

Social work with children and young people Living in precarious conditions

Concept

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1. Introduction

1.1. Objective of the policy paper

The provision of support to children and young people, who in many parts of the world are afflicted by poverty and discrimination, lies at the heart of the work carried out by Caritas Germany. Worldwide, there is an increasing number of children whose development is affected by growing poverty, wars and catastrophes, as well as by declining social provision for their basic needs. For the coming generation, it will be ever more difficult to establish stable social relationships and effective social bonds.

In view of the complexity involved in providing assistance in this area, Caritas Germany wishes to present a conceptual paper to summarize its understanding of the problems, its objectives and its theoretical and practical reflections on work with children and young people living in precarious conditions. It is based on our experience of projects and the discussion of concepts over recent years with our partners and other development organizations involved in this field. Since the challenges mutate as the years go by, this paper should also reflect a certain stage in the discussion and a certain level of experience. These in turn should serve as an invitation to further dialogue with the expert public both inside and outside Germany and should be further developed in the future.

Caritas Germany currently supports projects aimed at children and young people in Latin America, Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. As the cultural and socio-political conditions for social work vary considerably between regions, the programmes are geared towards local possibilities and resources. This applies especially to the East European area, where the concept of development is still in its infancy, since the difficult situations faced by children and young people represent a totally new phenomenon in these societies.

Through this paper, Caritas Germany wishes to clarify its support policy criteria to its partner organizations. At the centre of all our development programmes is the sustainable improvement of the conditions of life for children. This is not conceivable without cooperating with the relevant social forces within each country. With this in mind, Caritas Germany strives to support its partner organizations in their efforts to free up and strengthen local potential –the potential that children bring with them even when they have to grow up under difficult conditions, and the potential in those parts of the population that want to take over responsibility for the realization of the basic rights of children.

Last but not least, this paper should serve as a valuable tool in the hands of the project officers at Caritas Germany and other organizations involved in development policy issues. It should help those who wish to move into this complex area of support provision and serve as a reference in the evaluation of project proposals. The paper provides a set of guidelines whose purpose is to advise and assist our partners in a professional manner.

1.2 Context and causes

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees children civic, political, economic, social and cultural rights: the right to health, education, cultural identity and freedom of expression; the right to protection from violence, exploitation and abuse. Whenever actions are taken that affect children, it is their interests that should be given priority.

Although the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified almost throughout the world, these rights are being violated to a shocking extent throughout the world. These violations range from a lack of food and inexistent or inadequate educational provision to forced labour, recruitment and deployment in armed conflicts and sexual exploitation.

1.2.1 Levels of analysis

As a prerequisite for the development of suitable concepts and strategies aimed at improving the living conditions of children and young people, it is vital to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the factors that underlie their situation. These can be divided into several levels:

At the macro-level, the underlying causes are the structures of our global society and the economic, social, political and cultural structures of the national societies of the developing and transitional countries. The key concepts in this respect are: asymmetric development of the worldwide globalization process, increasing social inequality (both internationally and nationally), latifundia and mono-culture, rural exodus and population growth, a low level of production diversity and a lack of jobs on the formal labour market.

At the intermediate level, the search for underlying causes looks primarily at the institutions of national societies. A lack of formal education facilities, high school drop-out rates, poor quality of teaching, the high cost of attending school and an absence of vocational training institutions are reasons why many children are unable to acquire a reasonable standard of elementary education.

A further level of analysis is the family, which is embedded in the structures of both global and national societies. From an analytical perspective, the family is situated somewhere between the intermediate and the micro-level. At this level, the most important factors are the child's domestic situation, culturally specific role models, changing norms and values as well as the structure of the relationship between family members.

At the micro-level, the analysis is focused on individual psychological factors such as the nature of the mother-child relationship, deviant behaviour or aggression as a reaction to intra-family stress situations and children's individual coping strategies.

Within the framework of this paper it is not possible to describe the complex network of causes that lead to children being deprived of their basic human rights. Some of the factors at the macro-, intermediate and micro-level are addressed below, although without claiming to offer definitive explanations. Rather, the aim is to make clear that the support policy of Caritas Germany is based on a comprehensive understanding of the problem, and it is this understanding which forms the basis for effective and sustainable support strategies.

1.2.2 Underlying causes

Increasing poverty

The 1990s have been described by the United Nations as the best and worst years for human development¹. Whereas some countries and regions have enjoyed unprecedented progress, others have suffered stagnation and setbacks. The extent of the stagnation and setbacks points to a crisis in human development unprecedented in previous decades. Many of the setbacks can be attributed to the spread of HIV/Aids, which has considerably reduced life expectancy. A further factor is the fall in incomes. Countries in Central and Eastern Europe in particular are on a downward spiral. In sub-Saharan Africa, progress - measured on the index of human development - has slowed. Some countries in the region have even suffered severe setbacks. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean showed a slight reduction in poverty, measured in percentage points, in the 1990s.

Low levels of state revenue, decreasing public per-capita expenditure in the areas of education, health and social services, the mismanagement of natural resources, insufficient diversification of production, a lack of jobs on the formal labour market and a high rate of population growth are some of the factors that accelerate the negative effects of poverty in developing countries. Taken together, they represent a heavy burden for the coming generation – one that manifests itself, for example, in poor health, malnourishment, lack of education, unemployment and in poor quality housing that lacks basic hygienic facilities.

In Central and Eastern European countries, fundamental political and economic transformations are taking place, associated with economic crises, some of which are on a catastrophic scale, accompanied by considerable hardship for large sections of the population. Those particularly affected are children, the old, the sick and the increasing number of unemployed, who can no longer find a place in the rapidly changing society following the decline of state care institutions.

¹ The United Nations' human development index includes life expectancy, level of education and per capita income

Rural exodus

In search of a better life, many people migrate from rural areas to the cities. It is not only the hope of earning more money that plays a role in this decision, but also the fact that for many migrants the city embodies economic and social progress. Many young people in particular are attracted by the consumer and entertainment opportunities of city life.

In many cities, this massive rural exodus is overstressing their capacity and their potential to develop. For millions of people this means living in slum areas in conditions which are often inhuman – without light, access to drinking water and basic hygienic standards; in huts that are built from collected garbage materials with too little space for too many people. There are no education opportunities for children or adults, no playing areas and no communications or recreational facilities. On top of that comes the cultural and social uprooting of the former rural dwellers, since in the cities the social norms and values of village life no longer apply.

Job situation in the informal sector

Given the high rate of immigration to more heavily populated areas and the lack of jobs on the formal labour market, the majority of these migrants flock to the informal sector of the economy. This sector is dominated by small retailers, small workshops and above all personal services. Work in the informal sector is characterized by low productivity, low and insecure wages and poor working conditions. For this reason, many children and adults try to learn a trade that will enable them to achieve a measure of independence as quickly as possible.

With regard to the working conditions of children, it has to be borne in mind that in the countries of the southern hemisphere it is regarded as perfectly normal for children to help by working inside and outside the home. It is seen as an important form of preparation for life. However, with families under increasing economic pressure, children are expected to earn money at an ever earlier age. This produces an over-supply of labour, and the children become cheap competitors for job-seeking adults. Thus, the traditional form of child labour practised in many countries is now being dramatically commercialized. Children are forced into exploitative working conditions far beyond their physical and psychological capabilities.

Lack of education

The structures of the public education system in many developing countries contribute to the marginalization and discrimination of children from poor families. Apart from the shortage of available places in schools, the high costs associated with school attendance, e.g. school fees, uniforms, books etc., act as a barrier to the children of poor families. Moreover, the fact that the classes are usually held in the mornings and afternoons makes it impossible for many children to work outside school in order to contribute to the family income.

(Re-)entry into the formal education system at a later stage is almost impossible as the public education institutions and their staff are not flexible enough to respond adequately to the situation of street children and working children. Finally, the lack of basic knowledge in reading, writing and arithmetic prevent these children from accessing the vocational training opportunities that could open up the prospect of better wages and working conditions.

Changes in family structures

Changing economic and social conditions have a deep-reaching impact on family life. Generally speaking, the family system is gradually losing its authority. Those who leave the rural areas for the cities probably experience for the first time in their lives the bitter realization that they are regarded as inferior and are excluded from important areas of life (work and consumption). The migration of one or both parents to economically prosperous neighbouring countries results in children being left in the care of their grandparents, who are unable to cope with the task of bringing them up, especially in rapidly changing societies.

Culture- and gender-specific attitudes (e.g. machismo in Latin America, polygamous family systems in Africa) often worsen stress situations within the family. Many fathers do not fulfil the responsibilities they have towards the family, in many cases turning to alcohol and extramarital sexual contacts, using violence in family quarrels and leaving the responsibility of providing for the family and the bringing up of the children to the mothers.

While many children no longer experience their fathers as a positive figure of authority in the family, their physically and mentally over-burdened mothers are equally hardly in a position to give their children the emotional attention they need to ensure their healthy development.

In such conditions, it is difficult to establish the intact inter-human relationships that offer children social and emotional security. The poor relationship between a child's parents and the many years during which a child may have been rejected or abused often make escape onto the streets and into alcohol and drugs a refuge of last resort.

Individual factors

It is not only social and family factors but also individual psychological ones that play a role in determining how children deal with stressful situations. One can assume that, even under difficult conditions, the capacity of individuals to respond to their situation is determined by their individual resources. The development of self-confidence and the capacity to act adequately in a given situation are not only a product of social circumstances. According to research carried out in Latin America, the decisive factor is how much importance the child itself attributes to the various problem factors in its life, i.e. what psycho-social coping mechanisms it possesses to deal with its situation.

On top of that comes the individual's perception of possible alternatives. When a child decides, for example, to leave its family and seek a way out on the streets, it will also know that it is not the only one to take this decision. It will meet many other children on the street who have probably had a similar experience at home and prefer to live on the street rather than with their parents.

2. Principles and guidelines

2.1. Providing tangible help for those in need

Caritas Germany committed itself in its 1997 mission statement to fulfil its "obligations beyond borders" and to fight for "decent living conditions in Europe and worldwide, for the observance of human rights and for the introduction of minimum social standards"². It is through its work at the global level that the international department of Caritas Germany aims to meet this obligation.

In its newly formulated vision, Caritas Germany describes its work as tangible help for those afflicted by catastrophes, wars and other crises³. It is the duty of all Christians to provide "caritas" or charity, and at the same time it constitutes a basic mission of the church. One of the key goals of Caritas is that of maintaining human dignity and helping those in need to help themselves. In the pursuit of this objective, Caritas follows the principles of Christian social teaching. A fundamental aspect of this doctrine is the principle of subsidiarity, according to which Caritas Germany offers its partner organizations assistance and support (expertise, personnel and financial resources) to help them fulfil tasks which they are unable to achieve themselves. In doing so, Caritas respects the wishes and plans of its partners and sees its role as that of motivating and strengthening them and thus enabling them to make use of their own abilities and resources.

Together with its partner organizations, Caritas Germany works on behalf of socially and economically disadvantaged groups within the larger population and the victims of exclusion and violence. In its work in the areas of emergency relief and the provision of support for professional social work programmes, Caritas Germany draws on the expertise and experience of the Caritas association as a whole and of its relevant associations and organizations.

² Mission statement of the German Caritas Association, Freiburg 1997, page 2

³ Deutscher Caritasverband/Caritas international: Unsere Arbeit, unsere Ziele – Caritas international, Freiburg 2000, S. 3

2.2 Support philosophy

Caritas Germany supports subject-based approaches to the provision of social relief. Such approaches assume that, given their experience of life to date, the children and young people in question have acquired the skills to act on their own behalf to a sufficient degree to be taken seriously by adults and that these skills can be further developed through appropriate pedagogical measures. However, this recognition of the capabilities and achievements of the children does not rule out providing a realistic response to their needs for custody and care. Subject-based approaches do not restrict themselves to the relief of symptoms; they aim to tackle the root causes of problems. Children and young people are encouraged to organize themselves with other children and to take action themselves to improve their living conditions. In this way, the children themselves should become active agents in the development process and influence their own social environment. This is why many programmes have become involved in the children's rights movement (in Latin America and increasingly in Africa, especially West Africa) and attempt to exert an influence on national social policies as well as on international conventions.

The support given by Caritas Germany is geared at programmes which focus on the causes of the problems affecting children and young people and which try to work in a preventive manner. Preventive social work with children means creating and promoting social frames of reference which can offer children a more positive outlook, such as clubs and societies, youth groups, or informal gatherings of children and young people. Preventive social work with young people tries to involve their families, especially the mothers, and to strengthen their coping skills.

An important principle of Caritas is to promote sustainable change through medium-term projects⁴. In the area of social work with children and young people living in precarious conditions, this goal means taking steps to improve the living conditions of those children through poverty alleviation in such a way that they will in the long run be able to achieve a degree of independence from the social services provided by institutional bodies. Therefore, project objectives and activities should be formulated and linked with each other and combine action at the micro-, intermediate and macro-level.

2.3 Target groups⁴

The professional social work carried out in co-operation with Caritas Germany is geared towards children and young people living in precarious situations. This state is assessed using objective indicators such as poverty, disrupted or broken family situations, a lack of access to education, and drug addiction, all of which are factors that determine the living conditions and

⁴ In addition to the target groups mentioned, Caritas international provides support for aids orphans, child soldiers and children traumatized by war. As different methods of intervention and different support concepts are necessary for these target groups, they are not included in this paper.

chances of children and young people in the long term. However, the term precarious also involves an assessment of subjective feelings of abandonment, dependence, powerlessness, a lack of confidence and a sense of hopelessness. It also includes the provision of help to those in precarious situations of a short-term nature (e.g. legal aid in the wake of police raids or emergency medical assistance.)

2.3.1 Street children – a definition

In a stricter sense, street children are those children aged up to 18 whose lives are based around the streets and who have very little or no contact whatsoever with the parental home. They earn a living through odd jobs, working for example as car-park attendants or dishwashers, but also by begging and stealing. They live together in groups or packs where they develop their own sets of rules and values. They sleep in the streets, in underground sewers, in empty houses, on park benches, in driveways or back yards. The abuse of substances such as alcohol and glue or petrol sniffing are widespread. It helps them to put up with their hunger and frustration. In many cities these children repeatedly fall victim to violence and exploitation by adults. Sometimes brutal interventions by the police result in their being committed to prison or state-run homes, some of which are prison-like in nature.

The physical and psycho-social balance of these children is often severely damaged, and many of them show clear signs of retarded development.

2.3.2. Working children

This group is made up of children who find more or less regular jobs on the streets or in factories. While the employment of children in the industrial sector is widespread in Asian countries, children in Africa work specifically in those areas of the informal sector which pay the lowest wages and which are void of almost any social prestige. Some of them attend school, albeit on a very irregular basis. Occasionally they sleep on the street, but for the most part they still live at home. With their work they can make an often indispensable contribution to the survival of the family and to wider society (e.g. rubbish collectors in India). However, whether in the formal or informal labour market, the work they perform is very hard. It is also associated with severe physical and psychological strains that endanger the healthy development of the children and deprive them of their right to an education.

House girls form a discrete sub-group of child workers. They are often overlooked as they do not appear openly in public. At the age of 9 or 10 and sometimes even earlier, they are sent by their parents, who mostly live in rural areas, to a private household in the city. In contrast with the boys, who enjoy a certain degree of freedom on the streets, the girls are totally under the control of their employers. They have to accomplish difficult tasks for little or no pay at all. They have no free time and often no social contact outside their work. They may be physically mistreated for trivial reasons and often fall victim to sexual abuse by family members. The absolute

control exerted over these girls by their employers for the purpose of economic exploitation effectively makes them modern-day slaves.

2.3.3 Children in severely materially and psychosocially disadvantaged families

These comprise the large group of children aged up to 18 who live with their families and are not on the streets, but whose development is jeopardized by the difficult living conditions in their family and their environment. They include children from the townships of Cape Town or Johannesburg who have to struggle with the difficult legacy of apartheid and who have only limited prospects of finding a place in mainstream society because of the high rate of unemployment and their poor standard of education. Then there are the children in the metropolises of India whose living conditions are characterized by broken homes, catastrophic health conditions and a lack of educational opportunities. Children in St. Petersburg or Kiev whose families were among the losers in the political and social upheavals, also form part of this group. They grow up in families which, because of unemployment, alcohol abuse and psychological problems, can no longer guarantee their children the beneficial material and psychosocial care they require.

Although historical, political and socio-structural contexts differ from country to country, this target group always includes children and young people who are at risk of losing their social status and frames of reference because of social upheavals, and who face a bleak future because of the specific problems besetting them. In the view of Caritas Germany, they are consequently an important target group of preventive and development-orientated youth work.

2.3.4 Child prostitutes

Boys as well as girls under the age of 18 fall under this heading. Child prostitutes are those who sell their bodies on the streets for sex as a matter of financial necessity. As child prostitution is a serious crime, they cannot simply be included in the group of child workers.

The girls originate mostly from a situation of extreme poverty; more often than not they have experienced sexual violence at home and have experienced only a minimum level of security. Some try, on their own initiative, to escape the misery of the parental home and to seek friendship and opportunities of earning money on the streets. Others are sold into prostitution by their own family members or sold to human traffickers who ply them with alcohol and drugs. Without external help, there is very little prospect of their escaping the vicious circle of low pay, drug dependency and drug-related prostitution.

Since underage prostitutes operate illegally, they frequently keep to the streets. They work there under the extremely difficult conditions and are among the worst paid prostitutes. This applies to both boys and girls. The taboo surrounding male prostitution is much stronger, however, making it extremely difficult to gain access to this target group as part of a programme of social support.

2.3.5 Victims of child trafficking

Child trafficking, a crime involving selling children like commodities for the purpose of commercial exploitation, exists all over the world. In India and Nepal, boys and girls are sold to carpet weavers in order to clear their families' debts. Boys from Benin or Togo are recruited by criminal traffickers with false promises. They are forced to carry out extremely hard work without pay on plantations in Mali or Burkina Faso. Thousands of children are abducted every year from Albania and taken to Greece where they are forced to beg and steal for organized gangs. These are just some of countless examples highlighting the growing problem of international child trafficking. Working as slaves, children generate high profits for their exploiters. They themselves receive no education, suffer severe physical and psychological strain and lose their trust in adults and in life itself. They live in an alien environment in which they are unable to find their way back to their native country without external help, such is their insecurity and the level of intimidation they have been subjected to.

2.3.6 Other target groups

In addition to the target groups described above, Caritas Germany provides help to disabled children, aids orphans, Chernobyl children, Sinti and Roma children, children brought up in homes and children who have been traumatized by war and other catastrophes. Separate papers are being drawn up on the subject of specialised social work with handicapped and traumatized children.

2.4 Conceptual framework

The support policy of Caritas Germany concentrates on subject-based programmes as outlined above. This is not meant to suggest a uniform and neatly packaged approach to the provision of support, but rather a specific way of looking at the reality of life of these children and young people and at ways of supporting them. These programmes are characterized by the following measures, all of which are implemented according to their respective social context.

2.4.1 Analysis of the social context (analysis of social surroundings and living environment)

The marginalization of children and young people in developing and transitional countries is the result of complex and inter-related social factors. International factors, socio-spatial conditions, family conditions and individual patterns of perception play an important role and are linked to each other. The question social workers in open child and youth work have to address is what types of socio-pedagogical services they must provide for the different target groups in order to strengthen children's and young people's competences in social integration and in coping with life. The planning of support strategies therefore requires an accurate knowledge of living conditions in the respective social environment. Socio-spatial and environmental analysis represents a method of developing concepts and a starting point for a needs-based planning of services in youth work. The analysis of social surroundings and environment represents a method of developing concepts and a starting point for the needs-based planning of services for youth work. This enables as realistic a picture as possible to be formed of the living conditions of the target groups at the time, and provides socio-structural and qualitative information about the environments children and young people live in and about important individual and societal resources for developing innovative working methods.

As it is essential to gain a better understanding of the experiences of the children and their individual interpretations of their situation, they participate in this environmental analysis. Their own subjective outlook and needs are thus incorporated into this conceptual assessment. However, the active participation of young people in empirical studies of their living conditions is not just an important step in developing an assistance strategy for open youth work; it also forms part of the pedagogical work itself (e.g. in the framework of media pedagogical work).

2.4.2 Focus on skills

Subject-based approaches assume that children acquire important skills in their daily lives that enable them to survive in their specific social environment. These skills include a wide-ranging experience of life, a knowledge of people and the flexibility to deal with changing situations.

In pedagogical work it is essential to build on these experiences and to strengthen the children's and young people's psycho-social skills (micro level). They are encouraged to develop a positive self-image and more confidence in themselves as well as in others. In peer-groups they learn to listen to others, to accept others' opinions and to practise finding non-violent solutions to conflict situations. Another important component in the process of strengthening their psycho-social skills is that the children have to learn to analyse the problems they face in their everyday lives and, along with others, to develop adequate coping strategies.

An important goal of pedagogical work is for the children themselves to develop viable alternatives to their present lives. The decision to give their lives a new direction and to embrace a more positive outlook on life is a prerequisite for the training of work-related skills. These should

enable the children to free themselves from exploitative working conditions and to improve their income.

If they are to succeed in a trade or running a small business, children need to acquire more than just work-related knowledge and capabilities. They should also have the chance to develop important key skills. While participating in leisure activities in a group or within the framework of club activities, they can acquire and practise skills such as creativity, frustration management, planning skills, the ability to cooperate and communication skills.

2.4.3 Strengthening resources

The starting point for any conceptual approach is the question as to which of the existing social structures can be mobilized and, from the very start, incorporated into social work with children and young people, with the aim of:

- preventively supporting and encouraging children living in difficult conditions;
- correcting negative social prejudices about children and young people;
- persuading individuals as well as institutions to exercise their social responsibility for marginalized children and young people and to jointly develop strategies that can improve their circumstances.

Cooperation with employers is a vital aspect of efforts to collaborate with social institutions. It is essential for support programmes to motivate them to create training opportunities and jobs for the children and young people and to be there with advice as and when everyday problems arise in the training of children.

When collaborating with schools, the key aims are to heighten the awareness of the pedagogical staff of the problems faced by young people, to devise transitional solutions for reintegrating them into the formal education system and to promote solidarity among them.

Resources in an adjoining area of the family's life or in the community can be sought out (e.g. in the church), using socio-spatial analysis (see above) as a basis. Joint actions serve to promote an improved understanding of the precarious circumstances children and young people find themselves in. Professional and voluntary workers can join forces to improve young people's prospects in life.

Other social resources include those clubs and associations which are traditionally active in youth work. They can be sensitized to the difficulties of the children, offered training to help them adjust their activities to the respective needs of the children and encouraged to act jointly with other organisations.

A special role is played by the associations of working children and young people (e.g. in West Africa). Drawing on their national structure and their international networks (macro level), they aim to make the public aware of the difficult living and working conditions of children. By com-

municating with governmental and non-governmental institutions, they make known their point of view and represent their interests on issues related to child labour and children's rights. At the national level they make their voice heard in order to have children's interests considered in the law-making process.

2.4.4 Developing organizational skills

Promoting the ability of the children to organize themselves has a double function, namely an individual and a social one. Through continuous and committed work within the organizations, children learn that they can in fact solve their current problems and improve their situation by thinking through their options and then taking action. They are forced to come to terms with the different opinions and perceptions of others, to keep themselves in check whenever there is disagreement, to show social attitudes that can be accepted by everyone, to negotiate a compromise when necessary and to develop joint strategies for action. They have to learn to organize their activities within a given time frame and to keep to their agreements. In short, through their active involvement in labour associations and other youth clubs, the children acquire key skills that are of the utmost importance both with respect to their working future and their integration into society.

In promoting children's organizational skills, the aim is to help bring about structural improvements (intermediate level) in the long term. Equally, by encouraging children to join together and organise themselves into associations of working children, the goal is to make employers and other social groups more aware of the oppressive working conditions of the children and, through agreements with employers and public authorities, to gradually do away with those exploitative conditions. A further objective of those organizations which campaign on behalf of working children is to dismantle the prejudices of the population at large and to encourage them to show solidarity with the children and help make their everyday lives more bearable.

2.4.5 Participation

An essential component of subject-based approaches is the participation of the target groups involved; this is a central thread that should be present at all levels of any collaborative undertaking. Programmes are planned not for but with the children; the young people work actively in the framework of empirical needs analyses, enabling pedagogical staff to get to know social milieux from the point of view of young people. In developing education and leisure facilities, participation is a methodical principle that underpins teaching and the acquisition of skills.; it is a critical aspect of the children's efforts to organise themselves into pressure groups and labour associations; without participation, their active and public engagement in attempts to secure children's rights would be unthinkable.

From a pedagogical viewpoint, the participation and co-determination of children and young people offers many opportunities for learning and development: they learn how to express their views and ideas; they learn to recognize their rights and to assert their interests and concerns;

they learn to accept majority decisions and to take joint responsibility for decisions; conflicts are resolved by mutual agreement. In order not to overburden the children and young people in this process, the participation processes must be supervised and supported by qualified pedagogical staff.

2.4.6 Acting in solidarity

Efforts to promote solidarity are aimed both at the relationships between children and at the relationships between children and society.

For children who live on the streets, the group is a substitute for the family. It gives them a feeling of security, protection and belonging. But groups also compete with each other; they threaten and fight each other. The experience children gain from living in groups is not only marked by affection and security but also by violence and fear.

Here, the role of pedagogical staff is to address the manifold and contradictory experiences of the children and to help them find collective answers to their difficult living conditions through concerted action. Through co-operation in grass-root groups or work done in district neighbourhood centres, it is possible to devise joint strategies for improving the living conditions of young people which will also benefit the community (e.g. as part of socio-ecological projects at district level).

2.4.7 Gender-specific differentiation

Programmes for street children mainly consist of support programmes for boys, as they are the largest group numerically, with girls only appearing occasionally. When they do show up in groups or cliques, girls are mostly inconspicuous, drawing less attention by their behaviour to their need for socio-pedagogical support.

Gender-specific roles allow boys and girls different degrees of freedom to explore their potential, with girls clearly having less freedom than boys in this respect. A closer connection to home and family makes their level of suffering less visible in family conditions marked by severe psycho-social strain. In the context of child labour, girls must not only do physically hard work as paid domestic helpers; they are often also victims of violence and sexual abuse by family members. This total control of the girls by their employers distinguishes their living and working conditions from those of other child workers.

The situation of girls who sell their bodies on the streets in order to earn a living is especially dramatic. They are rejected by society and by their own families. In selling their sexual services, they expose themselves to very high risks to their health. They are exploited not only by customers but also by other adults who take a part of their earnings. Every day, they are forced to experience the physical and mental trauma of a disrupted childhood.

It is a fundamental principle of the subject-based approach that these girls should not be subjected to moral judgements; rather, their experiences should be regarded with understanding and empathy and acknowledged as a means of surviving. It is assumed that no girl will resort to prostitution unless driven to it by necessity.

The general educational goal of self-determination is of special importance in working with young female adolescents, in view of the special circumstances existing where girls live in conditions of great stress and hardship. Because girls appear less frequently in public, different ways of contacting them must be sought, e.g. through the schools. In designing support programmes, account must also be taken of both the special features of female types of child labour and of the specific interests and needs of girls for communication and social contacts, for education and training and for leisure activities and participation in publicity campaigns.

3. Methods

3.1 Mobile youth work (Street work)

Work with street children begins on the streets, in the very place where they work and live, gain their experiences and have their social contacts and connections. Street work was first developed in the 1920s in the USA and has been practised under different guises and technical emphases in nearly all Western European countries since the second world war. It has also found its way into Central and Eastern Europe since the fall of communism.

Street work has a particular value in the overall context of open youth work. It must neither be used as a kind of a “trawling system” for conveying street children to institutional offers of care nor as a kind of “social fire brigade” for pacifying aggressive street groups (cliques or gangs) – as a law and order measure. The general aim of street work is to provide children and young people at risk with immediate, constructive criticism and solidarity to enable them to cope with day-to-day problems.

The achievement of this goal presupposes that street workers have an exact knowledge of the reality of life of the children. They are listener, companion, and advisor. They should not allow themselves to be biased in their work or be guided by pre-established models that determine what is “right” or “wrong” for the children; rather, in their support role, they should respond appropriately to the specific needs of the children and young people. These could involve a return to the family, participation in an institutionalized programme, a decision to remain on the street, whether alone or as part of a street group, or a commitment to join a children’s rights movement.

First and foremost, the street youth worker is someone the children can talk to about their problems. As crisis situations arise, he /she can offer psychological, medical and legal help. He /

She is there to listen to the children when they cannot deal with the reality on the streets, when they have problems at work or when they want to go back to school. He /She can establish contact with the parents, if the children so desire, or direct them to social services or contact centres.

In discussions with the children, the street worker can try to interest them in new ideas and possibilities. He/She can make contact with youth groups and associations in the area and help set up such groups.

The wide range of skills that children acquire on the streets in their daily struggle to survive cannot disguise the fact that they are often exposed to violent infringements, exploitation and attacks on their dignity and fundamental rights. A lot more is demanded of them than what young people at their stage of development can be expected to bear without incurring physical or mental damage. This applies to boys and even more so to girls, who in many developing countries as a result of poverty become easy prey for pimps, procurers or sex tourists. They have a special need for protection as they usually do not live together in groups like the boys.

3.2 Shelters

Shelters are offered by “open” (i.e. non-institutionalized) centres in order to give the children a chance to rest, to take advantage of the medical and psychological care provided, to wash and clean themselves and their clothing, and to retreat for a while. In the shelters they can meet other children, play together or hold gatherings. Here they can meet adults who do not lecture them, but who listen to them and talk with them.

Subject-based approaches to the provision of support tend to adopt a critical view of institutional care programmes. And careful thought must be given to the conditions under which different forms of care are advisable. However, it is assumed that very young children (five, six, seven years old) have a special need for protection and care; thus, for them, some form of accommodation would have to be provided, should a return to the family prove to be impossible. Also, in the case of girls, it may be sensible, depending on their circumstances, to make it possible for them to live in a shelter for a longer period.

The special climatic conditions in Eastern European countries make it necessary to develop suitable forms of housing for children and young people for whom, for various reasons, reintegration into their families is no longer an option. It is equally important to replace the Soviet legacy of prison-like care homes with socio-pedagogically orientated approaches. Supported housing is still new and unfamiliar here and must therefore be designed and tested under the prevailing local conditions.

3.3 Individual counselling (case work)

Individual counselling is one of the key functions of open youth work. Situations where counselling is needed can arise in different contexts, both on the street, in the framework of institutional services provided by the youth centres, and on an unplanned basis in the day-to-day contacts between social workers and young people. Counselling is directed at giving individual help to children and young people in order to help them to cope better with life, i.e. to help them cope with their problems more effectively. The aim of counselling is to motivate young people to be aware of and to use their own resources. The quality of individual counselling depends to a very large extent on a relationship of trust between young people and social workers, which should be based on respect and on appreciation of the individual problems faced by children and young people. The family can also be included in counselling, depending on the circumstances and needs of the children.

3.4 Informal education and training

The structural weakness of the formal education system in many developing countries has already been pointed out. Even under normal conditions the schools impart very little of the knowledge and skills the children need for their lives and their survival; however, when it comes to street children and child workers, the curriculum and methodology offered by such schools are so remote from everyday life as to be completely irrelevant to the realities of this target group. The children are punished when they cannot concentrate because of the strain of work or their poor physical condition. The abilities they have acquired on the streets are rejected.

In cases where marginalized children and young people cannot be reintegrated into the formal education system because of their specific experiences, programmes need to develop teaching concepts that relate to their actual situation. Given that work is central to the lives of many children in southern countries, pedagogical concepts stress the importance of combining learning and work. On the one hand this appeals to the commonly expressed personal motivation of the children, i.e. to be able to do their work more competently and effectively; on the other hand, the connection between learning and working also makes sense when seen from the point of view of its occupational benefits. Research in different countries of the southern hemisphere has proven that what matters most in the process of acquiring skills for successful small businesses is a combination of the right personality traits, key skills, job training and experience.

The learning processes are therefore designed as broadly as possible, and, as far as methods and concepts are concerned, in a way that enables children to develop (further) important key skills such as autonomy, a sense of responsibility, frustration management and a willingness to take risks. This approach presupposes that it is the experiences of the children which should be taken as a starting point and that the children should be given a considerable say in the planning and design of the educational opportunities that are offered.

However, there are other aspects of the learning process, too, that are seen as important by the children. In courses and on excursions they learn more about general social mechanisms (e.g. the economy) and important social institutions and their way of functioning (e.g. the city administration). In projects they can address the living conditions in their neighbourhood. Through role play and discussions they learn how to better present themselves in public, e.g. in media such as radio and television. Everyday issues are examined within the framework of discussions on health and family problems.

In all cases, it is important that the education and training opportunities offered are prompted and suggested by the children themselves, that the children are involved in the planning, that the times are chosen to fit in with the children's work schedule and finally that the location is within reach of their neighbourhood and place of work.

Vocational training in workshops run by the project organiser offers protection from exploitative working conditions and has a relatively high professional standard. However, it often does not reflect the conditions of the local market. By contrast, vocational training in small local businesses has the advantage of being close to actual market requirements and takes place under real working conditions. The children learn to handle whatever tools are available locally to produce goods that can be sold on the local market. Through their contact with customers, they learn to adapt to the requirements of buyers, to contribute their own ideas, to negotiate and to produce within a fixed time frame.

When small business training structures are used, the role of the social worker in street children programmes undergoes a change. Vocational training in small local enterprises requires professional monitoring and back-up from the responsible project agency. The social workers become companions and partners i.e. they sensitize the small entrepreneurs to the special problems of the children. They act as advisors and tutors, for example when it becomes necessary to make the other workers better understand the sometimes difficult behaviour of the children or to help provide an element of psycho-social stability. Using the problem-formulating method they can help the children to analyse problem situations as they occur and to develop adequate strategies.

3.5 Income-generating measures

The promotion of income-generating measures follows up the vocational training and should help the children to earn a better income with their newly acquired knowledge and capabilities. The task of social workers is to encourage the process by which the young people concerned reach a clear understanding about what they want in life. At the centre of this process is the issue of which paths and strategies meet their personal goals and are likely to improve their financial situation. These can include forming a cooperative, setting up savings groups (as early as the training phase) or taking out small loans in order to finance the purchase of basic equipment. So far, experience has shown that it is not easy, especially for marginalized children and young people, to gain a footing as a small-scale entrepreneur in the informal sector. For this reason, it is important that support programmes pay special attention to this area.

3.6 Support for families

Up to now, the provision of support to families has mainly played a role in cases where the children had fled an oppressive family situation in order to live on the streets for a certain period of time or permanently. Many of them remain in contact with their families. A significant number hope to return to their families.

However, in view of the situation that prevails in many of the families, the family is not always considered the best place for bringing up the children. In this respect, it is important to keep open an option to return, to establish contact with the family if the child so wishes, and to be available if a child wishes to discuss problems with parents, step-parents or siblings. The chances of successful reintegration into the family are much greater the shorter the time spent on the street. That is why, in the case of small children and those who have not yet spent a long time on the streets, social workers make a particular effort to trace their families and to find out whether a reacceptance into the family might be possible and under what conditions. In many cases, this is not a linear process but one that requires great persistence. The children and the families can always count on the help and advice of the staff working on such programmes.

A recurring observation that emerges in talks with street children is the poor quality of their relationship with the father, who is held responsible for massive physical and psychological abuse of the children and the mother. In contrast, there is a very strong emotional bond with the mother, even when the child has been living apart from its family for a longer period. This is also confirmed by research carried out in different Latin American countries. In a great number of cases, it is the mothers who bear the sole responsibility of providing for their families, and they feel abandoned when forced to deal with psycho-social problems.

For this reason, the provision of support to families, especially mothers, is increasingly regarded as an important adjunct to preventive social work with young people. The aim here is to help mothers deal with their responsibility to themselves and to their families. Individual counselling is offered in the course of house visits and private conversations. In women's groups, mothers learn that they are not alone with their problems and can benefit from the solidarity and support of other women. The project agencies can provide them with information about established women's groups, e.g. in the neighbourhood or within the church community. Such organisations can then offer encouragement and psychological support through various activities.

3.7 Leisure activities

The promotion of leisure activities as part of open youth work is guided by the general pedagogical aim of promoting the development of children and young people. These activities are generally of a social, entertaining and educational nature, e.g. in the fields of sport and physical exercise, media, art and culture.

For children who live and work on the streets, such activities offer a chance to relax and distance themselves from the difficulties of everyday life. They can take a break, at least a short time, from their habitual “sniffing” and actually have fun. They make contact with other children from the neighbourhood, they feel a part of this community, and they can experience what it is to be accepted by others.

Organized leisure camps can be used specifically for educational purposes and can serve as a bridge between the “old” and a “new” life. Here, the children gain important experiences which stand in stark contrast to those which have marked their lives up to now. They learn to comply with socially accepted norms of behaviour, they have to show staying power in the planning and implementation of projects, they learn to work out solutions collectively and to accept majority decisions. The children find an atmosphere where they can talk about their problems, where they are able to relate painful experiences, where they learn to listen to others and have the feeling of being heard.

While they are at the camps, many children are encouraged to reflect on their lives so far and to develop a new outlook. By the time they leave the camp, they may have decided to learn a trade, to attempt to resolve conflicts without resorting to violence or simply to join a youth group. Even when they do not take the step to give their lives a new direction, at least they have learnt things that they can use in their everyday lives.

Leisure activities like sport, music, dance, role playing and excursions are central elements of the preventive social work carried out by the many youth clubs and societies in the slum areas of big cities. These enjoyable activities take place in the course of group and club work in which the social worker has the role of advisor. Associations which admit excluded children and young people receive ongoing support from the social worker.

Their general aim is to channel the potential of marginalized children and young people in a positive direction by involving them in group activities.

3.8 Community Work/Networking

In community work, the project officers extend the radius of their activities beyond individual young people and youth groups to members of the community who are responsible for identifying and dealing with problems of young people.

It should be noted here that many inhabitants of city districts distance themselves from street children or react to them in an extremely hostile manner (e.g. when the police are called in) because of the children’s frequently delinquent (survival) strategies. Social workers should facilitate reconciliation, destigmatization and understanding by means of constructive criticism and solidarity. That is why community-based project work sets out to include the local population in the project as an important problem-solving resource.

Collaboration with people from the neighbourhood, the city district, the community and the apartment block therefore aims:

- => to sensitize the community to the difficult living conditions of the children and young people and to dismantle prejudices;
- ⇒ to promote a reconciliatory and supportive response to the situation of the children;
 - ⇒ to inform the children about the possibilities that are there for them in the neighbourhood, e.g. participation in leisure activities, informal training, youth groups,
 - ⇒ to train voluntary helpers, e.g. in associations, churches, grass roots groups in methods of dealing with the special problems, interests and needs of the children and demonstrate ways of integrating them.
 - ⇒ to involve the children in community-based projects, e.g. as part of neighbourhood redevelopment projects.

The programme agency and its pedagogical staff may, for example, support volunteers working in youth clubs as well as in recreational and cultural associations, or the employees of church organizations and members of the church community, helping them to make contact with the various target groups and involving them in their group activities. It is also the task of the project agency to monitor and evaluate these processes jointly with all those concerned.

3.9 Associations of working children and young people

In some developing countries (e.g. Senegal, Mali), labour associations of working children and young people exist on the neighbourhood, city and country level in the form of single-occupation groups and general associations. They build networks on the international level that serve to promote the exchange of information and experiences with other initiatives and organizations. They campaign for international standards, e.g. with regard to the working conditions of children. In a dialogue with government authorities and international organizations (e.g. the UN World Summit for Children), they make the voice of working children heard worldwide.

This organization of children into their own professional associations offers them the chance to meet regularly and discuss the problems they encounter at work. With the pedagogical back-up of project officials, they are encouraged to analyse their own working conditions and to develop strategies that will allow them to find solutions and take action at the level of the individual, the group and the association. They learn to see their personal living and working conditions not merely as their individual fate but to understand them as part of the social problems of society at large. Members are encouraged to take up training opportunities, to jointly demand better working conditions for children, and to represent the interests of working children in contacts with local politicians and as part of international campaigns for working children and children's rights.

3.10 Public relations / lobbying

An important working tool at the macro level is the dissemination of information to the public on the problems of children and young people. The project agency cooperates with local institutions, e.g. professional associations, youth clubs, neighbourhood groups, the printed media, radio and television, and conducts suitably effective campaigns that direct the awareness of the public towards the problems of the children. It makes its own position clear and encourages alliances among the population and with political representatives in order to bring about sustained improvements to the living conditions of the children and young people.

4. Acting in partnership

4.1. Local project responsibility

Caritas Germany adopts a participatory and collaborative approach to development work; our partners, regardless of whether they are church or non-church organizations, are encouraged to respond to the perceived needs of specific target groups and to begin a development process. This guiding principle reflects our conviction that sustainable development and processes of change are only possible when those involved assume responsibility themselves and when the programme that is to be implemented jointly with participants makes it possible to a considerable extent for them to help and organize themselves..

With regard to support programmes for children and young people living in difficult conditions, it is assumed that Caritas Germany's partners have gained a thorough knowledge of the living conditions of the target groups in question based on empirical study (analysis of social surroundings and environment). In all cases, responsibility for the elaboration of an overall project concept as well as the planning and implementation of activities lies with the partner, albeit with the active participation of the target groups.

The contribution of Caritas Germany serves mainly to support the development process as a partner through dialogue and professional advice and to make the funds available that will enable the partner to implement the programme

4.2 Professionalism

Professional social work with children and young people living in difficult conditions is not possible without qualified staff and the corresponding specialist resources. The preparation, coordination and subsequent assessment of the effectiveness of activities, as well as the participatory nature of social pedagogical work with children, whose behaviour demands a high measure of empathy and patience on the part of the educators, all make it vital to recruit highly qualified professionals. In order to achieve the highest possible level of professionalism, it is important that the project agency's staff are offered opportunities for in-service training as well as for the regular exchange of experiences with colleagues from either within the organization itself or from other organizations which carry out similar programmes.

In this context, the duty of the project agency is to provide the logistical, administrative and financial framework necessary to put quality standards into practice. Although it is the agency which determines the overall framework of the social work, it is nevertheless important that the expert teams are given enough leeway to develop innovative ideas and approaches and that project managers support them in putting these into action.

4.3 Back-up advisory service

Responsibility for the planning and implementation of the support programmes lies with Caritas Germany's partner organizations, which as a general rule employ local staff only. However, Caritas Germany can place external specialist advisors temporarily at its partners' disposal if they are needed to address certain key areas of the project.

This expert back-up can be provided at any point during a project cycle. Even at the early stage of drafting the project proposal, advisors can already be at work. Right at the beginning of any partnership, the main focus is on reaching a clear mutual understanding as to the objectives of the project, strategies and tasks.

During the planning phase, the advisor can provide support with research, particularly in obtaining relevant data on the living conditions of the children. In discussions and workshops, staff from the partner organization reach agreement on the visions and objectives of the project and on the corresponding implementation strategies. The advisors examine to what extent the eligibility criteria (focus on poverty alleviation, self-help and sustainability) are met. During this process, Caritas Germany will contribute its own ideas about the project as part of the advisory process. This refers especially to the development of innovative concepts and methods in pedagogical work with the children.

In the implementation phase it is the task of the back-up advisor to observe the project process periodically, to identify problems where they arise, discuss them together with the pedagogical staff and the project agency and, last but not least, to encourage the partner to look for appropriate solutions. One of the main tasks of the advisor is to enhance the levels of communication

and reflection within the project. In concrete terms, this means that planning has to be regularly adjusted to the real situation on the ground; that the attention of those involved also has to be drawn to issues that would not otherwise be routinely discussed; and that there has to be time for joint reflection on what has not yet been achieved and what needs to be achieved in the near future. This way, all participants, including Caritas Germany, remain in contact with the reality of the project and can help to bring about ongoing improvements in the quality of the work being carried out.

4.4 Providing long-term support

Comprehensive support programmes such as described above make great demands on all those involved. In order to achieve the desired objectives, we see a minimum time period of at least 6-10 years as necessary. It is quite possible for the interval between first making contact with the children and the first conversation about their personal situation to last a year. From the moment where it first occurs to a child that a new way of life could be possible until the point where this vision is put into action, 5 years and more may be required.

The improvement of family situations or the successful integration of a child into working life is not always a linear process. It is usually marked by set-backs and disappointments that make it necessary to provide long-term external support. Processes of social change are very slow and require patience on the part of the children and project staff. The main requirement for the success of the programmes is thus a long term co-operation between Caritas Germany and its partner organizations.

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