

CILD RIGHTS

Promoting Child Rights

CARE FOR ORPHAN

Better to be with extended family

PANKAJ KARMAKAR

WHAT is the difference between a child growing up at an orphanage and an orphan growing up with his or her grandparents or uncles? Of course we all know the answer. The orphan growing up with his or her relatives will surely get more love and care than the one growing up at an orphanage. As a result, the former has better chance to be integrated with the society.

This is the new concept that is being introduced on test basis in dealing with orphans in Bangladesh as "family is the best place for children and institution is the last resort".

allocates Tk 1500 for a child in the orphanage so why not allocate the same amount to the families of these children in keeping them up.

"Whenever these children are sent to orphanage, they become further separated from families (or extended families) and deprived of their rights, love, care and dignity," says Shabnaaz Zahereen, Child Protection Specialist of UNICEF, Bangladesh.

Shabnaaz has been involved with rehabilitating the Sidr -hit children in coordination with the Department of Social Services (DSS).

With a view to introducing a child-sensitive social protection system, UNICEF implemented its first such initiative on a pilot basis titled "Amader Shishu" jointly with Ministry

bodies monitored monthly progress of the children and after 18 months reviewed the overall progress with these families and found that most of the families had successfully utilised the financial support for the betterment of the children fulfilling all conditions. Their income had increased, food security ensured, and their children were regularly going to schools.

In some cases where the families did not quite achieve these goals, UNICEF continued giving them support for another six months. And in the end, all goals were achieved.

Following the success of the project, UNICEF also launched another initiative in Lalbagh of Dhaka city in 2010 in collaboration with Ministry of Women and Children Affairs. In the

Tk 2,000 each per month," said Shabnaaz Zahereen. And it is in the same area where the incidence of child labour is high in the city.

Side by side with UNICEF, a NGO Aparajeyo Bangladesh, a partner of UNICEF and the government, had been nurturing the same kind of concept in its own way.

"Orphanages are shambling with poor education quality, unhygienic environment, lack of mental counseling, poor budgetary allocation," said Wahida Banu, Executive Director of Aparajeyo Bangladesh.

"We emphasise on family reintegration because if the children can stay with family their rights are protected and can grow up in a congenial atmosphere," she said.

Aparajeyo Bangladesh has around 12 years' experience of working with disadvantaged children. It has developed a range of expertise: non-formal education and street schools; care of children in day and night refuges as well as long term residential care; schooling of street children and vocational training;

"Orphanages are shambling with poor education quality, unhygienic environment, lack of mental counseling, poor budgetary allocation,"

Child-sensitive social protection is a system that should be responsive to children's rights and needs.

mass awareness-raising campaigns; defence of child rights and training of police, lawyers and doctors.

Currently around 1.37 lakh children across the country are getting support through 185 different kinds of care centres of Aparajeyo Bangladesh that has already developed a helpline for orphan and street children with support from UNICEF and collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare.

Just dialling 1098 on land phone, anyone can give information or seek support about orphan and street children and it is toll free.

Child-sensitive social protection is a system that should be responsive to children's rights and needs. While addressing children's vulnerabilities and supporting responses to abuse and exploitation, it ensures to all children realization of their full potential, said promoters of the concept.

Life is Promising for Toma

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

ALTHOUGH she grew up in a different environment from other children of the society, her spirit and struggle seem to make her a role model for the orphan and vulnerable children to secure a dignified position in society.

The 21-year-old girl Toma Roy, who was found at capital Dhaka's Sadarghat Launch Terminal in 1998 by child rights activists, has now become self-reliant and dreams of achieving an aristocratic status in further life through her skill, merit and hard work.

"Once, I was very afraid of my life thinking myself alone in the world. But now I am very much happy with my life," said Toma, who works as a supervisor in a business centre of Aparajeyo Bangladesh, a non-government organisation working for disadvantaged children.

She spent fourteen years of her life under supervision of Aparajeyo Bangladesh that provided her accommodation, food, education, mental counselling and other basic services, above all it has changed her life.

When she was found, she could not remember her parents or other family members, even could not tell how she came to Sadarghat. Till now, she knows nothing about her identity, and only can remember that she hailed from a Hindu family.

"From Sardarghat they (officials of Aparajeyo Bangladesh) took me to Boys and Girls Club at Motijheel of Aparajeyo Bangladesh where I stayed for one year. Later, I was transferred to a Drop-In Centre of the same organisation at Farmgate where I stayed for around 13 years," said Toma.

"I never felt isolated or lonely there. There were many children like me. They gave me motivational counselling to remove my mental sufferings. I thought they were like my family members," she said.

"Whenever I became mentally upset and cried, they took me to Shishu Park (children's park) or other places to make me happy," she said.

Toma has completed her Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC). She now waits to enrol in graduation course.

She also hopes to establish a care centre for orphan or vulnerable children, if she would have enough money in future.

"I would like to urge all the orphan and vulnerable children not to give up hope in face of many challenges. Everyone should keep up their spirit, courage and vision in his or her mind to go forward," said Toma.

Talking to The Daily Star, Aparajeyo Bangladesh Executive Director Wahida Banu said they are working to protect the rights of disadvantaged children so that they can grow up with full potentials.

"I never felt isolated or lonely. There were many children like me. They gave me motivational counselling to remove my mental sufferings. They were like my family members."



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

CILD RIGHTS

Promoting Child Rights

Not all are happy at orphanage

SHUDDIPTA SHARMA

RABIN (pseudonym), a 10-year old boy, has been living in the Sarkari Shishu Paribar, a government orphanage centre, in Mirpur-10 of Dhaka city for four years. He has many friends there and has a great opportunity to play with them all day long. The class-IV student does so besides studies, but it does not make him happy at all. He keeps mum very often and urges the authorities to let him go to his mother.

"I want to live with my mother. But they don't let me go. I hardly get this opportunity during Eid vacations," he said while talking with this correspondent recently.

Rabin is no different. All of the children living in the orphanage center have the same experience and express the same feeling. Although the government facilitates the orphan children to survive by setting up such centre, they always miss their family care.

The loneliness often leads the children to try to flee from the center. They also cry for their family, especially mother, very often.

"Most of the newcomers tries to flee as they miss their mother. Moreover, disciplined lifestyle and self dependency might lead them to try flee from here," said a staff of the center.

This Shishu Paribar is the only government boys' orphanage centre in the city. There is another center with facility of 175 seats in Tejgaon area for girls.

Some boys preferring not to be named alleged that the services of the center are not up to the mark vis-à-vis government allocation. Moreover, without taking proper care some staffs of the centre behave with the children as boss instead.

"There are five people who are designated as Bhaia (brother). But the Bhaiaes force us to call them Sir. There are some female staffs as well with designation of Khalamma (aunt). But we are asked to call them Apa (sister)," said an orphan.

He said it is easy for minor boys to call Bhaia and Khalamma instead of Sir and Apa. Calling as Bhaia and

Khalamma would also give them a family flavour. But the staffs do not allow them to do so.

The orphanage centre sources said currently a total of 96 boys live in the orphanage facilitated for 100 children. Of them, 33 children are studying in play group to class II while 59 children from class III to honours level. Moreover, 15 children are getting technical training from inside and outside of the centre.

The government allocates Tk 2000 for each child per month. Of the amount, Tk 1600 is allocated for food while Tk 400 for other needs including clothes, education and medicine.

"We have to eat whatever we can prepare ourselves, nobody helps us in preparing foods. Actually, we have to live by ourselves. Even if anybody feels sick he has to go to hospital by himself,"

There are 17 staffs led by a Deputy Superintendent in the orphanage centre. Of them five are Boro Bhaia and two are technical trainers. Post of an assistant superintendent-cum-teacher and a part-time doctor are vacant.

Moreover, there are seven other staffs there who joined in deputation. Of them, three are Khalammass, one is Boro Apa and three are technical trainers.

Meanwhile, as there are no posts of cook and dining room boy, children have to prepare their own food in the kitchen and do other works in the dining room.

"We have to eat whatever we can prepare ourselves, nobody helps us in preparing foods. Actually, we have to live by ourselves. Even if anybody feels sick he has to go to hospital by himself," an orphan boy complained.

AKM Mizanur Rahman, deputy

superintendent of the orphanage centre, told The Daily Star that as they want to build the children as self-dependent, they instruct children to do their works themselves.

He said the centre has rehabilitated 34 orphans through services while 27 through education, 22 through training and 42 through other means.

Students of the orphanage center study from play group to class II inside the centre and from class III to class V at a government primary school in the area. After completion of primary studies they study at Shaheed Abu Taleb High School, and Bangla College after secondary studies.

Quite a few students alleged that the non-government Shaheed Abu Taleb High School is a low grade school compared with other schools in the area.

"We are not studying there for free. The centre has to pay half of the fee from the money government allocates for us. We can easily study in other better schools in the area by paying the amount. But a Boro Bhaia doesn't allow us to do so," a student complained.

However, Mizanur Rahman said as this school is close to the centre, they admit students there.



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Family reintegration better despite good arrangement at orphanage

Ranjit Kumar Biswas, Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare and Tariq-ul-Islam, Secretary, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs talk to The Daily Star

ALONG with the child rights activists, the government also emphasises on family reintegration of orphan and vulnerable children for protection of their rights and ensuring their access to basic needs.

"In partnership with UNICEF, currently we have a project on child sensitive social protection under which we provide care to street and vulnerable children and try to reintegrate them with their families," said Ranjit Kumar Biswas, Secretary of the Ministry of Social Welfare.

"Many children, who stayed in orphanages and child care centres, have gone back to their families. Even after reintegrating with families, we keep on monitoring the children and families," he said.

The government is operating a total of 91 child care centres across the country. Out of these centres, 85 are named as 'Shishu Paribar' (children family) where vulnerable and orphan children aged between seven and eighteen are kept.

The rest six child care centres are called 'Choto Moni Nibash' (residence of infants) where infants up to the age of seven are kept, he informed.

"We can accommodate over 18,000 children in these centres," said Biswas, adding that other orphanages across the country are registered with the government, but not operated by the government.

About the facilities in these centres, he said, "As per our ability, we try to follow the international standard of child rights. We arrange facilities for them in compliance with their rights."

Talking to The Daily Star, Women and Children Affairs Ministry's Secretary Tariq-ul-Islam said, "Infrastructure, education system, food arrangement, budgetary allocation of the orphanages are good. But they need improvement in management system."

He also emphasised on training for the staffs and management bodies to make them more child-friendly. According to UNICEF statistics, around 45 percent of the total population are children aged under 18 in Bangladesh. As around 40 percent of Bangladeshi households are poor, poverty has a profound impact on the lives of the country's 61 million children.

Deprivation from seven human needs (health, nutrition, education, water, sanitation, shelter and information) is higher among the children living in low income families than their affluent and several affluent counterparts.

Experts also recommend the government to initiate drafting of a national child protection policy in the light of the comprehensive approach that supports a change in social attitude in favour of child rights and protection.

However, Women and Children Affairs Ministry's secretary said the government has no plan to formulate any new policy for child protection. But the Ministry of Social Welfare is working to update the Children Act, 1974, said Ranjit Biswas.

Deprivation from seven human needs (health, nutrition, education, water, sanitation, shelter and information) is higher among the children living in low income families

Experts recommend the government to initiate drafting of a national child protection policy in the light of the comprehensive approach that supports a change in social attitude in favour of child rights and protection.

All of it started following the 2008 cyclone Sidr that devastated the south-western region of the country. Many children became orphaned and they needed to be rehabilitated.

Traditionally, homeless and orphan children are mostly sent to orphanages for their rehabilitation.

But back then, UNICEF in consultation with Ministry of Social Welfare that deals with vulnerable children's rights thought of a different way to address the case of about 817 orphans and another 1333 vulnerable children of seven most affected upazilas of Bagerhat, Barguna and Patuakhali districts. UNICEF advocated with the government that as the government

of Social Welfare .

Under this initiative, families of 2150 children were given monthly financial support of Tk 1500 for an 18-month cycle which has 3 basic conditions that children should be going to school, they should not be married off under 18 and they should not be engaged in labour.

This money was disbursed on a six-monthly basis so that the supported families get a substantial amount to start off a small business that would help them earn better. This would help these families not to look at the orphan or vulnerable child as a burden.

UNICEF in collaboration with the social workers and local government

new country programme with government of Bangladesh UNICEF hopes to expand such initiative in 20 more districts by the end of 2016.

In the first phase of Lalbagh initiative, which completed the 18-month cycle last June, families of 500 children were provided same amount of money. Families of half of the children achieved the goals, while the rest half need further support could not achieve to achieve expected result, a recent review from UNICEF found.

"Eighteen-month long second phase of the project will begin this year where families of 250 children of previous phase and 250 new children totaling 500 children will be provided

It's still hard for Anwar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

ANWAR Hossain does not have any memory of his father. From his early age he lived in a government orphanage centre, Sarkari Shishu Paribar, in capital Dhaka's Mirpur-10 area. After passing 13 years he has left the centre recently.

The 19-year-old boy is getting preparation for university admission test now. Besides this, he works in a Kazi office in the same Mirpur-10 area for managing his daily expenses.

"I have been working there for about three years. As I don't have any other place to live, I also pass my night in the office," he said.

Anwar scored GPA 4.81 out of 5 in the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination from Shaheed Abu Taleb High School in Mirpur-10 and GPA 3.32 in the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) Examination from Bangla College.

"I failed to carry out my SSC result in HSC as I had to work in the Kazi office. I didn't have any other way, as I knew that I have to leave the orphanage centre after the examination. That's why I got engaged in the office then," he added.

He has applied in Jagannath University and will apply in a college under National University.

"I don't want to apply in any other university as it requires more money. Moreover, I don't want to leave Dhaka, as it would be hard for me to earn my daily expenses outside the city. I could at least work in the Kazi Office if I study here," he added.

The orphan boy does not have money to be admitted to a coaching centre for getting better prepared for the admission test.

"Getting admitted to coaching centre requires huge

money and I am not able to pay the amount. That is why I collect lecture sheets from one of my friends who has been admitted to a coaching centre," he added.

He said it is hard for him to take intensive preparation for the admission test as he has to work in the Kazi office for around 12 hours a day.

"I don't know whether it will be possible. But I want to be a banker in future. That is why I studied commerce at school and college level," he added.

Anwar had an uncle, a day labourer, in Jatrabari of the city. But he does not go there as his uncle is struggling with his family and doesn't enquire about him.

He has his mother, a domestic help, in the village in Faridpur. His only brother also has been living in the orphanage centre for seven years.

He said his mother admitted him to the orphanage when he was only eight years old. He studied from play Group to HSC staying in the centre.

"I cannot go to my village regularly due to the job I do. I often talk with my mother over phone. Usually I go to the village during Eid vacation with my younger brother," he added.

He said the orphanage center is only for boys aged between 6 and 18.

"After being 18-year-old we are not allowed to live there. But it is not possible for anyone to complete study and start career at this age. I urge the government to think it seriously to establish another institution for 18-25 years old boys so that they all can complete their study," he added.

AKM Mizanur Rahman, deputy superintendent of the orphanage centre, said although this center is for boys 6-18 years old, they allow those who prove as good student and a good fellow to stay longer in the center.

They learn skills to earn a living

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

HE is counting down the last 10 days of his 23 months reformatory term as a child convict at Jessore Kishor Unnayan Kendra (Jessore Juvenile Development Centre). Abdul Maliq of Dhaka was sent to the penitentiary under Women & Child Repression Prevention Acts. Now he is hopeful of a future. While asked would he do the same mistake in future, his straight answer was, "Why. Now I know some technical

works like electrical wiring and computing. After getting free, I will work with my skills."

Maliq is hoping to do something very legal for his living after coming out from Jessore Kishor Unnayan Kendra. Not only Maliq, a number of children go back to their homes attaining skills of various trades including electrical, electronic, automobile and computer which make them able to build their future.

Mentioning names of a bunch of his students the centre automobile instructor Akbor Hossain said, some



PHOTO: STAR

Maliq is hoping to do something for his living after coming out from Jessore Kishor Unnayan Kendra.

of them now drive vehicles and a number of students work in the automobile workshops. Currently 70 children are being trained up in different categories, he said.

Jessore Kishor Unnayan Kendra was established at Pulerhat under sadar upazila on December 26, 1992 to reform juvenile offenders by giving them proper education and vocational training. Currently there are a total 153 children in the centre of optimum 150 capacity, said Sheikh Abdul Awal, social care worker of the centre. "We are 5 officers and 36 staffs working in the centre," he added. The total allotted cost for each child is Tk 2 thousand per month which is just not adequate or proper. This is the only penitentiary for the 22 districts of four divisions - Khulna, Barisal, Rajshahi and Rangpur, he added. Shahabuddin, assistant director of the centre said, the centre is established on 5.22 acre land with two dormitories for the children, training centre, office building, school building and quarters for the employees. "We have shortage of security guards which is a main problem of the centre," he said. A house doctor, deep tubewell, proper conveyance or transport facility are also needed, he added.

"We first provide primary education to the children then they go

for vocational training," the assistant director said. "Now we need to educate the inmates of the centre up to class ten," he added.

Suman, a child convict from Gazipur, Dhaka who is serving seven years term in an arms case said, "I know all the electrical wir-

ing works. I will be an electrician after being free from the centre. I will not go back to the criminal world."

A number of children go back to their homes attaining skills of various trades including electrical, electronic, automobile and computer which make them able to build their future.



PHOTO: STAR