begging, and cheap child labour. The State’s share among persons trafficked for sexual exploitation is nearly 40%. 26 percent of women or girls enter into the trade between the age of 14 -16 years, 20% between 16-18 years and 16% before the age of 14 years. The Government of Andhra Pradesh formed a committee in 2002 and issued GO No. 1 in 2003 for rescue and rehabilitation of such children.

❖ Juvenile Justice

- As per NCRB, in 2007, a total of 73792 persons were booked under various cases of violations against children (infanticide: 0.52% and murder: 10.63% and rape: 25% and kidnapping/abduction: 23.75% and feticide: 0.28% and buying/selling girls for prostitution, domestic work, etc.: 1.55% and child marriage: 2.76% and other crimes, etc.). Out of all the 73782 booked, cases were compounded or withdrawn against 0.86%; trail completed for 18.29% and cases against 80.85% were pending at the end of the year in 2007. Out of the cases completed against 18.29%, only 38% (5129 persons) were convicted.
- Out of the total 1953 children apprehended in 2007 for various crimes in the State of Andhra Pradesh, 38.35% were illiterate; 36.2% had primary level education and 16.23% had education between upper primary and Higher Secondary. 68.36% were living with parents; 12.85% were living with guardians and 18.79% were homeless. As the figures indicate, as far as the State is concerned, 11.98% more street based or homeless children were apprehended against the national average of 6.81%.

❖ MDG - Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women and Improve maternal health Vs Gender Disparity

- There are four mechanisms for transmitting the effects of women’s empowerment to child wellbeing - maternal education and economic empowerment and intra-household decision-making power and community level empowerment. On the basis of this mechanism, if one assesses, in the State of Andhra Pradesh, there still exists a considerable gender disparity in literacy rate with 20% gap. While the overall literacy rate has gone up from 44% in 1991 to 61% in 2001, the male literacy rate has increased from 55 to 71% and the female literacy rate increased by fifty percent, i.e. from 33% in 1991 to 51% in 2001. However, the literacy rate is below the national average of 65% in total and 76% for male and 54% for female.

- The work participation rates (WPR) for males and females in Andhra Pradesh as well as at the all- India level show that female WPRs are below that of males, though female WPR in Andhra Pradesh is higher than the all-India average. However, when the quality of women's work considered, the scenario is not so encouraging. The nature of work that women do is concentrated in unsecured, unskilled jobs which are poorly paid, and lack any upward mobility and opportunity. In Andhra 12 Save the child by leading him/her to Navajeevan. Sponsor the child to realise his/her dream. Pradesh about half (48.7%) the women workers in rural areas are casual labour and about 47% are self-employed. About 70% of all women workers and 78.5% in rural areas are engaged in agriculture related activities in the State. Women account for 64% of the total workforce engaged in agriculture activities in the state. Moreover, the employment of women in the emerging and fast growing sector like information technology (IT) is far behind that of men in general. While the share of women working in the IT sector is 18% at the all-India level, it is 13% for Andhra Pradesh, 19% for Karnataka and 28.4% for Tamil Nadu.
- **The child sex ratio** imbalance has further worsened with a sharp decline by 2001 raising serious concerns regarding the value attached to women in Indian society – indicating deliberate interference with natural birth patterns and continuing preference to male child. While the child sex (0 to 6 years age group) ratio in AP saw a steep decline in 2001 Census to 960 from 978 in 1991.
- **Political Participation of Women:** Although women constitute nearly half the population, their representation in political bodies and decision-making structures is not commensurate with their numbers. Though the 73rd and 74th amendments of the Indian Constitution have provided for 33% representation for women in local bodies which include Zilla Parishad, Mandal Parishad and village panchayat, the women elected to local bodies are not allowed at many a place to exercise their official powers. Men exercise de facto control, in the name of the elected women, usually their wives. The Women Reservation Bill proposing 33% reservation Parliament is long time kept pending.
- **Violence against Women:** In India a nationwide survey shows that 52% of women suffer at least one incident of physical or psychological violence in their lifetime. The NFHS (II) reports that one in five married women in India experiences domestic violence from the age of 15. According to the Indian National Crime Records Bureau's unique 'crime clock 2005' which tracked criminal activities in 2004, the country reported one molestation every 15 minutes; one crime against women every 3 minutes; one dowry death every 77 minutes; one rape every 29 minutes; one murder every 16 minutes; and one sexual harassment case every 53 minutes. According to the recent estimates of NFHS (2005-06) III, about 35% of ever-married women have reported experiences of spousal violence in Andhra Pradesh. The incidence is higher in rural areas (37%) when compared to urban areas (31%) and the state ranks tenth among the twenty major Indian states.
- The victims of domestic violence: Though the Act was aimed to bring protection and redressed for the women from domestic violence, they do not seek remedy under the Act as the process is time-consuming. Though the Act stipulates that the cases should be disposed of within 60 days of filing them, the absence of a panel of lawyers to handle such cases is also delaying the procedures. As many as 10,000 cases of dowry harassment (domestic violence) are being registered in Andhra Pradesh every year. As a major negative side effect, it is children who suffer most along with mothers who fall prey to domestic violence and in many a case, separation/divorce thereof.

❖ **MDG - Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases Vs the State of Andhra Pradesh**

- According to NFHS 3 (2005-06), while the prevalence rate of HIV at the national level is 0.35 percent (0.26% and 0.46% respectively for female and males) of 15-49 age group population, Andhra Pradesh has the highest prevalence rate 0.97% (0.75 and 1.22% respectively for females and males), next to Manipur among Indian states. Based on the prevalence rate the number of people who tested HIV positive are around 1.8 million at the all-India level and 0.44 million in Andhra Pradesh. These numbers may go up if we include other age groups (0-14 and 50+) for save the child by leading him/her to Navajeevan. Sponsor the child to realize his/her dream. 13 which we do not have estimations. The state accounts for around 22% of the HIV positive persons in India.

❖ **Social exclusion, poverty, landlessness, health and, education are serious concerns for these marginalized sections**

- The official 'Human Development Report 2007 – Andhra Pradesh' recognizes that the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) still lag behind the rest of society as the benefits of growth has not reached to a great extent to these disadvantaged sections. As per 2001 Census, there were about 12.3 and 5 million SC and ST comprising 16.2 and 6.6 percent of the total population in Andhra Pradesh. About 90% of SC and 80 percent of ST are located in rural areas. Social exclusion, poverty, landlessness, health and, education are serious concerns for these marginalized sections.
- Education - Literacy and Schooling: As per 2001 Census, while 60.5% of the total population (males: 70.3% and females 50.4%) was literate, only 53.5% of total SC population (males: 63.5% and females 43.4%) and 37.1% of total ST population (males: 47.7% and females 34.8%) were literate. While 17.8% of SC and 25.3% of ST children, between 5 -14 years age group, are out of school, only 16.9% of children of the same age group of the remaining social groups were out of school. Between the SC and ST, the ST women and children are the most deprived.
- Health: As per NFHS II (1998-99), Infant mortality rate (IMR), which is an important indicator in the human development perspective, is highest among the ST (104) followed by SC (95), Other Backward Communities

(70) and the remaining Social Groups (47) while IMR was 71 when total population taken together. Across social groups in the state, anemia was highest among SC women (56%). The severe form of anemia was highest among ST women (3.2%) and SC women (2.6) in the state. Severity of under-nutrition was higher among SC children with 14.2%.

- Employment Structure: As per NSS 50th Round Employment and Unemployment Survey in 1994, for 90% ST and 70% SC population, agriculture is the principal source of livelihood (either as cultivators or as agricultural labour). About 35% of the STs are cultivators, while for a majority of SC households the principal source of livelihood was agricultural labour. That means, STs are better placed when compared to SC in terms of ownership of land. However, as per NSS 61st Round Employment and Unemployment Survey indicate, the position of the ST has deteriorated over the last decade (1994-2005). Such decline from 45% ST cultivators to 35.4% indicates loss of land resources and increasing dependency on agricultural labour (from 37% in 1994 to 43.7% in 2005). On the other hand, the percentage of population depending on agricultural labour has declined for SC from 69.1% in 1994 to 60.7% in 2005. Occupational diversification appeared to be negligible, especially among the ST community.
- Resource Ownership - Land: As per NSS 50th and 61st Round Employment and Unemployment Survey between 1993-94 and 2004-05, the percentage of population in households with cultivated land declined to a considerable extent across all social groups, but the decline was highest for ST followed by SC. In other words, landlessness, that is lack of cultivated land, is increasing more among these socially disadvantaged groups. While one is not sure whether increasing landlessness is due to land sales because of economic distress or due to better opportunities available in nonfarm activities, the increase in percentage of population depending on agricultural labour, especially ST, indicate the worsening situation for ST in Andhra Pradesh. The data also corroborates the displacement of the most marginalized, especially STs, from their traditional habitats in name of development, but paradoxically, excluding them.
- Income Poverty and Deprivation of Basic Amenities: Across social groups, the percentage of population living below the poverty line is the highest among the ST and SC communities. Moreover the gap in terms of consumption expenditure between these SC/STs and the 'other' communities has been increasing over a period of time, which indicates increasing economic inequalities across social groups.
- As per 2001 Census, most of the predominantly SC and ST villages are more deprived of basic infrastructure. Among SCs and STs, the latter are the worst affected. About 90% of the predominantly ST villages do not have tap water, while 67% do not have road connection and 73% do not have any transportation facility. People living in these STs villages are not connected with the outside world, as there are no proper roads or transportation. Medical services are not available for about 50% of ST villages in A.P.
- The percentage of households without electricity is highest among STs (64.6%) followed by SCs (50.5%). More than 60% of the STs and SCs households live in a single room and about 3 to 4% do not have even that single room. 76% and 54% of STs and SCs households do not have tap water (which is considered safe drinking water).
- Atrocities: As per the data released in 2005 by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, among major Indian states, Andhra Pradesh is fourth (after Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Gujarat) in terms of crimes against SC and ST - with Crime Rate (i.e., number of crime incidents per lakh population) 23.7% against SCs and 14.5% against STs in AP while it is only 9.5% and 6.2% at national level.
- Scheduled Caste women are victimized most by upper castes because they lack the social position to stand up for their rights individually and because assaulting or raping them reinforces the subordination of the whole SC community to upper castes. SC and ST communities in general and women in particular do not know their rights and are too powerless individually to hold the judiciary and the executive accountable for enforcing protective laws against crimes committed against them, such as, murder, rape, parading of a Dalit woman in the nude, social boycott, beating, attacking Dalit bastis, destruction of property, causing serious injuries, death in police custody, encroachment on Dalit lands, bonded labour, forceful eviction from house sites, harassment due to love relationship with caste Hindu, suicide due to humiliation and excessive beating by the police; being beaten: for riding a cycle, wearing nice clothes, for sitting in the bus; harassment of Dalits Sarpanches and Panchayat members, and resentment and insult when a Dalit wins an election.
- Political Participation: Although the statutory position of SCs and STs in PRI bodies is satisfactory (represented as per the constitutional quota of 15 and 8%), they are unable to work effectively in these bodies due to the social hierarchy and inequalities that exist in rural society. Studies have clearly brought out how proxy leadership (upper castes in the villages) controls the panchayats and their decision-making process on behalf of SCs and STs.

❖ The unpredictable weather conditions

- The untimely catastrophic floods and drought - the ill impacts of climate change - started to be felt by all sections of the society, but already socially and economically marginalized communities - Dalits, STs, etc. - become more vulnerable due to natural disasters as their dependence on nature is much higher than that of the rich, and their ability to cope with disaster much weaker. Here too, the children and women suffer most.

❖ The move by the government to amend the Right to Information Act

- The envisaging exemption from disclosure for official discussions and consultations (previously known as file nothings) and prohibition of frivolous and vexatious complaints — will eventually handicap severely

the very RTI Act which was hailed as the weapon in the hand of the ordinary people to elicit information and monitor effectively the implementation of various legislations and schemes meant to benefit them. Indeed, obviously this will have implications to the implementation of child related schemes too.

❖ **Food Inflation**

- The rising food inflation - reached 19% in the last week of November 2009 and escalation of essential commodities' prices, mainly due to global economic crisis and acute shortage of rainfall due to the ill impacts of the climate change. The situation is still grim as the food inflation is still hovering above 10%, to be spiraled up again due to the recent de-control of fuel prices, unpredictable weather conditions and deteriorating political instability arising out of huge scale scams like 2G Spectrum.

❖ **POSITION/POLICY OF THE GOVERNMENT SUPPORTING THE CHILD WELFARE MEASURES**

- The State Government of Andhra Pradesh has launched a programme on elimination of employment of domestic child labour, in tune with the Union Government notification [extending provisions of Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 and its revised schedules of hazardous employment], which came into effect on October 10, 2006. As per the notification, employing children below 14 years as domestic servants or in restaurants, tea stalls, dhabas, hotels, motels, resorts, spas or other recreational centers is prohibited. Violation of this notification will be an offence punishable with imprisonment for not less than three months, extendible to a year with or without fine of not less than Rs.10, 000/- according to an official release. These provisions have come handy for the rescue of child workers, especially Child Domestic Workers in the city.
- By the 86th Amendment to the Constitution of India, education is a fundamental right. The State has to ensure that every child is in school. Right to Education (RTE), which came into force from April 1, 2010, is an essential step towards improving each child's accessibility to secondary and higher education, bringing India closer to achieving national educational development goals, as well as the MDGs and Education for All. In the light of Right to Education Act which guarantees the right to every child between the ages of 6 and 14 to free and compulsory elementary education, there is a greater urgency to amend the existing the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation Act) which gives scope for child labour – by making a distinction between hazardous and non-hazardous categories of work for children under 14 years.
- The Women and Child Development Ministry, Government of India, has launched centrally sponsored "Integrated Child Protection Scheme" (ICPS) to bring all the child protection related institutions/ programmes/schemes – including those provisions - Child Welfare Committee, Juvenile Justice Board, Children/Juvenile Homes, etc. – under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 (amended in 2006) and National Plan of Action for Children 2005, under one umbrella. In the context of ICPS, the State government of Andhra Pradesh has launched the 'Society for Protection and Empowerment of Women and Children' to monitor the implementation of ICPS at State level and to facilitate effective protection of women and children by synergizing the service chain of government, non-governmental organizations and private sector.
- Aarogyasri is a unique health insurance scheme being implemented by Government of Andhra Pradesh through Aarogyasri Health Care Trust. The scheme provides financial assistance to BPL families to meet the serious health needs.
- Judicial Activism, addressing PILs or taking cases on its own, helped accelerating the process of implementation of various legislations and schemes for the benefit of the marginalized and the most vulnerable. On February 2, 2010, observing that India is now becoming a hub of child sex abuse, the Supreme Court of India, directed that the government needs to understand clearly that child trafficking is a serious issue. It directed the government to institute a special investigative agency to deal with trafficking and plug the loopholes. The bench also advised the government to seek the help of NGOs in tackling the problem of child and women trafficking. Furthermore, the Supreme Court of India took serious note of the non-response of the states and Union Territories on the recommendations made by National Human Rights Commission on Child Labour (20th July 2010). It ordered all the State chief secretaries to explain by attending the Supreme Court of India. It is also took cognizance of the implementation of the Juvenile Justice Act 2000 and Amendment Act 2006. To quote another important judgment, this brought far reaching changes for the benefit of children: the one of December 13th 2006 instructing the governments to implement ICDS scheme without fail, especially among the marginalized – SC/ST – communities.
- The present State and Central governments are more proactive towards Public-Private-Partnership (PPP), involving NGOs and other Civil Society Organizations in implementing various programmes/ schemes, including those related to children development. In general, the policies of the Government (the Congress Government – both at Centre and State) are more child-friendly. For instance, efforts made by the Government to continue and more effectively the schemes related to child development, including Mid-Day-Meal at school, to improve the situation at government run homes (such as, Observation/Juveniles Homes within JJ System, Social Welfare Hostels, especially for the children from the marginalized communities, etc.), NCLP and SSA projects to enroll and retain out-of-school children in regular schooling, etc.
- Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008 provides welfare measures for the worker in the unorganized sector. The Act being described as the first major step in 60 years to remove the difficulties of the poor employed in the unorganized sector. Agricultural workers and migrant labourers will also be covered under the Act. 94% of the working class in the country employed in the unorganized sector would get the benefit of health, life and disability insurance, old age pension and group accident scheme. The Act

while helping the poor families to save their resources will ultimately benefit the children indirectly in getting better education and health care.

❖ **IN GENERAL**

- The grim socio-economic conditions in most of the interior villages, housing the marginalized communities and the strengthening thereby of anti-state movements, such as, Maoists/Naxalites, etc. and the escalation of conflicts between these groups and the State within AP and many other neighboring States may have a lasting negative impact on otherwise peaceful environment within the region. The activities of religious fundamentalist groups and the supportive terrorist out-fit, both from within and outside the country, add fuel to the fire.
- Lack of awareness among the target groups (the most vulnerable and marginalized, socially economically- politically excluded – sections of the society (especially SCs and STs) about the Acts, Government Programmes/Schemes for their sustainable development, which in turn, make them remain incapacitated to demand and access their rights and entitlements. (This is especially true in building the 'Knowledge-Based Communities' as part of actualizing an Integrated Child Rights Approach by Navajeevan in future.)