



National Policy Dialogue on Street Children

Venue: Yak Palace, Lalitpur

Time: 10:30 am- 1:00 pm

Date: November 14 2014

Organizer: CWIN Nepal

Supported By: COMIC Relief

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CWIN-Nepal

NATIONAL POLICY DIALOGUE ON STREET CHILDREN

Introduction

“National Policy Dialogue on Street Children” was organized by Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre (CWIN-Nepal) with the support of UK based COMIC Relief on 14 November, 2014 at Yak Palace, Lalitpur.

Mr. Kumar Bhattarai, the Spokesperson of CWIN Nepal, facilitated the program. Mr. Kiran Rupa Kheti, Under Secretary of Ministry of Women Children and Social Welfare, Mr. Tarak Dhital, Executive Director of Central Children Welfare Board, Mr. Madhav Pradhan, President of CWIN Nepal, Ms. Bimala Rai Paudel, Honorable member of National Planning Commission and key note speaker of the program, Mr. Gauri Pradhan, Human Rights Defender and Former Commissioner of National Human Rights commission were the invitees to the dash.

Also present in the program were high level officials of Kirtipur, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur municipalities, police personnel’s, representatives from civil society networks, non-governmental organizations affiliated with National Alliance of Organizations working for street children (NAOSC), direct field workers working with street children many affiliated to Street Field Workers Forum (SFWF), individual researchers and media.

Significance of the program

It is very important to analyse the current status of protection of street children to address their issues of concern in the national policy and for designing the programs for their sustainable social reintegration and empowerment. A policy dialogue on street children can pave the way for making a policy for street children addressing their problems and initiating programs that benefits their life in the long run. The policy dialogue and discussions among the stakeholders and high level officials can help to generate a set of recommendations which can be provided to the concerned policy makers for policy changes and to ensure sustainable coordination among concerned stakeholders for the welfare of street children.

Objectives of the program

The policy dialogue on street children was organized with the objective of finding ways to ensure that the issues of street children are put forward and addressed in the national policy of children. Along with this, other objectives of the program are as follows:

- Reviewing the status of street children in Nepal and their place in the policy document
- To open pathways for the collaboration of government, municipalities, police personnel, civil society networks, organizations working for street children, media and other concerned stakeholders to ensure the rights of street children and to incorporate their issues in the policy document of the government

- To bring experts' opinions in relation to street children in Nepal and sharing of experiences and recommendations from the concerned stakeholders

Welcome Speech, Sumnima Tuladhar, Executive Coordinator, CWIN Nepal

Ms. Sumnima Tuladhar in her welcome speech highlighted the objective of the program. She emphasized that working with street children is not an easy task, rather a very challenging one. They have been facing lots of problems and seen many hardships of life from very early years of life. She stated that a policy dialogue of stakeholders is important to catch the attention of all the concerned stakeholders in the policy level to incorporate their issue in the national policy. She was also hopeful that the dialogue between stakeholders will provide the opportunity to bring forward issues and ways of incorporating them in the national policy.

Keynote Speaker, Gauri Pradhan, Human Rights Defender

Mr. Gauri Pradhan, Human Rights Defender and Former Commissioner of National Human Rights commission and founder President of CWIN-Nepal presented working paper on "Addressing policy and practical improvements in relation to street children".

Since two and half decades, founder President of CWIN Nepal, Mr. Pradhan has been working for the rights of children and was the pioneer activist to fight for the rights of children.

He mentioned three types of street children, children who live and work in the streets, children who work in the streets and go back to their family or to any other place and children living with families who live in the streets.

He mentioned that no constitution in the world has ever brought the issue of street children in their constitution except for Nepal. He argued that the constitution of Nepal can provide reference to other country. In his working paper, he has made recommendations based on his two and half decade long experience with street children. Issues of street children have been mentioned in the constitution of Nepal but there is a need of recommendation for ensuring the rights of street children in the policy level and the policy should be more functional.

According to him, the policy makers hardly take reference of existing policies which result in policy conflicts. Furthermore, the inclusion of provision for street children in the constitution has no meaning unless the implementation part is given priority.

He believes that the street children's psychology is different and they have unique skills, maturity and courage to deal with the hardships in street. He wants to term street children as street survivors as they have many surviving strategies. They are aware and keep them updated about the ways to survive in the streets. He even shared a fact that current statistics show that none of street children are malnourished in a country where 42-45% of children are malnourished.

He acclaimed the work of the organizations working for street children as the number of children on the streets has been constant for the past decade. He argued that it has been possible because of the continuous comprehensive interventions of the organizations working for them.

The reason for street children coming to streets cannot merely be connected with poverty as even the child from well off family land in streets due to various reasons, including domestic violence, abandonment or other psychological issues.

In his working paper, the intervention programs for street children have been divided into the following five categories:

1. Philanthropic and welfare based programs
2. Organizational support and care
3. Socialization and social reintegration
4. Emergency support and Child Helpline
5. Empowerment and self reliant

He believes that the interventions are carried out worldwide but there is a need of strong coordination and collaborative approach. He believes in rights based approach over welfare based approach.

He also pointed out some of the existing myths on street children which are as follows:

1. They do not have family
2. They are fugitive
3. The reason of street children is poverty
4. There is more security in urban than rural areas
5. They are violent and involved in criminal activities
6. All street children are beggars
7. They are substance abusers
8. They do not receive any support from organizations
9. The number is rapidly increasing
10. The problem of street children cannot be resolved

He strongly adheres to the principle of ensuring the protection, development and participation of street children through coordination and collaboration of government, civil society networks and other concerned stakeholders focusing on the programs like alternative education, life skill and personality development training programs, financial education, education on reproductive health and family planning, HIV/AIDS, programs to minimize the usage of drugs, psychosocial counseling services, expansion and strengthening helpline and emergency support services, open house, safe house, drop in shelter facilities etc that will protect the rights of children in the long run.

He states, "We cannot completely eradicate street children from the streets but minimize the number through social empowerment, reintegration and socialization."

He is positive that it is the right time to form the policy and to work for the effective implementation, when all the people in the policy level and municipalities are experienced and sensitized in the issues of child rights and street children as well.

He said, "One of the intervention strategies for the government can be through support to organization which can open door for the continuous monitoring and strategies identification of the programs."

Provision of vital registration; mobility check and monitor of children without families or abandoned children which could be the victims of trafficking to work in the preventive aspect; skill development of the field workers and the organizations; focusing programs with rights based approach rather than focusing only in welfare based approach which might further trap children in the street's vicious life circle, social reintegration, extension of emergency support etc should be taken into consideration when formulating the national policy. According to him, for its effective implementation, there should be the development of system based approach.

Remarks: Kiran Rupa Kheti, Under Secretary of Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare

Government is working on making a procedural guidelines and he believes that the working paper prepared by Mr. Pradhan will become a guiding paper for the government. The sensitivity of the issue of street children is realized but there is always a lack of continuity. There is a need of sensitivity among the bureaucrats who are in the position of making laws and formulating programs.

He stated that, "There is a need of procedural and model conceptual clarity in working with street children as one time rescue and intervention is not sustainable. Therefore, there is a need of integrated, multi sector, multi disciplinary approach to address issues of street children which can be programs focusing on the poverty alleviation, creating employment opportunities, providing free education etc."

He also believes that there is a need of sensitization, strengthening and capacity building of women and children directorate, Nepal police, various district service centers, and organizations, along with Central Children Welfare Board, line and focal ministry-MOWCSW to ensure that children are not traumatized or re-victimized in the process of interventions.

He is also working as the national coordinator of South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children (SAIEVAC) and has tried to allocate budget for street children, as well as has addressed the issue of street children and their inclusion in programs against sexual violence in the regional level.

He states, “Without incorporating the integrated approach and effective collaboration among the stakeholders the government alone cannot do anything. Therefore, there is a need of system approach to address this challenging issue”.

Remarks: Tarak Dhital, Executive Director, Central Children Welfare Board

Mr. Dhital has dedicated his golden years of life working in the field of children for more than two and half decades. He believes that children who come to the streets are children with lots of potential and courage. We need to tap their potentiality for positive action and guide them to right path by adopting various modalities suitable for them. He stated that the government mechanism is rusted and it should be lubricated with suitable and effective intervention strategies. He affirmed that though we talk about coordination and collaboration, there is unhealthy competition between the stakeholders and among the governmental agencies as well. We should not make the situation complex but rather simplify things and go by system and rights based approach.

He believes in the necessity of conceptual clarity among all the policy makers and need of integrated approach to address the issue of street children whose causes cannot be confined to one.

He said, “It is important to provide the clear policy points to the bureaucrats and other policy making body which is sustainable and focused on its actual root cause rather than focusing on ad hoc and fragmented interventions.”

He assured that the being prepared by the government will address the issues regarding street children. Except for the citizenship issue, all other issues are incorporated in the government's procedural guideline mentioned in the working paper prepared by Mr. Pradhan. Like Mr. Pradhan, he also strongly believes in rights based approach and urged everyone to look beyond the welfare approach.

He later in his remarks, urged everybody concerned to give their recommendations in writing putting forward the valuable suggestions rather than just pressurizing the government in formulating a policy for protection of the rights of children.

Remarks: Bimala Rai Paudel, Hon. Member of National Planning Commission

National planning commission is striving for making evidence based policy. Nepal still is in the transition period and political dialogues are still being carried out and with political instability in the country it is children who suffer directly and indirectly. She strongly believes that nation should invest in 45% who are children as they are backbone and main developer of the country. Street children are the victims of various forms of violence and it is the responsibility of the nation to bring them out of that world of violence.

She also stated that street children are not only concern of human rights but it carries social, economic concern as well. Each and every child has the right to live in a violence free environment and whenever a child is abused immediate rescue and support facilities should be provide to the child. For this, effective support system should be provided by the government and should make provisions to ensure basic rights of children.

She also shared some of the ideas like establishing a foster child care center/ foster- parenting, educating them through innovative learning and using their creativity in the positive sides.

She also raised the issue of vital registration and how the process can be facilitated by the school, village development committees or organizations for children having difficulty receiving vital registration (especially birth registration and citizenship).

She stressed that there should be transformation in bureaucracy and there is a need of expertise in every thematic areas.

Open floor discussion

After the remarks from all the distinguished experts, the floor had been open to all the other participants.

In the discussion, question in relation to the feasibility of the inclusion of street children in Minimum Condition Performance Measure; policy for the mentally challenged children especially street children; feasibility of including the best practices like child protection services in Nepal; along with the probability of free compulsory education from Class 1-10 and how it can be put forward in terms of policy; and what could be the policy for regulating glue sniffing were some of the questions raised by the representatives from concerned stakeholder bodies.

Some suggestions were provided to the government from the discussions. They are as follows:

- ❖ For the effective implementation of existing laws and development of good working modality with children, it is crucial in recruitment of experts in every thematic area. Furthermore, it would make the approach more systematic if it is guided by effective laws and policies.
- ❖ There is an urgent need of formulation of laws to prohibit the selling of dendrites to children along with regulating and monitoring of the sales in order to address the issue of glue sniffing among street children.
- ❖ Policy should also address the need of recruiting skilled and experienced experts, including social workers and psycho-social counselors in organizations working for street children, drop-in-shelters, emergency shelter homes etc. who can be more sensitive to the issues and challenges of children. They can further enhance the possibility of successful social reintegration.
- ❖ Organizations are mushrooming in the urban areas. If the organizations concerned for street children are opened in rural areas, many problems can be addressed in the grass root level and can work in the preventive aspects.
- ❖ There is a need of working environment conducive for front line field/social workers by developing working mechanism clearly mentioned in the policy which can act as the guideline for them.
- ❖ There are many family planning services, safe-abortion centers, but still all the girls/women are deprived of such facilities or are unaware of it. Therefore, there should be strict implementation and sensitization of existing policy to address this issue.

- ❖ Government should focus on the issues of citizenship and birth registration which is very challenging and thereafter formulate separate policy to ensure the citizenship of street children.
- ❖ There should be identical jacket for all the front line field workers.

Mr. Krishna Gautam, SP from Women and Children Service Directorate – Nepal Police, urged the government to clearly develop mechanisms for the police officials who directly work with street children. He stated that due to the absence of emergency shelters specific to street children, their work has been very challenging. Especially children with disability who are left in streets by their own parents are hard to be addressed or provided proper support. The working difficulty of police at such critical areas should be highlighted in the national policy so that they can find effective ways to combat the challenges.

After the open floor discussion, Mr. Gauri Pradhan said that the sense of ownership is very important and the government (police, community police, municipalities, government agencies) is the first body to take the ownership and help the concerned entities. Government should always take responsibility and should create conducive working environment for police, organizations and concerned agencies. The government should clearly develop mechanisms and should mention in national policy about the roles and responsibilities of communities, police and local entities to address the problem at local level. He further acknowledged the roles of non-governmental organizations to be significant in taking necessary steps within their working sphere to take care of street children.

Finally, the program concluded with the remarks from Mr. Madhav Pradhan, President of CWIN-Nepal. He highlighted on the need of incorporating the issue of mentally challenged and differently able children in the working paper. He also felt the need to address the issue of street youth which is emerging as a greater challenge.

Conclusion

National dialogue on street children was successful in having a dialogue between all the key stakeholders present in the program. The working paper of Mr. Gauri Pradhan and recommendations from stakeholders provided guideline for the preparation of procedural guideline of the government. This event helped identify the issues of street children and highlighted the need of rights based, integrated approach along with system approach in coordination and collaboration among government, local bodies, organization, media and other concerned stakeholders to ensure the rights of street children.