

Education as a tool for empowering Kenya's street children for realization of Millennium Development Goals

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Abstract

Education is an empowering process that enables those who have been marginalized in the social, economic, political and cultural spheres to claim their status as fully participating members of the society. Nevertheless, research conducted in Kenya reveal that about 300,000 street children in Kenya have had no formal education and are hardly proficient in the two co-official languages used in the country – English and Swahili- languages in which vital information leading to improved livelihoods and participation in national development is available. Drawing evidence from a study on the literacy and numeracy needs of street children in Kenya, the paper argues that street children need to be equipped with appropriate knowledge through acquisition of numeracy, language and literacy skills for them to be fully empowered to be able to participate in the country's development and by extension help the country in the achievement of the first and second Millennium Development Goals: eradicating extreme hunger and poverty, and achievement of universal primary education.

KEY WORDS: street children, education, empowerment, millennium Development Goals, national development, universal primary education

Introduction

The survival of a nation in the present world depends on that nation's knowledge of the environment, its economic output, the technical skills of its population in the areas of agriculture, land use, human rights, tourism and the knowledge of information technologies in order that the nation may gain easy access to global knowledge. To attain all this, the country must focus on achieving education for all citizens for it is only through education that these great goals can be achieved. Nevertheless there are many children who live in extremely difficult circumstances, some of them living on the streets, who do not have a hope of ever achieving literacy and

numeracy skills because they have not been to school and they feel they are now too old to be admitted to regular schools. Such children have lost hope of ever achieving their dreams and aspirations. This trend ought to change and the society should address the plight of such children.

One important way of empowering children in especially difficult circumstances is ensuring that they access quality education, and making sure that they are able to function in the global arena. In this connection, acquisition of international languages, particularly, English is significant. English in Kenya, for example, is the official language of communication as well as the medium of instruction in schools. Those who master it reap many academic, social and professional benefits. It is a language acquired through formal instruction thus the children who do not attend school, such as the street children found in many urban centres in Kenya, hardly acquire competence in the language thus are disadvantaged when it comes to national and international communication.

Statement of the Issue

Education is a cornerstone to successful life and for survival of children in the real world. Indeed as an American educationist J. Gibbs (2004) observes, education is the principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values preparing him/her for later professional training and helping him/her to adjust normally to his/her environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he or she is denied the opportunity of an education. Yet education is something that is often lost to the street children and other children in extremely difficult circumstances in Kenya and elsewhere. Despite the various studies and research conducted to uplift the life of street children in Kenya, little has been done to address their literacy and numeracy needs, with an aim of empowering them for integration in national development.

Rationale of the Study

Kenya, as a signatory of the UN Charter on the Rights of the Child, must ensure that no child is discriminated against in whatever way. All children have a right to food, shelter, clothing, education, information, and life. UNESCO, of which Kenya is a member, stresses the right of human beings to a language of communication. Street children, though disadvantaged, are

entitled to all the afore-mentioned rights. In-as-much as street children in Kenya are not adequately being prepared for academic pursuit, they need life, literacy and numeracy skills to enable them to operate in society hence the need to study and document their literacy and numeracy levels.

Furthermore, the ability to communicate effectively in the society empowers individuals socially and economically. If the street children are empowered linguistically through the language and literacy program, there is high possibility that they will be able to adjust socially and be able to integrate within the wider society. Eventually, they will be able to involve themselves in economically viable activities such as trading, sales and marketing, thus be able to positively contribute to national development.

The lack of proper specially tailored curriculum for the street children makes it very hard for street children who had intended to leave the streets to fit into the regular classrooms (Eshiwani, 1993). In most cases the frustration leads them back to the streets where they continue to involve themselves in anti-social activities that are not healthy for the economic growth of the country. Perhaps, having a centre for these children where they will go through an acceleration program and receive basic counselling to prepare them to transit from the streets to the regular schools will impact on them positively and discourage them from engaging in anti-social behaviour or returning to the streets.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Term ‘Street Children’

The United Nations (1985) define a street child as any girl or boy for whom the street has become his or her abode and/or source of livelihood; and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults. According to Black (1991), the term street children was first coined in the early 1980’s as an evocative term to draw attention to a growing phenomenon around the world. Several definitions have so far emerged from literature. For example, Schurink (1993) as cited in Grundling & Grundling (2006) defines a street child as a boy or a girl who is under the age of 18 and who left his/her home environment part time or permanently because of problems at home or at school. Such a child spends most of his/her time

unsupervised on the street as a subculture of children who live an unprotected communal life and who depend on themselves and on each other, and not on adult for the provision of physical and emotional needs such as food, clothing, nurturing, direction and socialization.

Mugo (2004), on the other hand, uses the term street children to collectively represent different subcategories of destitute and delinquent children such as working children, child labourers, and children in conflict with the law; abused, abandoned and neglected children in dire need of help. The common denominator is that all these children are found on the street. They suffer various degrees of deprivation: familial, educational and occupational. Most of them have lost contact with their families and have adopted the street as their home.

Street children are recognized by different terminologies in different countries. Rane (1994) notes that in the USA, they are referred to as homeless or runaway. In Papua New Guinea, they are young rascals and in India, they are referred to as street children. In Kenya, they are called parking boys. The name “parking boys” arises from their main occupation of directing motorists into empty parking slots in the urban centres in exchange of some few coins. The use of such demeaning terms to describe these children diminishes their sense of self- worth.

Street children generally are children who in most cases are out of place, having been dislocated from places generally regarded as being normal for children: school and a family. Dallape (1987) captures the reality of the world’s street children. They live alone; are undernourished since birth; are denied affection, education and help; live without love; survive by expedience, by theft and by violence; coalesce into gangs and re-invent a family, a structure they have never known. They are children who are used unscrupulously by others, mistreated, imprisoned, and even eliminated; children whom the world tries to forget or ignore; children who see grown-ups as their enemies; children nobody comforts. Tomorrow, these street children will be men and women. They need our love. They need our attention. They need a father. They need a mother. They need a friend.

The problem of street children still remains among the greatest challenges facing the people and the government of Kenya (Mugo 2004). The rate at which the number of street children has been increasing despite the numerous interventions by government and NGOs is a major concern. The

phenomenon of street children in Kenya dates back to the colonial days (between 1890s and 1963). With the emergence of large urban centres, street children have now become a part of the new development. It is estimated that Kenya has over 300,000 street children (UNICEF, 2000) and the number is rising.

What Pushes Children to the Streets?

Several factors lead children to leave their homes and migrate to the streets of large urban centres: war and conflict, abuse and neglect, domestic violence, single parenthood, the AIDS pandemic, loss of parental control, rebellion, weakening of traditional family systems, orphanhood and poverty. Coupled with these factors is the fact that majority of the street children come from large families with severe financial hardships. Half a million children in Kenya today have lost contact with their families as a result of these factors (Suda 1997). Such children are currently living under very difficult circumstances as orphans, refugees, child labourers and street children. As these children grow up, the girls gradually drift into prostitution while boys tend to become hardcore criminals if nothing is done to rehabilitate them.

Street children are essentially an urban phenomenon. With growing industrialization, the process of rural-urban migration has caused disintegration of family leading to many social problems including juvenile vagrancy (Rane, 1994). As a result of the disintegration, children are unhappy, often neglected or mistreated by their parents and step-parents; ultimately, they run away from home. Many street children interviewed for this study reported that they left their home as a result of exploitation either at home or in workplaces. Some of them had worked as domestic or farm workers and they suffered abuse and maltreatment from their employers.

Poverty has been cited as one of the main push factors that drive children to the streets and the migration trends are enhanced by increased globalization (Mugo, 2004). The effects of absolute poverty in families are usually dehumanizing and devastating. Poverty affects not only the family and the community, but also the physiological well being of the child. Older siblings in poor families must care for the younger ones and they often find themselves pulled to the urban centres in the hope of finding greater opportunities.

The impact of HIV/AIDS on the family and society in general is another contributing factor. Many children are left orphans and in abject poverty. The disease continues to attack the most productive age groups among the population, thus leaving many children without one or both parents and adding stress to grandparents who have to support growing numbers of orphans. The children, seeing the situation they are in, think of alternative means of supporting themselves and go to the streets. Thus, the connection between HIV/AIDS, poverty, abuse and homelessness has been documented as contributing to flow of children to the streets (Mugo, 2004).

The effects of industrialization have been felt both in urban and rural areas and have contributed in one way or the other to the migration of children from their homes to the streets especially because of the pull of people from rural to urban areas, thus bringing about many slum dwellings and in turn the phenomenon of street children. A number of the children who come to the streets originate from the neighbouring slums, where there is overcrowding in the house, violence, physical abuse and a number of domestic stresses and broken marriages. Children are pushed to the streets by especially physical abuse and lack of basic necessities such as food, shelter and clothing. Thus with time, children leave their homes and start to adopt streets and other public spaces in the urban areas as their permanent abode.

Black (1991) observes that the sight of the growing numbers of street children shows that for more and more families, migration, poverty, low pay, early marriages, rapid child bearing, and crowded slum living were putting pressure on key value systems. Black further observes that as the process of urbanization and industrialization move ahead, the street children become familiar figures of the urban landscape.

Life on the Streets

Street children in Kenya and elsewhere are compelled to live in sub-human conditions. They lack facilities for safe drinking water, sanitation, immunization and other facilities that children their age require. Most of the time, they beg, scavenge in garbage heaps to collect rags, paper, plastic and bottle caps to earn some money for food and clothing. A majority of them work and even live their entire life on urban streets struggling with ignorance, abuse, exploitation and neglect of adults who should in reality be their protectors and their guardians. In many markets in the

urban centres, street children carry too heavy loads for their size and do jobs that destroy their physical and mental health.

The place of abode for street children is the streets, bus stops and railway stations, bridges, beneath flyovers, bazaars, shop pavements and disused buildings in the urban centres. This is their “home”; where they retire to at the end of the day. They protect themselves against cold with plastic sheets or cardboards. They smoke cigarette stubs, bhang and sniff petrol to help them forget their squalid existence for a while (Undugu Society, 1980). They then grow up in such harsh conditions without love, care and supervision of the adults.

The children abuse drugs while on the streets because they wish to let go the stresses and unhappiness in their lives. When sober, they are always thinking and worrying about how they can change their lives. They thus sniff glue and petrol to stave off hunger pains, to help them not feel cold, and mostly to forget what their lives are like (Makope 2006). With drugs, the street child has the illusion of entering a different world, escaping from the real world; the child convinces himself or herself that something better awaits him or her. The street child has been neglected, rejected, hit, abused and even raped by some members of the society. Under the drugs’ effect, the children see visions, and may start to hallucinate, getting high and believing they can even fly away to a land far from all their problems.

The older street children bully the newcomers and fights are frequent. Girls on the streets, on the other hand, quickly lose their virginity and imitate the bad habits of the older street girls; many of them already established prostitutes who talk about their patrols, looking for men who will pay them money to have sex with them. Young street girls get initiated into the trade of selling their bodies for their survival on the streets. Sadly, before running to the streets, most of the girls have been raped by their step fathers or step brothers (Klich, 1990) and they fall into worse problems when they escape to the streets.

Klich (1999) captures the life that street children in Mexico City lead: everything is thrown in their faces- aggressive nicknames, ruthless laughter, plunder, sneering, ridicule, the scar that never heals, manhandling and all sorts of crudeness. In the streets, the children wash windshields, and swallow fire. They are jugglers, clowns, prestidigitators; they put balloons on

their behinds and dance until the balloons blow up. Sometimes they fly to the skies under a yellow balloon. Almost all passers-by are indifferent to the magic in their faces and their hands. The red light never stops for them and the show goes on till early in the morning. Amidst all they try to do to interact with the immediate society, the street children in Mexico City are isolated in every way.

Poniatowska (1999) observes that street children in urban areas are skinny, dirty and with dilated eyes. When they suffer broken bones, they do not go to hospital and they wait for the bone to heal itself. When it rains, the streets get flooded and everything is soaked. Nevertheless, the street is an addiction to the children. They own it. It compensates for the loneliness, rejection and lack of love that they have to face every day. The street lures them. It gives them money they never got while at home. It gives them rhythm, tempo, and immediate retribution. In the streets they find a replacement family in street gangs, which offer them friendship, security, recognition and even employment- things missing at home (Dunford, 1995)

Yet despite all this, they are both heroic in their quest for a better life and quietly prophetic of a tragic tomorrow if we do not defend their rights and respond to their needs. Their message often goes unheard and their lives go untouched as the government plans and initiates programs of community development, urban basic services and international cooperation (Dallape, 1987). The urban societies treat them as social outcasts and for this reason, the street children mistrust society and look at any outsider or stranger with suspicion. The public uses words such as hooligans, delinquent and vagrant to describe the street children (Ayuku, 2001). Alienated and insulted by society, the children suffer from low self-esteem despite their considerable achievements in surviving in the face of terrible odds.

A proportion of street children have lost contact with their families, sometimes because they are not wanted, sometimes because 'home' is so distressing they have left on their own accord. However, a number of the children find themselves on the street of a big city without being aware of what is happening to them. Dallape (1987) notes that in countries hit by drought and famine, young children are sent to town with friends and once there, they are abandoned and do not know how to get back. Others are sent to the streets by their parents in order to get money and they must bring back some money home by any means. Still a few children do not know

where they come from and can hardly remember their parents or siblings. They only know the street as their home, their school, their playground and as their place of work. Many of them engage in risky behaviour, developing a sub-culture of their own and adopting the street as both a workplace and habitat (Black, 1993). Divorced from a stable social environment, these street children easily descend into petty thieving, which often develops into more serious criminality

Contrary to common beliefs, street children are not always harmful and maladjusted; some street children have been identified to possess sound and healthy personalities. Aptekar (1996) observes that street children are not lazy and idle as many think. Some of them work and survive by justifiable income-earning methods such as car washing and errand running. They also have identifiable abodes and families in form of street groups, and they only live and work on defined territories. This shows that the street children are fully functioning human beings.

On a positive note, street children have a great attitude towards work, a lesson that the society can borrow a leaf from. They know how to survive and they seem to have the strength to deal with all sorts of problems, to cope with them and to solve them and/or prevent them (Nieuwenhuizen, 2006). They see their work as a way of earning one's living through offering service to people. Because of living on the streets for so long, most street children are capable of doing almost everything. No work is humiliating to them provided it brings money at the end of the day, and the child is therefore assured of buying some food.

As Mugo (2004) observes, the eventual solution to the never-ending dilemma in the streets lies in prevention – at the heart of every community and in the conscience of every society- and asks us all to work together upon this long term agenda as well as within our local hands-on with the street children themselves. It should be a common cause that we should all come together for. If we were to do so, the problem facing the children of the street would surely remain silent no more.

Stigmatized Children

The street child in Kenya has been stigmatized. He is called a thief, a prostitute, public menace, idler and the like and such social labels belie the behavioural complexity and personal variation behind each street child. Donald & Swart-Kruger (1996:202) reports of a street boy who felt that

people did not want to see street children; that it was as if they were a bad dream. He felt that people did not love them; that they treated them worse than animals. The boy added that such people forget that the street children are people too, with feelings. Such feelings show that the street children feel alienated from the rest of the society. They feel that the society does not care whether they die or live. There is need for mutual understanding and communication between the two parties and language should play a significant role.

Apteker (1996) observes that street children all over the world are treated badly and that they have been sold into what amounts as servitude and have been murdered for no more than committing petty crimes or simply being naughty. Boyden, as cited in Apteker (1996), puts forward the idea that street children become the objects of moral judgment because they violate the norms of society by not being under the same roof as their parents, by working instead of being in school, and by assuming the right to enjoy the fruits of their work as they choose (consuming drugs or alcohol). But is this indeed the case?

The public perceives the street children as social reprobates in need of correction. Some members pity the children while others despise them. As Black (1991) notes, such perceptions are influenced by the street children's looks and behaviour, as many are dirty and ill kept. As a result, many street children are subjects of harassment and many are arrested and taken to jail, where they stay for long alongside many adult offenders, brutalizing surroundings of the cell notwithstanding.

In Kenya, as elsewhere, street children have come to represent the moral decay and large-scale social problems in the society, including inequality of income, and changing family values. As Lugalla and Kibasa (2003) note, when people look into the eyes of impoverished street and working children, they are confronted by the breakdown of their society and insecurity of their future. Thus, there are many suspicions and misunderstandings between street children and the wider society.

Most people pity the street children and think of them as abused and neglected but do not do anything beyond that. The common reaction is that of contempt and animosity due to their tricks, ragged appearance and general unmanageability. It goes without saying that the uses that street

children make of the street do not agree with what people regard as normal, acceptable or common. Thus the street children are seen as a representation of a deviation from society's norms resulting in all sorts of negative reactions- physical mental and sexual abuse and limited access to a variety of amenities including public buildings and government services (Dallape, 1987).

Street children are difficult to accept among people who do not understand them and their tribulations. A case in point is when they go to hospital, and they are either turned away or handled with suspicion, probably because they are dirty and dressed in tatters. One wonders where they are expected to go when they, just like any other human being, fall sick. In Mexico, many street children are killed and none is arrested for the killings (Klich, 1990). For example, drivers run over them but they are never caught, as if the life of a street child does not count.

A particular group that street children dread most is the police, with their infamous swoops and the resultant harassment. Most street children are reported to fear police officers that they feel regard them as thieves, beggars and criminals. Many street children are arrested without evidence and detained in juvenile prisons, institutions that at times are unfit for the children's health and general development. They talked of police mistreatment once they get arrested. They are robbed off their possessions; they are abused; and sometimes they are killed. As Dallape (1996) observes, since street children have no political power and often have no relatives to intervene, they are an easy target for the arbitrary power of the police. There is some extent of violence applied on the children and the whole exercise of arresting them comprises to some degree child abuse.

Need for Educational Empowerment

While poverty has been noted as the root cause of the population and environmental crisis in the developing world, dealing with poverty also presents the easiest point at which to break the cycle (Clark, 1996). To address poverty globally, education has to be made accessible to all. Children should be able to complete at least primary education, and, through education, get formal or informal jobs that will enable them to meet their basic needs. All nations should make this happen. Education has the power to make a difference in a person's life and in the world. Street

children have aspirations. They want to make a home; do well; celebrate life's joyful times, and to strive for their children's future (Black, 1991).

Education is perceived and valued as an indispensable vehicle for development and quality living. Noting the important role that education holds in global development, the United Nations, in its Universal declaration of human rights, states that everyone has a right to education and that education was no longer a privilege. Echoing the fundamental role of education in Kenya, President Kibaki (2003) notes that ignorance is the biggest obstacle to the fight against poverty. He adds that a Kenyan without education is not empowered to take advantage of life's opportunities.

Most street children have had limited if any schooling. Black (1991) reports that most of the street children she interviewed in Manila had received no formal education and most of them came from the slums where they learnt the ways of the working world at their mother's knee and started earning at an early age. Most of these children were malnourished and their parents were too poor to afford proper housing, food and clothing for themselves and the children. Formal education was then seen as luxury that the slum dwellers could not afford it.

Education is held in very high regard in Kenya because everybody knows that without it, there is no passport to a better place in life. In this connection, Kenya spells out her national goals of education through which her aspirations are met (Government of Kenya 2006). One of the goals listed in the manual is to promote social, economic, technological and industrial needs for national development. This means that education in Kenya should:

- a) Prepare children for the changes in attitude and relationships, which are necessary for the smooth process of a rapidly developing modern economy.
- b) Produce citizens with skills, knowledge, expertise and personal qualities that are required to support a growing economy.
- c) Provide learners with the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes for industrial development.

These objectives relate very well to the objectives of primary education in Kenya. But how do the street children achieve the aforementioned? They have not received any formal education. Where do they come in so that they too can be prepared to participate in nation building? Something needs to be done to address their educational needs, hence the proposal of an Education for Life Centre that would facilitate street children's enrolment in formal education.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study was mainly qualitative which entailed describing phenomena as they naturally occurred in the field. The rationale for the choice of using qualitative research was mainly because the researcher needed to understand the subjects and to comprehend their experiences and aspirations. It was only after such an observation and understanding of the subjects that interventions that would address their situation could be put in place. The researcher wished to have the street children as participants in the quest to understand their educational challenges and their aspirations, and what they thought about enrolling in formal educational institutions. The qualitative methods were therefore ideal in enabling the researcher to interact with the street children, the research subjects in the study, in their natural setting: the urban streets of Nairobi.

Qualitative approaches were useful in arriving at adequate description of the field and concise understanding of the interactions that ensued between the researcher and the street children. As Mugo (2004) argues, the values of qualitative research such as openness, subject-orientation, introspection, research-phenomenon interaction, induction, historicity and argumentative generalizations of results comprise the main arguments for the preference of the approach in many studies that adopt qualitative design. From the interviews and tape recordings, explanations were given regarding language situation, literacy and numeracy levels, aspirations of the street children, which in turn inform the designing of an English language curriculum for the street children in Kenya and proposal for establishment of education for life centre.

Population and the Setting of the Study

As mentioned in the research scope section, the population of the study is Kenya's street children and the accessible population comprise the street children in Nairobi City. There are wide

varieties of standards of living in Nairobi. Most wealthy Kenyans live in Nairobi but the majority of Nairobians are poor. Over half of the population is estimated to live in slums, which cover just 5% of the city area. The growth of these slums is as a result of urbanization, poor planning and the unavailability of loans for low income earners. Kibera and Mathare slums are the largest, Kibera being one of the largest in Africa.

Basic amenities such as water and toilets are unavailable in most of the slums. Water must be purchased by those who can afford it, often at the expense of food for the children. Most slum dwellers are unemployed and live in abject poverty. Conditions in the slums are generally pathetic, with incidences of illicit brew and other criminal activities being reported now and then. A number of times, the shelters in the slums are demolished or are burnt down and slum dwellers are rendered homeless thus making worse an already bad situation. As a result, there are many street children in Nairobi due to the poor living conditions and poverty experienced in the slums. The fact that Nairobi has the most number of street children in Kenya is a rationale enough to have it as the most appropriate setting for a study that deals with street children in Kenya.

Sample and Sampling Procedures

Data were collected from a sample of 120 street children: 90 boys and 30 girls. As noted earlier (cf. chapter 2), street boys are more than street girls hence the rationale to have more boys than girls in the sample. The researcher used judgmental sampling and networking procedures to reach the required sample. The underlying principle of judgmental sampling entails identifying in advance the target variables. This then presupposes the type of respondents to be studied. Street children of age range of ten to eighteen years were to comprise the sample hence the need to use judgmental sampling to have only those street children with the required characteristics forming the sample.

The concept of social network (Milroy, 1980; Milroy and Margrain, 1980) looks at an individual in a society as having specified networks of relationship with other individuals whom he or she depends on and who in turn depend on him or her. Such a network enables one to reach a member of the sample through “a-friend-of-a-friend” approach. The researcher needed to get socialized to the field and to the street children. To achieve this, he had to enter the field through

a contact person, an administrator at the Kenya Street Children Rehabilitation Trust, who in turn introduced the researcher to a few street children who then became the researcher's contact persons in the field. Through the contact persons, the researcher was able to reach many street children. Thus by identifying a contact street child it was possible to reach the required sample, after judging whether a potential member fitted within the required category.

Data Collection Methods

Every street child in the sample was interviewed for thirty minutes on their educational background, aspirations, and educational challenges they foresaw in relation to realization of their career aspirations. The study used several methods of data collection. First was the interview, which was structured to obtain data related to levels of their literacy and numeracy skills. The rationale to use interview method rests on the premise that many of the street children had not been to school and would not have been able to read and fill in a questionnaire. The researcher was able to obtain information on the street children's bio-data, educational background, and factors that pushed them to the streets. In addition, information on their level of proficiency, how far they went in their school, ability to read and write, calculate simple arithmetic among others was obtained through interview.

The researcher explained to the street children that he would tape-record them. It was felt important to inform them about this since it would be unethical to tape-record them without their permission. The researcher showed the respondents the tape recorder and gave them a chance to talk into it and be tape-recorded. Then he played it back so that they would become familiar with the tape-recording process and thus, reduce the effect of the Observer's Paradox.¹ Contrary to the researcher's expectations, the street children had no problem with being tape-recorded and their stories were tape-recorded in a very natural and elaborate way, even though they had not used a tape-recorder before.

The researcher made sure that he had at least two tape-recorders in order to guard against malfunctioning. He made sure he had adequate audiotapes, dry cells and some writing materials.

¹ The aim of the research was to find out the reality on the ground regarding literacy and numeracy levels of the street children and their career aspirations. But we did not want the children to be made self-conscious because of their interviews being recorded.

To ensure that the stories that the children told were a reflection of the reality, thus ensuring reliability, the researcher needed to verify the information by checking with the children's friends and by building a relationship of trust long before the interviews were conducted. This was especially helpful because truths, fantasies and twisted realities are less common when a relationship of trust with every individual child has been established (Nieuwenhuizen, 2006).

After every interview, the researcher played back the recording for the street child who would then listen and point out whether there were some areas where he/she would not like, so that they could be deleted. Happily, the researcher was never asked to get rid of any section.

To determine reading proficiency, two texts were given: one in English and the other in Kiswahili, which each respondent was asked to read. For the writing proficiency in both languages, they were asked to write a paragraph of about 120 words on:

- a). Maisha yangu mtaani (My life on the street) for the Kiswahili proficiency
- b). What pushed me to the street for test of English proficiency.

Data were collected after the researcher had visited and established useful links with the street children, thus gaining their confidence and thereby minimizing the observer's paradox. For example, the researcher was free with the street children and did the best to answer all their questions. He insisted that there was no wrong or right question and that they should ask for clarification any time they felt something was not clear to them. The researcher told them about his background, and participated fully in some of their tasks. The researcher also did the best to respect the street children seeing them as individuals with feelings of joy and sorrow and daily life accomplishments and difficulties.

The researcher wanted to learn from the street children as much as possible about their culture, language, literacy and numeracy skills issues, and they were the teachers in that case. They knew a lot about their environment since they were the ones on familiar ground.

Data Analyses

The tape-recorded data was transcribed and written down on paper word for word. After that, the researcher went through studying the information from each of the sampled street children noting

down the emerging information in relation to the objectives of the research. Information on the literacy and numeracy ability was also analysed. The emerging patterns were later studied and the patterns analyzed and interpreted to form a discussion on the street children's aspirations, language use, literacy and numeracy skills, and their educational challenges among other issues.

Research Challenges

The main challenge encountered involved language use. Hardly any of the sampled street children had the ability to use English despite it being the official language in Kenya. This is because most of the street children had not been to school, and English is acquired in a formal setting in Kenya. In addition, the children could not speak standard Kiswahili and most of them only communicated in Sheng, a hybrid language that borrows a lot from African languages, Kiswahili and English. The researcher could not understand some of the Sheng terms and expressions but this was resolved by getting help from those who understand Sheng. To counter this, the researcher used as much Kiswahili as possible, limiting himself to the use of very basic terms and avoiding complex Swahili words. In addition, making use of research assistant who understood Sheng helped in the translation and understanding of the many Sheng words that the street children used during the interview.

It was also difficult to gain the trust of the street children and to have them sit for thirty minutes answering the questions. Some of them were reluctant to be interviewed and were suspicious of the researcher's motives and what he wanted from them. Some literally avoided the researcher and would run away. The street children who were the researcher's contact persons in the field helped in a great way in ensuring that the children gained trust of the researcher. Some of them expected to be given money for their time, and were disappointed to hear there would not be any payment. Others saw it as a waste of their valuable time which they would rather spend begging on the streets. Some would give very hasty responses, all the time looking at the passers-by, and at times interrupting the interview by running after one who looked like a possible benefactor.

Ethical Consideration

The researcher needed to first get consent to conduct the fieldwork and had to get permission from the coordinator, Kenya Street Children Rehabilitation Trust, a unit that addresses the welfare of the street children.

Secondly, there was also need for the researcher to get an informed consent from the street children who formed the sample in the study. The researcher informed the sampled street children details about the research project. The children were told about the objective of the research and the expected outcome and how they could benefit from it at the end.

The researcher also explained his expectations of the street children in the research and asked them whether there were issues that were not clear to them. The children were reminded now and again that they were not obliged to take part in the research if they did not want to. The researcher explained to the children that the data collected would only be used for the study and that their real names would be changed while writing up the final project. The researcher also promised to seek the children's permission, if the pictures of the sampled children would ever be used in the final report. The researcher also promised not to include the major places that form the abodes of these children.

The children were also compensated for their time during research. The researcher bought bread and fruits for the children. Some of the children also requested to be given toothbrush, which the researcher gladly gave. The researcher avoided giving money and instead brought the items with him to the streets. The researcher believed that as soon as money exchanged hands, the relation between the researcher and the children would change drastically.

RESULTS

Languages Spoken by Kenya's Street Children

The analysis of data in relation to the identification of languages in which the street children were fluent and those that they had difficulties in revealed that most of them were fluent in their mother tongues. In addition, a few of them had learnt other indigenous Kenyan languages, besides their own, as a result of interacting with their friends on the streets who came from ethnic

groups that speak the said ethnic languages. A number of them could speak Kiswahili, but with numerous grammatical mistakes especially those related to concord and tense. Hardly any of the street children was fluent in English language, despite it being Kenya's official language.²

The following table lists the languages spoken by the sampled street children and highlights the number of speakers competent in the three linguistic skills of reading, writing and speaking (cf. Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Language Use and Proficiency Levels

LANGUAGE	LANGUAGE SKILLS		
	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Sheng	120	-	-
Kiswahili	80	5	5
English	3	2	2
Gikuyu	34	6	6
Luhya	18	3	3
Dholuo	18	5	5
Kikamba	12	1	1
Kimeru	12	1	1
Kalenjin	8	2	2
Kiambu	7	1	1
Ekegusi	4	0	0
Turkana	2	0	0
Taita	2	0	0
Kuria	2	0	0
Kimaasai	1	0	0

² English is learnt in a formal setting in Kenya, such as schools. The fact that many street children have not been to school makes it hard for them to acquire competence in the language.

Language Proficiency Levels

As the table 4.1 indicates, most of the sampled street children did not have a mastery of the linguistic skills of reading and writing even in their own languages. This is because they had not been to school where the literacy skills are taught. Even the sixteen who had been to school up to at least primary grade three seemed to have forgotten how to read and write in their mother tongues. Surprisingly, some of the children said they were not able to speak their mother tongue because they had left their homes long time ago, and they now either speak in other indigenous Kenyan languages or use Sheng in their communication.

Numeracy Skills

Although the sampled street children could count in Swahili up to 100, most of them were not able to do some simple sums of additions, subtraction, multiplication and division. They all said that it was hard for them to even add up the money they got by the end of a day of begging on the streets. This again is attributed to the fact that only a few of the children had been to school so they missed out on acquiring such numeracy skills.

Aspirations of Street Children

The street children that formed the sample in the study had aspirations and knew where they wished to be professionally in the future. They had clear plans for their future, holding on to some ideas about what they want to be when they grow up. The following table presents the aspirations of the street children.

Table 4.2: Career Aspirations of Kenya's Street Children

PROFESSION	BOYS	GIRLS
Medical doctor	19	3
Army	18	1
Pilot	12	1
Engineer	10	2
Police	10	1
Teacher	10	6
Motor mechanic	7	0
Carpenter	7	0
Pastor	4	1
Farmer	3	1
Nurse	0	5
Salonist	0	3
Secretarial	0	3
Cateress	0	3
TOTAL	90	30

Table 4.2 indicates that some of the street children wished to pursue white-collar careers such as piloting, engineering and teaching. For example 18 street children wanted to be medical doctors and 11 of them hoped to become pilots. Others would like to join blue-collar careers such as carpenters, salonists and motor mechanics.

Unfortunately, of the 120 street children interviewed only sixteen had been to school but had dropped out in their first years of elementary learning. Most of them were illiterate and they also could not do simple arithmetic sums. Yet what they craved for most in education was acquisition of literacy skills. Almost all said they hoped to complete school one day; they would like to have

a full education and lead a normal life like their peers in regular schools. They believed that education held the key to a bright future for them, and that if they were to achieve their career aspirations, then they needed to go to the highest level of education. They dreamed of becoming rich and powerful, like the people they saw passing by in big cars or the ones enjoying themselves in hotels. They looked forward to getting a permanent job and gaining money to help themselves and their families. The children dreamed of falling in love and feeling grown up. They all said they would like to raise families but were aware that this would be dependent on whether they would be able to support them. They all said that regular income was necessary if they were to win bread for their families.

The children would love to earn money in a more structural way than is the case on the streets. They would like to earn the money in a more honest way than through the acts of stealing. They would also want to reduce their use of drugs because they all seemed to know the dangers associated with drugs. They felt that they should not follow bad friends. They would also want the police and the entire society to have a more positive attitude towards them and they longed to have the image of street children as thieves and beggars erased from the public's mind. They all felt that they needed to become good people: no stealing, having good friends and no doing drugs.

They were all very enthusiastic about going to school. Nevertheless, they were aware of their personal limitations in achieving their dreams. One of the children captured it well when he said that he would like to be a medical doctor in a hospital because he believed it would be the best profession for him and was what he liked best but was not sure how he would get out of the street life and get back to school. He felt that his current occupation should be to work on the streets and try to make better his life as a result.

Foreseen Educational Challenges

Most of the street children felt that if they were able to read and write, and do some simple calculations, they would do much better in life. They understood their predicament in trying to communicate in a Kenyan society that usually communicates through written form and in English, the tongue that to them is a privilege to the chosen few. Further, some would love to

read the Bible, while others would want to watch and understand some television documentaries but their major handicap is language used in the media: they cannot comprehend it.

They also felt that most regular schools would not admit them for fear that the street children could not fit into the normal school routine on the account of the character change they have undergone while on the streets. In addition, they also felt that the learning they had missed out ever since leaving school (some had never been to school at all) made the schools feel that it would be practically impossible for them to fit in.

This corresponds with the report of the hearing on street children in Kenya (ANPPCAN, 1995). It recognized that many street children would find it difficult to participate in a regular classroom and that regular schools would find it difficult to cope with such children due to personal and limited resources. The report further expresses that besides the bad habits picked up by the children while on the streets, substance abuse and addiction, bad language, indiscipline; stealing and bad behaviour would pose challenges to educationists. It was felt that these children may not benefit to the fullest if they were just picked and packed back to regular schools, for they tended to be academically backward and had a very short attention span. Suggestions were floated as to how this could be addressed. For example, additional efforts can be expended to make lessons interesting in order to catch the concentration and attention of street children. This would motivate them very much. Additional resources can be provided in these schools to cater for street children and teachers should receive more specialized training to be able to respond professionally to the needs of street children.

Even as we think of providing formal education opportunities to the street children, there is need for their inner strengths and abilities to be respected. Then we must strive to build on them so that their self-image as self-independent persons, their initiative, the group as a basis for social support and nurture are taken into account as the starting point for providing support to them (Rane, 1994). Our practice should be based on understanding these children and responding to the nature of the services they require, rather than a pre-conceived and stereotype notion of the care of the children. For example, in this study, we find that street children interviewed aspire to go to school and realize that education is an important key if they are to achieve their career aspirations. What street children in Kenya really crave for most from education is literacy. The

desire to learn is there and the need to be literate too. They all understand that some kind of know-how is essential for their future life. They know that literacy and numeracy skills are valuable in enabling them calculate the profits of their imagined future businesses, use of money, how to save and where to save. Bearing this in mind, it will make sense to support the children by providing a school for them for this is what they really want.

The street children need to be equipped with the ability to read and write. After achieving this milestone in their lives, they will be able to access relevant information and technology which will facilitate their being recognized as important and vital citizens in the society. Thus they will be able to function effectively in the society because they will have benefited from an education about the world around them.

Kenyan Street children's stories- a sample

Allan

He is a fourteen-year-old boy, originally from Siaya District in the western region of Kenya. His father worked in the quarry but he was not making enough to be able to support his family of seven. Allan travelled to Nairobi with his aunt, who lived in Mathare, one of Kenya's biggest slums, with the hopes of finding a school where he could study as he stayed with his aunt. He never got the chance to attend school after all. His aunt was also having financial difficulties and did not manage to fulfil her promise of getting a school for Allan. He would go for days without food, and there were a lot of quarrels from the aunt, who had four children of her own and no man. Allan thus found life at the aunt's house very difficult and he felt as if he was the odd one out in the aunt's one room tinned house. At the same time he knew that he could not go back home and even if he did, none would understand his plight. He opted to run away and he moved to the streets upon the influence of a fellow slum boy he befriended while at Mathare. On the streets, Allan started begging money and other time he would collect waste paper and sell to get money for food. He now lives on the streets and reckons that still life is very hard but he has his freedom and can get to do whatever he wants to do. He has three sisters and three brothers whom he has not seen in a long time. He cannot read the Bible, yet he loves to read of the word of God.

He can only watch KARATE movies because they have actions, as he cannot understand the language because most programs are in English.

Allan wants to be a mechanic, to repair cars, because cars have always fascinated him. Before doing so, he would love to study up to high school level since he knows very well that education will help him achieve his goal. He would love to go to a college and do a course related to automobile repairs. Afterwards, he would look for a job and think of how to help his parents and siblings. He would like to get married, have three children, live happily and comfortably as a family, have the children go to good schools so that they can have a bright future. He would love to learn more about Karate so that he can defend himself from bad people such as criminals.

Rebecca

Rebecca was born in 1992 in Dagoretti, in the outskirts of Nairobi. She can speak Swahili and some English. Her parents separated a long time ago and the father later remarried. She has six siblings, with her being fourth born. She used to live with her grandmother. She started school then dropped out in Primary 3 as there was no food at home and she was to take care of the younger siblings to enable the mother to go out to look for food.

Rebecca would love to resume school, study up to University level and be a lawyer so as to defend the helpless and poor ones in the society. She developed interest in legal affairs when she was called as a witness in her parents' divorce case when she was just eight years old. Her desire is to get in love with a man, get married and together, have four children. She feels that it would be hard to raise more than four children.

James

James is a twelve year-old boy from Elburgon, Rift Valley. Both his parents are alive but they are very poor. He is the last born in a family of five siblings. He went to school up to Primary Grade Three, and then dropped out because the parents were not able to buy some textbooks that were needed for him to proceed to Primary Four. He can only speak in his indigenous language (Kikuyu) and Sheng. He also knows a few words in English such as boy, car and girl. He also can count up to twenty in English and can recite fluently the English alphabet. James says that his father used to drink a lot and when he came home he would beat up all of them and often

chase them out of the house for no apparent reason. James summarizes the suffering that he went through by saying: “*tulikuwa tunapigwa kama nyoka*” (We would be beaten like a snake). He decided to run away and find solace on the streets.

The main difficulties that James faces while on the streets involve going without food for days on end and sleeping without knowing where the next meal will come from. He says that they are not assured of their next meal since they depend on what they may get from the dumpsite or buy some food with the little money they may have begged on the streets. They cry that they get very little from begging, and they are afraid of stealing and getting shot by the police.

Another challenge that James faces is police harassment. He always lives in fear of being arrested and beaten up by the police, who according to him are “ruthless” and “cold.” Many a time, fierce police dogs are let loose on him and he has to run for his life. He wonders aloud whether anybody has any idea what it means to live in constant fear, not knowing when and from what direction the enemy will pounce. He feels unsafe all the time.

In addition, James finds it hard dealing with the attitude of the public. He feels that the society neither understands nor cares for him. He feels that members of the public do not understand the street children at all, and they tend to think that street children enjoy being on the street. Most are not empathetic to their plight and do not bother to find out why the children left the comfort of their homes. He says that most street children are pushed to streets by circumstances, and they need love not hatred and indifference from the society.

Peaceful coexistence among the street children themselves is also a challenge. There are frequent fights among them, and some of them end tragically. James has witnessed many fights that led to murder. He saw a street boy, whom he referred to as Carton, being stabbed and then died.

Has James been back home since he ran away? Yes. He once went back home but saw the conditions had not improved so he took off for the streets once again. His father was still drinking and making life a nightmare for everybody. He preferred the life on the streets. He says he has been on the streets of Kisumu, Nakuru, Eldoret, Kitale and now Nairobi, all major urban centres in Kenya. Asked about his aspirations, James says he would like to go to school and study to be a judge, He says “*nikipata nafasi nirudi shule, nitamshukuru mungu. Nitamwambia*

asante” (If I ever get a chance to go back to school, I will be grateful to God. I will thank him). He would like to get a job after his degree in law, get married then be able to help his parents and his siblings. He would like to raise a family, and get as many children as God will enable him to: “*Siwezi kukataa watoto*” (I cannot say NO to the gift of children). He would love to raise his family in peace, making sure they have tea and bread every morning.

John

John is a young fourteen year-old teenager. He was born and brought up in Grogan, a dangerous alley in Nairobi’s River Road. He has 4 siblings. Neither he nor they have been to school. He can speak Kikuyu, Kikamba and Sheng. His mother as well as his siblings used to beg on the streets. He has lost touch with his family and has not seen his siblings in five years. He does not know where his brothers and sisters are or even the whereabouts of the mother. His mother was alcoholic and would beat him up for no reason at all. He does not know who his biological father is and this is something that bothers him very much. He has a big scar on the face as result of the mother hitting him with a bottle when she was drunk and he inquired about his biological father.

John confesses to have abused drugs because he wanted to forget his sufferings and bitterness. At times he is unable to sleep because of hunger, so he takes drugs. A lot of insults and all forms of abuse are common on the streets and he is frequently involved in fighting with other street children. He has also suffered much from police harassment and beatings. He says he has been hurt many times and never went to hospital because none would treat him if he has no money.

John wants to go back to school to study to be lawyer. This will ensure he is able to take care of his family. He will be able to look for his mum and siblings and help them after securing himself a job. He loves scouting and would also want to be a famous soccer player. He prays that he will get children and that they will not go through the hardships he has had to undergo. He will build a beautiful house for the family, look for the mother and his siblings and settle them in that comfortable house. He prays that God will help other children going through similar problems like him. John believes in God and loves to hear about the word of God but he is unable to read the Bible or any other religious books due to illiteracy.

Lucy

Lucy was born and brought up in Mathare slums in Nairobi. She is sixteen years old. She has four siblings. She can speak Dholuo, Swahili and Sheng but has difficulties understanding English as she dropped out of school at Primary Grade three. Her father died when she was eight years old and she remembers vividly the sufferings she and her family went through after that. The father was a casual labourer and would get jobs in any construction project going on around Mathare. Some time the father would be lucky and get a job in a construction that would be on for a long time. Other times he would be unlucky and would be off job for days. But she says life was better when her dad was alive.

After the father died, Lucy's mother started some business of selling second hand clothes to women at Mathare, but the business did not do well. She was not able to meet the basic needs of her children and she started shouting at them, and beating them up, blaming them for the misery she was in. Lucy could not take it anymore and she left for the streets. According to her, problems at home and the never-ending quarrels from her mother pushed her to the streets.

Lucy has been sensitized about HIV and AIDS and knows some people who have died of it. Lucy has had sex for money many times and she would get about 3 US dollars per day. She knows of street girls aged 13, 14, 15 years who have gotten pregnant. The fathers of their children are the street boys.

Lucy would like to go to school and be able to lead a successful life. She knows that life on the streets can only get worse. She would like to leave the streets and get a better life. Her dream is to become a teacher and if possible also become a professional soccer player.

Need for an Educational Centre for Street Children

To address the educational needs of the street children like the few sampled above, there will be need to establish an educational centre for them. The aim of the centre will be to change lives of the street children and provide them with the opportunity to improve their future. Now they will have their basic needs met and will have a chance to get off drugs, access primary education and even engage in income generating activities. The centre will incorporate participation and behavioural changes to ensure that the program takes the desires of street life out of the children,

instead of merely taking the children out of the street. The aim is to take the children off the street and provide them with a second chance: enhance their learning and learning capacities and social networks; provide them with vocational training, business skills, mentoring and avenues to existing mental and health care centres.

The centre will aim at creating a learning environment that would accommodate the deviant behaviour exhibited by children addicted to drugs, children who were constantly abused at home and often misused by established gangsters: terrified children who were forever on the run, fleeing the police. The centre's aim is to prepare the children realistically for life, helping them to develop a constructive attitude to life and help them to understand their responsibilities as members of the community. The emphasis will be on training for self-development rather than training for certificate only. The focus will be on instilling in the children those values and attitudes necessary for adjustment to desirable living in the society.

If funds will be available, the vocational training can be built next to the centre so that the children who wish to proceed to skills training can do so, and the ones who want to join regular schools can go ahead, again with the assistance of area education officers. It is hoped that by the end of the program, the children will have a working knowledge of especially English, Kiswahili and basic Math.

A starting point to start bridging the gap between street children and children in regular schools will be inculcation of literacy and numeracy skills, which will connect the street children with the wider society. These skills include: listening, speaking, reading and writing (Bukonya et al., 2005) in both English and Kiswahili. The acquisition of, for example, listening and speaking skills in the two language will help street children cultivate a favourable impression of themselves and will be able to interact with others effectively and confidently. In addition, reading may expose street children to new vocabulary, good models of language use, different registers and learning of concepts thus widening the horizons of the street children. Designing a language curriculum that focuses on the acquisition of the four language skills in both English and Kiswahili followed by teaching of other subjects would be a milestone in narrowing the gap between the public and the street children. Concurrently, the children will be going through a

program in arithmetic so that they can acquire numeracy skills, as they are vital for survival in the society.

Language is indeed a major means of thinking and communicating and it is fundamental to learning. Through language skills, the children will become articulate, self aware, effective decision makers who are able to live and work with others. Proficiency in both Swahili and English will help a great deal to build the children's self-esteem and confidence and will be an added boost in inculcating a value and desire for self development, so that they can aspire to be something better in life. Additionally, their learning English will enable them interact with people from different backgrounds. This will particularly enrich their personal growth and to facilitate international understanding. All in all, it is hoped that they will end up behaving responsibly, honestly, openly and creatively.

The street children need to be listened to and their perceptions understood and their own world-view taken into account. This should be the basis of designing programs that will be responsive to the needs of the street children: interventions that in the long run will be meaningful and workable because they will be based on the reality on the ground.

The findings of the study indicate that street children in Kenya use Sheng to interact with one another while on the streets. They do not have mastery of English, the official language in Kenya. This is a disadvantage to them for they are unable to communicate in many of the domains that require the use of the English language. Although the majority of the street children could speak Kiswahili, it was noted that almost all of them could neither read nor write texts in the language. Kiswahili is the national language thus very pivotal in communicating national affairs of the nation. The same case applied to the use of the ethnic languages. The street children could speak the language fluently but very few of them could write or read texts in their mother tongues.

In the acquisition of numeracy skills, the street children were able to count from one to one hundred in Kiswahili. Some of them could count in English too, and also in their mother tongues. Unfortunately, they were not able to do simple arithmetic involving addition, subtraction,

multiplication and division. This is because they had not been to school where such skills are usually acquired.

In terms of aspirations, the street children had great dreams of where they wished to be in the near future. Some wanted to become pilots, doctors, teachers, lawyers and others wished to be car mechanics, salonists and pastors. They also knew that for them to achieve their vision, they would need to receive quality education so that they could compete favourably with their age mates in the regular schools.

The findings imply that there is need to address the educational needs of the street children so that they can access formal education. The establishment of an education for life centre that would act as a transition between the streets and formal schools for the street children has been proposed. In such a centre, the street children will receive accelerated input in all the major subjects in the Kenyan elementary education curriculum so that after they will have received substantial exposure, they will be ready to enrol in the regular schools at the level where their age mates will be, so that the street children do not have to start learning at the kindergarten level with 3 year-olds.

The study has outlined a syllabus that can be followed in the teaching of the English language at the centre. It focuses on all the four skills of reading, speaking, listening and writing. It has also been noted that there is need to come up with syllabi for other subjects in the elementary curriculum so that they can be used in teaching the street children at the centre.

Implications

The findings show that many street children are illiterate. Nevertheless, the draft national policy on children in Kenya recognizes the right to education as a basic human right. It further observes that all children deserve quality, accessible and affordable education. However, enrolment of children in especially difficult circumstances in primary schools in Kenya is noted to be low. Street children and children of poor families in general form the majority of those who drop out of school (Shorter and Onyanha, 1999). These children are noted to lack both the material and the psychological support to enable them to continue their education. Most of them come from unstable family backgrounds and therefore enjoy very little support from their parents. This facts

aside, the draft policy recognizes the fact that for Kenya to achieve universal primary education by 2015 there is need to ensure that all children, including those in difficult circumstances (such as street children), have access to quality education.

The phenomenon of street children is a problem that has a solution requiring concerted political and social action, will and financial resources. For example, empowering the street children will require provision of quality education so that they will be competitive with their peers already in the regular schools. The first thing would be to understand the plight of these children, getting to know their individual, social, emotional and physical needs so that we can help them to be the best they can. Second thing would be to provide what they crave for if it is going to make them achieve their goals in life, for example the need for quality formal education among the street children as reported in this study (cf. chapter 4). Enrolling such street children in school will be a great avenue of getting them off the streets as they will be in school full time. Unfortunately, in most developing nations, not enough is being done by governments to encourage greater investment in full time education for the street children and other children in especially difficult circumstances.

Achievement of universal primary education in the world's nations can be a great step in helping curb the problem of street children and the poor nations should be helped by donor agencies to realize this significant milestone as stipulated in the Millennium Development Goals. Although the government of Kenya instituted free primary education in 2003, parents are still expected to provide uniform, stationery and other basic needs that the children require. Unfortunately, children in especially difficult circumstances may have no-one to provide for them these basic necessities. Such children are not able to access quality education then, unless some interventions are put in place to address their plight. If nothing is done, the children will have no alternative than to enter the labour market, where they are usually exploited, or they just survive on the streets begging and hoping that one day, they will wake up and everything will be alright.

Street children's empowerment through education will be achieved when street children access quality education. This in turn will be the key to poverty elimination and participation of these children in national development. If nothing is done, street children will be deprived of their

right to childhood and destined to end up as illiterate workers and beggars on the streets with no opportunity to develop to their full potential.

Investment in education should target children in difficult circumstances in order to prevent them from dropping out of school and also to have the ones who have not been enrolled join the school system. With this in mind, it is important for the community groups, government, and non-governmental organizations to work together to address the educational needs of the street children and help to remove them from the streets. From the results reported in this study, already many street children recognize the power and the value of education and would love to pursue formal education. Indeed they prefer schools to streets. Nevertheless, they do not know how they can enter the formal school system since most of them are already overage. In Kenya, if a child does not have a birth certificate and has crossed the normal school age of six years, there is absolutely no provision for allowing him/her to join in a higher class under an accelerated program and he has to sit in the first class along with much younger children and often made fun of for it. That is why establishment of a centre that would act as a transition camp to enable a smooth shift of a child from the street to formal education environment is ideal. It will be a centre where street children who have never been to school will be prepared to enter the formal school system in classes appropriate to their age. During their time at the centre, these children will be put through some accelerated courses which will equip them to catch up with regular-school going children.

Recommendations

The findings reported in this paper point to the fact that street children recognize the power and value of education and have a fervent desire to go to school, and they look forward to being rich and successful one day. What the children are not sure of is how to reach where they aspire to be. This is where the society, governmental and non-governmental organizations need to come in so that they can help to meet the needs and aspirations of street children and other children in difficult circumstances. With this in mind, the following recommendations can therefore be made.

First, societal institutions should be made aware of their responsibility towards children in especially difficult circumstances, and together with the government, find solutions to the causes underlying the circumstances, which produce neglected and abused children such as the ones found on the streets. These institutions should be sensitized about the street children and their needs, and prioritize the needs which can be provided for by the wider society. In particular, the church, individuals, professionals, organizations, and other institutions should all be dedicated, committed and involved in the uniquely challenging job of alleviating the suffering of misplaced youth and abandoned children.

What many NGOs are doing may be just but a drop in the ocean, but to that individual child who is helped and transformed from a street child to a hopeful child with a brighter future through their program, it means the whole world. We must strive to work toward a better world for children in difficult circumstances, such as the street children on the streets of most developing nations. We should not go by numbers, but by doing what we are able to do within our capabilities.

Second, the plight of children in extremely difficult circumstances should be brought to the attention of every individual member of the society for all the citizens ought to play their collective part. As Mbogori (1992) points out, the levels of unemployment, poverty, ill-health, illiteracy and other difficulties will remain overwhelming if they are left to any single agency to deal with alone. Indeed the societal problems can be resolved if all of us faced up to them with a clear sense of determination. This seems to echo the words of Dallape (1987) that the eventual solution to the never ending dilemma in the streets lies in the prevention and in the conscience of every society and asks us to work together upon this long term agenda as well within our local hands-on projects with youngsters themselves. Thus, there is need for all to come together in this common goal of addressing the plight of street children. This will ensure that the problems facing children on the streets remain silent no more and that many other children will be prevented from taking the path that leads to the streets.

Third, there must be societal and global attention to alleviating poverty and especially women's poverty. Focus must be on helping alleviate poverty, which is one of the principal factors that create the street children phenomenon in the first place. In particular, the economic status of

women in the society needs to be addressed for if they are empowered economically, they will be able to take care of their families and this will help reduce the number of children who run to the streets. As Dallape (1987) observes, experience has shown that to uplift the community at large, it is vital that attempts are made to improve the socio-economic standing of women. For example, women can be offered appropriate financial assistance so that they can underwrite income generating ventures. As their economic standing improves, women will be able to assist their families more.

Fourth, the government should develop policy to address the serious phenomenon that street children have become. Political leaders should be obliged by the society to play their important role as policy makers to eliminate the causes producing unemployment, poor housing, and misery and as a result, many abandoned children who end up on the streets of major urban centres.

Children should be given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity. They should be protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment. As Mandal (1990) notes, a nation's children are a supremely important asset and their nurture and solicitude are a society's responsibility. Their self esteem needs to be worked on by frequently being reminded that they are important, worthwhile, beautiful or handsome and that they are loved. Members of the society must be ready to give the hope of a better tomorrow for the street children. The children should enjoy the benefit of social security and their growth in all spheres should take place in a healthy manner. Efforts should be directed to strengthening family ties, where possible, so that full potentialities of growth of the children are realized within normal family, neighbourhood and community environment.

Conclusions

The street families and street children are indeed a marginalized lot whose needs must be addressed. Although the main task ahead should be to combat and alleviate poverty and economically empower vulnerable families currently living below the poverty line, it is imperative to consider the plight of the children already on the streets and who feel they are too old to join six year-olds in preschool in order to acquire language, literacy and numeracy skills.

Being unable to break the vicious cycle among street children will condemn them to a struggle in a never-ending situation.

The educational intervention in which the street children will acquire literacy and numeracy skills may be a cry in the wilderness, but we must be willing to be mindful of those less fortunate than ourselves in the society and help in the realization of a better world for one or two street children who may benefit from the programs such as the proposed education for life centre. If the street children are helped to be in school and therefore, acquire quality education, their right to childhood will be enforced by keeping them away from child labour, streets, and from all kinds of exploitation. Indeed school is an institution that takes care of all a child's development. It is the thesis of this book that through acquisition of language, literacy and numeracy skills, street children in Kenya will be empowered and the impact of their empowerment on their participation in the overall project of nation building will be inevitable. In so doing, they will join the country in the achievement of millennium development goals.

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