



CHILD PROTECTION BULLETIN

STATE CHILD
PROTECTION
SOCIETY, ASSAM

MONTHLY BULLETIN OF ACTIVITIES CONCERNING CHILD PROTECTION IN ASSAM

EDITORIAL

Urbanization is taking place at a very rapid pace. While the average poor person was once a rural resident, today the average poor person lives in a city. The majority of urban growth is taking place in the poorest segments of urban society, both because of migration and high fertility among the urban poor. This has resulted in the growth and proliferation of slums in the developing world.

Children growing up in slums experience a childhood that often defies the imagination of the 'innocent childhood'. The slums typically lack proper sanitation, safe drinking water, or systematic garbage collection; there is usually a severe shortage of space inside the houses where the children live, and no public spaces dedicated to their use. But that does not mean that these children have no childhood, only a different kind of childhood that sees them playing on rough, uneven ground, taking on multiple roles in everyday life, and sharing responsibilities with adults in domestic and public spaces in the community.

This month's news bulletin discusses on the issues of children living in the slum areas of Guwahati. This will help the readers to be able to understand the conditions of the children in the slums.

*Editorial Board,
State Child Protection Society, Assam*

LIFE IN SLUMS

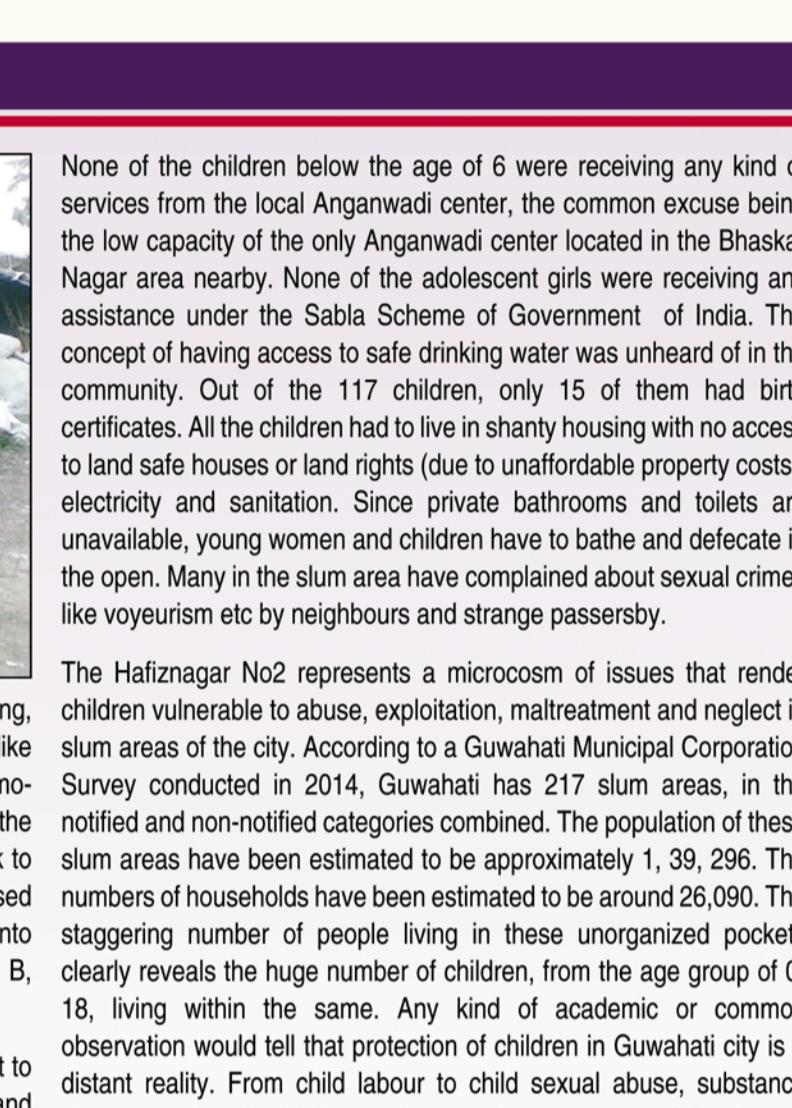
The vision of representative legislators, the ingenuity of civil administrators and the modishness of development planners have transformed Guwahati into one of the "most promising" cities of India, if not its urbs prima. The strategic advantage of its geopolitics coupled with rapid economic growth holds propitious hopes of it being transformed into a multidimensional hub of international trade, politics, tourism, et al. The assuring narratives of its increasingly valuable real estate, an expanding millionaires club, a competitive consumerist middle class and the ascending tourist footfalls conjure up an exciting imagery of a soon-to-be world class city, tucked in the heartland of India's northeast.

In vaudevilles of urban development lie certain facets that go unnoticed given the distracting pageantries that come along with it. The lustrous shopping centers, expensive private schools, high-rising apartment enclaves, abundant luxury cars, exquisite cuisine hubs, intellectual coffee table conversations, international culture festivals, and multilateral conferences gather enough material to be content with the idea of a good city living. However, a lifting of the veil would reveal a world that is completely diametric to the shining story of Guwahati development. As clichéd as it may sound, the urban narrative of this city brings along with it tales of unsafe migration, homelessness, poverty and abuse.

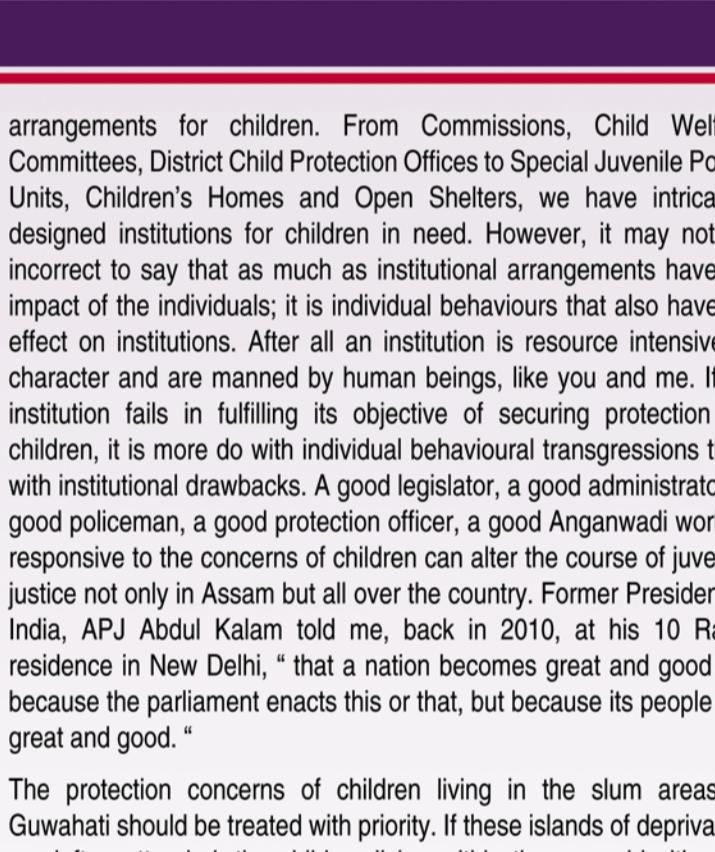
Most slum areas of Guwahati city are unfit for human habitation. Located either in unorganized narrow alleys or along perilous railway tracks, these over-crowded human settlements completely lack the primary social goods required for survival. Unlike organized communities, slum areas are bereft of the conditions of living that are mandatory for the protection of children living within the same.

My accident of professional choice afforded me the opportunity of working closely with such a slum community in Guwahati.

The Hafiznagar Slum Area No 2, located in the Bamunimaidam Area of East Guwahati, Assam, has been an informal settlement for more than 40 years now. My initial contact with the community in 2011 revealed that the area had more than 260 settlers, of which 117 were children, most of them migrants from nearby villages of Assam, who had come in search of better livelihood opportunities. However, since the inhabitants had settled along a 900 metres railway track, the railway authorities would evict the establishments each year by breaking and burning down the shanties, only to have the people re-settle back in that same area due to lack of viable alternatives. Year after year, the same eviction drives, coupled with the stress of dealing with abject poverty and social isolation resulted in the people losing faith in any kind of organized living and establishment which finally led into the conversion of this area into a deprived "ghetto".



Children in Hafiznagar Slum Area No.2, Guwahati



"Ghettoization" had given rise to acute alcoholism, gambling, substance abuse, rape and other kinds of anti-social activities like smuggling, robbery, murder etc. The entire area had been unceremoniously converted into a dumping ground of waste materials from the city, as most of the young men and women living in that area took to rag-picking as a source of livelihood. Since the area had no regularised human waste sanitation systems or water supply, the area turned into a breeding ground for diseases like diarrhoea, jaundice, hepatitis B, gastritis.

All the children were severely undernourished posing a huge threat to their growth and survival. Due to the complete absence of water and sanitation, all the children often become victims of some kind of illness mostly diarrhoea, ring worms, scabies and jaundice. 67 out of 117 were engaged in some kind of Labour- rag-picking, garage, domestic help and vegetable vending. All the children were subject to some forms of violence within the community, either inside the family or outside. Most adolescent girls were victims of some kind of abuse- sexual, mental, verbal or physical.

Out of the 117 children living in the area only 9.84 percent, between the age group of 6-14 years, were attending regular school at the Government School, in the nearby Chandmari area. Many others had dropped out because of unfriendly mechanisms and corporeal punishment at the local Government Schools. About 20 per cent of the children aged 8-19 were into alcohol, drug and substance abuse. The area being alongside a railway track led to the accidental death of many children. Every child, above the age of 4, had complained about one or other forms of physical assault by their parents and neighbours. The quest for survival, in this ever growing city, had forced the parents to give more importance to earning rather than protective child rearing. Children were left unattended to their own devices through the day while parents were away in search of livelihood. Inquisitive and uniformed children would venture out into the streets and the marketplaces, which more often than not, brought them in contact with deviant minded adults. All these factors impeded their social and cultural growth, most of them displaying adverse social and psychological behaviour.

The protection concerns of children living in the slum areas of Guwahati should be treated with priority. If these islands of deprivation are left unattended, the children living within these would either be unceasing victims of abuse or fall under the vicious circle of crime. I believe, that this can be achieved not through board room meetings, examining cold imprints of misery or filibustering by legislative debaters

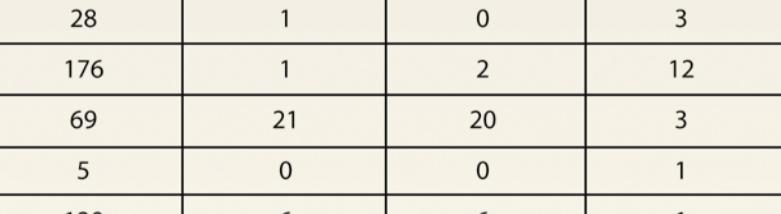
None of the children below the age of 6 were receiving any kind of services from the local Anganwadi center, the common excuse being the low capacity of the only Anganwadi center located in the Bhaskar Nagar area nearby. None of the adolescent girls were receiving any assistance under the Sabla Scheme of Government of India. The concept of having access to safe drinking water was unheard of in the community. Out of the 117 children, only 15 of them had birth certificates. All the children had to live in shanty housing with no access to land safe houses or land rights (due to unaffordable property costs), electricity and sanitation. Since private bathrooms and toilets are unavailable, young women and children have to bathe and defecate in the open. Many in the slum area have complained about sexual crimes like voyeurism etc by neighbours and strange passersby.

The Hafiznagar No2 represents a microcosm of issues that render children vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, maltreatment and neglect in slum areas of the city. According to a Guwahati Municipal Corporation Survey conducted in 2014, Guwahati has 217 slum areas, in the notified and non-notified categories combined. The population of these slum areas have been estimated to be approximately 1,39,296. The numbers of households have been estimated to be around 26,090. The staggering number of people living in these unorganized pockets clearly reveals the huge number of children, from the age group of 0-18, living within the same. Any kind of academic or common observation would tell that protection of children in Guwahati city is a distant reality. From child labour to child sexual abuse, substance abuse to malnutrition; children living in the slum areas of the city are far from being protected by the State.

According to Article 27 of the UNCRC, every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development and the state has the obligation to assist parents "and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing". This ideal clearly points out to the basic fact that children, in order to develop progressively, need an atmosphere conducive to their growth and development.

Though varied successful initiatives are being undertaken by organizations like us, Snehalaya, Child Friendly Guwahati, sSTEP, MoC and ICCW in areas of child health, education, protection, etc, it becomes imperative to address some of the fundamental issues that could sustain the care and protection of children. Safe housing is one such fundamental aspect, without the fulfilment of which all other initiatives remain unsustainably incremental in character. Long term solutions are closely related to the land and housing rights of the people.

Another aspect, that could usher a phenomenal change in the protection status of marginalized children, lies in the progressive response of stakeholders towards the needs of such children. India is one the countries that has an elaborate deployment of institutional



but by empathetic individuals who take collective responsibility to enhance the protection of children who, under the law, are indeed "children in need of care and protection".

"Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin"- Mother Teresa

MIGUEL QUEAH
(Child Rights Activist), Founder-UTSAH, Guwahati

Centre for Child Rights (CCR)

Centre for Child Rights (CCR) was inaugurated at National Law University and Judicial Academy, Assam (NLUJA) on 14th March, 2015. The CCR has been launched jointly by NLUJA and UNICEF, Assam. The Centre is to act as a knowledge hub for Assam as well as other North-Eastern states of India in anchoring and facilitating various child rights related activities. To mark the occasion a one-day Conference on PROTECTION OF RIGHTS OF CHILDREN: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES was also organised at NLUJA.



DSW, Government of Assam

Status Report on the functioning of the Juvenile Justice Boards and Child Welfare Committees in Assam for the month of March 2015

Sl. No.	Districts	Juvenile Justice Boards			Child Welfare Committees		
		No. of cases instituted	No. of cases disposed	Total cases pending	No. of cases instituted	No. of cases disposed	Total cases pending
1	BAKSA	Cases are jointly dealt with Nalbari JJB			1	1	12
2	BONGAIGAON	1	7	33	6	3	4
3	BARPETA	12	9	102	2	1	3
4	CACHAR	6	5	67	4	4	4
5	CHIRANG	3	0	45	3	3	0
6	DARRANG	5	6	140	5	3	21
7	DHEMAJI	0	0	28	1	0	3
8	DHUBRI	1	2	176	1	2	12
9	DIBRUGARH	6	2	69	21	20	3
10	DIMA HASAO	2	0	5	0	0	1
11	GOALPARA	6	6	120	6	6	1
12	GOLAGHAT	4	6	25	2	1	4
13	HAILAKANDI	1	0	12	5	5	2
14	JORHAT	5	1	48	3	3	6
15	KAMRUP (M)	42	20	193	57	65	84
16	KAMRUP (R)	Cases are jointly dealt with Kamrup (M) JJB			1	1	16
17	KARBI ANGLONG	3	1	55	1	1	1
18	KARIMGANJ	2	2	58	12	0	25
19	KOKRAJHAR	5	21	139	1	1	7
20	LAKHIMPUR	1	4	27	7	13	27
21	MORIGAON	5	5	15	7	7	29
22	NAGAON	3	7	262	33	19	21
23	NALBARI	1	3	35	0	1	26
24	SONITPUR	9	4	136	5	6	38
25	SIBSAGAR	2	2	63	6	5	44
26	TINSUKIA	4	5	61	17	11	9
27	UDALGURI	1	1	21	3	6	19
Total		130	119	1935	210	188	422

Source: MIS Cell, SCPS, Assam

Corrigendum: In the month of February the total pendency of Kokrajhar JJB cases as published in CP Bulletin of March Issue read as 153. But it should be 155 and the total JJB pendency of cases should be 1924.

For any feedback, write to:

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Lokonya Press, Guwahati-781028

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