CHAPTER VIII
Perception of Beneficiaries towards NGOs

This chapter would describe the perception of the beneficiaries in various localities towards the services provided by the NGOs for educational care of disadvantaged children. In each of the visited locality, an effort was made to conduct at least two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with the parents whose children received help from the NGOs for educational attainment. Localities were selected depending upon the functioning of NGOs. Details of the selection procedure are mentioned in methodology. It is worthy to mention here that while FGDs were conducted in the community, adolescent girls and boys have also participated in the discussion along with their parents in many of the places. Although the prime objective, for conducting FGDs was to understand the perception of the parents towards the services of NGOs, this opportunity was exploited to understand the community as a whole in terms economy, kind of livelihood, gender or education and sustainability of NGO the activities. The FGDs covered the aspects like a) need for NGOs in the educational care of their children; b) status of girls’ education; c) type of services they receive from the NGOs; d) usefulness of the services rendered by the NGOs; e) do they want any change or improvement in the current service delivery of the NGOs; and f) what would they do if the NGO stop working in their community? Discussion on FGDs has taken place here as per the respective NGO under case study.

1. Right Track (RT)

Right Track is facilitating six Multi Activity Centres (MAC) and one of which is located in Sholo Bigha Basti of Mahestala Municipality. The community is majorly inhabited by the population of Muslim community, migrated from neighbouring places like Canning, Lakhikantopur, Mathurapur road and so on of South 24 Parganas. The residents belong to
lower income group, where male are engaged in activities like rickshaw pulling, helper in automobile garages, running small shops near and around the basti while women are working as domestic help in neighbouring locality and even some of them do come to Kolkata for the same purpose.

In Sholo Bigha Basti three FGDs were conducted with the parents of children attending the MAC. The first FGD was conducted in the Right Track’s centre for remedial coaching while the other two were conducted in the Masjid para. In the first group, there were 14 participants of whom eight were female (mothers) and six male (fathers). The second group was composed of nine participants of which seven were female and rest two were male. In the third group all eleven participants were female. The details of FGDs given below are a cumulative of three group discussions.

The members of groups were asked to highlight the need of this NGO to work for the educational attainment of children and the participants were of the view that there were three government primary schools in the locality within the radius of 1km while one high school was situated at a distance of 1.5 km. The participating parents were not happy with the quality of education imparted in the schools. They said children’s unwillingness to study at home and knew from the NGO worker that their children were unaware about the things that they were supposed to know in their respective classes. Participants were illiterate and those were literate, had forgotten the lessons that they studied in third or fourth standard. Further, they were confused with a fact i.e. if their children did not learn anything in those schools them how they got promotion to the next standard. In that context, they found NGOs were beneficial as they were taking care of the educational need of their children. They also added that they found it difficult to re-enrol their drop-out children into a formal school. The indifferent attitude of the teachers was one of the major
factors for such complaint, as revealed during FGD. In addition, they also mentioned that the procedure to enrol their children in a formal school had become easy but to obtain the birth certificate from the appropriate authority was still a major challenge for the parents. They said, local leaders of ruling party did not want them to stay or occupy the land of Sholo Bigha Basti. In order to evacuate them from this place, many a time their houses were set on fire by some unidentified people with the support from local leaders. In this connection, they faced difficulty in obtaining the birth certificate from the local authority. Accordingly, workers of RT were of great help as they had information relating to the process of obtaining birth certificate as well as how to handle local leaders along with school teachers.

The members further added that NGO workers did not discriminate between girls and boys, rather they expressed to provide equal opportunity to all. In this connection, researcher tried to understand the daily routine of their daughters and revealed that most of the girls were entrusted with daily household chores as soon as they reached the age of nine to ten years. Their work list contained washing cloths and utensils, taking care of their younger siblings and at times they also had to cook, as shared by the NGO worker and on which the participants hesitantly agreed. In response, women participants shared that it was always better to learn the daily household chores at an early age as they had to do it for their life long. Further, it was found that early marriage was a common practice in that community. They usually preferred to marry off their daughter by the age of 15 to 17 years. Having cited such occurrence of early marriage, participants said that financial condition of the family was important reason along with the fear that their daughter might elope with the boy of different religion, if the marriage would delay. They also believed, if the girl would study more, there would be a problem for them to get a suitable bridegroom.
Participants appreciated the NGO for taking educational care of their daughters inside the community.

While responding to the types of services provided by the NGO the participants of the FGD said that they received help like education at the supportive learning centre to enhance learning of their children, getting enrolled in school, doing all needful to get benefit of government schemes, conducting health check-up camps once in three months for the children, providing with pen, copies and other materials required for children’s studies, etc. The community also got support from the NGO against the local leaders who wanted to evacuate them from Sholo Bigha.

Regarding the relevance and usefulness of the services of NGO, members of FGDs were of the opinion that those services were very essential for them. Because they left their homes in search of livelihood and out of compulsion they had taken shelter in Sholo Bigha Basti which was devoid of any basic facilities like drinking water, proper toilets, stable income and so on. They said, it was difficult to make arrangement for two square meals every day and likewise spending money for the education of their children was a kind of distant dream. They could not afford to spend money on private tuition, pen, text books and other related materials. Being illiterate or less educated, they failed to help their children in their studies. Thus, they felt, services of Right Track were most relevant and beneficial them as well as for their children.

When the groups were asked ‘do they want any change or improvement in the programme activities of Right Track?’ The participants were of the view that it would have been great help if the NGO could run a full time school inside the community, because the kind of education imparted in the government school was of poor quality. Further, children were friendlier with NGO workers and could clarify their confusion at any point of time. In
addition, for parents also, it was convenient to interact with the NGO workers than with the school teachers. As school teachers exhibited an indifferent attitude while interacting with the parents and often discouraged them saying education was of no use for their children, children would become drop-out sooner or later without learning anything. Again, most of the parents were busy with their work and likewise they hardly found anytime to meet the teacher personally to obtain information relating the progress made by their children. The participating parents further said that it would be good if the NGO could start any skill development programme for their children or adolescents. Because many of the parents placed their children in different shops for learning the trait of business, but the owner were basically exploitative in nature and thus paid very less in spite of extended working hours. Finally, they wanted the NGO to make some arrangements for them so that they can have a stable income as the work they do was volatile in nature.

Responding to the last question participants said, if the NGO would stop working in their locality, they might not have other option than relying upon the existing resources. There would be more drop-out children and number of child labour would go high. In a way, they said that they were dependent upon the services provided by the NGO specifically relating to the education and well being of their children.

2. Tiljala SHED (Society for Human and Educational Development)

The slum of Topsia was visited for the purpose of present study. In that slum area, Tiljala SHED runs a number of programmes like remedial coaching centre for dropped-out children from formal schools and rehabilitation cum shelter home for the children engaged in rag picking. There three FGDs were conducted with parents.

In response to the first question, the participating parents were of the view that functioning of the NGO was very much required for their community as government and local leaders
were reluctant towards their development. Regarding education of their children, participants said, there was a primary school called ‘Topsia Primary School’ located nearby, situated at a distance of 100 meters from the place where FGD was conducted, along with other schools of which two were private run. Majority of the children, who wished to study usually attended the Topsia Primary School. According to the participants, it was an industrial area and people from different places used to come there in search of job. There were number of leather factories in the neighbourhood but many of those were shut down or shifted to other places. The reason for such happening was not known to them. The only thing they could say was that there was a dispute relating to land and also between the employee and employer. Accordingly, the families were facing tough time in the community as their income had gone down. They said they were not ignorant about the education of their children but the economic constraints on the part of the family forced them to withdraw their children from the formal schooling. It is worthy to mention here that at the beginning, during first FGD, participating members denied the fact of school drop-out in the locality but it was the interference made by Ms. Jabeen Arif, a community worker of Tiljala SHED, helped the researcher to get the actual picture relating to the educational status of children in that locality. Ms. Jabeen Arif had been working with this community since 1st March 1999. After the interference made by the community worker, the member of first FGD admitted the fact that nearly 50% of the children did not attend the school because of economic necessity of the family. It was said that both the parents were usually engaged in activities for economic gain of the family and thus failed to take good care of their children. Male members of the community were usually engaged in activities like rickshaw pulling, employed as hawker on daily basis, selling of waste products collected by the children from dustbins and nearby dumping grounds and so on while the female folk were engaged as domestic helper in high rise buildings in the
locality. In addition, many women with their daughters were engaged in cutting out the chappal strips from rubber sheet provided by the locally based chappal manufacturing factory. Boys were engaged in one or the other income generating activities like rag picking, working as a helper in shops, etc. Occasionally girls assisted their mothers in their work as a domestic helper. In this kind of situation, NGO helped their children to get enrolled into the formal school, provided them with text books, pen, bags and other related study related materials. Further, NGO workers were also interacting with the school teacher to know about the progress made by the children to identify the area where improvement needed. In addition, as parents did not have sufficient money to provide their children with private tutors, the remedial coaching centre run by the NGO was of great help. NGOs were also required to avail benefit of government schemes like obtaining minority scholarship, obtaining birth certificate for the children, uniforms and so on, as shared by the participants.

Regarding girls education, like Sholo Bigha basti, the respondents in all three FGDs were of the view that they did not discriminate between boys and girls. But with the interference made by community worker from Tiljala SHED helped the researcher to understand the actual picture. Like the previous place, there also girls were entrusted with daily household chores. The reasons were: if the girls of tender age could accomplish the household chores, the adult earning member of the family would get some extra time for work and recreation. Further, they viewed it as a preparation for later life. Early marriage was also found to be existent in that community. The participants were of the view that delayed marriage was against their tradition. It is worthy to mention here that the issue of early marriage was ignored by the participants, but further probing and interference made by NGO worker helped to obtain this piece of information. It was later learned from the participants that girls usually dropped-out from formal school after fourth standard.
The type of services provided by the NGO was found to be similar with Right Track. The participants said that they receive services like remedial coaching for the children; pen, paper, bags and other study related materials; support for obtaining birth certificate and getting benefit of government sponsored schemes; institutional services for children who were engaged in rag picking; vocational training courses for adolescent girls and boys; etc. In addition, during crisis time, NGO provided support to the affected families.

With regard to the usefulness of services provided by the NGO, participants expressed that services were very much relevant to their context. Firstly, they were illiterate and thus they failed to help their children with their studies. Secondly, their economic status did not permit them to avail services of private tutors or to put their children into private English medium school. Thirdly, they were ignorant about the government sponsored schemes and policies which were meant for the minority and downtrodden families. Fourthly, an institutional service provided for the children, engaged in rag picking activity, was another area they found of immense importance because of the fact that these children would get sufficient food, clothing and education which would improve their future life.

There was a question to know whether they wanted any change(s) in the current services provided by the NGO. In response, the respondents were of the view that children who were enrolled in the Rehabilitation cum shelter home for rag pickers, they might be allowed to visit their families frequently in order to help the family income. Further, they wanted the NGO to run a full-time school in spite of remedial coaching centre in the locality because many of the children from the slum were engaged in income generating activities and failed to attend the school.

In response to the last query, researcher came to know that there were other NGOs, other than Tiljala SHED, operating in the same area such as CINI Asha, World Vision, DAS,
3. Sanlaap

Sanlaap is an NGO known for its commitment towards the upliftment of brothel based commercial sex workers. In addition, they work for the prevention of trafficking and rescue of girls who got trapped in the trafficking racket. The details of the organization are mentioned in chapter 5 and 6. Bow Bazaar red light area is one of the many operational areas under the organization which is visited for the present study. The commercial sex workers of Bow bazaar red light area are divided into two categories such as sex workers who stay there with their children while the other category includes the women who come from neighbouring districts of Kolkata in early evening and leaves the area by night. Sanlaap is running a programme namely Sopan, a Drop-in- Centre (DIC), for the children of commercial sex workers in order to mainstream them into formal education. The researcher has conducted only one FGD in the area as the DIC opens in the evening and further evening is the peak time for the sex workers. There are 11 sex workers, whose children are attending the DIC, have helped to conduct FGD.

Participants express that they prefer not to send their girl child to school when they reach the high school level in order to save them from the eyes of pimp and thus they opt to send their girls outside the red-light area to get engaged as domestic helper in some skyscrapers or apartments with the help of the regular customer and friends (commercial sex workers) who does not stay in the area. However, many of the girls join the trade by the 13/14 years. According to participants, economic necessity is there but it is the stigma associated with this profession forces their girl to join the trade sooner or later. Although, the
activities carried out by Sanlaap and other NGOs like Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee is helping them to combat the situation but it may take some more time to get better, mentioned by the members of FGD.

Participants of the FGD, while responding to the need of NGOs in taking care of educational need of their children, are of the view that NGOs are very much required for the well being of inhabitants of Bow Bazaar red light area. They mention that they often become victim of discrimination. The government as well as the duty bearers of government establishments ignore their voice and they often become susceptible to verbal abuse. The so called civilized society views them as a commodity that can be availed in exchange of money without considering them as human being with feelings and emotions. It is the NGO that stand by their side and help them to fight the odds. They further add, their children are not even spared by the people in and around the red light area. Their children often become victim of discrimination in schools, play grounds, shops and each and every place they go because of the trade with which their mothers are associated. They encounter challenges in getting birth certificate of their children as the concerned authority holds an indifferent attitude towards them. They say, they prefer to stay inside the Bow Bazaar red light area because of the fear of getting abused by people.

Referring to the education of their children, they are of the view that it is difficult for them to take care for the educational need of their children in terms of getting them enrolled in the school and to provide care at home. On the contrary, they also mention that they do not want their children to stay back in that red light area, especially the girls, and want their children to study. Further, they highlight the reasons for such of their expressions. Firstly, they say that they avoid visiting any of the government office because of the rejection they encounter. Secondly, they are not well aware of the government schemes and projects
meant for the underprivileged section of the society. Thirdly, they do not have enough money to spend for the education of their children as they have to pay the lion share of their income to the owner of their house. In this context, NGOs are playing a pivotal role and taking care of the educational need of their children. In the locality, there are three primary schools namely Swamiji Vidyapith, and two KMC run schools of which one follows Urdu medium and the other one uses Bengali medium. Further, there are Bow Bazaar High School and Girendra Balika Vidyalaya- a Higher Secondary school. They mention that Sanlaap is helping their children to get enrolled in the schools, providing supportive coaching and most importantly they run this coaching centre in the evening that is the peak hour of their trade. In the evening, they do not get any time to look after their children. According to the participants, children leave their studies as soon as they reach the age of 13/14 years. Because, they start to understand by then what people, their classmates and seniors in the schools say about them. Participants also admit that they do not prefer their girls to go out of house and thus entrust them with house hold chores. Again, some prefer to send their girls to other places with relatives or babu (customer) as a domestic helper but the number is very negligible, as shared by the participants. In this context, NGOs are of great help as they are trying to put an end to second generation prostitution and accordingly they provide support to their children and prepare them for their future life. They also add that many a time it is difficult to get out of that vicious profession because of their indebtedness and social stigma associate with this flesh trade.

Regarding the type of services, Sanlaap tries to mainstream children into formal school, provides coaching support and imparts functional education to specific children. In addition they provide life skill education to all the children who are attending the DIC, as shared by the participants of FGD.
In connection with the usefulness of the services provided by the NGO, the participants are of the view that functioning of NGO(s) are very much required for them as there is no one to care for them or to look after the well-being of their children. It is because of the NGO that their children are attending the school, may be up to the third standard. Otherwise it would not have been possible for them to send their children to schools. The dealing with the school teachers and other government duty bearers is quite difficult for them as they face rejection and ignorance. Thus, the activities undertaken by the NGO are needed to be appreciated.

Coming to the kind of expectation that they have from the NGO, participants mention that it would be good if the NGO can run a full time school, preferably outside the community with hostel facility where their children can stay and study. From their conversation, it is understood that the women are really worried about the future of their children, like other parents, but their social status and economic constraints have shackled their children to live there.

Finally, when participants are asked what they would do if the NGO stops working in their locality, they say that they would feel bad about it but it would not make any big difference in their life. Firstly, because there are other NGOs working in that locality, taking care of their children and addressing the rights of commercial sex workers. Secondly, the numbers of children actually have benefited from their services are very less. It is true that they take care of their children but up to a certain age and at times up to the marriage but do not ensure a better and healthy life.
4. Pratham Education Foundation

Two FGDs were conducted in two villages namely Mathari and Jujobatu of Mathari Khamar panchayat of Jhalda I block. The villages were majorly inhabited by Schedule Tribe and schedule Castes. There were 12 participants in each of the FGDs.

At the beginning, when the groups were asked to highlight the need of the NGO in educational care of their children, in both the villages, the respondents were of the view that they faced many kind of disabilities mainly because of two reasons. Firstly, it was the remoteness of their villages and secondly, the geographical nature of the district. The participants were of the view that primary schools were situated nearby, within the radius of 1 Km, but the High Schools located distantly, between 2 to 3 kms. Accordingly, children who enrolled in primary school often opted out from the formal schooling as soon as they reached the high school. They said, there was road connectivity to the school but the number of public transport was very less. The only way left to the students was the bicycle. But during summer, it became unbearable for the children to attend the High School as the temperature will go high to 45°C. They further said, many of the children dropped out from the formal schooling even at the third and fourth standard. The reasons for such drop out included many. Firstly, they said it was economic condition of the family that compelled the parents to become ignorant towards the education of their children as they found it difficult to bear the secondary expenditures associated with the education. Secondly, parents found difficult to help their children in studies because most of the mothers were illiterate while fathers, who studied up to fourth or fifth standard, usually had no time to spend with their children. The inhabitants of both the villages were majorly landless farmers and few of them were small scale farmers with 3 to 4 bighas of land. Further, the climatic condition of the area and low water level affected their agricultural
produce. The third reason for the early drop-out was the engagement of children in the agricultural activities and because of which many children failed to attend the schools regularly. Finally, they shared that children even did not want to study and accordingly parents engaged them in some or other work so that they could learn some skill and with which they would be able to survive.

When the discussion moved into girls’ education like other places the participants were of the view that they did not discriminate between the boys and girls. On asking about the prevalence of early marriages in the village, participants said that it was not in practice. They preferred to marry off their daughter once they reached the age of 19 years. The prior experiences of the researcher in Sholo Bigha basti were found to be instrumental in further probing. After some questions and cross questions, it was learnt that the average age of the marriage for girls in the locality was 16/17 years. Income of the respective family was one of the reasons but not the prime one. The main reason for such occurrence was that the delay in marriage might put the family in difficult situation as they might not find a suitable bridegroom for their daughter in later stage. They would start the search for suitable bridegroom as soon as their daughter reached the age 13/14 years. Later, they shared that majority of the girls would leave their studies after their education in primary school. Because the high school was far from their locality and secondly, they were engaged in the household activities in order to get them prepared for their future life.

With regard to the types of services provided by the NGO, they mentioned it as a blessing for them. The NGOs provided educational support to their children and made follow up in the school as well as at home. Their children attended the classes conducted by the NGO before and after the school hours. In addition, some of the villagers also mentioned about the creativities and innovation induced by the NGO to make the education a joyful
experience. They said that they did not understand the activities initially as they saw their children were engaged in different kind of games. Later they understood that it was the game through which their children were learning counting and alphabets. They also added that the NGO was helping other drop-out children to get enrolled into the formal school while motivating their parents for the same.

The respondents were of the view that services provided by the NGO were of great use. Firstly, they did not have enough knowledge and time with which they could help their children in their studies. Secondly, they were not in a position to bear the secondary expenditure associated with the education like getting private tutor for their children, pen, and note book. Thirdly, their children were learning something and some good words that would help them in their future life without parental support.

When the participants were asked ‘Do they want any change in the existing activities?’ They expressed that it would be good if they could run a full-fledged school in the community. Further, they added, as the drop-out rate was high in high school, the NGO needed to focus on children attending the high school. A very few participants i.e. three from Matari village wanted the NGO to do some work for the development of the area and also to help them in availing the loan for agriculture and other purpose.

In the last part of the discussion, they said that they did not want the NGO to stop their activities in that village because many of the children were benefited from their activities. Participants also shared that their economic status was not allowing them to support the education of their children and the NGO was filling-up that gap. While concluding they said they had to rely upon the government school for the education of their children. But considering the constraints, as mentioned previously, associated with the government school they doubted how the things would go without Pratham Education Foundation.
5. Centre for Environmental and Socio-Economic Regeneration (CESR)

In 2010, CESR has started working in the villages of Ayodha Hill. There this NGO runs a free coaching centre for school going children, which is managed from the general fund. In addition, CESR runs a number of projects in different blocks of Puriliya district, details of which are mentioned in the chapter 5.

The Ayodha Hill comes under the Bagmundi Block of Puruliya district. The area is majorly inhabited by the Santhals, Munda and Adivasi. Bersabura village was visited for the purpose of present study. The village is occupied by the Sathals and FGD in this village has been attended by 10 parents comprising seven females and three males.

The participants have expressed the need of the NGO for the educational care of their children. They are of the view that they face lots of challenges in the area. Firstly, it is the remoteness of the area that makes them vulnerable to underdevelopment. Secondly, poor road condition which gets deteriorated in the rainy season. Thirdly, there is almost no means of public transport in the locality. It is worthy to mention here that it has two days for the researcher to conduct the FGD as there is only one state bus plies from the district head quarter to Ayodha Hill. The bus usually starts by 8:30 am and reaches the Bersabura village 10:30-10:45 am and it returns by 12 noon. Fourthly, there are limited avenues for employment. The majority of the villagers work as daily labourer and at times they sell the firewood in the nearby market. Finally, there is a primary school situated near to their village but the high school is situated distantly, nearly three kilometres from the village. Considering the above mentioned challenges which they encounter on a daily basis, they mention that their economic status does not permit them to continue the education of their children beyond eighth standard. Further, they are not literate and accordingly they cannot take proper care of their children in terms of their (children) studies. They mention,
children find difficult to understand the language of the teachers. The present teachers are from other community and their language is different i.e. Bengali and accordingly the children fail to understand the lesson which results in loss of interest towards studies. Here, it is required to mention that researcher has taken the help of a local volunteer of CESR, Mr. Daman Baske, who knows languages like Hindi, Bengali and the local dialect. Further, participating mothers have shared that occasionally, when both the parents go for collecting firewood in the jungle or for their engagement as a day labourer, they engage their children especially boys for tendering the cattle and girls are entrusted with the household chores. In this regard, the NGO is doing a good job by helping their children in their studies as they (parents) can’t afford to have a private tutor for their children because of financial constraints. Participants also mention that government has made the education easy by providing free books but there is secondary expenditure associated with it like notebook, pen, bag, transportation. Summing up, they are happy that CESR is operating in their village and helping their children.

Coming to girls’ education it is similar to that of Mathari and Juohatu of Mathari Khamar panchayat of Jhalda I block. The distance of high school from the locality is another factor that is hindering the educational attainment of the girls. In addition, there is another problem interfering with educational attainment of the girls is the scarcity of water in the area. The women folk of the village go to far in search of water and usually they are accompanied by the younger girls so that more water could be collected. Thus, many of the school going girls skip their classes for the purpose.

When it comes to the services provided by the NGO, they mention that the NGO is running a free coaching centre for their children and occasionally they organise health check-up camp for the villagers especially for women and children.
With regard to the usefulness of services, participants are of the view that services are of great use when remoteness of their villages and poor connectivity through public transport is considered. The children who are attending the school find difficult to follow their teachers because of language, as mentioned in previous paragraphs and accordingly they lose interest and leave their studies. In this context, when children are helped by the local volunteers, from neighbouring villages, with same dialect it becomes easy for the children to follow the lessons. Further, participants appreciate the role played by the volunteer of CESR. They (participants) reports that volunteer regularly meet the parents and inform about the learning level of their children which they hardly notice in case of government school teachers. However, they acknowledge the inability on the part of the parents to meet the teachers and update themselves about the progress of their children. Participants also mention the kind of reaction they may receive from the school teachers.

Coming to the improvement or change they would like to see in the activities carried out by the NGO, participants are of the view that it would be good if NGO can take care of the adolescent girls and boys in getting job or helping them with certain vocational training for income generation. They mention that education alone may not be sufficient to help their children to live a healthy life as situation has dramatically changed in the last decade or so. Referring their earlier view, i.e. they had a very good income opportunity as the Ayodha hill was a picnic spot, they say that everything has dried-up because of the Maoist movement in the area during last decade. But after the change of ruling party, these days tourists are coming but not sufficiently like previous time. On the contrary, they admit that four children have reached the IX and X standards because of the care taken by the NGO and it is needed to intensify.
Coming to the last part of the discussion, they share that they are always dependent on their fate as they have very little thing to do. If the NGO stops working in their locality, children who are attending the school may drop-out in the early stage comparing to the present day context. Participants also share that NGO is helping but they have limited capacity. They are happy to feel that at least their children are attending school and receiving learning support from the NGO.

6. Santiniketan Ratanpalli Vivekananda Adibasi Kalyan Samiti (SEVAKS)

SEVAKS runs a Special Education Centre for Disabled Children at their Ratanpally office. During the time of visit, researcher has found 15 children to attend the centre of which three girls and 12 boys. The details of the organization are mentioned in chapter 5.

The Special Education Centre for the Disabled Children is attended by children of different villages; some are nearby while some are from distantly located villages like Metakuna, Illum Bazaar, situated at a distance of 17 kms. In this case researcher has conducted only one FGD in the centre itself. Eight parents have attended this discussion.

At the beginning of the discussion, participants are asked to highlight the need the NGO in the educational care of their children. It is worthy to mention here that unlike previous participants of the FGDs, the majority of the parents are educated and some of them are government servants. They share, in government schools, there is no facility for the children with special need, starting from the staircase leading to classrooms to special educators. Participants mention that government has made legislations and schemes for the person with disability but implementation of the same is very poor. During the discussion, it is learnt that many of the children are even denied to take admission in the government run schools. The participating parents share that there are supposed to be one special
educator but the schools where their children are enrolled have no such special educator. Further, in Bolpur and nearby area, there is no school for the children with disability. They also mention that there are couple of institutions that take care of the special children but are situated in the district head quarter i.e. Suri, almost 30 Kms away from Bolpur. Parents are of the view that they might have taken their children to those institutions but the distance coupled with poor road condition and time consumed in the process keeping them away from the services provide by those institutes. Further, they also add, in the same locality i.e. in Purbapally, there is another institute namely ‘Chetnalok’ which is taking care of their children, but it is closed down because of financial constraints. They highlight that no fees or money is required for getting admission into this Special Education Centre run by SEVAKS and accordingly it is a matter of great relief for the economically challenged families as the parents normally spent more money for children with special need comparing to a normal child. Thus, considering the context they say obviously there is a need of this organization not only for their children but for other children with special need in the locality.

The researcher has failed to collect the information relating to the kind of challenges encountered by the girls with disability as participants abstained from making any comment. The only thing they share is that for children with disability, whether a boy or girl, always need a person around them for their care. But financially challenged family often find it difficult to do that as they cannot afford to hire a person for the purpose.

Coming to the types of services provided by the organization, participants share that twice in a week they bring their children into the centre i.e. on Friday and Saturday. The classes last for two hours i.e. from 8 am to 10 am. The children are also attended by the speech teacher, once in week, and a physiotherapist, twice in week. In between the classes, the
children are also provided with supplementary nutritional food. The organization also conducts training programme for the parents to make them aware about the need of their children. In addition, the NGO workers meet the children at their homes, twice in week.

The participants of the FGD are of the view that the kind of services provided by the NGO is of immense importance. In the locality, there is no organization that can take care of the children with disability. Further, parents of children who are attending the formal school share that they are sending their children to school only for the purpose that they would be engaged with something, knowing the fact that there is no special educator who could teach their children. Participants also mention that the NGO engages their children in extracurricular activities like art, painting and dancing which in turn is boosting the parents as well as their child’s morale. Comparing to government school, their children feel better in the centre run by SEVAKS.

When the participating parents are asked whether they want to see any change in the current activities of SEVAKS, they say it would be more beneficial for their children if the NGO can increase the number working days for the centre. They believe that it is the only place at Bolpur-Santiniketan area where their children learn something.

Coming to the concluding part of the discussion, parents are of the view that there is no other alternative place so far where they can take their children for education. They mention they would like to make every possible effort so that the NGO does not get shutdown. In addition, they also say if require they are ready to pay for the services that they receive from the NGO. Thus, parents have the positive attitude towards the organization.
7. Lake Gardens Women and Children Development Centre (LGWCDC)

LGWCDC worked in three districts of West Bengal, namely Kolkata, Howrah and South 24 Parganas, details of which could be found in previous chapters. Under the NGO, two field visits were made- one in Tikiapara, Howrah and the other one was near Akra Fatak, Santoshpur railway station.

a) Akra Fatak: No. 9 Brick Field

The place was popularly known as Akra. To reach the place one had to hire auto from Santoshpur railway station to Akra Fatak and from there one had to hire paddle rickshaw to reach the Akra Fatak: No. 9 Brick Field. The area was full of brick-kiln industries, according to the workers of No. 9 Brick Field, there were 57 brick-kiln industries in that area. It was learnt from the workers that the labourer working in those brick fields were from different parts of India like Bihar, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh. There labourer also came from the district like Murshidabad. They mentioned that the labour force of those brick fields witnessed the illegal immigrants from neighbouring country like Bangladesh.

The FGD was started with an effort to inform the participants about the purpose of the discussion. At the beginning, the parents were asked about the necessity of the NGO working for the education of their children. In reply, the participants were of the view that there was a huge need of the NGO as schools were far from their workplace. In addition, the social environment of the locality was not good especially for girls. They said, there was a place called Naya Basti beside the road that connected their workplace to the main road. The majority of the inhabitants of Naya Basti, particularly male members, were addicted to one or the other bad habits like drinking, gambling, using drugs and so on. Accordingly, they did not find it safe to send their children alone to school. They also
highlighted that language of communication was another barrier that their children were facing in the school. It is worthy to mention here that the school located nearest to No. 9 Brick Field was a Hindi medium school called ‘Sarbodaya Hindi Vidyalaya’. In a way participants highlighted the challenges encountered by their children in attending the school. The interference made by the NGO worker during the FGD further helped the researcher to extract much more information that escaped easily from the researcher’s purview. It was learnt that majority of the children helped their parents in the brick field. The factor for such involvement was that the workers were paid on the basis of number of bricks they made. Thus, simply to increase the number of their prepared bricks, they involved their children, as later shared by the participants. The migrants stayed in brick field for four to five months i.e. from October/ November to March/ April. Moreover, for the labourer, it was not certain that they would come back to same brickfield. Usually, it depended on the facts that from whom they took money, on what terms and conditions, and the linkage of money lender to middleman who took contract from the owner of brick field (directly or indirectly) for providing manpower. It is worthy to mention here that all labourers were in debt to one or the other money lender and the amount ranged between Rs 10,000/- to 25,000/- but interestingly without any kind of interest. Thus, the primary objective of the labourer was to repay the actual amount that they borrowed from the money lender and then to earn some surplus amount so that the family need could be met for rest of the year. Thus, from the discussion, it is understood that children of those brick fields were encountering number of challenges such as frequent change in their living place as well as school, involvement in the brick field as helper to their parents, communication problem and the social environment of the locality. Considering the above mentioned aspects the participants felt that there was a need of such NGO to work for the educational care of their children.
When researcher intended to know about the status of girls’ education it was found that both boys and girls helped their parents in making the bricks staring from thrash the clay, moulding, drying in them in sunlight and finally making stack of those. In addition, girls were also entrusted with household chores like other visited places. The early marriage was in practice as shared by the participants. It is worthy to mention here that participants initially disagreed to such practice of child marriage but prior experience in other visited communities helped the researcher to go for further probing. After prolonged discussion, it was understood that the selection of family members for the purpose of seasonal migration was decided by the head of the family keeping in view who could contribute to the family income and in what capacity. Accordingly, whosoever would come with the family were supposed to contribute into the family income. It was also learnt that money lender, from whom they borrowed money in advance, also calculated the potential labourers in the family and decided how much money could be given to a particular family.

Referring to the type of services they received from the NGO, they said that the NGO worker would visit their locality twice in a week i.e. Tuesday and Friday. The centre worked for two hours from 11 am to 1 pm. Children were also provided with light refreshment like biscuit, chocolate, banana and other seasonal fruits.

The participants of FGD said that the services provided by the NGO were useful because most of children would not attend the school. Further, they believed on the age old proverb i.e. ‘something is better than nothing’. Thus, for the parents, it was important that their children were learning something at least some basic calculation and language.

On asking the participants whether they wanted any change in the existing activities run by the NGO, participants were of the view that it would be good if the NGO could arrange a regular school for their children instead of running a centre for twice in a week. In
addition, participants shared that it would be more beneficial for them if such schools could run either in the early morning or in the evening because from 9:30 to 3 pm was a peak time for them as they had to do the moulding of the bricks followed by laying down the moulded bricks to get dried in the sun light and then arranging them in stacks.

In the concluding part, when the participants were asked what they would do if the NGO would stop working in their locality, in reply, participants mentioned that there was no other alternative or option for them to explore. Moreover, the kind of services that they were receiving was important but they suspected that those services would hardly make any differences in their life or in the life of their children. Children were attending the centre and were learning something but it won’t be sufficient for them to change the future of their life. Parents added that they wanted their children to study but at the same time children’s support were needed to add family income. Thus, the respondents viewed the services provided by the NGO as beneficial but those services did not have much impact on children’s future life.

b) Tikiapara (Howrah)

Lake Garden Women and Children Development Centre (LGWCDC) was working in the Tikiapara of Howrah-1. In Tikiapara, LGWCDC was implementing a programme called Child Health Development Programme for last three years. Under the programme, education of the children was one of the major components. The NGO was putting effort to form children group, parents group and youth group in order to sensitize the community towards importance of education. Through their (LGWCDC) health camps, they had built good rapport with six local schools along with teachers and parents of the children. The FGD was conducted in the LGWCDC Project Office, Tikiapra, with thirteen mothers of the children enrolled in those schools after a gap of two to three years. It is worthy to
mention here that mother tongue of majority of the inhabitants was permanent migrants were from states like Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh.

The discussion began with the topic ‘Need of NGO for the educational care of their children’. In response, like other places, participants highlighted the hardship of their life. According to them, there were schools in the locality and their children tended to attend the school but the economic condition of their family did not permit them to do so. They (participants) said that they migrated to this place in search of job as previously the locality was a hub of many small and medium industries. Gradually all the industries shuted down and they had to search for alternative means of livelihood. Hence, the kind of role played by the NGO was of immense importance. Participants shared that many parents were ignorant about the importance of education and engaged their children in activities in order to meet family expenses. The NGO was making effort to aware them during the Self Help Group (SHG) meetings. In addition, the NGO workers visited homes to motivate parents to enrol their children into schools. The NGO was also linking the parents with teachers of respective school and once the child was enrolled LGWCDC staff frequently did follow up. Participating parents also mentioned that the NGO took care of secondary cost associated with the education like pen, note books, bag and informed them about the government schemes through which they could get some financial assistance of government for the education of their children.

Situation of girls were found same in Tikiapara as that of Sholo Bigha of Mahestala and villages of Puruliya. The marriages of under aged girls were rampant in the locality. Girls opted to drop-out from the formal school either at an early stage or after 4th standard. In addition, girls were entrusted with household chores.
Coming to the second part of the discussion participants mentioned that they were receiving number of services from LGWCDC. NGO provided free treatment to their malnourished children and pregnant women, provided nutritional support to the children, arranged tailoring classes for the adolescent girls, generated awareness about the dos and don’ts during pregnancy and took initiative in enrolling children into formal schools.

When the participants were asked whether they found any usefulness of the services offered by the NGO, participants were of the view that the services were really essential for them because the kind of income they had was not sufficient for them to visit a doctor every now and then. Further, they also shared that majority of the women and children in that locality were suffering from one or the other health problems and accordingly health care service provided by the NGO was a great relief for them. Coming to the education of their children, they said obviously the NGO was doing a commendable job as it was generating awareness among the community people pertaining to importance of education and taking initiative to enrol the children into mainstream schools.

In the next part of the discussion, the participants were asked whether they wanted any change in the existing programme. They replied no and in between, a small number of participants i.e. four, were of the view that it would be good if the NGO could arrange some medical facilities for the male also.

In the concluding part, when participants were asked what they would do if the NGO would stop working in their locality. In response, they said that they would make every possible effort to resist that occurrence and in case they would fail to do so then they would rely upon the traditional doctors, commonly known as quack doctors. For the education of the children, they would aware other parents about the importance of it and kind of government schemes that they could avail to support the same. In a way, it can be
said that unlike other visited fields participants had shown a positive attitude and exhibited courage to carry forward the activity in absence of the NGO.

8. Vikramshila Education Resource Society (VERS)

Vikramshila Education Resource Society was running a number of programmes for the educational care of disadvantaged children. One of the premier initiatives of the organization was ‘Naba Disha’ (ND). The initiative was a joint venture of VERS, Kolkata Police (KP) and CRY. Initially, centres were started in five crime prone areas under Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC). Later on, there were seven ND centres in areas like Taratala, Hastings, Narkeldanga, Watgunge, Gardenreach, Lake and Ekbalpore. The major objective of the programme was to mainstream the disadvantaged children not only educationally but also socially. The centres provided an equal opportunity to the children to grow and develop. For the purpose of the FGD, ND in Gardenreach was visited. Total eight parents participated in the FGD of which six were female and two were male. Prior to the FGD, the participating parents were briefed about the purpose of the meeting and the points to be discussed in due course of time.

In the beginning, when the participants were asked about the significance of the services rendered by the organization, they (participants) were of the view that the NGO was playing a instrumental role for the better future of their children as well as for their families. Their children were receiving all the lessons and required inputs as that of children studying in elite private schools. They also opined that poor economic condition of the family was restricting them to support the educational expenditure of their children like stationeries, note books, fees for private tuition and so on. But the presence of ND centre in the locality mitigated that challenge as they supplied all accessories necessary for their studies and the more specifically the free coaching. The environment of the ND
centre was very conducive along with trained teachers and thus made education a joyful experience for their children.

Participants were found to be little uncomfortable when they were asked about the education of their daughters. There was a mixed response from the participating parents. Some of the parents said that they never discriminated between a boy and girls while some other participants questioned the importance of girls’ education. It is worthy to mention here that marriage of underage girls was rampant in the locality. During the visit to the ND centre, girls from lower grade i.e. primary level were found in adequate proportion of their male counterpart but in case of middle and high schools the ratio was not in favour of girls. Discussion on the issue did not last long as the participants were reluctant to share their views.

In the next stage, participants were asked to highlight the services offered by the NGOs. In reply, participants mentioned about the services like free coaching, guidance and training to handicrafts, vocational training and workshop on skill development. The participants were found to be satisfied with all the services as they believed that these activities would help their children to earn a better livelihood in future and would lead a respectful life. Accordingly, they (parents) did not want any change in the services.

In the last part of the FGD when parents were asked what they would do if the NGO would stop working in their locality. Participants were of the view that they would make every possible effort to sustain the functioning of VERS and might go to an extent to raise funds and seek help from the influential persons in and outside the locality.
Conclusion
The FGDs at different locations revealed that the economic constraint on the part of family was a major hindrance towards the education of children. It was the economic necessity that forced the families to come to the urban area and to settle in slum pockets like Sholo Bigha basti, Topsia, Tikiapara of Howrah, Gardenreach and brick field of Akra. Further, it was the economic necessity that forced the parents to engage their tender aged sons and daughters in jobs like domestic help, rag picking, daily labourer and so on. In spite of the prolonged intervention made by the NGOs, the conditions of girls were found to be in deplorable condition except SEVAKS. The discussion also revealed that parents were confused with present education system where there was no concept of pass or fail and thus they doubted the quality of education imparted in the government run schools. In addition, many a times, they did not find any relevance/ utility of school education for their children’s future.

The economic condition of the communities was almost same but socio-cultural background of each of the community was different. Further, the visited communities also exhibited a variety of disadvantaged children. The variety of disadvantaged children included child labour, rag pickers, children of commercial sex workers, children in seasonal migration, children of slum, children with disability and children from Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe communities.

However, sustainability of the services rendered by the NGOs was found to be a major issue which required immediate attention. Almost in all the localities, the participants had shown a kind of dependency over the services offered by the NGOs, irrespective of the approaches NGOs adopted. Accordingly, the situation called for a newer strategy to minimise the dependency of the community over the NGOs.