INDIA:
The Forgotten Children of the Cities
by Amrita Chatterjee
The UNICEF International Child Development Centre, often referred to as the Innocenti Centre, was established in Florence in 1988 to undertake and promote policy analysis and applied research; to provide a forum for international professional exchanges of experience; and to advocate and disseminate ideas and policies towards achieving the goals of child survival, protection and development. On a very selective basis, in areas of programme relevance, the Centre also provides training and capacity strengthening opportunities for UNICEF staff, concerned government officials, and the staff of other institutions with which UNICEF cooperates. The Centre is housed within the Speziale degli Innocenti, a foundling hospital that has been serving abandoned or needy children since 1445. Designed by Filippo Brunelleschi, the Speziale is one of the outstanding architectural works of the early European Renaissance.

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This publication is one of a series designed to bring to a non-specialist audience some aspects of the data and conclusions of technical case studies on The Urban Child and Family in Especially Difficult Circumstances undertaken in Brazil, India, Kenya, Italy, and Philippines under the auspices of the International Child Development Centre.

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THE URBAN CHILD
in difficult circumstances

INDIA:
The Forgotten Children of the Cities

by Amrita Chatterjee

Innocenti Studies

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The Indian rupee is quoted throughout this publication at an exchange rate of Rs 29 to $1.00.
This publication represents the fourth report, tailored to a non-specialist audience, resulting from an extensive case study on India, one of the five countries selected for the first project of the Urban Child Programme of the UNICEF International Child Development Centre (ICDC). Amrita Chattejee and I travelled to India in October 1991, together with Stefano Bertalame, an Assistant Programme Officer. The team visited urban basic services programmes and projects for children in especially difficult circumstances in five small and larger cities around Hyderabad, as well as in Bombay and Delhi. We were accompanied in and around Hyderabad by some of the most respected and best-informed urban community development practitioners in the country. Ms. Chattejee met municipal authorities, interviewed representatives of government and non-governmental organizations, talked with urban children and their families, observed them in their daily activities, met researchers, and acquainted herself with the material already prepared for the Indian urban child case study. A subsequent analytical publication, designed for the professional and expert community, will report more fully on the results of this project in India.

Responding to needs expressed by UNICEF Country Offices for understanding better the growing phenomenon of urban children in especially difficult circumstances, and for analysing existing programme approaches and policies, the first ICDC Urban Child project launched studies in the Philippines, Brazil, India and Kenya, and Italy. The first three countries were chosen for their innovative programmes on urban children and communities. India in particular was selected because of its impressive achievements in the area of community participation and the success of its urban planners in convincing the Indian government to adopt the UBS model for the country as a whole. Kenya exemplifies the growing problem of children living in the proliferating urban slums of Africa. Italy represents the project’s ‘conscience’, by reminding us that economic growth alone provides no assured safeguard for children. Children need to become much more central in the concerns of policymakers before real progress can be made even in high-income settings.

Each technical country case study in the Urban Child Project has selected a particular focus, which is only partially reflected in these reports for non-specialist audiences. The Philippine and Brazil studies focus explicitly on street children and how they relate to the community. Studies in India, Kenya and Italy focus more on disadvantaged children in the community and their relationship to work, education and the street. All discuss the problems of institutionalization, and include a concern for problems faced by young girls, highlighting differences from those faced by boys.

The main aim of the project is to develop a fuller understanding of the current problems facing children from birth until age 18, by analysing various levels of causes for their abuse, abandonment, mistreatment and neglect. This objective required going back to the children’s families and family histories to trace paths of deterioration that led to their present situation at home, in the streets or in institutions. It also required developing an understanding of what led people within such families to move apart, lose family connections and become socially isolated. Which factors led to loss of self-esteem by parents and children and to the downward spiral of severe distress? Which combination of factors seemed to lead certain families or certain children in those families along this path?

Low income is obviously part of the story, especially in slums in developing countries. But poverty is compounded by a sense of powerlessness, of exclusion, of lack of a rightful place that accompanies the failure of some of their expectations and their lack of access to resources they need or consider they have a right to. Lack of employment, for example, even if other members of the family are earning enough for survival, may be extremely damaging to male self-esteem and lead to heavy drinking, drug addiction and child or wife abuse. The effects on children of living in single-headed households where there are heavy loads of adult responsibility and work vary according to the social context and the number of children involved. It may lead to the serious social isolation of children in Western countries or to the obligation of children to start working at early ages in developing countries.

Families in cities obviously live in close contact with one another. The extent, however, to which
they actually interact constructively and have their own effective support systems in moments of crisis, be they extended family or friends, makes a considerable difference in the quality of their life, and of the lives of the children. Community cohesion and spirit provide an important safety net for children. In many of today’s cities, this safety net is failing.

In order to establish fully the connection between urban children in especially difficult circumstances, and the problems their families are encountering, one also needs to address the effects of social change on families and individuals. This ranges from understanding the deterioration of families in different environments, to identifying changes in expectations, personal roles and attitudes familiar in many countries. The project, furthermore, while not strictly undertaking a comparative analysis, has sought to identify and highlight common problems such as overcrowding, pollution, the growing presence of drugs and AIDS, urban violence, internal and external migration, and the lack of a sense of belonging, that transcend the North-South divide.

While concerned to identify the urban children, families and communities at greatest risk, the project has also been engaged in assessing existing, and considering possible, interventions aimed at reaching disadvantaged children more effectively. One form of prevention is obviously to support and strengthen the families that most need help before their situation gets out of hand. An essential step may be to provide communities with a stronger voice in identifying and helping to solve their own problems, but without letting governments off the hook. Pressure needs to be put on both national and municipal governments to enable them to realize the important advantages, politically and cost-wise, of supporting families for the sake of their children rather than having, later on, to institutionalize those same children and thus take full responsibility for their upbringing and social reintegration.

India as a country raises special problems of size. With its largely rural population of 844 million spread over 3,287,782 square kilometres, India is still experiencing considerable rural-urban migration. Children are increasingly bearing the brunt of poverty and of a deteriorating quality of life in cities. The Indian government can hardly keep up with its sprawling urban areas and with its increasingly complex urban structure. On the basis of a previous record of success, the government has recently identified the Urban Basic Services approach, which includes the involvement of communities and NGOs, as a model for the main national urban programme of the next five years.

With a still expanding population, how best to prevent aspects of the urban backdrop that affect children, and protect their well-being, remains one of the greatest challenges the country faces.

Each of the other studies emphasizes different and innovative approaches. The Philippines shows how a participatory approach can offer preventive solutions by specifically involving children and families living in difficult circumstances in the monitoring of their own problems. Another preventive approach, illustrated by the Brazil case, is to identify the strategy that will facilitate a shift in the existing vision of the role of children in cities and in the nation. Both Brazil and the Philippines illustrate the creative interaction that can be established among children, families, communities and policy-makers - but which needs to be closely supported to avoid tokenism or misutilization. The Brazil case shows how the public image of children can be significantly transformed and how this can be subsequently translated into technical support and into long-term municipal and state-level monitoring of children’s problems.

From the beginning, the project has been concerned about children as fully participating actors in these processes. This means involving them in the presentation of their own and their families’ difficulties and needs, in discovering how they use their time and how they view and use the city they live in. By so doing one gives them a stronger sense of personal esteem and responsibility that helps them become effective citizens. We hope this series of popular publications helps to illustrate the everyday lives of urban children and their families, showing not only the deteriorating quality of their lives but also the clarity of the observations, the ingenuity and courage with which they face the most adverse circumstances, and the potential for action that they offer to planners and policy-makers confronting the dramatic demands of the cities of the future.

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URBAN FAMILIES IN CRISIS

At first glance, nothing distinguishes Asim from the dozens of other shoe-shine boys who scurry around the shops in New Delhi's Connaught Place. Like other children who make a living here, he has mastered a street hawker's persistent sales pitch. His expression is hopeful, determined, and resigned all at once.

Asim is uncertain of his age. "Twelve, maybe 14. I've been working five or six years." He runs a broken comb through hair streaked with grey, and tucks it in his shirt. The clothes are faded, but they are laundered and carefully patched. "Amma (mother) says we must be neat and clean for work," he says. "She washes our clothes every day."


Taken aback, the tourists stop. Intrigued, they address Asim in Spanish. For a moment he looks flustered. Then he flashes an impish grin, knowing he's captured an audience. "I polish your shoe, sir. Best job in Delhi. No fixed price."

One of the men steps forward to oblige. The others gather around. Asim swiftly removes the tools of his trade from a nylon shoulder-bag: shoe polishes, a shoe brush, a rag for buffing. He lays his bag down and motions to his patron to place his foot on it. Selecting the appropriate polish, he applies vigorous strokes to the shoe.

The job fetches Asim Rs 25 ($0.85), more than he sometimes earns in a day. His windfall is several times more than the two or three rupees an adult shoe-shiner charges, and roughly what a child earns working a 10-hour day as a porter at Delhi's Interstate Bus Terminal. Asim raises the money to his hips, shakes hands ceremoniously with the Spaniards and bids them farewell.

Asim's income is crucial to his family. His father, Sayyed Hussain, a repairman in a small radio shop, normally earns Rs 30 a day ($1.03), but has drawn no salary for more than a week because the shop has been temporarily closed. "Amma depends on us to earn enough, so that she can buy the rations," says Asim. A few days ago his younger brother cut his foot on a piece of rusted metal and the visit to the nearby dispensary involved an unplanned expense, the harder to meet because his father was out of work.

Over the next few hours, Asim runs through the same routine, using smatterings of English, Italian, French, even Japanese and Russian. He's learnt these during fleeting encounters with foreign visitors. Sometimes his efforts are generously rewarded, at other times he is ignored. "Sub kisnet ki baat hai," he says. "It's all a matter of fate."

Asim and his family

The second of four children, Asim lives with his family in a squatter settlement a few kilometers from Connaught Place, where he and his 16-year-old brother Asif work every day. When darkness falls, they walk home to avoid wasting money on the bus fare.

Their mother, Razia Begum, was born in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh 38 years ago. She and Sayyed Hussain migrated to Delhi in 1976. All six of her children were born in the slums. One was stillborn, another died before the age of two. An unsmiling woman, Razia Begum looks at her four living children—three boys and a girl. Then her face softens. "Nobody, save your God above and your sons can help you through life," she says.

Asif, the firstborn, briefly attended school. But for the past five years he's been shining shoes. Despite his shadowy mustache, he is far less self-assured than Asim. When asked if he would have liked to continue at school, Asif replied: "Going to school was useless. The teacher would shout at me or use the cane if I didn't give good answers. And I didn't learn things that would help me find a job. At least I earn a living. We don't beg. We don't starve," he says. Razia Begum clucks her tongue approvingly. Her husband would not allow her to seek employment outside the home. "Sub tisat ki baat hai," she says. "It's all a matter of dignity."

The area they live in is called Motia Khan, or Jewel Mine. But there is nothing about its appearance that suggests how the slum earned its name. It emerged like so many other bastis (slums or shanty neighbourhoods) close to a construction site. Some of Motia Khan's inhabitants were attracted from the countryside and from smaller cities by the capital's long building boom. With construction
work leveling off, most of the 250-300 families in
the settlement have switched to other occupations.
Many women and children scavenge discarded
plastic. Men work as street vendors, porters, or tea-
stall attendants. The semi-skilled like Asim’s fa-
ther find jobs as repairmen, messengers, tailors, or
auto-rickshaw operators.

Most people in Motia Khan live a hand-to-
mouth existence. Few save enough to cushion their
families in times of emergency or to improve their
dwelling places. The huts – called jhuggis and
jhompatis – are made of scavenged or inexpensive
materials: mud and thatch, corrugated metal and
plastic sheets, canvas tarpaulins and jute cloth, and
are often very cramped. Many residents pay rent to
local landlords, early residents who over the years
have subdivided their plots.

Asim’s family lives on a four-square-metre lot,
larger than many. His home has mud walls and a
roof patched together with flattened tins, plastic
and cardboard. A naked light bulb hangs in the
centre of the room, drawing illegally-tapped elec-
tricity. The bulk of the room is taken up with three
metal-frame beds, pushed up against one another,
used for sitting, eating and sleeping. One corner of
the hut has been partitioned off for bathing, with a
plastic bucket and shelf for hair-oil and soap. An-
other corner forms the kitchen, where Razia Begum
squirts in front of a paraffin stove and throws rotis
– unleavened bread – over an open flame.

For 12-year-old Asim, the narrow foot-paths
and cheek-by-jowl huts of the basti are a welcome
sight every evening when he returns home tired
from work. If dinner is not yet ready, there may be
time to play a quick round of gilli-danda, street
hockey, played with sticks and a wooden puck.
After dinner, sleep, ready for another early start
tomorrow.

Razia Begum is full of praise for her sons.
“They’re good lads. You can ask anybody in the
neighbourhood. They don’t gamble, they don’t
steal, they don’t cause grief to anybody. Occasion-
ally they keep back some money to see a movie, but
that’s all right. They work hard.”

In a country as large and diverse as India, no
one urban child’s story can be regarded as typical.
But in many ways Asim exemplifies the 15-18
million poor Indian children living in similar situa-
tions. In families where children work, the average
incomes of parents are low but the entire household
income is somewhat higher because of their off-
springs’ earnings, according to a 1991 study by the
National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA), Delhi.
In 72 per cent of cases, the entire family’s monthly
income is over Rs 1,000 ($35). Significantly, the
NIUA study found that similar households whose
children did not work earned less than Rs 1,000.

Many of these families with working children
are entrenched in poverty, which in India is offi-
cially set at the prevailing cost of 2,100 calories of
food per person per day in urban areas. The inci-
dence of poverty varies from state to state. Nearly
two-thirds of the urban population living below the poverty line during 1987–88 were in the six states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Poverty is undoubtedly a factor in some children’s abandonment of home. A percentage of working youths are runaways living by their own wits. While there is no national count due to the floating character of their lifestyle, there are an estimated 100,000 homeless street children in Delhi alone, one out of every five of the city’s working children, according to NITU.

Throughout India’s towns and cities, the presence of large numbers of children living and working on the streets is becoming one of the more disturbing characteristics of the country’s urban growth. Various child-focused programmes are attempting to address this phenomenon. But children do not arrive on the streets purely by choice. If intervention is to be meaningful, we need to appreciate the different elements of family crisis that create the ‘working’ and the ‘street’ child. To do this, it is necessary to take into account the entire range of political, social and economic influences that affect the lives of slum families, including those events on the national stage whose repercussions reverberate in the neighbourhoods of vulnerable people.

In 1990, UNICEF initiated a series of studies that brought together a variety of qualitative and quantitative data on the predicament of the urban child in ‘difficult circumstances’. This publication is based upon the findings of the Indian researchers, and sets out to explain the characteristics of poverty in India’s cities and how it plagues children into these ‘difficult circumstances’. It explores the many dimensions of their predicament – their family situations, working conditions, and the coping mechanisms deployed by themselves and their families – in the hope of easing the emergence of meaningful strategies to remedy the plight of Aims and his millions of male and female peers.

As the story of Aims shows, there are spirited survivors among the nation’s poorest youngsters, who demonstrate that material poverty need not deprive them of a full life, any more than it condemns them to an existence totally without gentle moments and special pleasures. Amidst their difficulties, the children of India’s slums possess a gritty resilience and drive that can, if recognized, be constructively channelled and supported.

The urban explosion

In India, as in other countries, the rise in the numbers of street and working children is associated with the phenomenon of rapid urban growth, especially of sprawling slums and shanty-towns. The predicament of the urban child in ‘difficult circumstances’ is inextricable from these conditions of urban poverty in which he and she is brought up.

The first point of any enquiry into childhood in India’s slums and squatter settlements, therefore, has to be the entire living context of poor urban children: physical, environmental, socio-economic, and familial. Unless the child’s family is made the target of understanding and improvement, there is not likely to be sustained amelioration of the children’s current plight or future prospects.

The growth of India’s city slums over the past few decades has been a complex phenomenon stemming from the nature of India’s industrialization process. For all the progress that India has made in building an industrial base – ranking among the world’s top 15 producers – it continues to be listed among ‘low-income economies’. The per capita annual growth rate is 3.2 per cent, against a population growth rate of 2.1 per cent. Due to economic liberalization policies, industrial growth reached 7.6 per cent between 1980–88, outpacing that of the 1960s and 1970s, which averaged 4.6 per cent. But real agricultural output between 1970–80 grew only by slightly more than two per cent per year, according to the Asian Development Bank. For people in thousands of India’s villages, this translated into an incentive to move to the city.

Every year, numbers of rural Indians leave the countryside to look for opportunities in the cities. Unable to find affordable housing, the new arrivals occupy makeshift shacks and shanties that spring up on pavements, under bridges, around public monuments, outside bus and train terminals, along railway tracks and nullahs (open drains); anywhere, in fact, where space is available. Inevitably, the result is squalid, unplanned, and unsightly.

Take the case of Andhra Pradesh, the fifth largest state in India, with a population of 66.3 million and a population growth rate of 2.4 per cent per annum (1981–91). The state’s medium-sized towns account for a higher proportion of urbanization than elsewhere in the country and its city dwellers account for 23 per cent of the total population. One-fourth of them live in a slum environment devoid of basic amenities. This contributes to high public health risks which in turn affect the survival and development of children, who represent around 40 per cent of the state population.

Drs. Venkat Rao and Ravindra Prasad of Osmania University, in a study on children living in
urban poverty prepared at UNICEF’s request, found that in Andhra Pradesh the process of urbanization has been essentially one of migration to the city. Rural-urban migration accounts for 40 per cent of the growth of Andhra’s cities, and the primary incentive is economic.

In Andhra, as in many other parts of the country, urbanization has had both a positive and a negative side. On the one hand, it has enabled a sizeable segment of the rural population to resettle in centres where non-agricultural jobs are available. On the other hand, the study notes, “Urbanization happens to be a mere process of transfer of rural poverty to the urban environment.” When migrants reach the city, they become inhabitants of slum settlements where environmental deterioration and sub-standard housing are the norm and levels of health and nutrition are low.

Another cause of urban migration is the declining fortunes of different trade castes. For many, the anonymity of city life affords a welcome breakdown of caste rigidity which they had not been able to evade back home in the confines of traditional village life. Bombay social worker, Shriiath Bhatiwalla (quoted in India: Forty Years of Independence by Mark Tully and Zareer Masani), described how many rural dwellers were forced to migrate. “People who became landless and belonged to high castes in their villages found they could not survive because they were not permitted by their caste-fellows to take up manual labour or other occupations to earn an income.” They came to Bombay as long as 20 years ago and have done fairly well. They now have the means if they so wish, to buy land and go back to the village; but none of them want to. Here they feel they’re free to live as they want, to follow any occupation, without stigma being attached.”

The total slum population in the country was estimated in 1990 at between 45 and 56 million by the Task Force on Shelter for the Urban Poor and Slum Improvement; their prediction was that it would reach 78 million by the year 2000. Around 45 per cent of the slum-dwelling population is found in the large metropolitan cities. Congestion has adversely affected the quality of urban life. Delhi is often shrouded in a thick pall of smog. Bombay is said to have over 16,000 apartment buildings on the verge of collapse. There is running water in Madras only every other day. Calcutta’s government employees regularly show up an hour late for work because the transportation system frequently breaks down.

Increased urban problems come at a time when government budgets are tight despite some economic gains. In 1989, total GNP was $287 billion, with the per capita share working out to about $350. But the debt load on the economy is high: $70 billion to foreign creditors, according to the World Bank. (The Indian government calculates a somewhat lower figure.) Under pressure to curb government expenditures from such lenders of last resort as the International Monetary Fund, belt-tightening measures have been introduced, such as smaller subsidies on fertilizer and other farming inputs that place a further burden on the rural population. These may enhance the push factors encouraging people to leave the land and try their chances in the city.

The dynamics of Indian rural-urban migration include pull factors as well. Some social researchers, such as Kamala Chowdhury (Chairman of the Vikram Sarabhai Foundation), point out that many rural Indians are drawn to urban areas by economic opportunities created by industrialization. The four decades since independence in 1947 saw a spi-
ralling growth of India's industrial capability and manufacturing sector, with a corresponding increase in jobs.

Take the case of Asim's father, Sayeed Hussain, drawn to Delhi 20 years ago. Up to that time, he lived with his extended family - parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters - on the outskirts of Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh. After a few years of primary school, his father arranged a job for him at a local foundry where he struggled to make a living. A cousin in a similar predicament went to Delhi to improve his lot and came back two years later bearing gifts and alluring tales of a better life. Sayeed Hussain, by now a married man, told his bride that he was going to seek his fortune in Delhi. He would find a job, earn a lot of money and come back to start his own business in Moradabad.

The first few years Sayeed Hussain was alone, living with his cousin. Eventually a friend helped him secure an apprenticeship in an electrical repair shop where he worked without pay in return for training. When he finally began earning a regular wage as a repairman, he returned to Moradabad for his wife. They had one child, then another, and so things went on. Twenty years have passed, and there is no likelihood of any return to Moradabad. "The children's father has an income but money simply doesn't stay in his hands," says Razia Begum. "It's not for me to question how he spends it. As it is, I'm grateful he doesn't come home drunk and beat the kids."

The goods that Sayeed Hussain helps to repair are nowadays manufactured in India - which indicates how far the independence dream of Indian self-reliance has come in 40 years. Today, almost everything in the better-off home is locally made, from infant formula and washing machines to Maruti vans and colour television sets. The same is true of the workplace, where high-tech equipment no longer needs to be bought abroad. India exports computer software around the world from satellite-linked centres in Bangalore.

But the underside of this industrialization process has been an urban population explosion which began with the slowly-maturing push and pull factors of rural-urban migration, and now is irreversible. The 1991 census found that two-thirds of population growth among the urban poor during the last decade was due to natural increase. From whatever source come the burgeoning numbers, the fabric of the cities has not been correspondingly able to absorb their presence in an increasingly stressed and pressurized urban landscape.

The pressure on urban amenities

The single most important need of urban dwellers anywhere is the right to settle in one place and put some kind of roof - however temporary, however illegal, however flimsy - above their heads. Many 'squats' and even those in officially registered areas often live under the constant threat of eviction. Asim's family has moved six times in 16 years. Some moves occurred when the areas were razed by bulldozers, necessitating a shift to resettlement colonies invariably farther away from Sayeed Hussain's place of work. At other times, they were evicted by slumlords demanding more rent than they could pay.

They have occupied their current dwelling-place for longer than any other: four years. The shack is in a dilapidated condition. Rats have free entry and there are chinks in the corrugated metal walls. However, the dwelling is more roomy and better-equipped than many others in Moira Khan.

Life in the slum environment has many disadvantages, not least the Inaccessibility of utilities and public health services. The 1981 census showed that roughly 40 per cent of urban Indian households did not have electricity, 25 per cent did not have safe drinking water, and 40 per cent did not have toilet facilities. Most officially recognized slums now have access to potable water and sanitation. However, according to a survey by the National Institute of Urban Affairs in New Delhi, 59 per cent of the city's slum population have an inadequate supply of water. Long queues at hand-pumps, especially with the high temperatures of summertime, often lead to frayed tempers and neighbourhood scuffles.

The same study showed that 88 per cent of sample slums had community toilet facilities. In real terms, however, this means one toilet for every 27 families. Nearly 41 per cent of households defecated in the open. Such situations are hardest on women and children. Young children squat outside the dwelling place. Women have to get up before sunrise or wait until after dark to go out in the open. They often go in groups to avoid the unwanted attentions of children, or sexual harassment by men.

Some women avoid relying themselves more than once a day. A study conducted by the Society for Promotion of Agra Resource Centres (SPARC) in Bombay found urinary problems were fairly common among women residents of squatter communities. In the New Delhi slum of Nizamuddin, 10,500 residents have been allotted 14 toilets for men, 14 for women. But when the women were asked whether they used them, most said they did
not. They preferred to use the nearby maidan or open common. “There are latrines in the basti, one or two. I never use them. They seldom get cleaned, and when they do, the dadas (local toughs) demand money for their use,” explained Shafiqa Begum who has lived in Nizamuddin 13 years.

The vulnerability of squatters makes them an easy target not only for thugs but also politicians in need of votes. Slum resident and pavement dwellers alike use their ballots as leverage, telling office seekers they want better conditions: street lights, covered drains, improved sanitation and paved lanes. Seldom do their votes accomplish what they expected. Resources are limited. The waiting list for drains and toilets keeps growing, and slum populations expand even faster.

In some areas, residents pursue the need for better amenities forcefully. In Tummalakunta, a slum in the Andhra Pradesh town of Warangal, there are several water taps, one community latrine and one garbage dump for approximately 3,000 people. These were provided because residents bargained with the area’s state assembly member to use his influence with the municipality. But many subsequently expressed disappointment that their votes had failed to secure a better return. After 15 years, Tummalakunta remains an unauthorized squatter settlement, still ineligible for more civic amenities. During the monsoon season, the entire slum becomes submerged in deep water and slush and its residents fall prey to malaria and gastroenteric infection.

Meanwhile, in the Nizamuddin settlement of New Delhi, where Shafiqa Begum lives with her household of seven, there is a single, overflowing garbage heap used by more than 10,000 people. “Does the dump truck come regularly? I don’t know. I throw my sweepings in the nullah (open drain), or in the fountain.” The “fountain” is a rectangular construction, probably designed as a lotus pond during an earlier phase of New Delhi’s “Keep Your City Beautiful” campaign. Today it is filled with putrid waste.

It would thus appear that, in some ways, the urban slum population is worse off than the average rural Indian.

In Bombay, a large portion of the squatter population have banded together as the National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF). Their aggressive community action has yielded some results. Under the leadership of its founder and president, Mr. Joachin, the residents managed to procure garbage collection by dumping their garbage in front of the municipal offices. According to Joachin, it sometimes takes a gimmick “to show that we are human beings”.

The price of poverty - health hazards

The unsanitary conditions of their immediate environment, together with inadequate nutrition, pose serious health hazards for urban slum children. They impair physical and social well-being, adding to economic disadvantage. Diarrhoea can be a killer – accounting for 40 per cent of deaths in under-fives. Many children suffer repeatedly not only from gastrointestinal infections, but from common respiratory diseases and parasites.

Infant mortality rate (IMR: the number of deaths under 12 months per thousand live births) is the most widely used indicator for the health status of children. The Indian IMR showed a general decline between 1970 and 1988, a 31 per cent drop in rural areas, a 25 per cent drop in urban. Greater access to medical attention and higher living standards has meant that average IMR is significantly lower in the urban areas: 62 per 1,000 live births in 1988, compared to 102 in the countryside.

These encouraging figures for the towns disguise the unhealthiness of slum living. Malnutrition is widespread, and predisposes children to a number of infections spread by an unsanitary environment and an unsafe water supply. A survey undertaken in 1986 of 15 major cities found that the nutritional intake of urban slum dwellers was similar to those of the landless, and lower than the rural average. It would thus appear that, in some ways, the urban slum population is worse off than the average rural Indian.

The story of health deprivation begins at birth with a expectant mother who is under-weight and often uneducated. The links between female health and literacy and infant mortality are well-established. The health status and survival of children is significantly improved if mothers are educated and in a good physical condition. Kerala, with the highest women’s literacy rate, has the lowest IMR, 22 per 1,000 live births; Uttar Pradesh, representing the lower end of the female literacy scale, has an IMR of 81 per 1,000 live births.

The pregnant mother in the slum is unlikely to see the inside of a maternity clinic or a hospital. Some say they are too far away, and the thought of being examined by doctors too intimidating. It might help if a health worker visited the basti, but that happens infrequently because there are just too many bastis to visit, according to NIUA. In many cases, a woman receives no prenatal care. She is usually young when childbearing begins, in her late teens or early twenties. And, deprived of the counsel of the older women in her family left behind in the village, she receives no guidance regarding diet during pregnancy, nor help in caring...
for existing children. She may well expend more
energy than her body can afford.

When the time comes for delivery, it will
variably be at home. Neither doctor nor trained
midwife is sent for. The expectant mother is in the
hands of the local dai or birth attendant just as she
would have been in the village. The dai is probably
an uneducated woman (the razor blade used to cut
the umbilical cord is not likely to be sterile,) but she
has much practice in delivering babies. A Delhi
obstetrician points out: “We can’t compete with
the dais in winning over the trust of these simple
people. If the child dies, the dai will shed tears and
grieve with the family. That’s very important to
people who are fearful of modern medicine.”

The higher mortality rate for female children is
usually reflected after age one. Social research has
found that the preferential treatment for the male
child has been manifested not only in weaning
practices and nutrition, but also in utilization of
health services. “It is not that the mothers love their
daughters less,” explained one Delhi sociologist.
“They just happen to see their sons in a different
light. If they wean the girls sooner, or give them
smaller portions of food, it’s because they genu-
inely believe girls need less than boys, who must
go out and earn a living. It’s an age-old belief,
though the trend is changing.” There is some
indication of this in the data from 1987-88.

The poor nutrition of slum children, which
begins at birth, continues through their first four
years. Most of these children look much younger
than they are, because they are small in stature and
grossly underweight. “They call me ‘Mosquito’
because I’m so little,” complained a puny 11-year-
old boy in a squatter colony in Bombay. The NIUA
cites a 1978 Indian Paediatrics report as having
found that children from low-income families not
only weighed less and were shorter but they also
had late signs of puberty. In girls the average age
for onset of menstruation was delayed. While
people living in slums are generally undernourished,
social researchers have found that women are worse
off than men.

Six early childhood diseases – diphtheria,
whooping cough, tetanus, polio, tuberculosis and
measles – have been vigorously combatted by the
government’s universal immunization programme.
Aggregate figures for 1989-1990 indicate high
levels of coverage: 82 per cent for DPT, 82 per
cent for polio and 85 per cent for tuberculosis; dis-
quietingly, however, these levels have not been
reflected in a significant drop in child mortality.

Independently of mothers’ ignorance about di-
etary values, simple lack of food helps to explain
the malnutrition and stunted growth of many urban
children. Many households do not have enough
money to buy adequate food to feed their families.
According to NIUA data, 24 per cent of slum
households in Delhi said they would buy less food,
and 38 per cent that the nutritional content of their
food basket would be reduced, if their children
stopped working. “It hurts me daily to see my boys
go to work when they could be going to school,”
said Razia Begum of Asim and Asif. “But what can
we do?” She used the words ‘pate poojsh’ (stom-
ach, worship) which echo in many corners of In-
dia’s urban jungle.

Making ends meet – the daily grind

In spite of the congestion and squalor, migrants
hope that, once established in the city, they may
find their way into better opportunities and living
circumstances. But those with some education or
technical skills often discover that they are com-
peting with people who are better qualified. When
press for survival, the urban poor resort to all
sorts of ways to earn a livelihood.

The work participation rate of slum populations
is high. But only a very small percentage of the
urban poor are engaged in skilled occupations or
hold white-collar positions, and a large number are
self-employed. For most, livelihood is at best pre-
carious. “The majority are engaged in the informal
Most basti are colonies of normal individuals struggling to make a living and contributing to the city's economy.

tables, kitchen utensils and wicker stools, whisk brooms and cotton bedspreads. Some learn to carry out minor electrical or mechanical repairs or drive an auto-rickshaw.

Contrary to common stereotype, community life in the bastis is usually well-established, according to Indian sociologist A.B. Bose. Studies and personal observations have persuaded him that slum families do not live like strangers but interact and cooperate, forming local panchayats (councils) and developing a community life which complies with societal norms and a moral order, although patterns differ from area to area. While there are infamous neighbourhoods, there are not normally centres of criminal activity, broken families, or inhabited by violent, depraved, drifting people. Single parent homes are not the norm, although the proportion of households headed by women, or financially dependent on women, is comparatively high in some low-income urban areas: up to 20 per cent in Andhra Pradesh, for example. Most bastis are colonies of normal individuals struggling to make a living and, in the process, contributing to the city's economy — a reality which is often ignored.

In the early years of their new urban lives, the immigrants tend to maintain a lifestyle that closely resembles their rural pattern. There are, however, adaptations of which one of the most important is the breakdown of socio-religious caste barriers. Although migrants tend to cluster in regional groups, or according to religious persuasion, a squatter settlement is heterogeneous by nature. Mothers may tend to socialize with women from similar backgrounds, but they are more lenient about permitting their children to play and eat with those from different, even lower, castes. In New Delhi's Janakpuri settlement, the majority of its 10,000 residents are Hindu. The day after Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, the ground was littered with spent firecrackers, and it was clear the Muslim children had enjoyed as good a time as the rest.

While there is some loosening of traditional barriers, they have far to disappear. Social workers complain that the mix of castes and religions sometimes inhibits efforts to mobilize community efforts. Moreover, both inter-caste and inter-faith marriages are fairly uncommon.

The most significant departure from the rural lifestyle, and one that has the most far-reaching effect on children, is the loss of the extended family network. Separated from in-laws and other relatives, the young urban mother has lost her support system. While the freedom from meddling in-laws is welcome, it comes at the cost of diminishishing of child-care options and household help.

When a woman joins her husband in the city, it is not uncommon for her to spend the first few months or years conducting her life as she would in the village, attending her home and her children. At times she may miss past friends and family networks, but new friendships are formed, and the novelty of city life compensates for its loneliness. But once the financial pressures of urban life build up, women begin to seek employment. According to Osmania University social scientist Rao and Prasad, the wage-earning necessities and employment possibilities for women represent significant social changes brought about by urbanization.

An NIUA survey, based on a study of 200 households in two Delhi slums, found common patterns among the families where mothers were the main breadwinners, which graphically illustrate the impact on children of the ‘women must work’ phenomenon. If they were unable to take their young children to the workplace, they left them in the basti with older children or neighbours. Several women simply told NIUA researchers that they left their children “in God’s hands.”

Part-time work for women averaged three to four hours a day and fetched Rs 80-200 ($2.75-$7.00) a month. When the older girls are considered caparsh of minding younger siblings, the mother gradually increases her workload, sometimes working two shifts of three to four hours, returning in between to bathe, cook and check up on her children. A woman working six to eight hours daily as a domestic servant can earn Rs 250-300 ($8.60-$10.35) a month in the large metropolitan cities. She would earn as much as Rs 500-600 ($17.25-$20.70) in full-time construction work.

Again there are variations by state. In Andhra Pradesh, for instance, women in similar occupations earn less money.

A large number of women from slum areas scrounge the surrounding middle-class neighbourhoods and city streets for recyclable items. ‘Rag-picking’ is not a pleasant task, but the women can
Case I: Laxmi, the surrogate mother

In Vijayawada in the state of Andhra Pradesh, is a slum settlement called 'The Canal Hutting Behind Hotel Green Land'. Every morning, some 30 children between three and six years old gather in the neighborhood balcony (pre-school). Barefoot but in neat blue uniforms, the youngsters recite the Telugu alphabet and nursery rhymes.

Lingering in the entrance of the one-room schoolhouse is a pretty 12-year-old. She carries an infant on one hip. With her free hand she restrains a restless toddler. Her name is Laxmi. "I used to go to school," she says. "I can read and write a little, but I stopped attending after these two were born."

Her mother, Pitchumani, a thin woman in her 30s, works as a maid in a neighborhood nearby. She earns Rs 150 ($5.10) a month. "Sometimes I send the girl to work if I am unable to go," the woman says. "But then they cut my pay. The work doesn't change. Whoever does it. What can I do? The poor do not argue with the rich."

Laxmi enjoys filling in for her mother, particularly on weekends when she may catch snatches of TV shows. The outside work brings a welcome break from the monotony of her routine at home as surrogate mother and housewife.

In addition to domestic duties, Laxmi helps her mother assemble jasmine garlands. Her father takes these every evening to a flower vendor outside the Durga temple. The garlands fetch anything from Rs 15–30 a day.

"It's tough but we are giving the girl a good preparation for life," said her mother. "I am one of 12 children myself. I didn't know the meaning of spars time in my father's house and it has not been any different in this house either."

Laxmi's father is a tall, thin man who looks older than his 52 years. Once a porter, he developed a heart condition two years ago and works only intermittently. Pitchumani cut off all her hair a few months ago as a sacrifice for her husband's welfare. "Women have a tough life - it's part of your birthright. But I'm not complaining. God has been good to me. I have a man. I have three sons. There is only one cowry to give, and God willing, we will find a way."

Laxmi smiles quietly and shifts her tin-brother to the other hip.

make their own hours and they see it as easy money: Rs 25–35 ($0.85–$1.20) a day for ragpicking in Delhi. The trash is bought by a middleman, who resells it to a depot from where it is taken for recycling. Rates vary from one state to another, even from one part of a city to another, but plastic and rubber products fetch the highest sums. One advantage of ragpicking is that the mothers can take their children along, who start to help as soon as they are capable.

By choice and necessity, therefore, mothers often take their young children with them to the workplace, be it on the streets as vendors or ragpickers, or into the houses of families where they may be employed to perform domestic chores. Such children are subjected to stimuli outside the home at a very early stage. Moreover, the mother can seldom give undivided attention since she must work. The middle-class notion of childhood being a sheltered time of quiet nurturing plainly does not apply.

If working women do leave their children behind at home, they are put in the custody of an older sibling, often a daughter of five or six, barely able to take care of herself. These young girls fall into a demanding routine of child-care and housework very quickly, becoming full-time housekeepers at a very young age and robbed of the chance to attend school. See Case 1 inset. But, being children, they are likely to be distracted by games or chit-chat with their peers. When mother returns to find the chores undone, there can follow severe reprimand, even beatings and denial of food. Boys are rarely saddled with menial household chores. But they are often assigned errands such as fetching milk and groceries. This they must do in addition to wage-earning activities.

Many working parents endure long hours and exhaustion, at the end of which is an erratic and pitiful income. When earnings barely cover the costs of necessities, there is no room for extras. The cost of entertaining a visitor or purchasing medicines may leave the family subsisting on dry chappatis and onion, or just rice, for weeks. Tem-

If mothers were unable to take their young children to the workplace, they left them with older children or in God's hands
harshness of the saathi maa or stepmother. Few children run away unless home life becomes untenable. Abuse in the family as a motivating factor is corroborated by social workers and researchers, and is echoed in studies from other countries. "The urban poor are trapped in a vicious cycle from which they see no escape," said Bombay social worker Tina Gaido. "Their sense of self-esteem is very low, especially among the men who try to forget their problems by drinking. When they come home, they look at their children and their problems come back. Some trivial incident, usually something the child failed to do, will trigger an outburst. Many people crack under extreme poverty, and take out their frustration on their unfortunate children."

This is not to suggest that the life of children in slum or pavement dwellings is an undiluted nightmare, without its share of enjoyment and good times. Parents in the slums express the same tenderness and compassion towards their children as parents everywhere. Many mothers of working children express concern for their children's safety. Among the young roughnecks of Bombay's train stations, warm family feelings are often expressed, especially for mothers and younger siblings, along with an unmistakable longing for homes far away.

Poverty and limited opportunities affect the outlook and aspirations of basti dwellers and their children. To set and reach personal goals requires great tenacity and resourcefulness. For the vast majority, life is one of punishing hard work for pitifully little reward, with little time for stimulating and leisurely interaction among themselves or with their children. For the latter, the future is one of horizons limited by existing occupations: newspaper vendors, tea-stall waiters, parking lot attendants. Many accept their lot unquestioningly. Asked what they would like to do when they grew up, most children replied that they would continue doing the same jobs.

Ideally, childhood is a period of protection and dependency during which the child can develop into a fully-fledged human being. But for the children who grow up in slum neighbourhoods of India, as elsewhere, that period of nurturing dependency is all too brief. Adult responsibilities come too early, and often the burden is so heavy that the child's development is stymied in more ways than one.

Stunted growth and mental debility, physical abuse and psychological trauma, untreated sickness and injuries, the absence of a loving parent at home and the threat of exploitation by an employer can all be part of the reality of an urban slum childhood. For many 'children in especially difficult circumstances', even where there is an effective intervention to rehabilitate or prevent further damage, these scars may never completely heal.
EVERY parliament since Indian independence in 1947 has advocated ending child labour. But the task has been seen as overwhelming and virtually unattainable. Not until 1981 did the government first attempt to determine how many children actually worked by having the Indian census ask whether each household member below a certain age was attending school. The revelation that 82 million of India’s 159 million children aged six to 14 were not in school gave some indication of the numbers alternatively engaged in tasks which have some economic function.

The 1981 census estimated the urban child labour force at 14 million, of whom 42 per cent were engaged in manufacturing and processing, and 35 per cent in services and trade. This tally was conservative compared to the 17 million calculated by the National Sample Survey of 1983, and the 44 million (including those paid in kind) estimated in a study by the Operations Research Group of Baroda, sponsored by the Labour Ministry.

The wide disparity in estimates is due to the tendency of the census to bias its enquiry towards the formal, organized sector, resulting in an underestimation of children who work in the informal sector. The number of minors in the formal sector has shown a declining trend due to various laws curbing child labour, according to the NIUA. But the spread of urban poverty has pushed a large number of children into the informal work force. For too many families, there is no alternative to sending their children out to work.

Far from being an embarrassment, it is clearly the social norm in slum communities to arrange gainful employment for children, often from as early an age as six years old. And there is a case for the value of work for a child’s learning process and capacity for self-realization, so long as the work is not incessant, repetitive, and burdensome — which it too often is. According to the NIUA survey of poor urban families in New Delhi, 22 per cent of the children in the 5–18 age group were engaged in economic activities. Over 28 per cent of the surveyed low-income households had at least one working child. If the earnings of children were excluded, household incomes would be reduced by an average of 25 per cent. In the state of Andhra Pradesh, one urban child in six in the age group 6–14 was engaged in economic activity.

Child labour is not unique to the Third World. The early phases of industrialization in many Western countries witnessed similarly extensive employment of children. However, the incidence of child labour was reduced and eventually eliminated as the formal organized sector grew. Investment both in machinery and in the training of workers, as well as workplace legislation, gradually led to the phasing out of juvenile recruitment by mills, factories and mines.

At the same time, many of these countries began developing social security systems to relieve poverty, a major cause of child labour. Not only were higher income levels attained but also a greater recognition reached by individual families and by society of the educational needs of children and the deleterious effects of early employment for all social classes. In developing nations such as India, however, this has not yet happened. The informal sector, which uses unskilled manpower, and minimal technology and capital investment, is still a predominant source of work and earnings, and social security systems are not in place.

Estimates of just how many children work vary widely depending on the definition used for ‘child’ in regard to the upper age limit, and of ‘work’. Children are not usually categorized as workers if they perform unpaid work related to their parents’ occupation, such as tea-picking or rag-picking; nor if they are family workers in household-based industries, such as bidi (cigarette) rolling and carpet weaving; nor if they participate in contract production undertaken by the family on a piece work basis, such as embroidery or tangle-making.

The children’s workplace

Children work in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy, but primarily in the informal sector. Seventy per cent of working boys are self-employed, selling newspapers, collecting rag,
shoes, and parking cars. Some are wage earners in small industries like match works that pay by the piece. Others are employed by construction firms and repair shops.

There then are unpaid workers or apprentices in family workshops turning out glass bangles, embroidery saris, weaving carpets, crafts handed down from generation to generation. There are also children in bonded labour, a practice banned since 1976 but still operating, in which a child’s labour is contracted to an employer for a set number of years as repayment for a loan to the parents.

Twenty-two per cent of male working children start full-time jobs at the age of eight or younger, according to the NlUA. Another 25 per cent begin by age 10. Girls generally enter the labour market earlier – 25 per cent at seven or younger – usually as maid servants in middle-class households. But studies show that employment for girls outside the home often ceases around the time of puberty to conform with socio-religious practice: parents are extremely reluctant to expose their daughters to male attention.

Fifty per cent of working girls have an ill-defined employment status because they work as housekeepers or care providers to even younger children in their own homes. Many of these girls assume the strenuous tasks of a surrogate mother at the tender age of six. Significantly, more than half of employed girls receive no cash payment for their work, while only seven per cent of boys receive no pay. Of girls who do receive salaries, 96 per cent hand over the entire amount to the family, compared to 52 per cent of working boys.

Studies conducted in Delhi, Bombay and the Hyderabad area have noted that the percentage of working children is higher in households where the mothers also work, or among single parent families. Apart from economic factors, many mothers were quoted as saying that they feel that their children are safer in a work environment than left at home alone.

Whether children are independently employed or working along with other family members, or substituting for parents’ domestic roles and thereby enabling them to work, they are too often caught up in a situation which not only deprives them of education, training, and recreation, but may also affect their safety and health. Since much activity takes place on the streets, they run the risk of traffic accidents. Ragpickers are constantly exposed to gems and sharp objects. Porters and vendors at railway stations are particularly vulnerable to injury. Yet almost every young boy who had scars or amputated limbs from jumping off moving trains seemed to have a sense of fatalism about danger.

Children are also easy prey to exploitation, often by employers but also by their own family and peers. The working environment is hostile, the hours long, the work monotonous and threats often substitute for nurturing attention. The working child is seen as a worker only in terms of the work he or she performs. Aside from being deprived of childhood, these youthful labourers have no protection and often no chance of upward occupational mobility. Many industries are organized on a small-scale basis and are characterized by labour-intensive practices. Such operations keep consumer prices low while providing a competitive edge for the small or cottage sector. But in the process, the technology is frequently used with scant attention to hazard.

Children are not only cheap and docile, but are easy to lay off in response to market conditions. They have no rights as workers. Employers, often with the open collusion of government inspectors, ignore labour laws. And unions tend to exhibit little interest in children’s welfare. The law forbids children under 14 to work in units employing 10 or more workers and using power. This sanction is skirted by simply keeping the children off the official payroll. When inspectors do show up, the children either hastily leave the premises or identify themselves as visiting relatives of adults employed there. Even when children do almost the same amount of work as adults they are invariably paid far less.

Children’s earnings vary widely. In the larger cities, such as New Delhi, they earn between Rs 250 and Rs 300 ($8.60 and $10.35) a month. According to a 1989 NlUA study, 58 per cent of male children earn less than Rs 300 a month; 24 per cent earn between Rs 300 and Rs 500 a month ($10.35 and $17.24); a tiny percentage earns more than Rs 500. In general, female children earn far less than male children, and a significant proportion – 58 per cent, according to NlUA – work without any monetary compensation. Most are surrogate housekeepers and mothers, or assist their parents with street peddling, ragpicking or in construction.

Legislation and the working child

Independently of the legislation which since 1950 has established the right to free and compulsory education for every Indian child under the age of 14, the Indian Constitution also contains a number of provisions intended to protect working children. These include a categorical ban declaring that: “No child below the age of 14 years shall be employed
to work in any factory or mine or engaged in any other hazardous employment.”

In 1979, the International Year of the Child, a 16-member Committee on Child Labour was established to inquire into the state of India's children and to make recommendations. The Commission unanimously voted in favour of universal primary education and for eliminating children from the work force - seen as two sides of the same coin. It prescribed 15 years as the minimum age for entry into any employment.

More recently, the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986, replaced a British colonial era statute dating back to 1938. Apparently recognizing the practical problems of enforcing a total ban, the new legislation prohibits child labour in some hazardous jobs, regulating it in others. Specifically, children cannot work on plantations or merchant ships, in construction, or in places that produce hids, cigars, matches, cement, explosives and fireworks, shellac, soap, or cut mica, tan leather, clean wool, weave carpets, make cement, print or dye cloth. It set a maximum six-day work week, 7 pm work curfew, and a minimum age of 14 years.

The Labour Ministry's annual report for 1983–84 states that: “Despite the provisions of restrictive labour laws, the practice of child labour continues unabated because the exploitation of children is of financial advantage to employers and an economic compulsion to parents.”

Although the law is often more honoured in the breach, it was immediately criticized for not going far enough and banning all juvenile employment. The employment (and often the exploitation) of children in adverse and hazardous working conditions has been pointed out in the reports of several commissions and committees appointed by the government, as well as by activist groups and public-spirited Indian journalists.

The 1986 Act in effect admits the reality that child labour is a socio-economic problem, and one that is unlikely to disappear in the face of legislation. A legislative solution, in the opinion of many Indian experts, is seen as neither practicable nor capable of achieving its purpose.

The Indian government now appears to put emphasis on improving working conditions of children. Some social activists continue to argue that child labour is a stigma of society. Humanizing policies through a mix of legislative and welfare measures may take the edge off the adversity, they say, but it will not eradicate the problem. Yet the main thrust of the non-governmental approach now

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**The pros and cons of a total ban on children's work is currently the subject of heated debate**

... is to provide relief at various levels to children who must work, in the form of non-formal schooling, technical education, recreational facilities, counselling, credit facilities, health care and issuing of identity cards for their protection.

A workable approach to the desirable goal of prohibiting children from the workplace, yet assuredly long-term, is to reduce the need for children to...
work. This can only happen when the parents’ plight is relieved – a goal targeted by rural and urban poverty alleviation schemes. Their impact could be enhanced by coupling them with formal and informal elementary education for working children and improved social security services.

As the demand for a more educated labour force increases, the value of schooling will become more apparent. Will the unlettered 13-year-old who now spends his childhood welding auto-rikkashaws someday be the father of a young technician employed by an automated Maruti factory? Only time will tell if life will be any different for the future generations of India’s slum population.

Asif, the 16-year-old shoe-shine boy, said he dropped out of school because of compelling reasons at home. “My parents were always worried about not having money. I used to hear them talk at night,” he said. At the time Asif decided to work, he was no more than 10 years old. Like other children, he claimed he had not been forced by his parents, but that they merely approved his decision. Nor is this implausible. Very strong family feelings exist among the poor. From a tender age, children develop a keen sense of responsibility.

Even among the runaways at the bus depot in New Delhi or the railway stations of Bombay, many tough-talking youths would admit that, whenever possible, he sends a money-order home to his mother.

**Working children: occupation and hazards**

Like the two young shoe-shine boys from Motia Khan, many urban poor children seek the type of work which requires no training or special skills: car-washers, headloaders or porters, ragpickers and street hawkers selling everything from newspapers to home-brewed rat poison.

The initial capital investment required for their materials is small enough for their families to cover. And since the children are usually self-employed, they can set their own hours to fit in domestic chores. A large number of boys wash dishes and clean tables in small eateries, or sell glasses of tea to passengers at bus depots and train stations. The big bonus is free meals of snacks and leftovers – mostly not very nutritious – to take home. Occasionally there are tips.

Some children find seasonal work at construction sites, or as serving boys during marriage festivities, which provides a nice diversion from the tedium of their regular work, and hourly wages to boot. One reason why the monsoon is not popular amongst Bombay’s street children is because, as one 13-year-old boy explained: “People don’t plan their weddings for the rainy season, and that means less work for us.”

The more enterprising boys find employment in small workshops and factories. They may be recruited from the slums by employers looking out for a cheap hire. Sometimes jobs are found for them through a relative or friend. Such was the case of 11-year-old Yakoob who sells bread in a slum in Auto Nagar, named for the large number of auto-repair shops, in the township of Warangal in Andhra Pradesh.

Yakoob’s father, Mohammed Gafoor drives an auto-rikkshaw belonging to a sekh, an affluent merchant, who owns a small bakery in the city. Two years ago, Gafoor persuaded his employer to have Yakoob sell bread door-to-door in the slum where they live, Indira Priyadarshini Nagar. The 11-year-old attends the local primary school. Each morning before classes, he rises at six and walks three kilometres to pick up a small tin trunk full of oven-fresh baked goods. For nearly two hours, he makes his rounds. During the summer vacation, he sells bread in the mornings and ice-popsicles, also made by the bakery, in the evenings.

Yakoob was not enthusiastic about school. “We have to memorize lessons we don’t understand and the teachers beat us when we make mistakes,” he said. But he was not unhappy. The sekh was pleased with him, he said, adding that when he grew older he would probably follow in his father’s footsteps, driving his employer’s auto-rikkshaw.

Indira Priyadarshini Nagar – named for Indira Gandhi when she was Prime Minister – is a bleak corner of the Warangal township in which to live, despite the promise of its name. Its residents expressed displeasure with politicians who promised, but failed to deliver, electricity, roads and a reliable water supply. Nor are all the children of this squatter colony so fortunate as Yakoob that they can combine work and school. None spoke of the future with any measure of certainty.

On a Sunday morning in October, several young boys aged 10–16 were working in various auto-repair yards. The few who had been to school, even briefly, said they had no regrets about dropping out. Here, they were given one meal a day, a monthly salary of between Rs 50–75 ($1.70–$2.60) and tips from customers which could add another Rs 5 a day.

Most important of all, they all were proud to have a craft. Nadjim, a scrappy 15-year-old, works as a welder. He wears only one rubber shoe. The other foot is bare because it was severely burnt in a welding mishap a couple of months back. When he
of children, particularly in two states, Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh, which have set up apprenticeship schemes where they can start at a very young age. In one authoritative source (The Child and the State in India by Myron Weiner of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology), a Commerce Ministry official in New Delhi was quoted as asserting that child labour is necessary to keep India internationally competitive in some sectors. "If children were not employed by the carpet industry, India could not effectively compete with Pakistan or Iran."

In the glass factories of Firozabad, near Agra, 13 per cent of the 70,000 workers are children, according to Labour Ministry figures. Other estimates put the number much higher. Furnaces range in temperature from 500° C to 1,800° C. Bangles are arranged on trays by small boys for the 'pakhi wallah' who places the trays inside the furnace. They also carry burning looms of molten glass on four-foot-long iron rods without handles. Children are thus constantly moving around broken glass and burning materials, soot and coal dust. Many of them work on late-shifts because the furnaces are kept going all night to avoid the expense of having to shut them down, according to several accounts that have appeared in the Indian press.

A more benign version of child labour was seen in the city of Hyderabad, famous for its bangles made of lac, a resin from trees, luminous seed pearls and inlaid metal ornaments. Several of these are family owned and operated businesses, with mernfolk handling the storefront, women and girls working in the neighbouring courtyards and streets. The shops and living quarters are often within walking distance of each other, making it possible for families to keep in close contact. A walk through the narrow, congested lanes of Hyderabad bazaars affords glimpses of many young children working alongside their parents or older relatives, just as their own parents and grandparents did in villages across Andhra Pradesh. See Case II insert.

On the whole, girls are the invisible children of the poor, which does not make them any less exploited than boys. "In some ways, they are more vulnerable than boys because less opportunities are available to them," commented Joachim, president of the Bombay-headquartered National Slum Dwellers Federation. "I am trying desperately to get NGOs to focus on the problems of the girl child," he said. "Obviously a different approach has to be used. It's easier to find the homeless boys who missed a few weeks of work during recovery, his pay was docked. Still, he said: "This is a good job. There's a big market for this type of work. If I leave, I can pick up another job because I have experience now."

Employers are partial to hiring young boys because they will work for less pay, seldom demand raises or better working conditions, and are unlikely to unionize. In industries such as carpet weaving, bangle making, match box and firecracker manufacture, young children are preferred for their agility and quick movements. In fact, a frequently heard justification for their employment is that "children are ideally suited for these occupations and many of the traditional arts and crafts of India would suffer if child labour was abolished." However, "ideally suited" children may be for such professions as carpet-weaving and bangle-making, their working conditions are less than ideal. Many master weavers and loom owners work from their homes, the looms placed inside deep, damp trenches. That is where the children work. Ventilation and lighting is usually poor and the children toil long hours. The Factories Act does not apply to such small enterprises.

The carpet industry is in fact a major employer
Case II: The coloured bangles of Charminar

In Hyderabad, the best buys in glass bangles are to be found in the bazaar behind the Charminar, the 15th century landmark of the state capital. Around its blue, weathered walls, shops of almost dizzying variety.

This is a predominantly Muslim section of the city and in the labyrinthine gulleys, families live in adjoining white-washed houses. Some have lived there ever since they left their homes in rural Andhra Pradesh decades ago.

They carry on the tradition of their many crafts: jewellery, quilts, gossamer fine woven muslin and luxurious satins, and bangles. Young girls still in their school uniforms sit on burlap mats, decorating lac bangles with tiny glass beads.

In their midst is a bazaar. Hundreds of tiny, shining beads in many colours spill out across a girdle. Each child holds a pair of tweezers in her hand, deftly she picks up one bead at a time and presses it firmly down on the bangle with a swift motion of the thumb.

The process takes up to three-quarters of an hour. Dozens of bangles can be made in an afternoon and are then taken to the family shop and other outlets.

The girls are between six and 16 years of age. Some of the older ones will soon get married. "Then they will have a trade they can pass on to their own daughters," says Zebunissa Begum who runs a cottage industry out of her home.

Only two of the girls are her own. The others are neighbourhood children who get paid half to one rupee for every bangle decorated. In the bazaar the bangles sell for Rs 40 ($1.40) a dozen, Rs 75 for the more elaborate varieties.

Zebunissa Begum has been in the business since she was six years old. She holds up her calloused thumb, scorched from years of pressing hot beads into lac. "I was probably born with a blistered thumb. My mother made bangles, and her mother before her." And the girls hold up their hands to show off their own hardened thumbs, a mark of the trade.

or to arrange intervention programmes for street boys. Girls are temperamentally inclined to stay close to home. They don’t rebel against the restrictions as much as boys, or maybe they have a higher tolerance level. They’ll stick it out at home, no matter how badly they’re treated.”

However, little girls selling newspapers or jasmine garlands are a common sight at traffic-stops at most large Indian cities. Barefoot and dishevelled, they tag at pedestrians or dodge after cars and create a pathetic picture as they clutch younger siblings in their arms. Frequently they simply resort to begging.

Many young girls accompany their mothers or older siblings on their ragpicking rounds. In the Chandni Chowk area opposite New Delhi’s Red

Children and the underworld

Some of the occupations into which working children are thrust border on the illegal, and their survival strategies sometimes drive them to engage in anti-social behaviour. Through no fault of their own, they may eventually be sucked into the underworld of crime. Girls are at special risk of being absorbed into prostitution.

When young girls take to the streets, it is not uncommon for them to dress like boys to avoid sexual exploitation. However, it is not long before many of them are stared at by pimps or madams.

"Girls are terrified of being alone in the city," said Bombay social worker Tina Guido. “They aren’t as adventurous as boys. And apart from ragpicking and begging there really aren’t many things they can do to survive street life. You’ll never see a little girl polishing shoes, for instance. They are so vulnerable that they’ll go with anybody who will speak to them nicely, or offer them food and shelter.” See Case III: Overleaf. Young boys are also prey to the exploitative tendencies of adults.

Sexual exploitation is fairly common among the children who live and work at railway stations and bus depots.

Close-knit peer groups—usually described as ‘gangs’, which unfortunately conveys an overly
negative impression - are common among street and working children. Although some of their activities may be "petty crime" - pick-pocketing or stealing - membership of the 'gang' has positive characteristics as far as the child members are concerned. Apart from providing them with a sense of unity or physical security, the camaraderie helps fill emotional and social gaps. The 'gang' becomes a surrogate family, looking after the child when he is sick, hurt or in trouble.

The fight for survival forces some youngsters into activities such as pushing drugs or contraband. Nor is it uncommon for a young boy to start off as a helper to an older and more experienced peddler, and then to acquire a drug-dependency himself.

"Brown sugar," also known as "smack," is the opiate favoured by young drug-addicts in India. It is a form of heroin that can be injected, smoked or "chased". Chasing is the most frequent method used by street children. It involves placing the heroin on metal foil (usually from used cigarette packets), running a lighted match underneath, and inhaling the vapour. At the Victoria Terminus in Bombay, groups of adolescent ragpickers can be seen inhaling brown sugar at night. They do this at some distance from the platforms, with a younger boy strategically placed to warn them of approaching watchmen.

Smoking cigarettes and bidis, and gambling, are fairly common addictions among street children, often starting at a very young age, and not infrequently cited as their regular 'expenses'. The most popular indulgence, however, is film-going. A National Institute of Urban Affairs study on Delhi children notes that 52 per cent of the children interviewed went to movie halls and 20 per cent watched TV or videos in shops. Films provide important interludes of escape from the harsh realities of life. Working children frequently exhibit mannerisms they have learnt from watching their film idols. Many a street child, when asked of his ambition, will say that he wants to earn a lot of money so that he can buy a fancy car or home like a movie star.

While most street children are law-abiding, clashes with authority are not an uncommon feature of their lives. They are often threatened or roughly handled by policemen and security guards, who take advantage of their defencelessness. The first thing that usually happens when a child is either suspected or caught in petty thieving or vandalism is a severe beating.

Boys caught drug-peddling and girls suspected of prostitution are taken away to remand homes where they stay for a temporary period until a course of long-term rehabilitation is decided upon. Sometimes a child's stay in a remand home can amount to several months; thereafter, he or she is set free, only to return to a life on the streets. Often the nature of the child's misdemeanour does not warrant the severity of the 'sentence'. In a UNICEF survey undertaken by academic researchers in Calcutta, 15 case studies of juveniles in conflict with the law were included. The children, all boys between the ages of nine and 16, were all inmates of a rehabilitation centre. Some had been there as long as three years.

All but one were homeless street children. Most had been caught stealing food or merchandise from shops. One child, who prior to institutionalization had lived with his family in a slum, had worked as a domestic servant for a brief period. His employers had suspected him of stealing Rs 300. Only one was detained for a violent crime, a 14-year-old boy who had been arrested for attempted homicide against an older boy who bullied him and against whom he had retaliated.

Remand homes - known on the street as "chiller rooms", a corruption of "children's room" - are the worst nightmare of every street boy or girl. And every big city in India has its share of them, often a stone's throw away from the local jail. Children
with no first-hand experience of their own can
recite endless stories of ‘chiller room’ horrors, of
youths bound hand and foot, blindfolded, hung
upside down, starved, beaten, locked away.
In all probability this is highly exaggerated.
But what good do the remand homes actually
achieve? There is a clear view from some social
workers that institutionalization is at best a tem-
porary solution for juvenile miscreants. “The remand
home is like an attempt to clip their wings,” said
Malati Pillai, a UNICEF programme official in
Bombay. “Street children have very strong sur-
vival instincts. By confining them in a totally re-
strictive environment and depriving them of all
contact with the outside world for months, even
years, you make it that much harder for them when
they go out again. There has to be a way that would
equip these children to cope. Life is not going to be
any kinder the second-time round.”
Yet there are times when institutionalization
seems the lesser of two evils for the street child.
This is particularly true in the case of the little girl
prostitutes. At Aanchi Kholi, or ‘Our Place’, the
contact centre for children working and living at
Victoria Terminus station in Bombay, social
worker Arlene Rego spoke of the dilemma she was
undergoing regarding the rehabilitation of a 12-
year-old girl on the verge of going into prostitution
full-time.
“The child came here with her father, a cripple
who begs for a living. At first she sat with him and
begged too,” Rego said. “Then gradually we no-

Case III: Blossoms in the dust

The barred windows of brothels in Bombay’s Red Light district are like cages. Narrow and box-like, some
have eaves of mango leaves, the Indian symbol of welcome.
In the late afternoon, women are preening and preparing. They stand in doorways and open windows,
combining their hair, applying make-up, smoking cigarettes. Some wear bright saris, some only long
petticoats and blouses. A few are dressed in tight Western clothing.
Laxmi, a pavement-dweller employed in the women’s wing of the National Federation of Slum
Dwellers, is familiar with the district. Part of her work is to organize an outreach programme for young
girls lured into the flesh trade. The Federation works through 18 experienced prostitutes who take aside
the novices and describe what is in store. Some are so terrified that they want to leave immediately. Then
somebody accompanies them home.
Such rescue missions must be undertaken clandestinely. The madams running the brothels keep a
vigilant eye on their girls. Interference is dealt with noisily and unpleasant repercussions follow.
The biggest impediment to reuniting a young girl with her parents is the fact that they may have
received Rs 6,000—7,000 ($207—$241) from a pimp and her return is not welcome. Others are picked up
all street corners or on railway stations, where they were begging, rag-peddling or selling trinkets by pimps
and madams using various ploys to lure them away.
Laxmi stops before a shop where a woman sits cross-legged behind a sewing machine. Together we
walk to a nearby tea-stall where she introduces herself as Sona Pujari, ‘Gold Worshipper’. ‘My parents
died when I was ten years old. My brother took care of me for a while.’ When she was 13, her sister-in-
law decided it was time she got married. So a husband was found for her, a 30-year-old widower with
two small children.
‘My in-laws didn’t like me because I was unable to meet their (downy) expectations,’ she recalled. ‘So
they kept harassing my brother.’ Then her brother met with a fatal accident. Her in-laws threw her out.
For a while she survived as a beggar. But before long a pimp lured her into Bombay. ‘He told me that I’d
have a home and a mother to take care of me. I had no idea what I was in for.
I was sold for Rs 1,000 and put to work immediately. Very soon I got venereal disease, and the
madam got rid of me.’
‘Again Sona Pujari was homeless, so she moved to another lane where she
washed clothes and dishes for various ‘houses’. At night she slept on the pavement. ‘I spent a lot of
money on my cure. I ran up huge debts. I felt as if God was punishing me.’
Some years later, Sona Pujari met a man whom she has lived for the past 15 years. She does
not refer to him as her husband, but he is the father of her two living children, a girl and a boy, now 12 and
16. ‘In this line of work, you never know who impregnates you. But at least I can say I know who the
father of my children is,’ she says.
‘The children are in a government boarding school in Manipur. This is no place for them. When I can
save enough for a train fare, I go and see them. I miss them, but at least I have been able to give them a
healthy life.’
According to Sona Pujari, prostitution is a lucrative profession these days. ‘A woman can make Rs
200 or 300 (5¢—$1) a night. When I was, I was two or three rupees per man.’ She pointed to a pretty child
with neatly braided hair and a school satchel on her back. ‘She’s nine years old. Her mother was a
prostitute, but she died. The child’s aunt—a madam—took her in. When she is bigger, they’ll sell her.
‘For girls it is especially hideous because they are so vulnerable—like blossoms in the dust, with little to
nurture them save the calluses of life. It’s a miracle they survive.’
noticed she would disappear for long periods of time. She's friends with some of the boys who come to the centre and they told us what she was up to.

The social worker tried placing the little girl in one of the homes run by Snehasadan, an NGO working with Bombay street children. Three times she was taken in, but each time she ran away, eventually coming back to her father at the railway station. "The girl is obviously at risk, and one cannot just stand back and watch her go over the edge. So I'm going to have to do something very sad. I will appeal in court and recommend that she is placed in the kind of home from which it will be far harder for her to escape," Rego said.
WORKING CHILDREN
ON THEIR OWN

To be born into an impoverished urban family in India means that much of childhood is spent on the streets, whether for leisure, work or living. For many of those raised on the pavement, there is no respite from the streets even in adulthood. In a country like India, this is almost to be expected: so much of life transpires in the place where everyday shopping and social interaction occur.

Although many of the children on India's streets are working, it is important to recognize that not every youthful beggar or street hawker is a homeless child. Most working children go back home to their families every night. Even among those who are on their own, some tie with the family is usually maintained. In Delhi, for example, 75 per cent of working children live with their families, according to a 1988 study carried out by UNICEF and the Ministry of Welfare. They go out on the streets for some hours every day to work and return to their parents' homes with their earnings at night.

But while the number of India's homeless street children may be small as a proportion of the working child population, they still number in the hundreds of thousands (between 400,000 and 800,000, according to UNICEF). And they are the children living in the most 'especially difficult circumstances' of all. Children living without families face special risks, have special needs, and demand separate attention as a target group. This has only been given recognition by the Indian government relatively recently.

Earlier, they tended to be categorized with all working children, including those who lived with their parents. In some cases they were institutionalized on the assumption that they were either orphaned, abandoned, vagrant or deviant. But in recent years, street children in India have become an increasingly visible and disturbing manifestation of urban growth, and have begun to receive attention as a distinct and separate group.

Social researchers are now trying to steer the public and media away from the blanket use of the term 'street children' for all urban children working out in the open. This similarly became a matter of concern in Brazil. In 1988, a joint Government of Brazil/UNICEF team, finding that as in India the vast majority of street children were neither homeless nor delinquent, urged that the overall social problem be "redefined as one primarily of unprotected working children who were frequently exploited and who worked under abominable conditions for very low returns".

Even among homeless working children, there are different degrees of connection with the family, and of marginalization. There are those who visit their families frequently, living closer to their place of work with other children at bus depots and other public places. They return home periodically, which may be to a slum elsewhere in the city or even to another town. Sometimes the contact is fairly regular. More often than not, however, the child does not have enough money to spend on a bus or train fare.

Finally there are children totally on their own—the runaways and the abandoned. These have usually become estranged from their families by cruel treatment as the hands of a parent or step-parent, or because of some family tragedy such as a parent's death. The heavy burden to bring in money, and the
beatings and scoldings which rain down for the slightest misdemeanour, make life at home unbearable for some youngsters, driving them to seek a life of relative freedom, with no restraints and a responsibility only to themselves. Studies indicate that this is fortunately the smallest group, but it is also the most vulnerable.

Among the teen-aged boys at the railway stations in Delhi and Bombay, there are several migrants who come from as far away as Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. A few have even crossed borders from homes in Bangladesh and Nepal. Many left home three or more years ago. Although they speak of sending money to their mothers, or express the hope of going home some day, the ties are tenuous and likely to weaken with the passage of time. This situation is typical of railway station boys in Hyderabad as well.

Not only are such children open to all the deprivations and risks of street life, but the scope for work opportunities is severely limited. This is due to the fact that, without parents responsible for their actions, prospective employers consider them too big a risk. This ground-level lack of trust creates a vicious circle which closes in around the child. Ever-securing a small loan to set up a petty vending business is beyond their hopes.

Various surveys of homeless street children have found that they work from eight to 10 hours a day, and may be engaged in more than one type of income-generating activity. Thus, they may be out hunting for scrap materials in the mornings and switch to newspaper-selling in the evenings. The older youths who loiter about bus and train terminals try to compete with licensed porters for head-loader jobs, and a few manage to save enough money to invest in petty vending of inexpensive items like balloons or pocket combs. Drug-peddling and stealing are not uncommon amongst boys while prostitution is often the only employment open to girls.

Accurate data on homeless children is difficult to come by because of the floating character of their lifestyle. They are constantly on the move, either in search of work or a place to squat. But in recent years, their increasingly high visibility in public places has prompted the emergence of several studies. A seven-city study sponsored by UNICEF in collaboration with the Ministry of Welfare cited numbers which are sufficiently formidable to warrant the attention of policy-makers. The Delhi study estimated that one-fourth of working children live alone and arrived at a figure of 100,000 (Nangia and Banicker-Pinto, 1988). In Bangalore there are an estimated 45,000 street children, roughly half that number alleged to be homeless. In Calcutta and Bombay, estimates exceed 100,000 per city.

Most working children living on the streets are older than six, according to the UNICEF study, with the majority above eight years of age. In Kanpur, 72 per cent were in the 6-12 age group, whereas only 13 per cent were less than six years. According to an NIUA 1989 study (based on a sample survey of 30 street children) the mean age for street children is around 13 years. While initiation into active street life begins early, the younger children are likely to be accompanied by an older sibling, parent or other relative.

It has also been found that most children living alone are boys. The Kanpur study (Pandey, 1989) reported just under nine per cent girls. At street crossings and bus depots in many large cities, it is fairly common to see young girls selling evening newspapers or jasmine garlands. A short distance away, however, their mothers usually sit begging with infants in their laps.

Children living on their own frequently come from female-headed households, where financial pressures are the greatest. Those that are self-employed often earn more than their counterparts.
Case IV: The Railway Boys

At twilight in Bombay’s bustling Victoria Terminus, a group of young boys gather together in one corner of a shanty yard. They are joined by more boys, ragpickers lugging sacks of scrap across the tracks. As soon as they reach ‘home’, the mood lifts. Catching up with each other at the end of a long day, there is backslapping and laughter. They sprawl out on fastened cardboard cartons that serve as a communal bed when night falls. From behind an ear, a child retrieves a bidi (a rough cigarette), lights up and passes it around the group. Plans are made for a movie following dinner.

There are no curfew hours for these youngsters. All have run away from their respective families. And VT, as the station is known, has served as both home and workplace for a sizeable chunk of their lives. There is work, food, and access to public facilities. A change of scenery only requires a ride on a train—naturally, without a ticket.

Not the least of the advantages of living at the terminal is the camaraderie often lacking in the boys’ homes. These bonds compensate for the occasional blow of the watchman’s cane. Although they speak of home with some longing, and many say they send money to their mothers, most are estranged from their families and the possibility of returning is remote.

Tonight’s meal consists of a watery curried chicken cooked with rice over a stove of three charred bricks. A vegetable oil tin serves as the stew pot. A boy squats before the fire, stirring. His right hand is missing its thumb and forefinger, and a scar stretches across one cheek. These injuries were sustained while hopping down from moving trains, which happens frequently to ragpickers at railway stations.

The meal is ready. “C’mon and get it, you mothers! Chicken gorma and daryani for your pleasure tonight,” the child announces. There are no plates, no eating utensils, but the pot is passed around with fairness. Appreciation for the meal is voiced. “Murga Chor (Chicken Thief) here knows how to find the best boy in town—free!” says a boy whose nickname is Dilwalaat, Delhi Man. Street children are often known by nicknames to avoid being tracked down if they cross the law.

The leader of the group is a 17-year-old called Sagar Prasad and has been living at VT for the past three years. The youngest rebel against him in puppy-like fashion. “You don’t come to Bombay to die hungry, no sir! But it’s a different story if you get sick. Then you might as well kiss life goodbye—as we very nearly did this little worm here,” he said, nudging a small child with his foot.

There followed a detailed account of the child’s near-fatal illness and stomach surgery to remove “five or six huge worms”. The boys tell how they carried their friend to the hospital, the indifference of the staff, of how they pooled their resources to buy him medicine.

The former patient lifts his shirt to display the surgical scar. “When I became sick, I cried a lot for my mother. But home was too far away, so she didn’t hear me.”

who have employers. Their earnings can fluctuate widely, from Rs 10 to Rs 25 (less than $1.00) a day, but frequently they manage to earn only enough for bare subsistence. An NIUA report says that those lone children who are employed (either sub-contracted or working at tea stalls, etc.) can find themselves virtual prisoners of employers. They are made to work long hours, seven days a week, with few rest periods and little remuneration. Often their wages are withheld from them as ‘punishment’ or as an incentive to work harder.

Food is the biggest expense for children living on their own; on an average a child in Delhi spends Rs 5–10 daily on eating. The Andhra study notes that homeless working children consume quantities of tea every day since, in addition to being cheap, this tends to dull hunger pangs.

Since there is no family camaraderie at the end of the day, no home-cooked meal, household chores, or play with younger siblings, homeless children tend to spend a considerable proportion of their earnings on recreation. Unlike working children, many of whom hand over most of what they earn to their families, children on their own are not answerable to their parents, even less so if their contact is infrequent. NIUA researchers found that children living alone spend anywhere from Rs 25–50 ($0.86–$1.72) a month on movies; this expenditure may also include bidis and ganja (pot) and illicit liquor.

Very little is spent on clothing— if there is contact with their families, they usually receive a couple of new sets a year; if they have employers, they are sometimes given clothes on their main festival day, Diwali or Id. It goes without saying that children living on their own are likely to be even more impoverished in terms of nutrition and health care than those who live with their families or maintain some degree of contact.

Their existence is truly hand-to-mouth. With no safe place to call their own, apart from the verandahs and poaches of market places and commercial centers, or the covered platforms of train and bus terminals, they prefer to spend most of what they earn rather than have it stolen or extorted. Sometimes a homeless child will place his trust and his meager savings in the custody of an older child or a neighborhood vendor, only to be
Police how starved they are emotionally, how easy it becomes to take advantage of them. And when you consider their sleeping arrangements — in heaps, huddled together for warmth and protection, it’s not difficult to understand how sexual exploitation takes place.”

Most working children said that the one factor which can make their lives sheer misery is the constant threat of being physically threatened and intimidated by adults. “If it’s not the other vendors, it’s the dadas (street toughs) or the watchmen, or the policemen,” said one 15-year-old vendor outside New Delhi’s underground market. “They tell us we cannot work here, they demand money, sometimes they’ll take all our goods,” he said. “We’re always dodging them. We’re not doing anything bad. All we want is to earn a living.”

Finding ways to aid survival

In the bustling drama that unfolds daily at the New Delhi train terminus, the station house officer (SHO) at the police post at the entrance has made a difference in the lives of at least 50 young boys, all of them runaway from poverty-stricken homes in different parts of the country. See Case IV previous page. They live and work at the railway station. Until D.S. Chaudhury was appointed SHO, the youths were harassed by policemen on duty, or by the ‘red uniforms’ — licensed porters — who resented competition from the youngsters.

Chaudhury is an exception among the Delhi police, most of whom are unsympathetic to the plight of homeless and working children on the street, as are the police in other cities. He has issued identity cards to the station boys, allowing them to work as porters. The adult baggage handlers do not much care for the idea, but there isn’t much they can do. ‘Police Uncle’, as Chaudhury is referred to by the boys, is available to listen to complaints and issue warnings to bullies.

Porters are not the only people Chaudhury has had to win over. “Initially I had to convince my seniors to let the kids work. The point is, they have to survive somehow. There is not much we can do to help them, but I think it makes a difference if they know they can work in safety,” Chaudhury explains. “Many people think that the poor deserve to be poor, and that they need to be punished. Or perhaps, it is the baser side of human nature that takes advantage of those who are powerless. These kids who live and work on the streets, or at the railway stations and bus depots are kicked around and bullied.”

Chaudhury acknowledged that some policemen harass children. “They will tell a child he cannot use the toilets, or sleep on the platform at night, unless maybe he passes over some money,” he said. “But this does not happen too much now because the children know they can report.”

Then there are the dadas or street toughs who used to demand from 20-50 per cent of a child’s daily earnings. That too is something Chaudhury has asked his men to monitor. The boys are also prey to the machinations of drug dealers who use them as convenient scapegoats. A few inevitably end up involved with drugs, usually ‘brown sugar’. But, says the police officer, he keeps a watchful eye on such activities. “On the whole, juvenile delinquency at the railway station is kept to a minimum. We get maybe two or three cases of pickpocketing in a day. But in a place that is so congested, that type of thing is bound to happen.”

In addition to being assured reasonably secure working conditions by day, the boys of the New Delhi railway station have something to look forward to when night falls. Then they can retreat, if they wish, to the covered terrace above the police station. The night shelter goes by the name of Nukkad, or Corner. It evolved a couple of years ago from an NGO’s request to organize evening classes for the youths at the station. Eventually Chaudhury allowed them to sleep there through the night. It isn’t much, but it’s a great deal safer than sleeping on the open platform. The corner above the Station House Officer’s quarters has become the closest thing to home the 50 railway station youths have known in years.

The role that the New Delhi police officer has assumed addresses one of the most critical deprivations in the street child’s life — the lack of a guiding, protective adult. While trying to understand the street-child phenomenon in a country like India, the line between ‘home’, ‘street’ and ‘work’ is often blurred. For millions of poor adults and children, home and workplace are often on the street. The major risk faced by the street child is that his or her ‘work’ takes place within an environment that is not child-supportive. And this environment does little to nurture his physical or intel-
lectual well-being, or to develop solid moral values and socially empathetic behaviour.

**Efforts to help the homeless urban child:**

Surviving on one’s own often imparts a toughened exterior and an independent manner, and this frequently masks the real vulnerability of the child on his own. Children in the most difficult circumstances tend to lead a life devoid of emotional support and care. Coupled with economic hardship and nutritional deficiency, this is bound to thwart their physical and mental development.

The Brazilian situation provides some insights that could be meaningfully applied to the problems of homeless children elsewhere. A Brazilian government/UNICEF team concluded that the special problems such children face were due to the precarious nature of their life. It recommended that:

“The detention and internment of poor children working on the street was not only irrelevant, unjust and costly” but (also) increased their psychological and social marginalization, undermining their ability to cope with the world upon discharge.

In India too, as a result of advocacy by UNICEF and others, interest in the problems of homeless urban children has grown. Action on their behalf has mostly come from the voluntary sector, in which several NGOs have devised innovative schemes to address their various needs. See Case V

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**Case V: Snehasadan: home from home**

The rainy season is usually the time when homeless children in Bombay are most vulnerable, facing loss of shelter and livelihood. Most children work as ragpickers and shoe-shine boys. But there is no market for soggy newspapers, and Bombay people wear plastic shoes when it rains.

Father Place Fonceca, Director of Snehasadan (Shelter of Love), points to “our monsoon crop.” Many of the children arrive on his doorstep and announce that they will leave after the rainy season is over. But many stay on, five years, 10, even 15.

Established 30 years ago by a group of Indian Jesuit priests, Snehasadan currently provides shelter for 356 runaways and destitute youngsters. The children are divided into groups of between 20 and 30, each living in a home supervised by a married couple, some of whom are former street children. There are 15 homes altogether, 11 for boys and four for girls.

Initially, Snehasadan staff visited the streets for vagrant children. They learnt, however, that the most effective approach was child-to-child. Most of the Snehasadan children were led there by children already in the programme.

Since 1962, over 3,000 young girls and boys have been rescued. Many found their future spouses at Snehasadan and now have families of their own. Many more found placement in jobs as mechanics, clerical workers, hospital attendants. Snehasadan practices an open-door policy. The children are free to leave if they wish, and some do. But once they have made the decision to stay, they know that there are ground rules: daily baths, clean clothes and domestic chores. The younger children attend school, and the older ones get trained in some trade or technical skill. A scholarship fund helps pay their fees. Twice a year, the children are taken up to a holiday camp in Lonavla, a hill resort in the Western Ghats.

“They stay with us because they know we care,” says Tina Guido, a social worker who has been with the programme for four years. “Winning their confidence is the hardest challenge of all. These children have been so abused and traumatized, they have no reason to trust another human being,” she says. “But once we have managed to persuade them that they aren’t going to be hurt again they show an immense hunger to be loved and accepted.”

Guido has many stories about the Snehasadan family. She relates how nine-year-old Pinky, raped night after night by an insatiable stepfather, came to the shelter with a contagious venereal disease. “It was her mother who actually advised Pinky to run away from home. She needed the man, and she had two other children to take care of.”

For the first few weeks at Snehasadan, Pinky refused to talk at all. Eventually, Guido managed to win her confidence. “When I heard her story, I was filled with such anger that I wanted to see the stepfather punished,” she said. “But I was told that if I made it a police case, Pinky would be placed in a remand home. The child clung to me and begged not to be sent away. So I had to drop the whole affair.”

Despite stories of abuse, the shelter aims to reunite the children to their families. This is not simple since many refuse to reveal their identity. The runaways ended up on the streets to escape conditions at home and are reluctant to return. But in some cases Snehasadan has tracked down families and presented them with their lost children. Informal counselling is provided and the reconciliation is monitored for a time. If the situation remains unchanged, the children often leave home again. Some return to Snehasadan, which accepts them.

Although its affiliations are Christian, the programme is entirely secular. Recently, Snehasadan celebrated, with full Hindu rites, the marriage of two of its children. “Our goal is to make these children ‘whole’, not ‘holy’,” said Father Fonceca.
Inset. Other organizations, such as the Indian Council of Child Welfare, have expanded their programmes to include these children.

Some NGO projects already in place assist unprotected children either through direct services, or by facilitating access to community services. Working with small groups of children in specifically targeted areas, this enables them to receive non-formal education, vocational training, income generation, counselling, health care, shelter, supplementary feeding, recreation, and not least of all, unharassed access to public baths and lavatories.

In Bombay, for instance, 13 organizations formed a Coordination Committee for Vulnerable Children (CCVC). Together their programmes reach 800–1,000 street children. It may be a very small percentage of the total number of homeless youths in the city, but it nonetheless marks an important beginning. Through networking, referral and collective fund-raising, the group could eventually have a significant impact on the lives of larger numbers of disadvantaged children. Identity cards have been issued to the children with the endorsement of the Juvenile Aid Police Unit. This gives a baseline of Bombay’s street youths a support system and a sense of legitimacy.

The problems of children living alone undoubtedly cannot be solved by NGOs alone. But the flexible nature of their operations enables them to adapt to the varied circumstances of children who live and work on the streets. With growing awareness and understanding will come increased community participation and commitment. NGOs’ grass-roots experience allows them to translate the socio-economic factors governing impoverished children’s lives into the public and official sector, so that policies can be guided into the plans of larger community-based urban programmes.

For this reason, it is important to recognize that the work of voluntary agencies can go much farther if it is reinforced by legislative measures and finan-
IN SCHOOL AND OUT: THE WORKING CHILD

As far back as 1950, the Indian constitution declared that: "The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education until (children) complete the age of fourteen years." The goal was reconfirmed by later governments of central and state levels. Compulsory Education Acts were passed and the number of primary schools increased significantly, from 210,000 in 1950 to 529,000 by 1996. But the immensity of the under-19 population in India – 47 per cent of the total – has taxed the government’s ability to ensure that adequate education is freely available for all.

As the 1981 census revealed, there is still a huge ‘educational gap’: only 41.4 per cent of India’s population above the age of five was literate, 53.5 per cent of males, and 28.5 per cent of females. Since 1961, the number of literates has increased; but that of illiterates has also risen with population growth. Over those 20 years, the number of literates in the 10–14 years group jumped 137 per cent, but illiterates also grew by 64 per cent.

India’s adult literacy record in Asia is poor, trailing behind China with 73 per cent and Indonesia with 74 per cent. The highest literacy rates are among urban males, at 74 per cent, with rural females coming lowest, at 21 per cent. Girls have a lower literacy rate than boys in all age groups.

Altogether, the census found that 82 million of India’s 159 million children aged six to 14 were not receiving formal education. In the towns and cities, only 44 per cent of children aged 0–19 years were enrolled in schools and colleges, and at least six per cent of these were actively engaged in economic activities. Thus, the ‘educational gap’ is connected to the phenomenon of working children. Clearly, legislation and the expansion of classrooms to support children’s right to be in school does not necessarily solve the problem.

The importance of an educated population to national development and the reduction of poverty is nowadays regarded as an article of faith. Government spending on schools is considered investment in ‘human capital’. India spends 3.6 per cent of GNP on education, more, for instance, than China’s 2.7 per cent or Indonesia’s 1.6 per cent. Education is also highly valued by families and individuals. Without education, few slum children can expect to break the bonds of poverty, for not only will they be unable to gain other than non-skilled or semi-skilled low-paying jobs, but illiteracy lends itself to exploitation. However, because the access to education and its quality is so unevenly distributed in India, education continues to serve as a ‘gatekeeper’, protecting the prerogatives of the more privileged groups in society.

Figures recently furnished by the Ministry of Education indicate a significant improvement in enrolment ratios. During 1987–88, enrolment for classes I to V reached more than 97 per cent, from 42 per cent in 1950–51. But A.B. Bose cautions that the upsurge might reflect over-reporting due to under-age and over-age children in the class, and class repetition, the largest incidence of which is among disadvantaged children.

Lack of access to the classroom by the poor slum child is mainly a product of their families’ condition of economic necessity. There are no easy ways to bring about universal education without economically punishing families struggling to survive. Recognizing this, the government set goals in 1986 to reach the working child through non-formal schooling programmes. It has pledged to afford all children free and compulsory education up to 14 years of age by 1995.

The tendency to drop out

The educational disadvantages suffered by slum children are illustrated by their lower enrolment and attendance rates compared to non-slum children, and the much lower proportion who pass the primary stage and move on up the school system. Many slum parents are unable to provide what their school-going children require: nourishing meals, a quiet place to study, a guiding hand to help them through their homework. Since so many are them-
selves illiterate, it takes a huge commitment to see their children through school. The birth of younger siblings or the death of a parent can disrupt the household and its means of livelihood, providing no further possibility to release a child from income-earning duties.

Busti children have a high drop-out rate from school, and it is common to find children in classes lower than that expected of children their age, either because they started late or were obliged to repeat classes. Low enrolment and high drop-out rates are particularly noticeable among girls, arising in part from the traditional belief that book-learning holds little functional use for girls in life.

Most educational experts agree that a minimum of four years of schooling are necessary to ensure retention of effective literacy in later life. Some states, in an effort to boost and maintain school attendance, have offered incentives: mid-day meals, a kilo of rice per day for each child who attends school, free books, slates and uniforms. A few programmes have even offered parents cash incentives to lessen their dependence on their children’s earnings.

A study of educational facilities for slum children in Delhi (Patel, 1983) points to the sharp inequalities between slum and non-slam municipal schools in terms of physical facilities, teaching, suitability of curriculum and administrative arrangements. A typical case is the slum colony of Govindpuri, where there is no neighbourhood primary school. A large number of the local children work as scrap collectors or petty vendors. Those who do attend school must walk long distances. Many families did not consider it safe for their daughters to walk so far. Several girls said that they had disliked school because teachers belittled them for their ignorance, and better-off classmates teased them over their shabby clothing.

Thus, many factors contribute to the tendency for busti children to drop out of school within the critical period of four years. This high drop-out rate is seen as an important factor in holding down the adult literacy rate to below 50 per cent. Overall, the drop-out rate is 54 per cent in classes I to V, and as high as 72 per cent in classes I to VIII. Economic and domestic requirements from children are seen as the major determinants.

Dropping out, either for short periods or permanently, is also common among certain socio-economic groups, including migrant families, and scheduled castes and tribes. In Andhra Pradesh literacy levels are particularly low among those tribes who lead semi-nomadic lives even after migrating to the cities. In the state capital of Hyderabad, tribal women rarely seek domestic employment. They work mostly at construction sites, and they move their families around the city wherever jobs are to be found, making it impossible for their children to attend school without interruption.

Studies indicate a standard pattern among slum children not attending school. Irregular attendance is followed by inability to cope with the curriculum, and finally results in dropping out. Parental perception of the priority given to education is another factor. Most juvenile drop-outs have received no encouragement to stay in school. Some, like Asif the 16-year-old shoeshine boy in Delhi, quote their parents as saying they “thought it was a good idea” for them to work.

In Tummalakunta (Thorn Tree Tank), a slum in Warangal, Andhra Pradesh, a general store owner named Balassa explained why none of his five children was educated: “We have three daughters, and one did go to school for a short while, but my wife was unhappy about the girl walking so far. So we decided not to send the other two.” The two sons went to school for four years, after which they were apprenticed to auto-repair shops in the city.

“The children didn’t learn any trade, nothing useful. It was too big a risk to take. When my boys are 18, will the government guarantee them jobs?”

The irrelevance of the curriculum to the needs of the disadvantaged urban child is a problem targeted by various programmes, including non-formal education schemes aimed at drop-outs, working children and girls who cannot attend class full-time. Relevant learning calls for a diversity of activities that relate to the actual needs of the part-time student.

When a child drops out, it is rare that the absence is followed up by a schoolteacher or a truancy officer. Most slum children, despite their resilient appearance, say that they find teachers intimidating. Parents also complain that teachers lacked empathy for the poor and were impatient when dealing with their children’s problems and shortcomings. There is also high teacher absenteeism at schools catering to slum children, and a poor student-teacher ratio.

In spite of the difficulties, many urban poor parents strive to see their children get a basic education in the hope of better future prospects. As the demand for a more educated labour force increases, the value of schooling will become more apparent, especially in the case of the male child, and sometimes for highly practical reasons. “Whatever sacrifices you make now, sending your sons to school is like putting money in the bank,” said Kumala, a Maharashtrian fishmonger. “Some day
they will get good jobs and take care of you when you become too old to work.” Kamala takes a different view, however, of education’s value for girls. Her only daughter received two years of schooling, but that was enough. “The girl was becoming too chauloo (bold), always asking questions and arguing. That’s not good for a girl. So when she turned 17, we got her married,” she said.

Attitudes such as this depress the female literacy rate, and deprive poor women of knowledge and skills which would contribute significantly to their children’s and family’s well-being.

**The new approach**

In 1986-87, the Indian government for the first time adopted a set of policies regarding working children. With the exception of a few hazardous occupations, child labour would not be banned. This decision stemmed from the recognition, following international debate prompted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the UN Commission on Human Rights, that in many developing countries child labour is unavoidable. In late 1985, India recognized an important distinction between child labour, and ‘exploitative’ child labour. From this point onwards, in keeping with ILO policy, the Indian government sought to make conditions for the working child more tolerable. It also endeavoured to provide part-time, non-formal education for working children, rather than press for compulsory universal primary education.

National educational policy in India does not propose compulsory education. The existing laws simply establish the conditions under which state governments may make education compulsory in specific areas.

In 1961, the state of Mysore passed a Compulsory Primary Education Act which specified how compulsory education is to be enforced: the appointment of an attendance authority, compulsory registration of all children within the prescribed area, procedures for issuing notices to parents and guardians whose children are not attending, conditions under which children are exempt (illness, for example, or the lack of a school within a mile of their homes), and finally, penalties for failing to send children to school. However, similar laws in other states, while providing a legal basis for the introduction of compulsory education, often have gaping loopholes when it comes to enforcement. In order to ensure that local bodies do not over-zealously enforce attendance when an area is not yet ready, some laws allow the state government to make the final decision on whether enforcement is appropriate. It would be unjust to fine or imprison parents who keep their children from attending school because of economic compulsion.

In the meantime, progress has been made dur-
ing the past five years on expanding educational opportunities for the more socially and economically deprived sectors, such as children living in tribal areas and urban slums. Efforts are being made to reduce the cost of schooling for the poor, to make education more attractive for them, and provide more opportunities outside the formal system. The National Literacy Mission aims at imparting functional literacy to 80 million illiterate persons between the ages of 15 and 35 years by 1995. Operating through a network of teachers, scientists, technologists, ex-servicemen and voluntary agencies, the movement has already scored some considerable successes.

The need to influence parental attitudes concerning the value of education for children has also been realized. This needs to be reinforced with better service delivery, including improvements in basic physical facilities and management of schools in impoverished neighbourhoods. In spite of the government's strong policy statements, primary education lags far behind higher education in terms of resource allocation, receiving only one-third of the total education budget.

In 1986, government policy took another new turn with the high priority accorded by the National Policy on Education to early childhood care and pre-school education. India, the policy declares, "will adopt an array of meticulously formulated strategies based on micro-planning, and applied at the grassroots level all over the country, to ensure children's retention at school". This effort was to be fully coordinated with a network of non-formal education programmes aimed at working children. This was the special context of the goal of "free and compulsory education" for all children up to 14 years of age by 1995.

While current statistics indicate that India will fall far short of the target, there has nonetheless been a noticeable improvement in literacy rates. A number of national programmes are currently under implementation. Pre-school education in a growing number of areas is provided through Integrated Child Development Services, early childhood education centres and creches. Such centres in slums tend to suffer from overcrowding and shortage of adequately trained teachers. But such neighbourhoods are increasingly being assisted by voluntary agencies and non-governmental bodies.

See Case VI inset. Notable among the government's recent efforts to boost primary school education is 'Operation Black Board', a scheme established in 1987. It provided Rs 2,200 ($76) to each government primary school to improve basic amenities, supply learning materials and meet staff requirements. It also set a minimum requirement of

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Case Study VI: Jagriti: learning and self-esteem

At 9:30 a.m. 35 children are gathered outside the straw-and-bamboo shack that serves as a one-room schoolhouse in Mota Khan. The precariously hinged door displays a handwritten sign: Jagriti (Awakening). This is a project of an NGO called Street Survivors India, founded by Shabnum Ahmed in 1989 with funds from the Saaraa Sabaat Trust (based on proceeds from Mirza Nayar's film on Bombay's street children, Sairaam Bombay). It receives a $6,000 grant from UNICEF and extra funding from UNESCO.

Shabnum Ahmed is a well-educated, articulate woman in her 30s. Her arrival is greeted with whoops of "Didi aaye! Sister's come!" and a dozen hands at her clothing. Schooling is provided in two-hour shifts twice a day, with 35–50 children per shift. Plans are underway for a third shift, from 6 to 8 p.m., an attempt to accommodate adolescent boys who work as welders or tea-boat attendants and cannot come in daytime.

The children range in age from 12 months to 14 years. The toddlers have been brought along by siblings unable to lay aside their domestic responsibilities. Many children are barefoot, but their faces are scrubbed clean and their hair is neatly combed. Almost all wear uniforms—shirts and shorts for the boys, trousers and skirts for the girls.

Ahmed has a tough attitude towards children who arrive at school ill-kempt. "One has to be harsh sometimes, otherwise they will never develop any sense of self-worth. When you are born and raised in poverty, it is so easy to forget that you matter as an individual. Yet if they don't learn to pay attention to their needs now, they'll go through life being treated like nobodies."

Shabnum Ahmed's involvement with street children began a few years ago when she decided to start night classes for the teen-aged boys at Delhi railway station. She now employs four boys to help her conduct the classes, supervising at least one class herself every day. Her assistants all formerly worked as porters at the railway station. All were runaways.

"The core of the Street Survivors philosophy is that the children should not be ashamed of their circumstances, and have every right to be treated with respect," she said. "We want them to learn to carry their poverty with dignity. If they go around looking pathetic and filthy, all they're likely to get from people is pity," she added. "Pity doesn't get you very far, isn't that right children?"

Thirty-five beaming faces nodded assent.

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two teachers per school, with one of them a woman if at all possible.

The main thrust of Operation Black Board was towards the rural areas. In the cities, drop-outs and non-enrolled children are targeted through the Non-Formal Education system (NFE), especially in the nine states that are regarded as being educationally backward: Assam, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. These states account for 75 per cent of the country’s non-enrolled children. During 1988-89, Rs 403 million ($14 million) was spent on implementation of the scheme in 241,000 non-formal education centres. Assistance was also given to 296 voluntary agencies to run an additional 21,000 centres and 25 experimental projects.

The scheme covers urban slums and working children, although not exclusively. It is also an affirmative action programme for 'weaker' social groups, such as inhabitants of remote, under-developed hill tracts and tribal areas. "We are used to speaking of the India of the villages but the picture is rapidly changing," said Dr. Harijit S. Anand, an official in the Ministry of Urban Development in New Delhi. "We now have the fourth largest urban population in the world." This means India has to pay far more attention to educating the poor urban child, who is beginning to rank alongside the more traditional categories of the economically and socially marginalized, long seen as specific targets of redistributive public policy.
RESPONSES TO THE DISADVANTAGED URBAN CHILD

In a country as large and diverse as India, there can be no one response which will provide a panacea for poverty. But during recent decades, India’s experience with community development has led to the recognition that, unless those programmes are designed to help are fully involved in their planning and execution, results are bound to be disappointing. For this reason, the participatory approach has become the accepted orthodoxy in programming for the urban poor.

As far as the urban child ‘in difficult circumstances’ is concerned, most responses can be classified into two groups: those that are geared to improve the quality of community life, and thereby the health and well-being of children as special targets within the community; and those that are child focused, addressing the needs of the homeless, out-of-school, or working child specifically, with reference to his and her social, economic, and family environment. These two types of approach do not clash or contradict each other; on the contrary, at their best they can dovetail, each drawing on the services provided by the other.

The evolution of urban basic services

The ‘Urban Basic Services’ strategy (UBS), which has evolved in India over a period of two decades, is the key programme thrust for addressing the problems of India’s disadvantaged slum children within a community-focused framework. The UBS strategy, unlike traditional programmes that aim to upgrade the urban environment by means of expensive construction and the removal of noxious and unpleasant features of the slum landscape (including, often, its inhabitants), prioritizes the needs of the people already living in the slum area, not the needs of municipal authorities, real estate developers, or the construction industry. It is people-based, and depends on engaging and mobilizing the energies of the slum inhabitants to help deliver ‘basic services’.

Many children and young adults living in India’s slums and squatter colonies communicate a sense of futility about their future. When asked why they do not take advantage of accessible resources and opportunities, some simply respond: “What will that change?” Yet others exude a sense of powerlessness, almost as if they have no rights at all. As one tea-stall owner in Delhi’s Jahangirpuri resettlement colony put it: “The world passes us by without a look because we are the extras of society.” The word he employed — phoolo — literally means “unnecessary”. A UBS programme sets out to reverse this way of thinking, both as it affects slum inhabitants and those in authority positions vis-à-vis slums.

An early foreunner of the UBS strategy was an experiment in Urban Community Development (UCD) conducted by projects in various cities in the late 1960s. All emphasized self-help, community organization and support from the government for the ensuing activities. This was the first national experiment in urban community development similar to existing efforts in rural community development. In the early 1970s, slums and shanty-towns began to mushroom on the periphery of major Indian cities, and perception of the problems of urban poverty began to heighten.

By the mid-1970s, UNICEF was beginning to take an interest in the poor urban child. Because there was little experience in spending money in urban areas, contacts were established with existing UCD projects in various cities. The most promising was a project run by the long-serving, now retired, Dr. Surya Rao in Hyderabad. UNICEF, therefore, contributed enough resources to expand the project to all the bazaars in the city. This became a laboratory and demonstration model of emerging strategies for Urban Basic Services.

“The world passes us by without a look because we are phoolo — the unnecessary extras of society.”

By the early 1980s, UCD projects had been replicated in nine districts in eight states: West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Rajasthan and Jammu and Kashmir. However, in some government circles, the emerging UBS strategy, vigorously promoted by UNICEF and supported with funds, was at first taken somewhat lightly. The size of a programme's
involved from the beginning. Only they know what their needs are."

Launched as a national programme in 1986, the UBS strategy was scheduled for application in 168 towns and was deployed with varying degrees of success. In each participating town, the programme called for the establishment of a community-level infrastructure that includes neighbourhood development committees and trained volunteers, each looking after the health and social needs of women and children in their immediate neighbourhood of 25–30 households.

In the initial phase, ‘child survival and development’ was the stated goal, with the 0–6 age group as its target. Programming focused very strongly on interventions for improved child health, better infant feeding, immunization, home-based diarrhoea management, water use, nutrition education, monitoring infant growth, and birth spacing; for mothers, there were projects to promote functional literacy and income generation. The aim was to mobilize community interest and energy around issues associated with family well-being, and build on achievements to strengthen the capacity to plan and implement participatory social development. This, in turn, facilitated efforts at town, district or state levels to provide impoverished neighbourhoods with basic services. UBS, if properly implemented, can lead to overall improvements in all areas of people’s and children’s lives, via a convergence and dovetailing of community and government efforts.

In some slums, community cohesiveness is very conspicuous, emanating an aura of well-being not normally associated with squatter settlements. Kitchen gardens flourish in front of mud-and-ditch dwellings. Pour-flush latrines stand in many courtyards. Covered drains carry away sewage. All-purpose community centres have been constructed. Housewives supplement family income by participating in one of several collective schemes. Young children attend the neighbourhood balwadi or preschool. Even where progress is not so obvious, one fact is palpable: the involvement in their own development gives people a sense of motivation and a confidence in their collective strength.

Ensuring that projects to be funded under UBS schemes are genuinely the product of a community participation process, and not developed by municipal authorities on behalf of designated basis, is essential to UBS success. The planning of projects is therefore undertaken in the neighbourhood, under the guidance of the Resident Community Volunteer. These are usually women, because it is felt that they have easier access to households. Since women have more day-to-day experience of their surroundings, they also have a better appreciation of their needs and problems – and those of their children – than most men. Also, it is thought that
women are more persuasive with the municipal officials, to whom the committees have to present their requests for approval. See Case VII next.

Urban basic services: going to scale

In 1991, the government took the decision to endorse fully the Urban Basic Services strategy and to undertake total funding for its implementation. The government now proposes to extend the programme to 75-100 towns each year (500 altogether by end 1992), bringing an extra 1.1 million population annually under the UBS scheme.

Dr. Harjit Anand, director of urban poverty alleviation in the Ministry of Urban Development, is extremely enthusiastic about the potential for the UBS approach in meeting children's and communities' needs. The larger budget now allocated to UBS permits an increased per capita spending from Rs 20 to Rs 175 ($0.69 to $6.03). With the increased spending, UBS plans to widen its original focus on mother and child to include the needs of children in 'difficult circumstances', including homeless and street children. "There is a growing concern about juvenile vagrancy and drug trafficking, and through UBSP we can do something about it," Dr. Anand insists.

Urban Basic Services for the Poor (UBSP), as it will now be known, is actually a composite of UBS with three other poverty alleviation schemes: the Nehru Rozgar Yojana (Nehru Employment Scheme) for the Urban Poor; the Housing for Economically Weaker Sections Scheme; and the state-sector scheme, Environmental Improvement of Urban Slums. Over the years, the ratio of

Involvement in their own development gives people motivation and confidence in their collective strength

UNICEF's contribution to total programme costs has diminished, transferring increasing financial responsibility to the government. From nearly 100 per cent in 1982, the UNICEF share shrank to 25 per cent in 1990.

Between 1991-95, UNICEF will contribute 59 million; additional donor contributions could bring

Case study VII: The women of Andhra Pradesh

In the small and mid-sized towns of Andhra Pradesh, many Telugu-speaking slum communities are familiar with such UBS terminology as "Neighborhood Development Committee" or "Resident Community Volunteer". And the women, it seems, are familiar with the notion that in order to make a difference in their community, they have to speak up.

"In our society traditionally women kept quiet," said Madhav Suryapal, the regional officer in Suryapal. "So when they came to meetings and the women made their points, it was a pleasant surprise. Not only were more women outspoken about their needs, or in pointing out shortcomings of the community process, but they were also equally vocal about their achievements.

At the UBS centre in Linewada, a group of women were busy embroidering mirror-work blouses. Through the collective scheme, they have been able to dispense with a middleman. Once a week, several women go to Hyderabad to sell the blouses to a merchant and collect new materials. They used to earn Rs 2 ($0.07) per 100 pieces of mirrorwork. Now they earn three times as much.

Similar mini-enterprises operate in other UBS slums. Some package tooth-powders and washing detergents; others prepare dry papads (also called papadums, a lentil or rice-based crisp). "It's given the women a new confidence," said Jaya Amma, the area representative. Nowadays, the women not only speak up and ask for services - better roads, for example, so that a woman in childbirth can be taken to hospital in an emergency; they also offer to meet part of the cost.

Communities proudly showed off their groves of guava and fig, papaya and banana, their crops of beans and peppers, their floor loft latrines and smokeless chowpals (stoves). In a slum in the township of Suryapal, residents displayed an album of photos illustrating the step-by-step installation of covered drains, all done by the women.

In some slums, because men have not been directly involved in decision-making, and perhaps because they do not welcome the new confidence among the women, resentment shows. One crowded UBS centre became the scene of an acrimonious debate. The mis-informed that the committee's loan officer did not execute her responsibilities with impartiality. The loan officer, a frail-looking white-haired woman, sprang to her feet and defended herself. Eventually, an official managed to calm the situation. He explained that decisions about loan disbursements were made by the bankers; the committee loan officer was simply the conduit.

Surya Rao, one of India's UBS pioneers, describes urban community development as a movement. "There exists among these poor people a vast human reserve which needs to be utilized. If UBS is correctly implemented, this is what can be achieved."
the total to $19 million. The government has pledged $18 million during the first year, with funding expected to be increased to $35 million the following year. Additionally, $250 million will be allocated for the Nehru Employment Scheme for the Urban Poor.

Under the new direction UBS will take, there will be a greater emphasis on small enterprise schemes for women and vocational training for youths. Women can take loans up to Rs 5,000 ($172) to start a cottage industry; men can obtain Rs 4,000 ($138). Urban cooperatives can be formed that would enable people in the informal sector to share work areas. UBS also plans to encourage the participation of men in the development of their neighbourhoods, including drains, roofs, paved walkways. This at least is the ideal.

The challenge for both UNICEF and the government now lies in keeping pace with the expansion of the UBS programme not only to many more towns, but into the slums and shanties of larger cities as well, and in sustaining programme quality in the face of rapid expansion. UNICEF's largest urban involvement is in India. Its success as a national programme there will provide further credibility to the strategy in other parts of the developing world.

For India's policy-makers, UBS could become the mechanism that would make a qualitative difference in the lives of 40 per cent of the urban population, and improve the urban environment at a relatively low cost. It could also brighten the prospects of many millions of severely disadvantaged children, on and off the streets.

**Responses from the voluntary sector**

As the number of street and working children has grown, and their existence and way of life become more visible in street markets, public gardens, and traffic intersections, a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have begun to initiate programmes on their behalf. UNICEF, for whom

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'children in especially difficult circumstances' (CEDC) have become an important focus in recent years, has been encouraging such actions, while trying to sensitize government departments. The aim, as in UBS, is to strive for an integrated effort dovetailing NGO activity with efforts undertaken by civic and municipal departments.

It is not easy to harmonize NGO with government initiatives. Some NGOs are known for innovative, and at times unconventional, approaches. On occasion, their outlook might even be at variance with government policies. Many voluntary groups are led by social activists who have been known to encourage an awareness among the poor regarding their rights as citizens, consciousness-raising that can sometimes find noisy and, from the authorities' viewpoint, disruptive expression. And the existing reputation of the street child is poor: these 'urchins' are seen as deficient both in mental capacities and moral values, unamenable to self-improvement.

Unlike UBS, which targets the whole slum environment with an emphasis on women and children, most NGO efforts are directed towards the plight of a specific group. The national Slum Dwellers Federation in Bombay is one example; then there are the Mahila Mandals, or Women's Associations, which may help their members obtain small loans to start up pavement vending businesses. More recently some NGOs have come into being specifically to help children in difficult circumstances, such as the Delhi-based organization, Butterflies, set up by Rita Panicker.

Butterflies is organizing a street children's trade union among shoe-shiners, ragpickers and porters. Every afternoon, non-formal education is provided for the children, among them many who work around the Chandni Chowk area. Permission was obtained from a private school in the vicinity to use the playground after school hours. Each
child is provided with a copy book and pencil, for which they pay a nominal sum.

Butterflies also obtained a licence to run a restaurant at the bus terminal, and it is operated by half a dozen street children who bed down on the premises at the end of the day. Its menu board draws attention to the fact that the restaurant is managed by street children. "Unless some status of recognition is given to street children, they will always be looked down upon," said Rita Panicker. Her organization is one of a growing number of NGOs who feel that "the best strategy for the children is themselves".

Voluntary agencies and social workers closely involved with disadvantaged children have seen that a great many of these youngsters are extremely plucky and ingenious. "But that is really beside the point," says Panicker. "Somehow we have to get these kids into the mainstream." She and others have begun to feel that the only way street and working children can draw attention to their needs is through collective representation. For the last four years, they have taken part in a Child Workers Rally in New Delhi to commemorate May 1st Labour Day. Organized by the National NGO Forum, the rally draws larger numbers of working children every year. She recalls the first rally in 1988. "We told the news reporters to come, so it was well-covered," she said. "It was quite an event, the first time ever that large numbers of street children have banded together in this country to announce their presence."

This annual Child Workers Rally has helped attract official attention, and some revision in attitudes, towards street children. But there is still a long way to go. In spite of the young people's speeches demanding better jobs, better pay, improved safety at worksites, they return to conditions little or no different to before. Recently the government of India stated its intention to seek preventive, non-institutional and community-based solutions to the problems of street and working children. This was incorporated in the Eighth Five-Year Plan which began in 1991. The policy represents an important departure from the conventional public sector pre-occupation with institutional approaches: care for orphans in 'homes', the incarceration of juveniles in conflict with the law. This new policy direction is seen as a breakthrough for the disadvantaged child in India.

Advocacy to help bring about this change was carried out through audio-visual modules documenting approaches of various NGOs working with children. Studies on street children in six major cities were commissioned. State level workshops contributed to greater awareness of the problems of children in difficult circumstances, and task forces were set up to develop suitable programmes. These studies and workshops generated questions in Parliament on child-related issues.

There are now street children's forums in Bombay, Bangalore, Calcutta, Delhi, Madras and Hyderabad. In all of these places, city-level plans are being formulated. They bring together, possibly for the first time, a collaborative effort between NGOs, municipal corporations and state governments. A National NGO Forum for street and working children has been set up to coordinate and support state and city level fora.

"It was the first time that large numbers of street children have banded together to announce their presence."

Networking among NGOs has resulted in all sorts of innovative activities. Thus in Bombay, street children are being trained for assisting traffic police at pedestrian crossings during peak hours; in Delhi a local theatre group helps street children stage mime shows and skits based on the real-life dramas of their situation; in Bangalore street boys run a courier service and an NGO produces a regular news wall poster for street children.

Meanwhile, at the central government level, concern about children is reflected in the Planning Commission's acceptance of a new approach towards children in especially difficult circumstances. This was underscored by the first-ever official reference to street children as "a group needing special attention" in the President's address to the nation on the occasion of the 41st anniversary of Indian independence.

Services provided by NGOs

If NGOs are to win the confidence of government, and thereby enter an effective partnership in the provision of services for urban children, they will have to come up with models which can be replicated and used for 'scaling up'. At present, there is often a reluctance among officials to assist efforts in the voluntary sector because, in their view, it makes little sense to invest in schemes that benefit only a handful of the urban poor. Meanwhile the voluntary agencies face a major constraint in the absence of a firm financial base. Voluntary agencies are constantly struggling to find sponsors and when donor money becomes scarce, many an enthusiastically-begun enterprise is unable to sustain itself. This has conferred on them a somewhat fickle image.

Nonetheless, there is recognition of the grassroots knowledge many NGOs have acquired. And on their side, the NGOs have begun to see that in order to bring about lasting social change, they
have to gain the trust of city officials: "I suppose you could say NGOs have a love-hate relationship with the government," said Panicker. "But the fact is the state has the larger resources. We can only complement them. Sometimes we are called in an advisory capacity. That doesn't happen too often, but at least it gives us a chance to work together towards a common goal."

The value of experience-sharing and collaborative efforts is beginning to change the outlook of many NGOs in India. In Bombay, for instance, some 18 different groups involved with street and working children belong to the Coordination Committee for Vulnerable Children (CCVC). They receive a grant from UNICEF and have managed to secure the cooperation of the Juvenile Aid Police Unit to conduct workshops for policemen who handle street children.

Many of these organizations provide night shelters, non-formal schooling, play facilities and counselling for disadvantaged children. Frequently they refer a child to a CCVC member agency for particular needs. On November 14, anniversary of Nehru's birthday, celebrated in India as Children's Day, the Bombay consortium of voluntary agencies organizes a melo or fair for the city's street children. The event gives both its organizers and the children public visibility.

Some groups turn to the private sector for support. One example is the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres or SPARC in Bombay. Launched in 1984, the group consists of trained social workers, scientists, and researchers concerned about the problems of poor migrants in the city, particularly those of women pavement dwellers. SPARC has a mutually beneficial relationship with the National Federation of Slum Dwellers. They share an office space in the back of an old charitable dispensary, used at various times as a night shelter for street boys, a non-formal school and a women's savings-and-loan centre.

NSDF president, Mr. Joachim, has a high profile among slum communities, NGOs and local administration officials. He continues to live in the slum where he grew up and is greatly concerned about the welfare of street children. He has hired street educators from squatter communities to counsel youngsters in the suburb where the Federation is headquartered. Between 10 and 50 boys sleep there every night, and the centre is always open for a child who wants to enjoy a quiet meal or a nap during the day. When a child has a traffic accident, an illness or a rough encounter with a policeman, the Federation comes to his aid.

The Slum Dwellers Federation has assisted SPARC in the preparation of various useful studies, among them a census of pavement dwellers and people living along the railway tracks in Bombay. While none of these directly focus on children, the counts draw attention to the large child populations in these areas and could therefore provide useful reference points for child intervention programmes.

SPARC also lent itself out as a consultant to the Mobile Creches of Bombay in the preparation of a study on migrant construction workers during the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless (1987). Mobile Creches, which establishes childcare facilities at construction sites in Delhi and Bombay, is an NGO with a long and established history in India. They persuade contractors to allow a creche to be set up, and provide supplementary milk and food rations, learning and play activities, health care and immunization, and all-round professional day-care to the children of migrant construction workers and working slum mothers.

Creating an awareness of the difficult circumstances of urban poor children and of their rights is another important contribution of the NGOs. In Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh state, the Seva Niketanam Boys Home has used an unusual approach to organize projects for rural and urban underprivileged children. Donations in cash and kind are sought from neighbourhood schools, some of whom provide sponsorship for the 60 young boys who live at the school. Another 300 non-resident children are also associated with the centre. The middle-class children from the patron schools are encouraged to visit the Boys Home. A few come on a regular basis and have struck up friendships with children with whom they would never have come into social contact.

Although the Boys Home itself has been in existence since it opened as a charity in 1956, its current programme was started four years ago. Its director is an Englishman by the name of Shri Manihar who came to India in 1975 on a 'philosophical tour', saw the children at the Delhi railway station and decided that he had to stay. "I came to the conclusion that what these children need is not simply food and education but love and respect," said Manihar, whose wife Bhakti is a Maharashtrian social worker.

The programme offers much to the children who live or study there. An academic education is provided to children up to the age of 12, consisting of English, Sanskrit, Hindi, Telugu, Arithmetic, History, Geography, Natural Sciences, Philosophy, Vedic Culture and Physical Education. Non-academic instruction includes dairy farming, cook-
ing, sculpture, electrical and mechanical work, construction and design, and plumbing. An impressive vegetable garden runs alongside the Home and one room in the building is air-conditioned and serves as a computer laboratory. "The Home is also a safe haven for street kids who don't live here. They know they can come here whenever they need to," Manthar said.

During a visit to Seva Niketanam, the sleeping figure of a small boy was seen in one corner of the reception area. The 12-year-old was a newcomer. One thigh was swathed knee-to-groin in bandages. He had badly hurt himself jumping off a moving train after collecting paper cups. Manthar explained that he had been brought in by other street boys. "We hope he'll decide to stay on so that we can provide him with something more than the care for a damaged limb," Manthar said.

Two other young boys appeared. Well-dressed and well-mannered, they introduced themselves as students of a local school. They had come to seek permission to visit their friends at Seva Niketanam. Outside in the sunshine, a dozen smiling faces affirmed their welcome.
TENS of millions of children born and reared in poverty in India do not enjoy the passage of sheltered dependency conjured by the word 'childhood'. Adulthood makes an early encroachment upon the lives of youngsters, setting out each day with their shoe-shiner’s bag on their backs instead of school satchels, expected at ten years old to make a contribution to the family food basket.

The lessons of making out on the street, rather than those of the classroom, are these children’s main preparation for adult life. For some, the stimuli of the open streets, shopping centres, and transport terminals provide an alluring alternative to a fraught and violent atmosphere at home. But from there, many embark on a route to child should have to take, joining the ranks of misfits and miscreants from which the rest of society takes shelter.

Those working with the increasing body of organizations concerned about the ‘Indian child in difficult circumstances’ point to children’s own resourcefulness and creativity as key ingredients of any strategy to improve their situation. Even among the first children of India’s bus terminals and railway stations, many of whom have not yet been touched by any government or NGO intervention, there exists a remarkable sense of solidarity. Peer groups devise strategies to countermand the menace of local thugs or bullying policemen, and fashion each other in times of need.

At the train station in the Andhra Pradesh seaport of Vishakhapatnam, the story is told of a young boy called Ramu, a runaway who kept himself by sweeping carriages. Like other young boys who worked on the trains, Ramu used to jump from the roof of one wagon to another. One day, his foot slipped and he was decapitated by the wheels of the train. When his friends found his mangled body on the tracks, they were grief-stricken. One child actually lost his voice for a few days. But the boys got together and donated 50 paise each for Ramu’s funeral. And somehow, through collective effort, the children managed to return their deceased comrade’s body to the village where he was born.

The collective impulse can be found at work in the slum or squatter community. Programmes which build confidence and self-esteem should take on a life of their own. With minimal prompting, women decide to have their infants immunized, open a vending business, or make new recipes for family meals. Bidwadis—pre-schools—and kitchen gardens get started. Girl ragpickers and shine-shine boys steal a couple of hours from their workday to sit before a street educator and puzzle over sums and alphabets. Asim in Motia Khan, Delhi, and his younger brother and sister are now spending two hours every morning in a non-formal education programme run by the voluntary agency, Jagriti. These initiatives not only improve children’s prospects directly and indirectly, but help build a sense of community cohesion and strength.

The ideal—an ideal at the heart of the UBS strategy—is to create a system that strengthens the families and neighbourhoods where children live in difficult circumstances, while addressing the particular needs of the disadvantaged youths. Sweeping street children out of sight, or taking punitive action against “irresponsible” parents, is no longer seen as a suitable approach. Some strategies aim at enhancing the family’s capacity to provide for its own needs; others involve whole communities in building a healthier, safer environment for all who live there. And there are specific child-focused programmes which try to compensate for the educational, psycho-social or recreational gaps in slum and street children’s lives. Still other efforts aim at reuniting children with their families and reinforcing the bonds of support. Much of this work is being carried out in the voluntary sector, some of it with support or endorsement from government.

Concern for street and working children both at governmental and NGO levels is encouraging. But much work remains to be done. It takes a huge commitment on the part of policy makers to ensure that a country’s resources reaches its most vulnerable citizens. Observers such as Myron Weiner point to a deep psychological resistance within the Indian state bureaucracy to commitment to this kind of change. “The Indian position rests on deeply held beliefs that there is a division between

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**Children’s own resourcefulness and creativity are key ingredients of any strategy to improve their situation**
people who work with their minds and rule, and people who work with their hands and are ruled, and that education should reinforce rather than break down this division.” Weiner comments in The Child and the State in India. “These beliefs are closely tied to religious notions and to the premises that underlie India’s hierarchical caste system.”

The new commitment to Urban Basic Services for the Poor is one promising portent of change. Other policy re-orientations could also make a difference, such as a proportionately higher level of spending on primary education and on enabling economically disadvantaged parents to send their children to school and keep them there. In recent years the government has created affirmative action quotas to open up educational and employment opportunities for disadvantaged groups. In 1990, the total number of ‘reserved seats’ for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was 22.5 per cent, and another 27 per cent for Other Backward Classes. This legislative and policy bias towards the poor, unpopular though it may be in certain Indian circles, could valuably be reflected in policy attitudes towards disadvantaged children as a special group.

The endorsement by government of such promising approaches as the UBS strategy shows that attitudes are gradually shifting this way. This has not prevented some commentators from querying whether the centralized bureaucracy of government will be sufficiently flexible to the requirements of genuine participatory approaches. Fears have been expressed that the vitality and innovativeness of much UBS action to date may be stifled by its arrival in the big league of major governmental expenditure. Only time will tell whether these fears are justified. The experience of voluntary agencies, whose efforts are solidly based on rapport with the communities in which they work, is being harnessed by the government to help build bridges between action-minded slum neighbourhoods, and the commitment of government to the UBS programme. Voluntary organizations will be asked to oversee implementation at community level. This will require dedication on the part of government officials, NGOs, project officers, community leaders, and volunteers.

There is unquestionably a long way to go before the ideal of a work-free, well-nurtured childhood is realistic for millions of India’s most disadvantaged children. In the meantime, it is salutary to remember that these young children do manage to survive – quite successfully, by their standards – the ‘difficult circumstances’ in which they find themselves. And though they may be uncomfortable reminders of the malfunctioning of society, they nonetheless bear witness to the endurance and potential of the human spirit. If society is willing to see such children in that light and is prepared to listen to their own voices and others speaking on their behalf, then the first and most important step will have been taken.
The following is a list of the main sources used in the compilation of this study:


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