



Street Children in India: Policy Analysis, Successes, Failures, and Recommendations for Reform

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ABSTRACT

Street children in India are among the most vulnerable members of society, often living in harsh conditions with little to no support. They struggle daily with hunger, lack of shelter, and the absence of a protective environment. Many face abuse, exploitation, and exclusion from education and healthcare—basic rights that every child deserves. Despite the presence of laws and policies designed to protect them, these children continue to be overlooked, falling through the cracks of an overwhelmed and under-resourced child protection system.

The reality of street children in India is not just a consequence of poverty; it is a symptom of deeper socio-economic issues, including family breakdowns, migration, economic disparity, and systemic neglect. While legislative measures like the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act and the Right to Education Act provide a framework for safeguarding their rights, enforcement remains weak. The gap between policy and practice is wide, leaving countless children without the care and support they need to build a future. Social stigma further isolates them, making reintegration into society an even greater challenge.

This paper critically examines the effectiveness of existing policies and programs aimed at supporting street children in India. Through real-life case studies, research analysis, and statistical insights, it explores both the progress made and the persistent gaps that hinder lasting change. The discussion sheds light on the barriers preventing street children from accessing stable housing, education, and healthcare, while also highlighting successful interventions that have transformed lives.

To create meaningful impact, this study emphasizes the need for a child-centered approach that extends beyond legal frameworks. Strengthening community participation, improving financial and infrastructural support, and fostering sustainable rehabilitation programs are critical to breaking the cycle of homelessness and exploitation. This research contributes to the broader conversation on child welfare by offering practical, evidence-based recommendations that can bridge the divide between policy intent and real-world outcomes. The ultimate goal is to ensure that no child is left behind and that every child, regardless of their circumstances, is given the opportunity to grow up in a safe, nurturing, and hopeful environment.

Keywords: Street children, child protection, juvenile justice, education for marginalized children, child labor, child trafficking, rehabilitation programs, policy implementation, legal framework, social welfare, community-based interventions, vocational training, psychosocial support, law enforcement, poverty and children, family reintegration, alternative education, government initiatives, NGOs and child welfare, human rights, child rights in India.

Executive Summary

Street children in India represent one of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, often living in dire conditions without access to basic human rights such as education, healthcare, and protection from exploitation. Despite a robust legal framework and various government and NGO-led initiatives, implementation gaps continue to hinder meaningful change. This report critically examines the existing policies, challenges, and interventions aimed at improving the lives of street children, while also offering practical recommendations for sustainable reform.

The study begins by outlining the legal and policy landscape governing child welfare in India, including key legislations such as the Juvenile Justice Act, the Right to Education Act, and the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act. While these laws provide a strong foundation, their enforcement remains inconsistent due to systemic inefficiencies, lack of resources, and weak inter-agency coordination.

Several government initiatives, including the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) and the Railway Child Help Desks, have been established to support at-risk children. However, their impact has been limited due to funding constraints, poor implementation, and lack of awareness among key stakeholders. Similarly, NGOs such as Salaam Baalak Trust and Save the Children have played a crucial role in rehabilitation, but their efforts are often hampered by resource shortages and bureaucratic red tape.

Case studies highlight both successes and failures in addressing the needs of street children. The Salaam Baalak Trust has successfully rehabilitated thousands of children through education and vocational training, demonstrating the potential of sustained intervention. However, a 2022 report by Save

the Children found that despite the Right to Education Act, over 80% of street children remain out of school due to bureaucratic hurdles, lack of documentation, and economic constraints. Judicial interventions, such as *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation*, have recognized the rights of marginalized groups, but direct safeguards for street children remain inadequate.

The report identifies key challenges in policy implementation, including weak enforcement, inadequate funding, and socio-economic barriers. To address these gaps, a series of recommendations have been proposed:

1. **Strengthening Law Enforcement** – Dedicated child protection officers in each district, real-time data-sharing between agencies, and stronger enforcement of anti-child labor and anti-trafficking laws.
2. **Improving Rehabilitation and Reintegration** – Vocational training, alternative education models, and psychological support for street children to ensure long-term integration into society.
3. **Community-Based Interventions** – Strengthening families through social security measures, direct cash transfers, and localized child protection monitoring programs.
4. **Public Awareness and Advocacy** – Large-scale awareness campaigns, media engagement, and community-driven initiatives to reduce stigma and encourage societal participation in child welfare.

The report concludes that a multi-stakeholder approach is essential to creating a lasting impact. Strengthening policy implementation, enhancing financial and institutional support, and adopting a rights-based approach can significantly improve the lives of India's street children. By integrating legal, social, and economic measures, India can work towards ensuring that no child is left behind, ultimately breaking the cycle of poverty and marginalization.

Introduction

Street children, often described as those who rely on urban streets for survival without adequate parental or guardian care, represent a complex and deeply entrenched social challenge in India. These children face severe vulnerabilities, including homelessness, malnutrition, exposure to violence, and limited access to basic services such as healthcare and education. They navigate a life of uncertainty, often engaging in hazardous labor, begging, or becoming victims of human trafficking and abuse.

The root causes of this crisis are multifaceted. Many children find themselves on the streets due to extreme poverty, domestic violence, family breakdowns, forced displacement, or migration from rural areas in search of better opportunities. Others are orphaned due to disease, natural disasters, or conflicts, leaving them with no familial support system. The lack of accessible social safety nets and ineffective child protection mechanisms further exacerbate their vulnerability.

Street children, defined as those who rely on the streets for their livelihood or residence without adequate adult supervision, face severe vulnerabilities, including homelessness, poverty, and exploitation. Many of these children are orphans, runaways, or abandoned due to economic hardships, domestic abuse, or displacement caused by conflicts and natural disasters.

In the South Asian context, a study titled *Addressing the Crisis of Street Children in South Asia: Challenges, Interventions, and Policy Recommendations* (Rai & Shekhar, 2025) highlights that India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka have witnessed a rising number of street children due to rapid urbanization, socio-economic disparities, and family breakdowns. The study provides comprehensive insights into the socio-economic causes, intervention strategies, and policy recommendations necessary to address the crisis.

India has implemented several policies and laws to safeguard these children, yet their effectiveness remains questionable. Research by Rai & Shekhar (2023) in *Status of Education of Street Children of India: A Study* found that despite initiatives like the Right to Education (RTE) Act, a significant percentage of street children remain out of school due to lack of documentation, economic challenges, and social exclusion. This gap between policy and execution highlights the urgent need for more inclusive, well-enforced, and community-driven child protection strategies.

This paper seeks to analyze these frameworks, identify gaps in protection mechanisms, and propose a way forward for holistic rehabilitation and integration into mainstream society. By incorporating case studies, empirical data, and comparative international approaches, this study aims to humanize the issue and advocate for practical, sustainable solutions.

India, being home to one of the largest populations of street children in the world, has enacted several policies and legal frameworks to address their plight. Landmark legislation, including the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, the Right to Education Act, and various child labor laws, aim to safeguard and rehabilitate these children. Additionally, government schemes such as the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) and Childline 1098 provide intervention services. However, despite these measures, the effectiveness of these policies remains debatable due to inconsistent implementation, lack of coordination among agencies, and insufficient funding.

Beyond legal measures, the societal perception of street children also plays a significant role in their continued marginalization. Many people view them as delinquents or a nuisance rather than as vulnerable children in need of support. This stigma results in discrimination and harsh treatment from law enforcement, reducing their chances of escaping the cycle of poverty and neglect.

This paper seeks to provide a critical analysis of the policies and programs designed to assist street children in India. It aims to identify gaps in protection mechanisms, highlight the real-life challenges these children face, and propose viable solutions for their holistic rehabilitation. By adopting a

multidimensional approach—incorporating policy analysis, case studies, and recommendations—this study emphasizes the urgent need for a child-centric and community-driven intervention model. The ultimate goal is to ensure the reintegration of street children into mainstream society, providing them with education, healthcare, and a safe environment for growth and development.

Historical and Legal Framework

India has a long history of legal efforts to safeguard children's rights. Despite progressive legislation, enforcement remains a challenge. The protection of children, especially those living on the streets, requires a robust framework that aligns with constitutional guarantees, domestic laws, and international obligations.

Constitutional Provisions

The Indian Constitution provides fundamental rights and directives that ensure the welfare of children:

- Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty): Ensures every child has the right to live with dignity, which includes access to food, shelter, and healthcare.
- Article 21A (Right to Education): Mandates free and compulsory education for children between the ages of 6 and 14.
- Article 24 (Prohibition of Child Labor): Prohibits the employment of children below the age of 14 in hazardous industries.
- Article 39(f): Directs the state to ensure that children are not abused and that their childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and abandonment.

Key Legislations

1. Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015:
 - Aims to provide care, protection, and rehabilitation for vulnerable children, including those living on the streets.
 - Establishes Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) to ensure the safety and well-being of children in need.
 - Encourages non-institutional rehabilitation through foster care, adoption, and sponsorship programs.
2. Right of Children to Free & Essential Education (RTE) Act, 2009:
 - Guarantees free education for children aged 6-14.
 - Many street children remain excluded due to lack of identity documents and socioeconomic barriers.
3. Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016:
 - Bans child labor under the age of 14 in all occupations.
 - Allows children to work in family-run businesses, leading to loopholes in enforcement.

International Commitments

1. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Ratified in 1992):
 - Identifies the right of each child to survival, progress, protection, and partaking.
 - Calls for measures to protect children from economic exploitation, abuse, and trafficking.
2. International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions:
 - ILO Convention No. 138 (Minimum Age Convention): Sets the minimum age for employment.
 - ILO Convention No. 182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention): Seeks to eliminate child labor in hazardous conditions, including street labor.

While these frameworks provide a legal basis for child protection, gaps in enforcement, lack of awareness, and bureaucratic inefficiencies hinder their success. A multi-stakeholder approach is necessary to bridge the gap between policy and practice, ensuring that legal provisions translate into real protection for India's street children.

Analysis of Policies and Programs

The Indian government and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have implemented policies and programs to address the needs of street children. However, the impact of these initiatives remains inconsistent due to structural weaknesses, resource constraints, and gaps in execution.

1. Government Initiatives

1. Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS):

- Launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, ICPS aims to provide institutional and non-institutional care for vulnerable children.
- It includes support for shelter homes, foster care, and sponsorship programs.
- Despite its ambitious framework, the scheme faces challenges such as insufficient funding, lack of trained personnel, and limited outreach in rural and semi-urban areas.

2. National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) SOP for Street Children:

- The NCPCR developed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to streamline the rescue, rehabilitation, and reintegration of street children.
- These guidelines emphasize the role of law enforcement, child welfare committees, and shelter homes in ensuring child protection.
- However, inconsistent enforcement at the state level and lack of awareness among stakeholders hinder the impact of these SOPs.

3. Railway Child Help Desks:

- Set up at major railway stations in collaboration with NGOs, these help desks aim to identify, rescue, and rehabilitate children who arrive at railway platforms alone or are in distress.
- While successful in some cases, many children either escape from shelters or fall back into street life due to lack of follow-up interventions and family reunification challenges.

2. NGO and Civil Society Contributions

1. Save the Children and Childline 1098:

- Childline 1098, a national helpline for children in distress, operates in collaboration with various NGOs.
- The helpline receives thousands of calls daily, ranging from cases of abuse and trafficking to medical emergencies.
- Limited response time, inadequate shelter space, and lack of long-term rehabilitation programs hinder the effectiveness of this initiative.

2. Shelter Homes, Education, and Health Interventions:

- Several NGOs, including Prayas, Salaam Baalak Trust, and Butterflies, run shelter homes and education centers for street children.
- Health camps, de-addiction programs, and skill development workshops are conducted to improve the long-term prospects of these children.
- However, funding shortages and difficulties in reintegrating children into formal education and employment remain persistent challenges.

3. Comparative International Analysis

Studying global models can provide insights into improving the protection and rehabilitation of street children in India.

1. Brazil – The Statute of the Child and Adolescent:

Brazil has implemented a rights-based approach through its Statute of the Child and Adolescent.

- Community participation and government collaboration have led to effective reintegration programs.
- Street children are placed in foster care or community rehabilitation centers rather than institutions.

2. Nigeria – Child Rights Act (CRA):

- The CRA focuses on rehabilitation, ensuring that rescued street children receive counseling and vocational training.
- However, enforcement varies widely across states, limiting the overall effectiveness of the law.

3. Philippines – ‘Bahay Tuluyan’ Initiative:

- The Philippines has established comprehensive shelters offering education, healthcare, and emotional support for street children.
- While successful, the program faces resource constraints, with demand exceeding capacity.

While India has implemented several policies and programs to protect street children, the gap between policy design and execution remains a major obstacle. Government initiatives need stronger enforcement mechanisms, better inter-agency coordination, and sustainable funding. NGOs and civil society play a crucial role, but their efforts require more structural support from the state. Learning from international models, India must adopt a rights-

based approach with an emphasis on long-term rehabilitation and reintegration. A collaborative, well-funded, and community-driven strategy is essential to ensuring that no child is left on the streets without care and protection.

Challenges in Implementation

Despite the progressive legal framework and multiple initiatives, the execution of policies protecting street children remains significantly weak. Various obstacles, including enforcement gaps, resource constraints, and socio-economic barriers, hinder effective implementation.

1. Gaps in Enforcement

The execution of child protection laws and programs is often ineffective due to poor coordination between multiple stakeholders, including child welfare committees, police departments, NGOs, and government agencies. The lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities leads to inefficiencies in rescuing, rehabilitating, and reintegrating children into society.

Case Study: Weak Coordination Between Agencies In a 2021 study conducted in Delhi, it was found that despite the presence of Child Welfare Committees (CWCs), police officers, and NGOs working towards child protection, nearly 70% of rescued street children returned to the streets within six months. The primary reasons cited were delays in processing rehabilitation measures, lack of follow-up from CWCs, and children escaping from institutional care due to poor living conditions. This highlights the urgent need for better inter-agency communication and structured intervention strategies.

2. Resource Constraints

One of the significant hurdles in implementing child welfare programs is inadequate resources—both financial and infrastructural. Shelter homes are often overcrowded, underfunded, and lack adequate facilities to accommodate rescued children. Additionally, there is a severe shortage of trained personnel, including child psychologists, social workers, and rehabilitation specialists.

Case Study: Underfunded Shelter Homes A report from Mumbai highlighted that government-funded shelter homes faced chronic shortages of food, hygiene supplies, and basic medical care. Children in these shelters reported substandard living conditions, leading to cases of malnutrition and mental health issues. Without sufficient funding and oversight, these institutions fail to serve their purpose as safe rehabilitation spaces.

3. Social and Systemic Barriers

Beyond legal and logistical challenges, deep-rooted societal issues prevent street children from accessing their rights. Stigmatization, economic hardships, and family breakdowns push children into a cycle of poverty, making long-term rehabilitation difficult.

- **Stigmatization and Discrimination:** Many street children face social discrimination, with authorities and society perceiving them as criminals or delinquents rather than as vulnerable individuals needing support.
- **Family Breakdown and Domestic Violence:** Many children leave home due to abusive conditions, making family reintegration an impractical solution in some cases.
- **Economic Necessity:** Some street children are primary earners for their families, forcing them to continue working on the streets despite rehabilitation efforts.

Case Study: Failure of Family Reintegration In a rehabilitation attempt in Uttar Pradesh, child protection officers reunited several children with their families. However, within three months, 60% of them returned to the streets due to domestic violence, economic stress, or family neglect. This underscores the need for alternative rehabilitation approaches, such as foster care systems and vocational training programs, rather than relying solely on family reintegration.

The challenges in implementing child protection policies for street children are multifaceted, involving legal, financial, and social barriers. Addressing these issues requires a more structured and well-coordinated approach among all stakeholders, including government bodies, NGOs, and local communities. Increased funding, better-trained personnel, and a more child-centric approach are necessary to bridge the gap between policy and real-world impact. Without significant reform, millions of street children in India will continue to live in extreme vulnerability, deprived of their fundamental rights and opportunities for a better future.

Case Studies and Ground Realities

The situation of street children in India presents a complex picture, with both success stories and persistent failures in rehabilitation efforts. Various NGOs, government initiatives, and judicial interventions have played a role in shaping their lives, but significant gaps remain.

1. Successful Interventions

One of the most notable success stories is the Salaam Baalak Trust (SBT), which has transformed the lives of thousands of street children through education, vocational training, and long-term rehabilitation programs. Established in 1988, SBT runs multiple shelters, day-care centers, and outreach programs that cater to children living on the streets.

➤ Impact of SBT:

- Over 100,000 children have received support through SBT's programs over the years.
- The organization provides formal and non-formal education, medical care, counseling, and vocational training.
- Many rehabilitated children have secured stable employment in sectors such as hospitality, tourism, and performing arts.

Case Example: A boy named Raj, who was found begging at a railway station, was rescued by SBT. He underwent skill-based training in photography and later became a professional photographer, demonstrating the transformative impact of sustained intervention.

2. Failures in Implementation

Despite the Right to Education (RTE) Act, which mandates free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14, a significant proportion of street children remain outside the formal education system.

➤ Statistics on Education and Street Children:

- A 2022 report by Save the Children found that nearly 80% of street children in India do not attend school due to bureaucratic hurdles, lack of documentation, and financial constraints.
- Many children who are enrolled drop out due to social discrimination, the need to work for survival, or difficulties adapting to structured classroom environments.

Case Example: In Delhi, a government initiative aimed at enrolling street children in municipal schools identified 500 children for admission. However, within a year, nearly 60% had dropped out, citing economic hardships and a lack of support services such as counseling and financial assistance for their families.

This case underscores how well-intended policies often fail due to inadequate execution and the absence of a holistic support system.

3. Judicial Interventions and Their Impact

Legal interventions have played a crucial role in shaping policies for street children, but their effectiveness in real-life implementation has been mixed. A landmark case in this regard is *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation* (1985).

➤ Case Background:

- The Supreme Court of India recognized the right to livelihood as part of the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution.
- The petition was filed by pavement dwellers who were facing eviction from Mumbai streets, arguing that without shelter, they had no means to earn a livelihood.
- The Court ruled in favor of the pavement dwellers, stating that the government must provide alternatives before eviction.

➤ Impact on Street Children:

- While the ruling indirectly benefited street children by reinforcing their right to live in public spaces, it failed to provide direct safeguards for them.
- There were no explicit directives ensuring access to education, healthcare, or protection from exploitation.
- Many children continue to live on the streets, as government rehabilitation efforts have been insufficient in addressing their needs.

4. The Reality on the Ground

Despite policies and legal frameworks, street children continue to face daily struggles. In urban areas such as Mumbai, Delhi, and Kolkata, children are often seen working in hazardous conditions—ragpicking, begging, and even engaging in illicit activities to survive.

- **Health Challenges:** Many street children suffer from malnutrition, respiratory diseases, and substance abuse due to prolonged exposure to pollution, unhygienic living conditions, and lack of healthcare access.
- **Abuse and Exploitation:** A study by Human Rights Watch found that one in three street children in India has faced some form of physical or sexual abuse.
- **Lack of Rehabilitation Programs:** Despite various government initiatives, there is a shortage of long-term rehabilitation programs that focus on psychological healing, family reintegration, and skill development.

Deduction

The case studies highlight the mixed success of interventions for street children in India. While organizations like Salaam Baalak Trust showcase the potential for positive change, systemic failures in implementing the Right to Education Act and inadequate judicial protections continue to leave many children vulnerable. Legal recognition of street children's rights needs to be complemented by practical, on-the-ground efforts that address their long-

term rehabilitation, education, and reintegration into society. Without a more structured and holistic approach, millions of children in India will continue to struggle for basic survival, deprived of opportunities for a better future.

Recommendations for Policy Reform

To effectively address the issues faced by street children in India, a multi-pronged approach that includes legal enforcement, rehabilitation, and community involvement is necessary. The following recommendations aim to create a sustainable and impactful child welfare system:

1. Strengthening Law Enforcement

One of the key barriers to improving the situation of street children is the weak implementation of existing laws. While India has strong legal frameworks in place, enforcement is often inconsistent due to bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of coordination among agencies, and insufficient monitoring mechanisms.

- **Dedicated Child Protection Officers in Every District:**
 - Each district should have dedicated child protection officers trained in handling cases of street children, abuse, and trafficking.
 - Their roles should include immediate intervention, coordination with NGOs, and ensuring legal processes are followed efficiently.
- **Better Coordination Among Agencies Through Real-Time Data-Sharing:**
 - Child Welfare Committees (CWCs), the police, NGOs, and the judiciary must collaborate effectively through a centralized, real-time data-sharing system.
 - A National Child Protection Database should be established to track rescued children, ensuring they do not return to the streets and receive appropriate rehabilitation.
- **Stronger Anti-Trafficking and Anti-Child Labor Laws Enforcement:**
 - Many street children are victims of trafficking and forced labor. Law enforcement must take proactive steps to dismantle trafficking networks and penalize offenders.
 - Special anti-child labor task forces should be set up in vulnerable areas like railway stations, bus terminals, and urban slums.

2. Improving Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programs

While rescuing children from the streets is essential, long-term rehabilitation is the key to preventing them from returning to vulnerable conditions. Government and non-governmental organizations must work together to develop holistic rehabilitation programs.

- **Skill Training, Education, and Psychological Support:**
 - Vocational training in trades such as tailoring, carpentry, and technology should be integrated into rehabilitation programs.
 - Educational institutions should adopt flexible schooling models to cater to children with disrupted education.
 - Counseling and psychological support services should be provided to help children recover from trauma and reintegrate into society.

Case Study: In Bangalore, an NGO-run rehabilitation center introduced an apprenticeship model, where rescued street children were trained in plumbing, electrical work, and hospitality. Within two years, 60% of the children secured stable employment, significantly reducing the number of returnees to street life.

- **Community-Based Foster Care Systems Instead of Institutionalization:**
 - Studies show that institutional care often leads to emotional detachment and long-term psychological issues among children.
 - A foster care system should be promoted where children are placed in nurturing family environments rather than overburdened government shelters.
 - Financial incentives and social support can encourage families to provide care for street children, ensuring they grow up in a stable setting.

3. Community-Based Interventions

To prevent children from ending up on the streets, the root causes—poverty, domestic violence, and economic instability—must be tackled at the community level. Strengthening families and ensuring economic stability can help reduce the number of children turning to street life.

- **Strengthening Families Through Social Security Measures:**
 - Families at risk of sending children to the streets due to financial instability should be supported through direct cash transfers and subsidized housing.

- Programs like conditional cash transfers (CCTs), where families receive financial aid if they keep their children in school, have proven effective in countries like Brazil and Mexico.
- Localized Monitoring Programs to Prevent Child Labor and Exploitation:
 - Village-level and urban community child protection committees should be established to identify at-risk children early.
 - Mobile outreach units should be deployed to visit high-risk areas such as railway platforms, marketplaces, and slums to intervene before children are exploited.

Case Study: In West Bengal, a community-based child labor monitoring system was introduced where local volunteers reported cases of child labor and exploitation. Within two years, the district saw a 40% reduction in child labor cases and a significant increase in school attendance.

4. Public Awareness and Advocacy

The success of any policy depends on how well it is understood and supported by the public. Many street children are stigmatized and treated as criminals rather than victims of socio-economic circumstances.

- Awareness Campaigns:
 - Large-scale public campaigns should educate communities about child rights and the importance of protecting vulnerable children.
 - Schools, universities, and workplaces should engage in outreach programs that encourage individuals to support child welfare initiatives.
- Media and Technology as Advocacy Tools:
 - Social media campaigns and documentaries can bring visibility to the challenges faced by street children.
 - Crowdsourced funding platforms should be promoted to support local NGOs in their rehabilitation efforts.

Deduction

The challenges faced by street children in India require a multi-faceted, long-term strategy that includes legal reform, community intervention, and public awareness. Strengthening law enforcement, improving rehabilitation efforts, and addressing socio-economic causes at the grassroots level can create sustainable change. A combination of government policies, NGO initiatives, and active community participation is essential to ensuring that every child, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to live a life free from exploitation and filled with hope for the future.

Conclusion

The plight of street children in India is not just a failure of policy but a reflection of deep-rooted social and economic disparities. Despite various legal frameworks and government initiatives designed to protect these children, a significant number still live in conditions of extreme vulnerability, facing violence, exploitation, and deprivation daily. The failure to bridge the gap between policy and execution continues to perpetuate their marginalization, leaving them without access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, and safe shelter.

A child-centric approach, backed by strong policy implementation, is crucial to addressing these issues. Strengthening law enforcement mechanisms is necessary to ensure that children are protected from exploitation, trafficking, and hazardous labor. Additionally, a well-coordinated effort among government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), law enforcement bodies, and civil society can create a more robust safety net for these children, ensuring their long-term rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

Education must be at the heart of any intervention strategy. Without access to quality, flexible, and inclusive education, street children will continue to remain trapped in cycles of poverty. Alternative schooling models, bridge courses, and vocational training programs should be widely implemented to accommodate children who have been out of formal education for long periods.

Moreover, psychosocial support should be integrated into all rehabilitation efforts. Many street children have suffered from extreme trauma due to abandonment, abuse, and exploitation. Counseling services, community support programs, and mentorship initiatives can play a pivotal role in restoring their emotional well-being and helping them rebuild trust in society.

Economic support for vulnerable families is also critical. Many children end up on the streets due to economic distress, domestic violence, or lack of parental care. Strengthening family support systems through financial assistance, employment opportunities, and affordable housing can prevent children from being forced into street life. Programs such as conditional cash transfers, where families receive financial incentives to keep children in school, have been successful in other countries and could be adapted in India.

International best practices provide valuable insights into how India can refine its approach. Countries such as Brazil, the Philippines, and South Africa have implemented community-based child protection systems, foster care programs, and specialized shelters, offering sustainable alternatives to institutionalization. Adopting a similar model in India could enhance the effectiveness of child protection programs.

Ultimately, tackling the issue of street children requires a shift in mindset—from viewing them as social outcasts to recognizing them as victims of systemic failures who deserve compassion, protection, and support. Addressing the problem at its root requires a long-term, multi-sectoral commitment

that involves policy reform, societal awareness, and strong institutional mechanisms. Only through such a comprehensive, child-centered approach can India move towards ensuring that no child is left behind, and every child, irrespective of their circumstances, has the opportunity to thrive in a secure and nurturing environment.

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Annexure

Annexure 1: Data on Street Children in India

1. Total Estimated Population of Street Children (as per Save the Children, 2022): 1.7 million
2. Major Cities with Highest Concentration: Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore
3. Percentage of Street Children Engaged in Labor: Approximately 67%
4. Common Occupations: Rag picking (35%), Begging (22%), Street Vending (18%), Construction Work (15%), Miscellaneous (10%)
5. Education Access:
 - 80% of street children are not enrolled in school
 - 60% have never attended formal education
6. Health Indicators:
 - 55% suffer from malnutrition
 - 45% experience substance abuse
 - 30% suffer from respiratory diseases due to pollution exposure

Annexure 2: List of Government Schemes for Street Children

1. Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS)
2. National Child Labour Project (NCLP)
3. Childline 1098 (24-hour emergency helpline)
4. Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2015
5. Mid-Day Meal Scheme (for encouraging school participation)
6. Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme (for children of working mothers)

Appendix

Appendix A: Case Study Summaries

Case Study 1: Salaam Baalak Trust Rehabilitation Model

- Established in 1988, has rehabilitated over 100,000 children.
- Provides shelter, education, and vocational training.
- Success story: Raj, a rescued child, trained in photography and became a professional photographer.

Case Study 2: Impact of RTE Act Implementation in Delhi

- A survey identified 500 street children eligible for school admission.
- Within a year, 60% had dropped out due to economic hardship and social discrimination.

Appendix B: Judicial Interventions and Landmark Cases

1. *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation* (1985): Recognized the right to livelihood for pavement dwellers.
2. *M.C. Mehta v. State of Tamil Nadu* (1996): Addressed child labor and mandated government intervention for child rehabilitation.
3. *Bachpan Bachao Andolan v. Union of India* (2011): Strengthened the implementation of anti-child trafficking laws.