

Book Review

Child Sponsorship: A Tool for Development. Gracy Fernandes, 2015, Mumbai, TISS, ISBN: 81-85458-87-1 paperback pp.xi+168, Price: Rs.600.

The Sustainable Development Goals are a new set of targets aiming to end global poverty, fight inequality and prevent climate change. The significance of education in this global endeavour for development is articulated in the fourth sustainable development goal, which states “to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” The efforts of governments and international funding agencies are to be combined with other stakeholders, who are concerned about the quality of education of the children from the disadvantaged sections of the society, to accomplish the target by 2030. Child sponsorship is a child-focused programme evolved over a period of time under the humanitarian voluntary organizations as a formal organized service for child welfare. World Vision, Plan International, Save the Children, Child Fund International, ActionAid and Child Rights and You (CRY) are some of the global trendsetters in the field of child sponsorship. Education is a cornerstone of the child sponsorship programme of all these agencies, with assistance provided to children and their families to meet their educational needs. A report of ActionAid India shows that as an impact of their work, 26,160 children who were forced to drop out were brought back to school with systems established to monitor their progress and 7,176 children were supported to get scholarships from government for further studies. Child sponsorship is a key strategy within the framework of intervention tools applied in development practice.

The book on child sponsorship is a cumulative outcome of the authors’ long and meaningful social engagement in the urban slums of Mumbai as part of community services and subsequent assignment of teaching and learning in a college of social work combined with the field-based research in child sponsorship and profound experience in the evaluation of family and child programmes in India and other developing regions of the globe. The context and rationale of the work are mentioned in the introductory

chapter as an attempt to reflect on the shared and collective experience of the stakeholders of child sponsorship programmes, comprising families, children, sponsors and sponsorship agencies.

The second chapter gives a detailed account of the genesis and evolution of child sponsorship programme in India. As a prelude to the chapter, the moral imperative of giving found in the holy texts of major religions is flaggingly mentioned to highlight the altruistic principles linked to the philosophy of giving. Rationale as well as scope of child sponsorship are presented by giving a broad definition of child sponsorship: "Sponsorship is one of the most important child welfare services which aim at strengthening the family as a unit and preventing family disintegration leading to subsequent institutionalization of the child. Sponsorship refers to financial assistance from a person better placed in life to a child in a disadvantaged family for his development in general and education in particular. However, it is no longer confined to the boundaries of monetary help but has also expanded to include other services within its realm. It has evolved from charity/donation based giving into a systematic and combined effort of welfare agencies to reach out the needy children" (p.18). Subsequently, the author has explained the dimensions of child sponsorship with micro-narratives of the pioneering national and international agencies engaged in child sponsorship programmes. The phases of evolution and approaches of child sponsorship programmes from 1920 to 2015 are discussed in detail. The author has identified five phases in child sponsorship with various focuses, approaches and implementation strategies, which are meaningfully presented in a tabular form, facilitating clarity of concepts for the readers. The five phases mentioned in the book are the following:

- 1) 1920–1960, with focus on *child* with charity approach comprising crisis intervention and institutional care of children who need care and protection.
- 2) 1960–1970, with *child and family* as focus with community-based approach with financial and social support for parenting and vocational training for family.
- 3) 1970–1980, with *child, family and community* with developmental and participatory approaches.
- 4) 1980–2000, with *child, family and community* with developmental approaches with emphasis on *rights perspectives*.

- 5) 2000–2015, with *family strengthening and non-institutional alternative care for children in need of care and protection* with collaborative approach with NGOs, governmental agencies and international partners.

The literature review of the respective period on child sponsorship is also summarily presented to enrich the narration and to highlight the shifts in programmes of child welfare services during the aforesaid phases of evolution of child sponsorship programmes.

The third chapter comprised of the important theoretical frameworks for crafting policies, schemes, strategies and practice of child sponsorship. Insights from ecological and structural theories are utilized to fit in the child sponsorship in the macro perspective of community development practice. Right-based perspectives and child rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) are explained to highlight the importance of child sponsorship as a way towards facilitating the poor and marginalized children to realize their rights for *survival, development, protection and participation*. Even though the policies of children and the gaps in child policies are only briefly explained in the chapter, the section may evoke the readers to reflect over the hurdles in the fuller realization of child rights in India. The last part of the chapter is about sponsorship and Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) of the Ministry of Women and Child Development of the Government of India. Under the scheme, preventive and rehabilitative sponsorship supports are provided to families to enable children to continue to remain in the family and to continue their education. The programme clearly indicates that the government too has recognized child sponsorship as an effective tool for the realization of child rights. By analysing the sponsorship support given under ICPS, the author reiterates the importance of child sponsorship as an effective tool in child development services in India.

Chapter four is a detailed account of the implementation process of child sponsorship programme followed by the implementing agencies. Cognitive behavioural model, integrative short-term treatment model, problem-solving model, task-centred model and strength-based model are suggested as effective strategies for child sponsorship-related practices. The detailed steps of child sponsorship programme are designed, based on the good practices followed by the child sponsorship agencies. The major tasks and skills essential for social workers in the process of child sponsorship

are elucidated in this chapter, which appears to be an effective checklist for the practitioners to monitor the quality of their services.

Accountability, ethical dilemmas in child sponsorship and critique of sponsorship are discussed in the fifth chapter. The agencies in sponsorship services are accountable to several stakeholders, especially to the donor agencies, local donors, government and service users. The effective strategies applied in the sector to increase the level of accountability and transparency are presented in the session. The major ethical dilemmas faced by sponsorship agencies, like the needs of the service users versus the needs and requirements of the sponsors, community development approach versus the relationship between individual sponsor and child and top-down decision-making versus bottom-up approach, are discussed by citing the problems faced by agencies in the field.

The major criticisms levelled against child sponsorship programmes are the following: The sponsorship is a symptomatic relief with creation of dependency among the beneficiaries, self-image of a sponsored child is often affected, the sponsorship is linked with conditions, there is lack of uniform standards in the sector, programmes are often predetermined without addressing the needs of client systems, etc. The author reviews these prevailing criticisms with an analysis that the sponsorship is a supplementary contribution that will have effects as the child reaches adulthood as an educated citizen. It would be more effective if it were accompanied by action that changes the macro situation that pins down the most vulnerable groups and hinders their developments. The author argues that even though the criticisms levelled against sponsorship are significant, the fact remains that sponsorship with all its limitations introduces the elements of caring philanthropy and personal involvement into a large social problem that is perennially short of funds and commitment. The chapter ends with a cautionary note that the agencies in child sponsorship need to be alert and alive to the shortcomings of every model and monitor the programmes constantly to ensure that flaws are minimized and the goal of well-being is maximized.

The frameworks for evaluation of child sponsorship are explained in the sixth chapter; details are useful for practitioners engaged in child welfare services as well as for social work students to understand various evaluation frameworks to immerse deeper into child-related fieldwork practices. The

seventh and the final chapter describes the emerging trends and possibilities in child sponsorship, including the prospectus of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in child sponsorship programmes. The efforts of Kailash Satyarthi and Malala Yousafzai, the Nobel Laureates of 2014, for the promotion of child rights are incidentally cited as a concluding remark to endorse the concept of child sponsorship as an effective tool in creating and facilitating opportunities for promoting the well-being of underprivileged children.

Four annexures are provided on allied topics of child sponsorship in the present volume. A summary of child-related policies, legislation, schemes and programmes, family strengthening and non-institutional alternative care for children in need of care and protection prepared by Nilima Mehta; de-institutionalizing and family reunification initiatives in Odisha by Rajendra Meher; and family-based sponsorship service for children: ICPS by Lina Kashyap are informative supplementary resources for capturing a holistic perspective on child sponsorship. As the title indicates, the volume serves as an effective tool for development practitioners, students in social work and social researchers to meaningfully enter into child-related social engagements.

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