

# ISSUES PERTAINING TO CO-ORDINATION AND CO-OPERATION IN CHILD WELFARE SERVICES\*\*

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The purpose of this paper is to discuss some issues relating to co-operation and co-ordination of Child Welfare Services in India. To achieve this, I would like to divide my paper in two areas, viz., (i) to take the review of existing child welfare services, co-operation and co-ordination in these services, and (ii) raise some of the issues for discussion.

## I. WHO IS A CHILD

In India we do not have a definition of a child. Different acts indicate different definitions. For example, according to the Children's Act, it is below 16, according to Child Marriage Restraint Act, it is 15. For marriage, voting right and employment there are different ages stipulated. Indian Constitution indicates "No child below 14" will remain without compulsory primary education. So it becomes very necessary to define a "child" and his age. It would be better if we accept WHO definition which takes into account the age from 0 to 14 and covers pre-natal age also.

## CHILD POPULATION

Children account for a substantial proportion of the population in our country (42%) as compared to 28% of child population in the developed countries (United Nations, 1971). The difference in demographic structure and growth have impor-

tant social and economic implications. The age composition of a population is among the fundamental determinants of its potential needs and capacities. The presence of numerous children places heavy burden on necessary housing, educational and health services, and on availability of economically productive time on the part of women. It thereby affects family's ability to savings. With 40% of India's population below poverty line the worst sufferers are children.

## ABSENCE OF CHILD WELFARE POLICY<sup>1</sup>

In India we do not have a policy statement on 'Social Welfare' (Kulkarni, 1964). Kulkarni defines social welfare policy as strategy of action indicating the means and methods to implement the social welfare services. A policy statement is like major threads of warp and woof on which by filling details a mantle is woven" (Kulkarni, 1964: 26). Since there is no social welfare policy, no definite 'child welfare policy' has been evolved as yet. The planners should view that expenditure on children is investment in human capital rather than consumption. The importance of child welfare programmes is supported both by the theories of child development and the theories of socio-economic planning and policies. In the absence of 'clear policy' we have to search for policy guidelines in the Constitution of India and various acts

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<sup>1</sup> Policy on child welfare has been declared by Dept. of Social Welfare Government of India in August 1974.

pertaining to children and documents on five year plans.

#### CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

The Child Welfare Services in India could be broadly divided into Statutory and Non-Statutory Services. Under the statutory services we may include the services offered to juvenile delinquents under Children's Acts, services to backward class children, suppression of immoral traffic of Women and Children, Beggars acts etc. In these services there are two kinds of gaps. First of all, there is no uniformity in the Acts pertaining to children. There is no common objective. The second observation is that these services are partially implemented by the Government and partially by Voluntary Welfare Agencies. The Government co-ordinates the work with these agencies by giving them grant-in-aid. As the Government is in a position to give money the relationship between the Government Departments and the agencies is not of co-partners in a common activity but it is that of giver and receiver.

Since we claim that our State is a 'Welfare State', the responsibility of the Welfare Services automatically lies with the Government. With the tremendous growth of child population in our country, it is beyond the limits of voluntary agencies to cope up with the size of the problem. Child Welfare schemes are spread over various sectors in the plan, such as health, education, labour welfare, social welfare, community development, housing, etc. As a result the child gets fragmented services.

(a) *Education:* The Indian Constitution makes it obligatory on Government to provide free and compulsory education to the children under the age of 14. In almost all the states, villages with a population of 300 or over have been provided with schools.

According to the second All India Education Survey (1967) 95% of the rural population is served with primary schools in their own villages. But there is a good deal of wastage in education. The percentage of school drop outs at 7th Std. level is as high as 85% in a city like Bombay where the best of educational services are available.

Recent studies in school drop outs have brought out that a number of children cannot attend school because of poverty. Many children start earning at a very early age in spite of utter unemployment of the grown ups. Malnutrition, lack of clothes, books, proper study-place are the factors which keep children away from school. Our present day education system is also responsible for this. A child coming from lower castes cannot adjust in the school which generally imbibes middle class values. The teachers do not understand the difficulties in learning situations faced by a lower caste child who is the first member from the family coming to the school.

The constitution of India, section 45, says that the Government of India have by implication accepted the responsibility of pre-school education. The Planning Commission in their five year plans has mentioned the importance of pre-school education and expressed that "the highly impressionable plastic and educationally potent period of the child" should not be neglected. The various committees such as the Child Care Committee (1962) appointed by CSWB. Ganga Sheran Sinha Committee (1968), The Education Commission's report (1966) has accepted the importance of pre-school education. But still pre-primary education is not considered as a service which is most essential. There is an ambiguity as to whether it is an area of education or that of social welfare. The pre-primary education is equated with day care service. The rural Balwadis are considered as partial day care centres. This has affected

the pre-school education movement. As it is attached to social welfare, the monetary aid that a voluntary agency gets is very meagre. Some careful thought needs to be given to this issue. It will be worthwhile to accept pre-primary education as a part of total education and necessary policy needs to be developed. Most of the Balwadis are supervised or inspected by staff who are not trained to inspect the education based institutions and as a result the agencies do not get necessary guidance in the development of pre-primary education programme.

United Nations report on children (1971: 47) observes 'for the pre-school age group, the use of television for educational purposes could be more extensively explored. It might perhaps be one of the means of providing pre-school education at very low cost to a very large number of children in the developing countries'. This needs to be brought up to the notice of the authorities of All India Radio and T. V. Stations so that they can introduce such programmes. Necessary T. V. sets also need to be installed in poor class localities.

(b) *Health*: Gore observes, "Health is another area where an overall policy perspective has to be developed. Among preventive health services those which ensure protected water supply and sanitation should receive high priority. They are the two strategic areas for prevention of disease in all age groups. Next in importance are the services for child and maternal health. The foundations of physical and mental health are laid in the early stages of childhood and adolescence. Whatever can be done to protect and promote the health of the child will serve his own individual interest as well as the interest of the nation" (Gore, 1973: 22). In the light of the observations made by Gore the preventive health services are a very important part of child health programmes.

The broad objectives of health services under the three plans have been to control and eradicate communicable diseases and to provide curative and preventive services in rural areas. Maternity and child health services have been expanded and modernised through the establishment of Primary Health Units during the last four plans. Family Planning has become the focal activity of primary health centres.

The proportion of rural mothers who receive specialised assistance in these centres is very low. Most of the deliveries in rural areas are still conducted at home by the villages Dais. Though the immunisation service is available many babies are not immunised. Small Pox vaccination is now available universally but still there is a resistance on the part of the village community to immunise the child. The immunisation against Polio, whooping cough, tetanus is not available sometimes due to non availability of vaccine and sometimes due to non availability of staff.

In urban areas also the services offered at hospitals are not sufficiently used. There is also a shortage of children's hospitals. Maharashtra has 18 children's hospitals whereas Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Haryana, Jammu-Kashmir and Rajasthan have none. (S. Phadke, 1969: 20).

(c) *Nutrition*: It is estimated that 50% to 60% of the child population suffers not only because of the malnutrition of their mothers but also from the accumulated effect of their own malnutrition and under-nourishment which is a serious hazard to their growth. At least two-thirds of Indian children live in families which are poorer and larger than the average families. It is estimated that nearly 10 to 12 thousand children go blind every year due to vitamin A deficiency.

Millions of children suffer from parasitic and infectious diseases. The calory

intake of Indian children is much below the required level.

School feeding programmes have been introduced to supply nutritional feeding of the children between age groups 3 to 6 and 6 to 11. It is the responsibility of the family to provide adequate food to its children and Government should be urged to make enough food available at cheaper rate to the families. The draft outline of the 5th plan provides Rs. 400/- crores for this programme. But it is necessary to bring down the food prices. Otherwise the number of children who will need nutrition in school will increase. In the rural areas through the Central Social Welfare Board, the Scheme of Family and Child Welfare has been introduced. They conduct rural Balwadis, distribute nutrition and arrange for immunisation with the help of Applied Nutrition Programme and the Primary Health Unit. I had an opportunity to visit some of the projects in Maharashtra and it was noticed that there was complete lack of co-ordination and co-operation on the part of the three organisations viz. the Functional Committee, the Public Health Units and Applied Nutrition Programme. As a result, the social change which was expected in the attitudes of villagers towards the welfare of their children is lacking. Somehow we find that there is apathy towards these programmes resulting in non-involvement of the people.

The welfare of rural children is a responsibility of the Community Development Department, Central Social Welfare Board, the Commission for backward classes and Tribal Welfare etc. and a good deal of co-ordination is necessary in their programmes.

(d) *Services for Special Groups of Children*: It includes the services for physically and mentally handicapped children. On the basis of industrialized countries, "it is esti-

mated that about 5% of the total child population is expected to be victims of severe handicaps whereas additional 10% to 15% may need special attention so as to overcome less severe handicaps", (United Nations, 1971 : 75).

In the majority of cases, the handicapped child is a normal child faced with some disadvantages which are often temporary. The general aims of a social policy concerning every disabled child should be to ensure that in spite of his handicap, he should be assisted to be as normal as possible, happy, productive, self reliant, socially acceptable and mobile. The disabled child needs special attention but not over protection.

In this area preventive work is very necessary. If the normal Maternal and Child Health Services are made available to the people and if the villagers are educated to make use of these services it is possible to prevent a number of children from becoming handicapped.

(e) *Children Born out of Wedlock*: The term "illegitimate" used to describe a child born out of wedlock indicates how some of the children in any society are denied fundamental human rights. (United Nations, 1971 : 29). These children have no parents, no home, no caste or class bondages. Adoption and Foster Care Services for these children are almost nil and these programmes should be strengthened on planned and systematic basis, so as to fulfil our nation's commitment to the children's charter. The stigma attached to the illegitimate child can be washed away if the child gets proper home environment. There is not enough community education about adoption and foster care programmes. There are not enough families to respond to the demands of children needing adoption.

(f) *Child Labour*: In our country, many

children work for long hours for meagre returns. There is no control over the jobs they do or on their service conditions. The exploitation of child labour adversely affects education and results in an inappropriately composed labour force. There are four major areas of child employment (i) agriculture (ii) manufacturing (iii) trade and (iv) domestic service (United Nations, 1971: 31). Children of working mothers from lower income groups and middle classes pose another problem. There is organised day care service or creches for the children of industrial working mothers. Large number of working mothers in construction, agriculture and in organised Small Scale Industries like, 'Bidi' making leave their children in home to the custody of elder children in the family. Efforts should be made to review the legislative measures and think of a strategy to bring these children into schools.

(g) *Child Abuse*: With deteriorating economic conditions we come across a number of children misused for begging, transporting illicit liquor etc. The growth of the cities and the expansion of slums are having the effect of increasing child abuse. With shortage of foodgrains we observe a number of children being used for carrying rice in the black market.

Children whose parents are in marital discord, suffer from various types of emotional problems. In such cases, the parents have to be helped to control their impulsive behaviour and help their children to grow in a healthy way.

## II. CO-OPERATION AND CO-ORDINATION IN CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

Child welfare services are scattered in Government agencies under different departments and various authorities, on the one hand and the voluntary agencies on the

other. In the rural areas, Government is the major partner in running the services while the voluntary agencies offer their services mostly in urban areas. Though the voluntary agencies (about 10,000 in number) share a very major responsibility in running the services, they cover a very small population which needs child welfare services. As there is no comprehensive child welfare Act covering normal children and no well spelt Child Welfare Policy, the welfare state committed to the welfare of all citizens, does not have much to offer. Dubey observes "It is being increasingly recognised that in a welfare state the measures of social security, maternity and health services, assistance to the dependents and the handicapped, employment services, services to the needy will have to be provided universally. Ultimately, therefore, the state will have to be responsible for providing these services though the voluntary agencies will continue to help" (Dubey, 1973 : 11). In this respect it will be worthwhile to examine the grant-in-aid programme of the Governments. Kulkarni observes in the evolution of a country-wide grant-in-aid system, certain irritants have also been experienced both by the grant-in-aid giving body as well as by the recipient" (Kulkarni, 1964 : 26). He further observes:

"The question about the precise quantum of a grant that would serve to stimulate and not cripple voluntary effort still remains unanswered" (Kulkarni, 1964 : 26).

The observations on Grant-in-aid are:

- (i) The grants are given by different departments.
- (ii) There is no common pattern of grant-in-aid.
- (iii) Grant-in-aid is inadequate,
- (iv) The state cannot help all the existing agencies,
- (v) The state cannot help adequately the

agencies which already receive help,  
and

- (vi) There is no ratio determined as to how much the agencies should raise and how much should be the state share? 50-50, 40-60, 20-80 or what?

It is necessary to regularise the grant-in-aid system on the model of the Education Departments' Grant-in-aid programmes to secondary schools. Secondly, the grant-in-aid patterns is highly discriminatory. When the Government runs the same programme they spend almost 3 times the funds. To quote an example, when the Central Social Welfare Board runs a Balwadi and nutrition programme in a rural area, the expenditure at one centre is quite high. Under the scheme of Family and Child Welfare Project they pay a full salary to a Balsevika which comes to 260/-. While giving grant for the salary of a Balwadi teacher to a rural agency the rate is Rs. 75/- if the Balsevika is trained. Similarly, the programmes covered under the Children's Act, the Government certified schools spend much more than the certified schools run by the voluntary agencies. The rate of grant per child per month is Rs. 37.5 in the homes run by voluntary agencies while in the Government managed homes it comes to around Rs. 67 per child because the overhead charges such as staff salaries etc. are paid by the Government. If we compare the salaries of staff members of the Government agencies and the voluntary agencies, we find a wide gap. It is high time that the Government realises that the voluntary agencies are conducting a programme for which the Government itself is responsible.

#### STAFF POLICY

In the absence of a proper social welfare policy, there is also a lack of personnel

policy. Many workers in the voluntary agencies as well as the staff members in Government departments and Central Social Welfare Board are untrained. There is a tendency to recruit without advertising. As a result they follow a routine which is out dated. The staff show no initiative. They are not equipped to handle the welfare tasks. If we want to bring social change through welfare programmes, we have to realise the importance of properly qualified staff. The terms "Untrained Balwadi teacher", "Untrained Social Worker", indicate that they are not equipped for the work that they are supposed to do. It will be worthwhile to formulate the staff policy in such a way that the problems of the staff members could be examined and they could be given proper training. A number of untrained persons who are employed in the welfare agencies are eager to undergo training if proper in-service training opportunities are offered to them. Looking at the financial strength of the agencies to day it is necessary that Governments should provide some percentage of the funds required for supervision and training. This is likely to bring long term returns because money spent in training the personnel is a permanent investment.

#### INVOLVEMENT OF THE LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENTS IN CHILD WELFARE WORK

The local self-government bodies like Municipal Corporations, Municipalities, Zilla Parishads and the Gram Panchayats are the real organisations who deal directly with the people. Education and Health Services are already under the jurisdiction of these organisations, but they do not have proper Social Welfare Departments. Actually such departments are very necessary to undertake large scale child welfare programmes. On examining the structure of Social Welfare Services we **find that** no constitu-

tional responsibility of running the welfare programmes is vested in local self-government bodies. Big corporations like Bombay Municipal Corporation spend large funds on Social Welfare Programmes. But there is no policy of distribution on the grant-in-aid pattern laid down. The responsibility of sanctioning grants rests with the finance department. A Social Welfare department is extremely necessary to do this work. It will be proper to reach the people through an infrastructure of Central and State Governments. Some may express that politics may overcome the 'welfare'. But we cannot overlook the fact that they already handle education and health programmes. 'Social Welfare' would be an additional responsibility. They also need to be oriented to keep in view the future child welfare while drawing the housing and town planning schemes because parks, gardens, open play-grounds etc. which are essential requirements for child recreation are not taken into account. The welfare agencies find it very difficult to get suitable accommodation and plots for construction of buildings. The plots should be reserved in modern town planning. The encroachment in Bombay on Oval Maidan, Girgaum and Dadar Chowpatty, Shivaji Park Maidan, should be strongly resisted.

I would like to sum up my paper with

following observations:

1. There is a need for clear-cut consistent national policy for child welfare.
2. There is acute shortage of personnel working for children. Proper personnel policy needs to be evolved to fulfil future welfare needs of children.
3. Even when the services exist, the people do not make full use of them because of the attitudes, beliefs values, and low level of literacy. So there is a need to have massive education programmes to enable the parents to make full use of the services offered.
4. There is a tremendous increase in child population as a result it nullifies the effect of the already inadequate resources and facilities. So child welfare policy should be essentially linked with population policy.
5. The Grant-in-aid programme needs thorough reorganisation.
6. The child welfare programmes should be brought under one department.
7. The local Self-Governments should be involved in implementing the child welfare programmes at the grass root level.
8. The national bodies working for children should guide the people and create awareness about the emerging needs of children.

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