



NAVAJEEVAN BALA BHAVAN VIJAYAWADA

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

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INTROSPECTION INTO THE SPECTRUM OF INTERVENTIONS UNDERTAKEN

(‘CHILD SAFETY NET’ - INTERGATED CHILD RIGHTS APPROACH – EXTENDING
THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM OF DON BOSCO TO THE CIVIL SOCIETY)

The ground reality and our experience on the field require us to undertake introspection into the interventions we implement for the cause of young at risk, taking into the diversity of groups of these children. It is true that we Salesians are perhaps the pioneers in the field with varied activities, such as, street presence, counseling, home integration – often preceded by home enquires, and other rehabilitation measures like, bridge schools, schooling or skills training of the rescued children, housing them in group foster care homes, etc. As if a ‘conveyor belt’ we cater to the needs of different groups of children.

Child’s Right to Participation: Many a time, in all these processes of rehabilitating these children – in the ‘crowd’ pulling, the ‘child’ is forgotten. Often, the system is geared towards collective care rather than individual personal follow-up giving due importance to his/her ‘best interests’ – Child-Wise Transition Plan. We forget the ‘person’ of the child; underestimate his/her ability to be an agent of his/her own positive change and to participate in the decision making process that affect his/her life. Instead of 22 save the child by leading him/her to Navajeevan. Sponsor the child to realize his/her dream. Paying mere lip service to child’s right to participation, we have to incorporate measures to participate the child actively in the process of planning, implementation and review processes.

Due Place to Girl Child: Most of our activities and allocation of resources thereof are geared towards prevention, rescue and rehabilitation processes benefiting the boy-children. As the ground reality and our experience reveals, it is high time that, on par with boy-child, we establish institutional infrastructure for the rehabilitation of the girl-child, especially in the context of growing number of run-away girl children. As of now, most of our projects are confined to the provision of non-institutional measures to benefit the girl-child.

It is a fact that there are fewer girls on the street than there are boys. While the easier option would be to believe that this is because girls are less likely to leave their homes than boys, this is not entirely true. It is true that girls may tolerate violence, emotional and verbal abuse and discrimination to a much greater extent than boys, partly because of the systemic gender discrimination in our society to which they are socialized at an early age. What is also true and disturbing is that when a girl child does leave the (sometimes questionable) security of a home, she does not remain on the street very long. Usually, girl children are preyed upon much faster, and quickly whisked off the street into situations which have elements of bonded labour or commercial sexual exploitation.

While the systems for providing residential support for boys was very well established in Navajeevan, when a girl child at risk was found, either on the street or through its outreach programmes for eliminating child labour, the organization found itself in a dilemma.

Few organizations have residential support options for girls, and there is a strong gender component to this. Comparatively few organizations in India are willing to take on the responsibility of girl children, and our Don Bosco Organizations are not an exception to this unwillingness. This is because there is a widespread perception that the rehabilitation for girl children is more difficult, as it involves more number of years and more resources when compared to that of boys. While it is possible for the organization to rationalize looking after boys till they reach the age of 18, and then expecting them to take care of themselves according to cultural norms, the same cultural norms suggest that older girls or young women require the most protection when they are at that age, and hence, if an organization takes care of them up to that point, they should consider support for further protection, most usually, within a marriage. For all these reasons, most organizations consider the care of girls more difficult and do not choose to establish rehabilitation measures for them. (While the government does run homes for girl children in need of care and support, its intake is a small number; also, often not up to the mark.)

Thus, until recently, Navajeevan was on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand the number of girl children at risk being identified was going up, and there were few support systems for children thus identified. On the other, there was no tradition of looking after girl children among Don Bosco organizations, and Navajeevan itself had no infrastructure available. (Presently, Navajeevan started constructing ‘Balika’ - a girl-children village; also, it has now residential bridge course facilities for rescued girl-child workers and skills training streams for girls above 15 years.)

❖ **An Emphasis on the ‘Socially Excluded’ and the Vulnerable:**

As noted in the data analysis of Navajeevan, there is a growing number of children, from the socially and economically excluded SC/ST Communities/families, flowing to street and into child labour market, and thereby losing a joyful childhood and opportunities for all round development. It is Navajeevan’s save the child by leading him/her to Navajeevan. Sponsor the child to realize his/her dream. 23 experiences, after they are admitted to Navajeevan’s care, unless they are given special attention, these children cannot come up the ladder of life. There is the possibility that they will not be able to avail the available opportunities within the organization as they are not able to ‘negotiate’ with the concerned unlike other children coming from the dominant communities. They are often too submissive, timid and silent without being capable of expressing themselves.

Becoming sensitive to the stated scenario - with the personality developmental problems that are perceived among the children from these marginalized communities, an Organization like Navajeevan has to take a conscientious policy decision to support these children in a special manner to overcome these difficulties, many a time connected to the way they were nurtured/taught (to be over-submissive/subservient, ‘give in’ when rights are violated) within their families and communities. Also, while promoting and protecting the rights of all the vulnerable children, one has to put a special emphasis on the rights, protection and developmental opportunities of girl children, especially from these communities.

❖ **Lay Collaboration and Community Participation and Ownership:**

The term ‘lay collaboration’ is not something new for us, but the need of the hour is to have the willingness with an open mind and heart to put it into practice in a radical way – a radical renewal called for by the contemporary situation where “The lay person is a member of the Church in the heart of the world and a member of the world in the heart of the Church” (Puebla). This is a call for an active belief in the spirit of Don Bosco, read again with the sensitivity and approach begun in the Church with the Vatican II Council, expressed in the years of the post-conciliar period, right up to the Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* – the attitude of “shared communion and responsibility.” We have to create ‘settings’ in which lay people work in the community: oratory, youth centre, school, training centre, parish, communities for young people in difficulties, the educational use of free time, institutionalized and

spontaneous initiatives, etc. In the first place the variety of emerging settings and initiatives call for participatory planning/ designing, implementation, monitoring/review of any intervention, involving lay collaborators, and more primarily, the members of the target groups – children/youth at risk, if the given intervention to be adequate for the concrete circumstances. In other words, we should apply an inclusive approach – the necessary convergence of all involved in the work, lay collaborators along with the children/youth at risk (the primary stakeholders) and all others: local community elders, PRIs, various line departments of the government, CBOs and Civil Society Organizations.

The times we are living in, however, permit and indeed demand new expressions of the common mission. Nowadays, as we have emphasized in the sternness in recent years, there are transversal causes such as the family, life, education, children's rights, peace, the question of women, safeguarding the natural environment, global solidarity – that can see us involved together.

Now let us consider the other members of the 'vast movement of persons'. Lay people work with Salesians and together we share the spirit and mission of Don Bosco for the service of the young. The Salesian Constitution, referring to the educative and pastoral community, states: "In this community lay people associated with our work make a contribution all of their own, because of their experience and pattern of life. We welcome and encourage their collaboration, and we give them the opportunity to get a deeper knowledge of the Salesian spirit and the practice of the preventive system. We foster the spiritual growth of each of them."

We need to be innovative as our founder and father was, in his times. Think of new paradigms, build networks and join hands with others. We not only bring in others into our settings, but we begin to go 24 save the child by leading him/her to Navajeevan. Sponsor the child to realize his/her dream. Out and become partners in initiatives for young at risk run by others. We need to take lay collaboration as the way to achieve maximum reach and make lay collaborators equally responsible.

❖ Life Skills – Sexual Health Education - Career Guidance as Part of Transition Planning:

As part of Integrated Child Rights Approach, the project team plans to undertake activities towards strengthening soft skills of the target groups, without which the real impact of other activities – such as, skills trainings, education scholarship, etc. – cannot be achieved. In today's market, a student without career orientation, soft skills (communication, creativity, problem solving, etc.) cannot bloom, however high marks he obtains in his exams. Without training families how to prioritize their needs and accordingly spending, the extra income they may be able to earn will not result in meeting the education, nutritional/ health care needs of the children. Without facilitating the marginalized communities to establish market linkages, the objectives of skill training in various skills cannot be attained. Without facilitating families, especially the marginalized ones, to obtain Basic/Life Documents, especially for their children, one cannot envisage to equip them to demand and access their rights and entitlements provided by the State under various schemes – for instance, a marginalized family without having the 'white ration card' cannot avail the benefits under Arogyasree/free Healthcare Scheme. Or, a child without birth certificate cannot avail of admissions into educational institutions / employment opportunities, etc.

❖ Public Private Partnership – GO-NGO Collaboration:

It makes efforts to enhance the delivery of services through the principle of public-private partnership (PPP) which facilitates convergence.

❖ Children in need of care and protection and children in conflict with the law:

The Government runs and provides grant-in-aid to NGOs to run several types of 'Homes' (Juvenile Homes, Destitute Cottages, hostels, ashram schools) for children in need of care and protection. But for those in conflict with law, Government itself runs observation homes, correctional homes etc. Some of the latter do invite or permit NGOs to carry out ad hoc supportive services to improve the quality of care and also extend rehabilitative services through counseling, training or job placement. Some States have formalized the support and participation of NGOs by forming Home Committees with specified roles and responsibilities of the NGOs in the partnership. The Delhi Government handed over the complete management with allocated budget of an Observation Home for boys to PRAYAS in 1998. In Tamil Nadu, 20 JJ Homes are under the management of NGOs. In Delhi 36 children died in a span of three years due to overcrowding in four Homes for the mentally challenged. The Umerkhadi home was established in 1927 by Children's Aid Society in what was originally a jail built by the British in 1804 and handed over to CAS. AS operates four homes out of this jail premises. An abandoned jail is used as the observation home in Gaya.