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Role of non-governmental organizations in the daily lives of the Afghan and Pathan children and youth working on the streets

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Abstract: *This article aims to investigate the role and effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the daily lives of the Afghan and Pathan children and youth working on the streets. In this ethnographic research, 30 girls and boys, aged 12 to 16, were involved in the data generation. Three NGOs were selected in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. In this research, children and youth discussed that one of the NGOs is meeting the needs of education and other two NGOs are putting their efforts but to a limited extent. This investigation also revealed that none of the studied NGOs have focused on the work based learning and skills development, however contributing to a very limited scope. The studied group has valued the NGOs' consideration of respect and dignity aspects in their operations. It is concluded that NGOs need to plan comprehensively to play an effective role to improve the daily lives of their target groups such as children and youth working on the streets.*

Key words: NGOs, Afghan and Pathan children and youth, ethnographic research, limited scope of working.

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1. Introduction

Having the roots from 18th century European liberal thought of the Enlightenment, the civil society plays an important role in the lives of people in different countries (Ferguson 2007, 384). Although there is still

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no consensus on what civil society is or even does, everyone agrees that civil society is conceptually distinct from the state. Due to this distinction, it is researched widely to understand civil society independently of the state (Oxhorn 2007). It is found out that Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) can play a critical role by working with the state in policy design and implementation. In this connection, researchers such as Hann (1996) favors that civil society can transform the society and the state. However, it depends on the functions of the civil society in a particular context of operations. He further argues that social society can be linked to the issues of providing quality of life to people. However, quality of life provided by the civil society varies from country to country (see also; Layton 2004). Today 'civil society' has been reconceived as the road to democratization and freedom. However, Hann (2003) criticizes that now a days donor operationalise the concept of civil society in the only way they understand. In practice, most writers conceive of contemporary 'civil society' as composed of small, voluntary, grassroots organizations which open the door, conceptually, called Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Schuller (2009, 85) argues that NGOs provide legitimacy to neo-liberal globalization by filling in the gaps in the state's social services created by structural adjustment programs. Taking criticism and favors on NGOs, the following section discusses the NGOs in Pakistan and their role in the Pakistani society.

An important reason found in the research, which explains the presence of working children on the streets, was internal and cross-border migration. The studied children, youth and their families in this study of Afghan refugees have migrated across the borders or in some cases earlier generations, while the Pathan families/community living in the Rawalpindi and Islamabad (called twin cities - the studied area of this research) arrived as a consequence of internal displacement in Pakistan. In both cases, a common outcome has been that many children have been forced to work in an exploitative working environment – the street. According to an estimate of Society for the Protection of Rights of the Child (SPARC), there are 1.5 million street children in Pakistan, who are living and working on the streets (Editorial 2013). Hussain and Khan (2013) have also noted that street children in Pakistan face a lot of problems on the streets. Despite the fact that many NGOs are working for the welfare and development of children in general, the number of children working on the street is increasing day by day (SPARC 2013). Such a significant problem of Pakistani society deserves deeper inquiry, which is the major impetus for this research to investigate the role of NGOs and their effectiveness in the daily lives of working children and youth on the streets.

This article aims to investigate the role of NGOs' programmes and services provided to the Afghan and Pathan children and youth working

on the streets *and* to analyse the effectiveness of NGOs' programmes and services provided to the study group.

The investigation of effectiveness of NGOs' programmes and services will provide an in-depth understanding of NGOs' role in the daily lives of the Afghan and Pathan children and youth working on the streets. It will firstly provide an opportunity to NGOs to analyse and develop those programmes and service which can have a deeper impact in the daily lives of the study group of this research and secondly would help, as to how they can collaborate with other organization to achieve sustainable goals.

2. Review of the literature

The NGOs fulfill a role where governments are not able to act (Lewis and Kanji 2009, 12; Ulleberg 2009). There are many NGOs across the world, and many of them work for children's welfare issues, including Pakistan. These NGOs claim to be more transparent, efficient, accountable and reliable than government organizations (see e.g. Hanson and Nieuwenhuys 2013, 13). Against these standards, the effectiveness of NGOs is measured nationally and internationally. If they are ineffective, people will remain marginalized and vulnerable (Liebel 2012, 27). However, NGOs face many challenges in meeting their responsibilities. The challenges for NGOs have become more complex and larger due to a changing context - globalization (Lewis and Kanji 2009, 15). These global challenges have put emphasis on connecting grassroots level interventions with the structural forces that influence patterns of poverty, exclusionary economics, discriminatory politics and ruling of elites (Edwards and Fowler 2002; Lewis and Kanji 2009). Despite all the challenges and difficulties, NGOs seek to make social changes at a broader level, fired by such ideas as an end to discrimination and poverty, and the provision of rights to the vulnerable and marginalized groups of the society (Lewis and Kanji 2009, 16).

Role of NGOs in the lives of young people

Now a days, a large number of NGOs work for the development of young people. NGOs play different roles to improve the daily lives of young people. Research has shown that NGOs are involved in educating young people, providing health facilities to the young people, creating and providing linkages for income generation, capacity building and many other tasks (Ulleberg 2009). A study by Sama and Järvelä (2016) investigated the role of NGOs in employment generation. The research results show that NGOs working in Finland have contributed in the rehabilitation of children and young people where parents were not supportive. It is also found that NGOs have arranged the employment for the young people and young people are satisfied with the arrangements.

Many NGOs believe that involving young people in the designing of projects, implementation and evaluation will give an in-depth understanding of their needs and issues. It is also believed that young people can contribute positively in the projects to make them a success. In this connection many successful projects have been initiated around the world, where young people participated in the projects (for details see UNPY 2010).

History of NGOs in Pakistan

The history of Pakistani NGOs has its roots back from the time of partition, 1947, when Pakistan got separated from India. Although not directed to as NGOs at that time, many voluntary organizations focused to provide humanitarian aids to refugees pouring into the country. During the first few years of Pakistan, many of these NGOs concentrated on rehabilitation and basic services such as health and education to the refugees. The next expansion of NGOs took place in *1970s*, when martial law government explicated its philosophy of social work welfare. During *1980s*, many new NGOs emerged for development of communities by involving local communities in their programmes and projects (ADB 1999).

In the early *1990s*, there was another rapid increase in NGOs, when new organization were formed to take advantage of new available funding under the People Work Programme, particularly in rural Sindh and Punjab. It is difficult to estimate the number of NGOs in Pakistan. Only rough estimates are possible. In a publication of UNDP in *2001*, number was suggested to be between 8,000 to 16,000. If non-registered NGOs are added to registered one, number of Pakistani NGOs could be anywhere between 25,000 to 35,000 (Tufail 2006).

The NGOs have a limited scale of operations due to their project based approach and lack of funding, thus questioning the sustainability of many NGOs in the world (Ulleberg 2009). The same situation prevails in Pakistan which continued to experience significant problems of poverty for many decades, a major consequence of which has been sustained and perhaps increasing child labour including children working on the streets. The Human Development Report of 2013 ranked Pakistan 146 out of 187 countries in terms of human development and reported that 49 per cent of the population lived in multi-dimensional poverty including income poverty (PPAF 2013).

Thus raises the questions on the effectiveness and accountability of NGOs in different parts of the world as studied by Ebrahim (2003). It is mentioned earlier that there is a big number of NGOs working in Pakistan, which emphasize the question of effectiveness of NGOs and promises of changing the lives of their target groups (Talat 2014). In this research, an opportunity was given to children, youth and their families to investigate

the role and effectiveness of NGOs in their lives, which is discussed in the coming sections of this paper.

3. Methodology

To analyze the increasing role of NGOs in Pakistan in the daily lives of the Afghan and Pathan children and youth, this study has investigated the effectiveness of the NGOs assisting the target group of this study in Rawalpindi and Islamabad through a qualitative research.

This study was part of a PhD research and data was generated with 30 children and youth (boys and girls), aged 12 to 16. These children and youth lived with their parents and were impoverished. Ethnographic approach was used to generate data and it was done over the period of seven months in 2012. In this research, children, youth and families investigated the role of the selected three NGOs working for their welfare and development in Rawalpindi and Islamabad (the twin cities). Semi-structured interviews and observation were used as primary data collection methods in this ethnographic study. However, innovative tools and techniques such as drawings, photo-elicitation, writing about myself, were also used. In this research, Urdu – Pakistan’s national language- was used for communication. Children and youth cannot write Urdu well but their spoken language is very good as they communicate with many people on the daily basis. This skill of learning made them to survive in the market successfully. In this research, children and youth choose pseudonyms for their privacy and confidentiality. Complete research ethics considerations were taken into account while researching with children and youth, according to an Australian University, where the researcher was pursuing her PhD. Information was given to the young participants about the tasks they would be asked to undertake. Consent that the generated data and discussion would be used for presentations and research publications was obtained from young people who participated in this research. To maintain their confidentiality, young people choose their own pseudonyms in the beginning of the research fieldwork. Other practicalities such as payment, security, and the importance of respecting children’s privacy through blurring of photos were also important considerations raised by the ethics committee.

The data analysis was a complete process. I followed Corbin and Strauss (2007) grounded theory approach for the data analysis and developed different categories accordingly. The categories were presented and discussed with children and youth to have a robust data analysis (Creswell 2014, 199). These categories became the major findings of this research, presented in the coming sections of this article.

4. Results and Discussion

Three NGOs which were the focus of this research are explained in the following section. In this part of the research article, the studied NGOs-work on different projects according to their defined objectives and funding respectively- are discussed in detail.

NGO One was selected for this research because it is a leading organization in relation to children's rights. It has established a Drop-In-Centre (DIC) in the studied area (Rawalpindi) and provides non-formal education to the Afghan and Pathan children without any discrimination.

NGO Two focuses on primary education of children. It works in the formal and non-formal education. It runs four DICs in Rawalpindi and Islamabad, all of which were studied in this research. It works both with the Afghan and Pathan children living and working in the studied areas.

NGO Three provides formal education to children mainly to Pathan and other ethnic groups. It works only in Rawalpindi and runs seven schools which were studied in this research.

Meeting educational needs

UNICEF (2013, p.1) and SPARC (2013, 65) both report that the situation of education is not encouraging for either boys or girls in Pakistan. However, NGO One, NGO Two, and NGO Three, studied in the research, are putting considerable effort into improving the situation of the educational sector. NGO Three provides accelerated primary education completion programmes for those children who were not able to start their school at the age of 4 or 5 which is a normal age of schooling in Pakistan. These children were much older than the normal cohort, often seen to be about eight years old when in Class 1. The research in this study revealed that NGO Three, enabled increased primary completion rates in Pakistan, even though there was a high drop-out rate. The research also showed that NGO's (One and Two) Drop-in-Centres (DICs) need more proper planning, more resources and more efficient use in delivering good outputs and outcomes, especially with regard to education, which were lacking at the time of this research

The perceptions about the NGOs appear to have varied significantly among the Afghan and Pathan children and youth working on the streets. For example, a Pathan boy (Irfan, aged 16) who had completed primary education from NGO Three and was currently enrolled in a private school in pursuit of finishing his high school and then in grade 9-10, expressed it as follows:

The NGO's school has changed my whole life and I am so thankful to them. When I came here, I was 12 years old, had never been to school and was working day and night.

With this NGO, I completed my primary education in three years while working regularly. It was a great opportunity for me to work and study at the same time. My life has taken a new direction (Irfan, aged 16).



Figure 1. Irfan (Pseudonym) with his class fellows in his current school

In this way, working children such as Irfan, Zaqiya and Shumaila (studied in this research) are given a chance to get an education which is widely recognized as a means to bring positive change in their lives. These three cases, all of whom were continuing their middle and high schooling from grade 8 to grade 10 present clear evidence of some success by the NGO Three. Many other Pathan boys and girls have also completed their primary education through the NGO Three. This is seen as a big achievement in the Pathan community, even though formal education is not considered important and parents appear more interested in the financial contribution of children and youth.

Nevertheless, there are many children who left NGO Three before they had completed primary education, and there is no doubt that this organization faces a high drop-out rate due to competing demands of children's work, lack of resource, as well as the lack of research on the needs of children and youth such as those studied in this research.

The contribution of Drop-In-Centres [NGO One and Two] is different from NGO Three. In NGO One's DIC children come only for three months, while NGO Two's DIC allow children to stay with them for at least eight to twelve months, before they are mainstreamed into nearby public and private schools. During this time they learn Urdu (national language of Pakistan) and English alphabets, as well as learn to read signboards and street names, to understand basic arithmetic and to write few sentences in both languages (interview recordings; writing on myself;

observation during the fieldwork from October 2011 to April 2012). However, children's learning depends on their regular attendance and interest in studies, and as noted above, there are major competing demands in the form of work and other responsibilities. Despite the fact that children and parents appreciated the role of NGOs in their daily lives, they also have identified few complaints which they think that are important for NGOs to improve their performance.

A major complaint about the DICs was that there was only one teacher in each DIC, and that teacher taught all the children (25-30 in number) together at the same time. Clearly it is difficult to handle different class levels at the same place and at the same time by one teacher. This dearth of teachers was exacerbated because, not only are there insufficient numbers of teachers in DICs, but their lack of professional training in non-formal education limits their capacity to reach out to very mixed groups of students, and so further constrains the children's learning. In some cases the teachers have some basic formal teaching qualifications but they are not professionally trained in non-formal education which is quite different from formal education. Such a lack of training further makes it hard to deliver apt education in an effective manner (interviews with teachers; observation in the DICs). Another factor which hinders the learning at the DICs is the high turnover of staff including teachers. One of the consequences of high staff turnover was the negative effect on children's learning and achievements at the DICs, and it certainly appeared to contribute to some children leaving the DICs without completing their programmes. This raises a question about the functioning and effectiveness of DICs in regard to their claimed capacity to deliver education to the marginalized and socially excluded children and youth, who consider the DICs not just a great opportunity to learn, but perhaps their only opportunity.



Figure 2. Children are getting education in different DICs

Cash transfers

In the field of providing education to poor children, cash transfers are amounts of money paid by NGOs to children or their families. In the street children literature, cash transfers, both conditional and non-conditional, are considered an important strategy to support the working children's education while minimizing family poverty (UNICEF 2013, 52). In this research, NGO Three was found to provide an amount to the children (Rs.10/day, AUD 10 cents) so that they and their families stayed motivated to continue education. Despite the provision of cash transfers, NGO Three still experienced drop-out rates, especially for girls. It seemed reasonable that NGO Three needed to develop other supporting strategies to ensure retention of children in their schools. Such strategies might include providing vocational and skill training, and providing micro-finance which could be useful for the working children and youth. Provision of micro-credit is quite practical because children and youth working on the streets are quite active in their working lives. They want to do something else of more worth and respectful. For example, a boy aged 15, was rearing goats with the help of his mother. He wanted to expand this activity as his business, however none of the assisting NGOs, had worked on this aspect. They were neither providing micro-credit nor connecting children and youth with the institutions providing micro-credit, thus leaving with no options to children and youth than to continue the work which they were doing at the time of this study.

In summary, the children, youth and families are appreciative and thankful to NGOs for providing above mentioned services, but considering their living and working environment, they frequently expressed concerns especially in the case of DICs (Bano 2008, 480). Thus, it is difficult to conclude whether or not the children were getting an education, which met the children needs and expectations from studied NGOs.

Work-based learning and capacity building is important

In the literature, the paucity of employment generation and skills training opportunities for street children has been highlighted in various countries as a major lacuna in policy making (UNICEF 2012). In Pakistan in particular, there is lack of literature, research and action on generating employment and providing sufficient and appropriate skills training to street children and working youth and children on the streets as stated in Article 28 of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989). Certainly, none of the NGOs studied in this research, had even considered providing comprehensive skill or vocational programmes and services which might give those children and youth currently working in the informal economy, the skills or knowledge to seek work in a safe

and regulated employment environment. However, NGO One and NGO Two attempt to provide very limited skill training in their DICs. Boys between about eleven and thirteen are provided training in NGO One for paper bag making but they saw this as somewhat limited:

As far as learning about our working environment, we are not very sure how learning at the DICs helps us. We have never been taught how we can improve our working capacities. How we can learn new skills that we can switch over to any other job or occupation. There are much fewer skills training opportunities for us in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The training (paper bag making) given will not help us to make our living in the future. We can earn more while working on the streets than with this paper making (group discussion on January 27 2012).

These concerns suggest that it is important to consider the expressed and real needs of working children and youth. Children, youth and families think that to survive in the current situations, it is imperative if they find better alternatives than the options already available to them, as discussed above. Yet, they are very evidently not getting such assistance from NGOs at present, as has also been argued by Thomas de Benitez (2011, 39) and NSDC (2013). On the other hand, such education and training may also be outside the ambit of the organizations and it should also be kept in mind that NGO One and NGO Two DICs can only provide skill and vocational training within their limited budgets.

Success in delivering good quality skills training in a limited budget is of course determined also in part by the management of resources and time period of the projects. At the NGO One and NGO Two DICs, a range of classes in cutting, sewing and embroidery are offered to girls aged between thirteen and sixteen over three month sessions. According to the staff of the center, these skills are in demand, and that is the reason they have started such these skills training. A girl aged 14, learning cutting and sewing at NGO Two center noted:

I like to come to this centre, as this is the only free time I can have with my cousins and friends. Sir (centre manager) motivated and convinced my family male members to permit me to come here to learn cutting and sewing. The situation here is not encouraging as I am not learning much because sometimes there is no teacher and sometimes the machines are broken. I hope that things will get better in the centre and I will learn something before my family stops me (Suriya Rani, aged 14).

This excerpt highlights the fact that good ideas are not enough and better management at the DICs is needed if initiatives are to be effective. Of course there are also further problems related to opportunities for girls' access to learning, because such opportunities are also likely to be foreshortened due to *pardah*, honor and mobility issues, as was discussed somewhere else (Khalid, forthcoming). The data of this research revealed that the DICs can really contribute to girl's life and help in building their capacities, if DICs develop an understanding of their families' cultural norms and traditions.

It is analyzed however, that NGOs did not put much effort to think about the immediate needs of skill improvement and finding alternatives for the Afghan and Pathan children and youth working in the informal economy. The recent efforts and success of DICs have been limited. Youth is the most marginalized group affected by unemployment globally but it is even worse in developing economies such as Pakistan (see ILO's 2012 report on Global employment trends, p.31-44). This youth unemployment has long term impacts, not only on the labor market itself but also the future of youth is also not bright as far as careers are concerned in the global economy (see ILO 2012, 33; Murtaza 2013). Such unemployment situational analysis should compel organizations to have a strategic approach especially while developing programs and services for poor and marginalized children and youth.

Dignity and respect

As the UNCRC explicates, the right to dignity includes fair treatment to all (UNCRC 1989, Article 28 (2), 37a, 41 (1)). Dignity is a widespread term used in many statements and conventions on aspects of human rights, including the UNCRC and Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is an intuitive concept which is rarely defined, although scholars have noted that the etymology of the term dignity refer to 'inherent worth'. In a similar vein, the Social care Institute for Excellence defines dignity as a state, quality or manner worthy of esteem or respect and (by extension) self-respect¹.

Just as dignity is a profound and important concept that is not always easy to define, so too, there are different meanings for the term *respect* for different people. For some, it is being polite or having good manners. But in reality, it means treating others with honour and esteem. Respect is about valuing the worth of yourself, others and the world around you.

²The NGOs studied in this research showed clear awareness of different attitudes to dignity and fair treatment of children and youth. NGO One

¹(<http://www.dignifiedrevolution.org.uk/What-do-we-mean-by-Dignity-and-Respect/>)

²(<http://www.danitajohnsonhughes.com/2011/04/r-e-s-p-e-c-t/>).

and NGO Two sought to treat every child equally, as far as the enrolment of the Afghan and Pathan children in their programs was concerned. These two organizations allow any child who is working on the street or involved in child labor to come to their DICs. There is no discrimination on the basis of sex, race or nationality. The Afghan children and youth also attended the DICs and they never had any problem with the management of DICs in the enrolment processes or in any other issues (see Thomson and others (2006) for migrant children's treatment in the society.

On the other hand, NGO Three does not encourage Afghan children to be enrolled in their schools ostensibly due to the lack of interest in education by Afghan children, youth and parents. However this was not their written and defined policy not to enroll Afghan children and youth, but staff showed a reluctant attitude towards the enrolment of Afghan. After working with the Afghan community for years, the field staff have adapted the practices according to their experiences, and conveyed their ideas to the management. One can still find a few Afghan students in the schools (field notes; field observations). This is said to be due to their refugee status, despite the fact that such proscription is not only against all international laws, but also against the public commitment of Pakistani government to the welfare and development of children and youth (UNICEF 2013).

Children's protection and safety from any kind of punishment and bad treatment in their living and working environment is also part of the conceptualization of dignity and respect as well as a right given in the UNCRC, as highlighted by Freeman (2010, 215). Banning corporal punishment in schools is a responsibility of the state aimed at ensuring that children have a safe learning environment. Corporal punishment is legally banned in the Punjab province where Rawalpindi city is situated. However there is a wide gap between the laws and the implementation of this legislation in the public schools visited during this research. Often I witnessed corporal punishment in the public schools when I was collecting data for this research (see also Chohan and Qadir 2013). By contrast, the NGOs, studied in this research, gave full consideration to this aspect in their daily functioning. Children were treated politely and with care and were never physically punished, quite a difference from their living and working environments. The children often said that they appreciated this treatment in NGOs, and that they wished that they could have the same treatment from everyone in society in general, and in their working environments in particular. The children and youth said they appreciated the trust and safety, and said they felt that they could express their feelings to the staff members easily during their informal gossip time in the DICs. However, there were also children and youth who did not

express their feelings to any one due to shyness and lack of confidence (field observation during fieldwork from October 2011 to April 2012).

In conclusion, it was evident that all studied NGOs gave importance to the children's dignity and respect. Thus from their perspective, dignity and respect are necessary for the well-being of children and youth working on the streets, even though it is lacking in their lives. Moreover, the attitude and behaviour of staff and teachers had raised their awareness of dignity and respect, so that these children now understood that they deserved to be respected in the society.

5. Conclusion

The data analysis overall revealed that an understanding of children and their socially constructed childhoods is largely lacking at the organizational level studied in this study. The significance given to the children's work for their families, the immediate work-based learning, the importance of time and learning in DICs, and the issues related to girls are those matters which need to be given weight by organizations, if they are to develop effective programmes and services.

The data analysis of this research has also shown that NGOs are working to a limited scope in helping their target group. In the case of education, only NGO Three provides accelerated primary education and the rest of two NGOs operate DIC's, where non-formal education is provided. Data analysis of this research revealed that none of the studied NGOs had even considered providing comprehensive skill or vocational programmes and services which might give these children and youth, the skills or knowledge to seek work in a safe and regulated employment environment, as discussed by UNICEF (2012). It is also discussed by children and youth that NGOs sought to treat every child equally, as far as the enrolment of the Afghan and Pathan children in their projects was concerned. It is to conclude that NGOs were seen to be making efforts to improve daily lives of their target groups, but to a limited extent.

If we compare the work of NGOs in Pakistan with other CSOs working in different countries, it is analysed that CSOs play an important role in improving the daily lives of people. For example, in rural areas of South-Africa, where women and non-white people's poverty status was not considered important in the government policies and programmes. With the help and long efforts of CSOs, government policies of poverty reduction have changed and presented a model in the world where South Africa's policy makers are dealing with poverty in terms of lived experiences of the poor (Krishna &Prewitt 2000).

In a similar manner, another case study of CSOs role is researched by Shereneta and others (2000) in Ukraine where handicapped citizens got attention of the government due to the work of an organization Cerebral. This organization has proven that services can be provided to handicapped

people innovatively and government and society both should work to improve the status of the vulnerable group.

To conclude, it can be stated that successful experiences of CSOs including NGOs should be shared generally and in Pakistan particularly that lessons can be learnt. There is also a need to combine the resources and talents of CSOs and NGOs in Pakistan to achieve sustainable goals. The best outcomes can be achieved when CSOs work, not individually and in isolation from other organizations, but when partnerships are formed among different types of CSOs, and also between CSOs and government agencies (Krishna and Prewitt 2000).

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