LEEDO’s response on Human Rights Challenges to the OHCHR

LEEDO is a local non profit and charity organization located in Bangladesh. It has been putting its utmost efforts to connect the hopeless, aimless, extremely disadvantaged children loitering or begging on the streets of Dhaka (capital city) and sometime getting trapped by the child traffickers. The children, if not rescued, have every chance to get associated with the drug addicts or getting hooked by the drug dealers. There are instances that many of the street children get victimized by the street gangs and commit various crimes time to time. There are not enough initiatives or practical support from the vast society to address this problem. Mr. Forhad Hossain, Executive Director of LEEDO always thought of helping the distressed people, and as such the burning issue of the street children touched his heart. On his own effort he started to help the street children from his school life, before it took its organizational shape.

We are alarmed by the findings of a recent study of the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) that said that 56 percent of the street children in the country are addicted to different kinds of drugs, while 21 percent of them are being used as carriers of drugs. The reason for the situation has also been identified that easy availability of drugs. 53 percent of the children surveyed saying they can buy drugs directly from the traffickers.

Children living on the streets are particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Now a days, there are a big number of Street Children like orphan, poor, beggar, abandon from parents, sexual abuse, trafficking, Special (Mentally & Physically challenges), in conflict with the law, unexpected, street sex worker, street working (domestic & hazardous) and lost etc. are seen on the street in a very vulnerable situation in Bangladesh. They come on the street due to extreme neglect, abandonment, immense poverty, hunger, natural calamities like flood, cyclone, drought, hills & mountains collapse etc., and lack of education & care of guardians, lack of child friendly school environment and care, physical, mental torture & abuse and above all social unawareness. Many street children work in hazardous and low-paying jobs to support themselves and their families. Street children are defined as children who have no home and live on the streets. The family may have left them or they no longer have a surviving family member. Usually they are fled out of the home for poverty, broken family, ignorance, punishment reasons etc. They come to the city by launch and train normally. After reaching the city, they became unsafe and vulnerable but as they to survive so they involve in various work for earning. As they ask minimum wages so people attend badly to appoint them as worker. Thus they involve in hazardous work and crime like drug bearing, drug selling etc. They live in stations, terminals under bridge and docks where they feel unsafe but they have no alternative option. For lack of shelter they sleep on the street and most of the times they become abused by bad intend people. Especially street living girls stay in risky zone. They are harassed sexually and they suffer unexpected pregnancy problem. For their loneliness, detachment from family, negligence, harassment physically and mental torture they remain frustrated. To reduce frustration and get rid of trauma they usually take drugs that hamper their physical and mental growth.

The issue of glue-sniffing and the broader issue of drugs addiction are also prevalent in Dhaka city where many street children are involved in the use of harmful psychoactive substances. This can lead to an overdose, increasing the risk of accidents, violence, unwanted pregnancy and unprotected sex. Continued use of the substance can lead to complications such as brain and liver damage. The most popular drugs among street children are inhalants like gum, acetone, gasoline, and paint thinner. This drug addiction is called “Dandy” and it is very much popular because it is very cheap and easy to access and using it has no legal consequences. The children of the street carry dendrites in a plastic bag and put their mouths in the plastic bag to inhale. Sometimes the children gather in groups to take turns to inhale. They also gather in public places to take the “Dandy” especially at the bus stations, train stations, launch terminals, footpaths, and footbridges.

LEEDO is obsessed of giving the best possible support to these children and acts on a fairly designed method. LEEDO executes its services through outreaching the children, giving them non formal education in the schools under the sky, providing them transitional shelters and finally putting them into the permanent home known as LEEDO Peace Home. Every step is carefully designed and completed systematically. We are rescuing them and rehabilitated them in our LEEDO Peace Home and other like minded organization for long term rehabilitation.

Just to mention a few success stories, in October 2022, LEEDO teen aged girls earned a lot of appreciation and inspiration from the spectators of the football matches held by the Street Child Football World Club in Doha, Abu Dhabi. Also, this year in the month of September, 2023 another team of boys and girls will be playing cricket being hosted by the Street Child Cricket World Club, in Chennai, India.

It is so commendable that one of the football player used to be serious drug addict and now she is absolutely free from drug after she was rescued and rehabilitated a few years ago. She is LEEDO’s pride-- Eti.

It is so delightful to hear when Eti says “LEEDO saved my life from the drug. I am so grateful to LEEDO.”

Recommendation to remove the drugs addicted street children and giving them the opportunity to lead a normal life.

Equally importantly, to rehabilitate this large number of street children who remain vulnerable to all kinds of abuse, mainly from drugs, the government should create a thorough database with updated information and take measures to ensure their wellbeing. Their education should be its number one priority. The children also need proper counseling to bounce back in life. There are many NGO and private organizations in the country who have been working to ensure their rights. If the government and these organizations work collaboratively, the situation can definitely improve for our street children, and they can be saved from the scourge of drug abuse.

We have applied SDG for remove the children from drug abuse which are placed below:

* SDG4: Offer education fitting to the needs and abilities of the street children, like the safe house.
* SDG8: Stop the worst forms of child labour, human trafficking, modern slavery and forced labour to protect the street children.
* SDG10: Empower street children to become active social, economic and political actors by giving them the means to through policy and laws. One example of that is to register them as citizens.
* SDG16: Increase awareness of the challenges facing street children within institutions meant to protect them.