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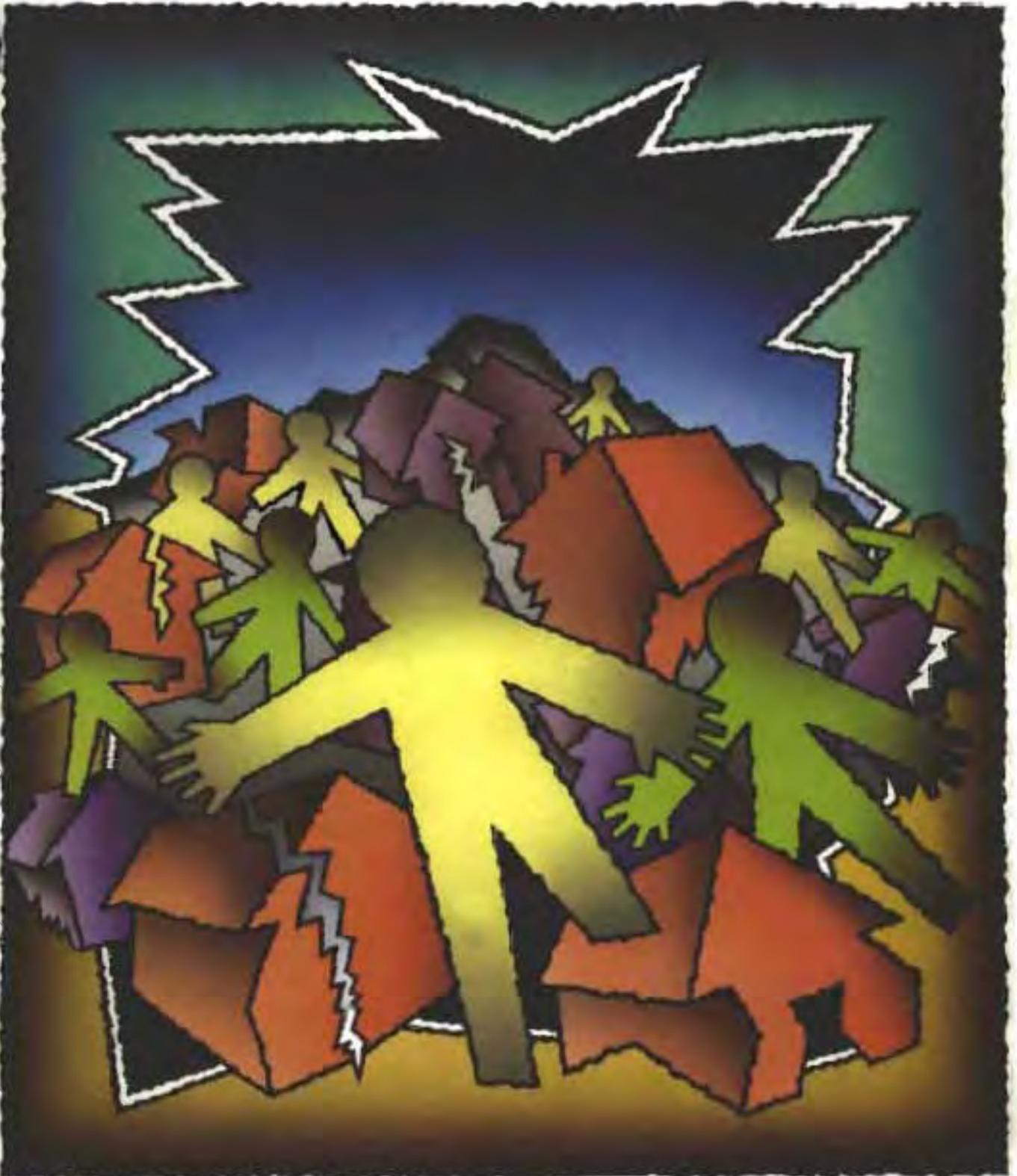
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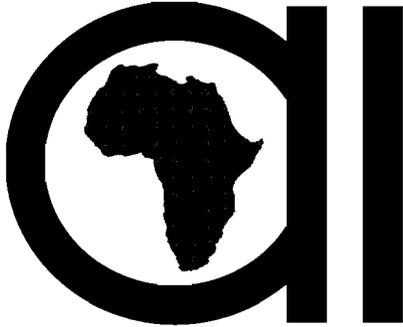
# INSIGHT

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Africa Bulletin



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# “Street children are people too”

Jill Swart-Kruger,  
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Street children are a constant source of fascination for those whose childhood years are past. People who spent their childhood years in warm and caring family settings, especially, find it difficult to conceive of anything positive in the situation of a child who has taken responsibility for his or her own life. Countless studies have shown that the public perception of street children hinges on two extremes: the street child as a criminal-in-the-making and the street child as a helpless victim of circumstance. The former view incites acts of violence against the children, the latter leads to overly sentimental gestures towards them. Both obscure the reality of being a street child.

In 1984, at a meeting with 26 street children I asked them what they felt about the way the community responds to them. Twelve-year-old *Oupa*,<sup>1</sup> stunted in growth owing to years of hunger at home before he took to the streets in order to “eat every day of my life”, directed his intense gaze out of the window as if searching for an answer. Then he said in a matter-of-fact way:

People don't want to see us. It is as if we are a bad dream. They just want us to go away. They don't love us. We are not even as good as animals. They forget that street children are people too.<sup>2</sup>

In common with street children elsewhere in the world, those in Africa are commonly victimized and abused physically, emotionally and verbally (cf Williams in this volume). This abuse is imposed on children who are already in pain; a tough demeanour frequently blankets deep personal hurt. In Tanzania, street children told

of how they missed their mothers, of how a friend was wetting his pants in his sleep, of not being able to handle a single more night. They grieved for the loss of their family through AIDS, though they do not let themselves name it as such, and for the loss of their childhood – a cherished bicycle, a secret tree tunnel, lost brothers and sisters ...

they drew pictures of big people beating little people, and of themselves swirling in stormy circles.<sup>3</sup>

The drawings by South African street children in this volume reflect a rich awareness of their sociocultural environment and vividly bring the reader closer to the perceptions of the children themselves.

Street children confound the efforts of officials whose job it is to keep cities tidy and presentable. Unlike many other children categorized as “in need of care”, they refuse to adapt themselves to the moulds that society creates for them in places of safety, regimented child-care institutions and children's homes. Those who work with street children need great flexibility and to work according to a few basic principles.<sup>4</sup> Yet the search for “model” structured programmes is constant.

Attempts to characterize “the street child” have also been unsuccessful. Ennew's thought-provoking discussion on notions of childhood will stimulate a fresh debate on this issue while that of Richter and van der Walt will challenge the approach of those who seek easy answers via psychological profiles of street children.

The literature on street children is voluminous but little has been published on street children in African contexts. Ennew and Richter, together with the other authors whose work is represented here, have worked with street children in Africa and share a commitment to advocacy on their behalf.

## Notes and references

- 1 Oupa is an Afrikaans word, meaning “grandfather”.
- 2 Statement translated from Zulu.
- 3 R Rajani and M Kudrati, *Street children of Mwanza: A situational analysis*, Tanzania: Kuleana and Unicef, Tanzania, 1994, p 2.
- 4 See, for instance, Judith Ennew's excellent book: *Street and working children: A guide to planning* (Development manual no 4), London: Save the Children, 1994.

# Difficult circumstances:

## Some reflections on “Street children” in Africa

In Addis Ababa, a 12-year-old boy draws a self-portrait with red, blue and green felt-tip pens as part of a pilot research project. It is a lively picture, using bold lines. He depicts himself with a box of objects in front of him, one hand at his mouth, and wearing a hat. At first glance it looks as if he has drawn himself selling goods on the street, the hat apparently incidental. But his explanation is different. The box contains rotten fruit, he says. He is wearing a hat to hide his face because he is ashamed to be seen eating such bad food.<sup>1</sup>



Drawing of a grave (Mashack, age 15)

This anecdote is an object lesson in both attitudes to street children and the interpretation of information about them. It is a common assumption that children who live and work on the street either have no moral values or are antisocial, yet this boy's attitude shows a high degree of social sensitivity and dignity. Studies of children in general, and street children in particular, tend to rely on adults' assumptions about how children feel and what they must need. Children themselves are rarely asked about their lives. Instead, researchers ask parents, teachers or staff of institutions. If they ask children directly they seldom pay much attention to making questionnaires and interview schedules relevant to children's experiences, interests or use of language. If they do try to approach children's worlds through non-verbal research methods such as collecting drawings, they frequently fail to ask children what the drawings are intended to represent, relying instead on adult interpretations, often using psychological concepts and research instruments derived from Northern contexts. This is particularly notable, in Africa as

elsewhere, in research about children affected by organized conflict, who are widely believed to have been traumatized in the same way and to require the same rehabilitative treatment regardless of cultural context.<sup>2</sup>

The dangers of adult-centred approaches in child research are clearly illustrated in an example Jill Swart uses to show the importance of listening to children's explanations, taken from her research among street children in Johannesburg. Swart describes two street boys, both of whom repeatedly drew graveyards.

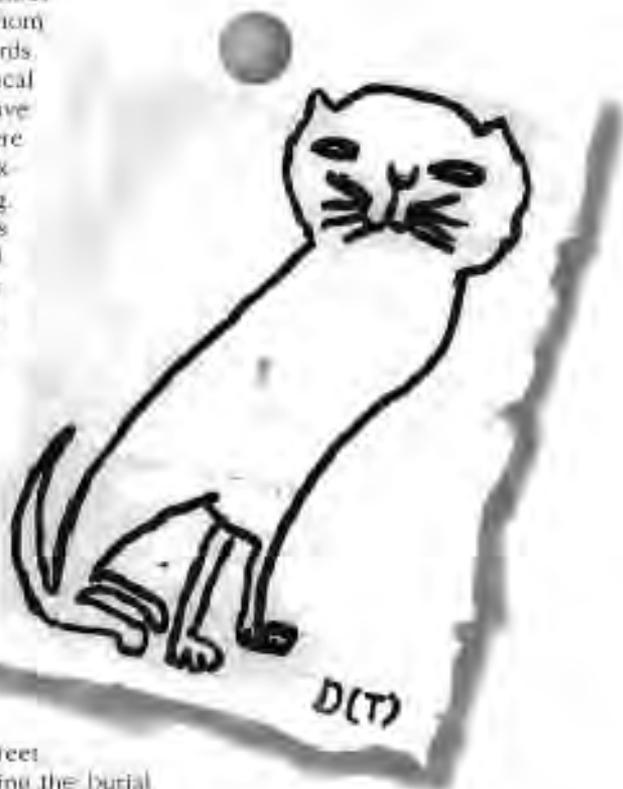
An adultist, psychological interpretation might have been that both boys were depressed and even fixated on death and dying. However, the children's explanations revealed to Swart not only that

this kind of interpretation would be incorrect but also that the two boys had quite distinct motivations for their drawings. In one case, the drawings represented the boy's return to a traumatic moment, “the symbol of his unhappiness”, when a quarrel with his brothers and sisters at his mother's graveside effectively led to his living in the street.

The other boy was depicting the burial place of his beloved grandmother, to which he returned as a happy memory. “Graves is good. I think of my Granny. She loved me.”<sup>3</sup>

Besides being influenced by adultist assumptions, research about children who live and work on the streets of urban Africa also has to contend with constructions of childhood that have little to do with African contexts. In addition – as everywhere in the world – this research is faced with the challenge of models of street children derived from Latin America.

*Dr Judith Ennew,  
Coordinator, Indicator for  
Children's Rights Project,  
Childwatch International,  
gives a critical overview*



This cat lives in Hillbrow, Mapatopata gives it chicken and liver. She feeds all the cats every day. I like this cat. It has long whiskers. (David, age 17)



(Lolo, age 9)

### The Child

Two sets of ideas define the notion of childhood current in the international community, both based on relatively recent Northern historical constructs. The first separates children from adults, defining the ideal family as a nuclear unit consisting of protected children and protecting adults. The maintenance of family form and the state of childhood is ensured through

the existence of bodies of knowledge and groups of experts, actually or implicitly authorized by the state, who advise on the socially defined problems of the adult-child relationship and act in order to eradicate or alter irregular situations. The second set of ideas separates adults from children within the production process. According to this, children cannot be workers, but they do require a special kind of socialization that cannot be provided within the family group. Thus education serves a double purpose. It teaches the skills and habits required by the formal economy, while operating a process of selection and rejection that reproduces class relations. At the same time it provides an additional form of control of childhood that is external to the private, family world.

The central figure in this complex of ideas is "The Child", apparently ungendered and ageless, although obviously small, innocent and in need of protection. I would argue that "he" is also most likely to be blonde, blue-eyed and middle-class, bearing little relationship to most children in most countries. In Northern contexts, The Child is used as an ideological control within state socialization processes, such as social work practice. The construct is also exported to the South, in a process some have called "globalization", through international agencies, media, cultural control mechanisms and even international human rights treaties, such as the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.<sup>4</sup>

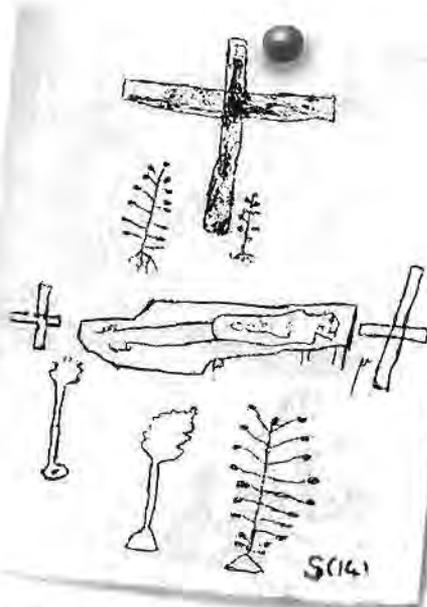
The fact that other notions such as The Girl Child, The African Child and The Indian Child have been used to signal the impossibility of a single model is not helpful, since they result from the same essentialist fallacy as The Child. With respect to The Girl Child, for example, it is clear that the girl who was to become Queen Elizabeth II has as little in common with girls in Manchester suburbs as Benazir Bhutto had with girls in Islamabad slums, but both shared childhoods that had many features

similar to that of the young Jack Kennedy. Similarly it is difficult to see what, apart from geography, makes a Cairo shoeshine boy, a ten-year old domestic servant in Lagos, an Afrikaans schoolboy and an Ethiopian youngster herding camels, fall under the same rubric of The African Child. Just as it is now regarded as archaic to talk about The Man or The Woman, so it is best to recognize that children are individuals who experience a variety of childhoods in different ways.

### Street children: The Latin American model

The ideal childhood of The Child is often contrasted with a similarly mythological figure, The Street Child, which has been a particular focus of attention for international bodies of all kinds since the United Nations International Year of the Child in 1979. Throughout this period the definition of street child has been the topic of considerable, repetitive debate and despite the fact that neither Unicef nor the International Labour Office can give any reliable or authoritative figures for the number of working street children worldwide, some numbers are in circulation and have gained credibility. They, like some popular definitions derived from early street work in some Latin American cities, are often cited at the beginning of accounts of street children. But they have no validity or basis in fact.<sup>5</sup>

Although some excellent studies of children who lived and worked on the street in Latin America predate the 1980s, the Latin American model of street children is due to what Irene Rizzini has called a "prodigious outpouring of texts" using "oversimplified methodologies and approaches" since 1979. The model has two facets. In the first place it is aligned with the largely negative public image of street children, in which they are seen as antisocial, amoral, impossible to rehabilitate and easily drawn into criminal or terrorist activities. They are regarded with a mixture of fear and pity and are the constant subject of newspaper reports and articles. Nevertheless, in the 1980s a new image began to emerge that, if it has not exactly eclipsed the old, has at least been merged with it. Based initially on largely journalistic accounts of the *gaminas* of Bogota, and popularized internationally through the work



Grave drawing

(Sipho, age 14)

of Unicef and the non-governmental organization Childhope, this new figure of the street child began by having heroic qualities.<sup>8</sup> As Rizzini notes about this new version of The Child,

although exploited, poor and oppressed, he was a 'strong and astute' being, a surviving hero for whom it was necessary to create critical, creative and participative action on the part of educators, who always had something to learn from the children and had to face opposition from the public, who only demanded immediate results. There the children would be playing their part as denouncers of an unjust society that evaded its due responsibilities.<sup>9</sup>

The notion of street educator was derived from a particular reading of the work of Paulo Freire,<sup>10</sup> in which children became viewed as protagonists and the street as a battleground.<sup>9</sup> This focus on the relatively small numbers of children visible on urban streets obscured the needs of the far greater numbers of invisible children in slums, or working in agriculture or as domestic servants. However, it was backed up by widespread circulation of guesstimates of the number of street children that were as incredible as they were irresponsible.

As long as they are viewed as heroes, street children are, to a certain extent, made to bear the symbolic weight of adult political agendas. Thus it is not surprising that the Brazilian Movement of Street Children (or "for" street children, translations differ) although often cited as an example of child participation, has largely adult leadership.<sup>10</sup> Nor is it surprising that the battlefield has become increasingly violent as street children become increasingly subjected to extra-judicial executions, particularly in Brazil, Colombia and Guatemala.<sup>11</sup> Accounts of the killings of street children are exaggerated by the mass media so that the international image of Latin American street children is now becoming dominated by this aspect.

Within international development agencies focusing on child welfare, however, earlier models of alternative work with street children now predominate, with the result that there has been a globalization of The Street Child based on Latin American work, but promulgated by Northern-based welfare agencies, parallel to the globalization of The Child. This tends to use the idea of outreach work with

street educators, although their role has different local interpretations and seldom approaches the degree of political involvement assumed in Latin America. Indeed, although Enda Jeanne's Action, to a certain extent, espouses a similar protagonist role for working children in its work in Africa<sup>12</sup> (which incidentally predates the better-known Brazilian Movement), it appears that African children and youth have sometimes taken more spontaneous political action, without adult stimulus. The importance of children's political actions in the fight against apartheid cannot be underestimated, but there are also some less well-known examples, such as the set *vetal* (to be clean and make clean) street activities of youth in Dakar which began in 1990 and, unlike the Brazilian Movement, largely petered out once adult political interests began to try to shape the action.<sup>13</sup>

One apparently inescapable effect of the Latin American model has been the widespread espousal of a categorization of street children that had its origins in observations made by programme workers in the early 1980s. Anyone who works with street children, in research or programming, comes up sooner rather than later against the issue of definition. One definition that is sometimes used identifies street children in terms of the places where they are found and the lack of adult supervision. This is widely quoted, but does not provide exact parameters.<sup>14</sup> Various Unicef texts made popular a distinction between children "on" the streets (visible and working there, but still living with their families) and children "of" the streets (for whom the street has become their major point of reference). A further refinement occasionally used distinguishes a smaller group of "abandoned children" within those "of" the streets.<sup>14</sup> Although unworkable even in Latin America, this is often applied as an operational definition in other parts of the world. However, because it is unclear it is applied in different ways according to local circumstances, leading to varied interpretations so that the meaning is further obscured.

## The Latin American model in Africa

One striking point of contrast between Latin America and Africa is due to colonial history. Latin American countries have at least a common core of culture and language from their past Iberian colonizers and more recently from North American cultural and economic imperialism. Although I would be the first to argue that there are vast differences between, for example, Argentina and Honduras, or Peru and Venezuela, these are nowhere as marked as the extraordinary diversity of African cultures.



"Graves is good" (Meshack, age 15)

Thus the imposition of a Latin American model of street children is bound to be fundamentally incorrect. In the first place it denies the differences that exist between different Latin American contexts, which are mirrored in differences in street children's lives and activities.<sup>15</sup> In the second place it imposes cultural assumptions from one continent to another, often filtered through the prism of Northern welfare agencies. Finally, it incorrectly assumes the homogeneity of culture in a continent that one hears all too often referred to in international settings as "a country like Africa".

The use of Latin American assumptions in African literature on street children appears to be more muted than it is in fact, because it tends to be filtered through the work of international child welfare agencies. Most reports on street children in Africa do not refer directly to the literature from Latin America, but do make use of the distinction between children “on” and “of” the street, usually referring to it as “the Unicef definition”. In some cases it is employed without further comment. In a major study of street children in Ethiopia it is used as a “behavioural indicator” of the “level of engagement in street life”,<sup>17</sup> and at least one of the differences between African and Latin American models is discussed:

there are many reasons to suspect that the profile of street-children in Ethiopia may deviate significantly from that of the Latin American profile. The long and bitter civil war in the north of the country and ongoing violence in the south compounded with the debilitating effect on rural areas of drought, famine and the breakdown of rural economies may mean that the number of unaccompanied and of the street children in Ethiopia may be significantly greater than in other areas of the world.<sup>18</sup>

Among programme workers in Addis Ababa there is a tendency to use the term “streetism” to denote ways of life associated with living on the street, rather than to use the terms “on” and “of” the street, which do not make much sense in a town that doubled in size in the 18 months before the study referred to above took place, so that opportunities for work for children other than in street trades are scarce. Some other attempts to get away from “on”/“of” terminology have been made in African contexts. For example, in Kampala, the term “urban out-of-school children” is used, although this brings with it the assumption that all children out of school must be on the street. In some cases, local words are used, such as “stroller”, which applies to both child and adult street people in Cape Town.<sup>19</sup> For her study of a suburb of Johannesburg, Swart uses the words of the children themselves:

Street children in Hillbrow use the slang Zulu terms *malunde* (those of the streets) and *malalapipe* (those who sleep in pipes) to refer to themselves. Members of the public commonly call them *skadukinders* (Afrikaans: shadow children) or

‘twilight children’. The latter term was originally coined by the newspapers and then became a popular term to refer to the street children.<sup>20</sup>

This media term is also seen as symbolic by some human rights activists:

Street children are to some extent the product of the dismantling of apartheid, living in the twilight between the darkness of the previous regime and the dawn of something new. Many of them may already be lost, brutalised as they are by their lives on the street.<sup>21</sup>

The involvement of media and advocacy organizations returns in this quotation to the negative aspects of the globalized model. According to Fabio Dallape, who has many years of experience with African children living and working in the street, the term “street children” is “inappropriate, offensive and gives a distorted message”.<sup>22</sup> It focuses the attention of welfare agencies on a small proportion of children visible on main thoroughfares and ignores the larger numbers in slums and shanty towns who have less access to food and services. It also focuses public attention on labelling children as delinquent and gives a message to society that these children need to be rehabilitated, thus ignoring Swart’s evidence that they tend to hold mainstream moral values, and taking no account of the sensibilities shown by, for example, the boy drawing a hat to hide his shame.

### Children in especially difficult circumstances

At around the same time that the new image of street children became current in the mid-1980s, Unicef coined another category, Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances, which is now in use throughout the world, with the acronym CEDC (pronounced in English) entering some languages as a word. Although originally established as a group term to include refugees, children with disabilities, children affected by organized violence and unaccompanied children in disasters, as well as street and working children, CEDC now seems to be almost synonymous with “street children” in many settings. In national reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, CEDC tend to be discussed as such even though there is no specific mention of the category in

the Convention. The discussion is often wholly limited to street children. In other contexts, urban childhoods are often discussed as if all children in urban areas are street children.

Although African literature on children as a whole tends to focus on health and nutrition, the CEDC/street children category is increasingly significant.<sup>23</sup> It is particularly pertinent in African contexts that “Difficult Circumstances” implies a number of specific social circumstances such as children who do not live with their families, who work in exploitative conditions, or are involved in armed conflict. “Difficult Circumstances” does not include poverty or lack of food security, which are presented in CEDC literature as *causes* of “Difficult Circumstances” rather than difficult circumstances in their own right. Thus Dallape correctly criticizes the entire notion of CEDC as failing to provide a class analysis, and ignoring the structural causes of children’s problems.<sup>24</sup>

### The street

Although the street child population may not be so large in terms of number as is often publicized, as the authors of a report from Uganda point out, it is “staggering in terms of its complexity”.<sup>25</sup> One of the more productive approaches is to think in terms of children having a special relationship to the street, among other domains of their lives.<sup>26</sup> But this also entails the realization that the street has different meanings and connotations in different contexts. In the same city it can have many meanings. These might include being: a major site of socialization, social and commercial life in marginalized districts; places dedicated to the circulation of traffic; and spaces dedicated to the circulation of consumers and/or business employees. Streets can be paved, cobbled, grass or dust. At night they can be lit with neon lights and full of movement or pitch dark and silent. The streets on which street children move tend to be the central modern areas and, just as these areas are usually small in comparison to the vast areas of slums, suburbs and high density housing, so the numbers of street children visible in what Fabio Dallape calls the “Avenues” are almost always very small compared to the child population of any city.

**TABLE 1** Trends and projections in urban population<sup>27</sup>

Region/Year	1950		1970		1990		2000	
	mn	%	mn	%	mn	%	mn	%
Africa	32,3	14,5	82,7	22,9	217,4	33,9	354,4	40,7
Latin America & Caribbean	68,6	41,5	163,6	57,3	320,5	71,5	411,3	76,4
Developing world	285,6	17,0	635,8	24,7	1 514,7	37,1	2 251,4	45,1
Rest of world	448,2	53,8	698,6	66,6	875,5	72,6	946,2	74,9

### Urban Africa compared to urban Latin America

It is when considering the meaning of "the street" that major differences between Africa and Latin America become noticeable. In the first place the rates of urbanization remain dissimilar and African urbanization is of a much more recent date (Table 1), thus representing a relatively new factor among the root causes of streetism.

The literature on the problems faced by urban children throughout the continent, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, makes frequent reference to the hypothesis that rural-urban migration brings about either inter-generational conflicts over values, or anomie among young people who have migrated and are no longer protected by the certainties of traditional tribal values.<sup>28</sup> This is combined with hypotheses about the breakdown of family values, the increase in single-parent families and overpopulation as primary reasons why children begin to live and work in the street, all of which accords with the "simplistic" Latin American models of the 1980s referred to by Rizzini. Unfortunately, in Africa as elsewhere, the record is frequently flawed by researchers failing to use control groups, targeting only groups of children in the streets as research subjects. It is thus not possible to conclude that these children are more or less likely to come from broken or single-parent families than contemporaries from the same socio-cultural and economic groups. A further tendency distorting the evidence is the use of Northern models of family life, even by African researchers. It is seldom that one finds discussion of family breakdown couched within the framework of a discussion of, for instance, the transition from polygamous and extended family life towards more monogamous models. More frequently it appears as if the literature assumes

the prior existence of single-household nuclear families as the norm, which is surely not the case in most African contexts. I would suggest that a significant factor in this analytical distortion is the considerable influence of Northern financial resources and policy priorities on both research and programme practice, as well as the use of sociological and psychological research instruments developed in Northern contexts.

Comparative urban geography also tends to show differently structured cities on both continents, although the effects of these on children have not been compared. However, different levels of industrialization and of rural-urban interpenetration will affect the juvenile labour market every bit as much as they affect adult employment patterns.

A further topic that is almost always ignored is the meaning of the street in different cultural contexts. In Latin America, as discussed above, the street is a rhetorical, battleground, a site of political activity of a particular kind, in which children symbolize and are used for adult political ends. It is also, like streets everywhere, a gendered space. Women are associated with the house (*casa*) and men with the street (*calle*) in ways connected to the Latin cultural conceptions of honour and shame, and this distinction is often very sharply drawn. The result is that only a very small proportion of children living on the streets of Latin America are girls and it is not uncommon for the estimated Latin American percentage of street girls (10%) to be globalized. Given the variety of African urban cultural situations, the *casa/calle* model cannot be so clearly applied. For example, Enid Schildkrout's study of the roles of children in Muslim Kano shows the street, like other spaces, not only gendered but also a bearer of age relations, society being

stratified, as in many African societies, by relative, rather than chronological, age. Whereas male and female spaces are strictly delimited, both inside and outside the home, particularly where women are in purdah, children have greater spatial mobility than all adults and can cross male/female boundaries particularly when they are young. Women could not carry out either their domestic responsibilities or their independent economic activities and still remain in purdah were it not for the roles played by children. Street trading for example is carried out by both girls and boys, on behalf of women.<sup>29</sup> Detailed ethnography of other urban African situations would undoubtedly reveal other understandings of the ways in which urban space is used and the effects on children who live and work on the street.

### African childhoods

Understanding the lives of children who live and work on the street entails finding out about the lives and roles of children in any culture. As discussed earlier, the notion of The African Child is as much of an obstacle in this process as the global construct of The Child. African childhoods are very diverse. They cannot be encompassed by any one ideal, any more than they can be understood through the depiction so often encountered in foreign media of African children as victims of starvation and war, which is sometimes cynically referred to as the "ribs and flies" image.

Nevertheless, there are certain African realities that affect children on the continent whatever their cultural context, geographical situation or socioeconomic status. In the first place, children and young people form more than half the population of most African countries, which has implications for the distribution of resources and for policy. Closely related to this demographic factor are the observations that significant deficits exist in the schooling systems of most countries and that there is a general lack of provision of child care for working mothers in urban settings, both of which are likely to be significant contributory causes of streetism. In the context of the stringencies effected by structural adjustment, neither of these deficits is likely to be addressed substantially in the short or medium term.

In addition, many African countries are affected by large-scale population displacements and/or the presence of significant numbers of refugees, as the result of natural or man-made disasters and armed conflicts (Table 2).

This is a further point of contrast with Latin America, as is the fact that there is a greater tendency for refugees in Africa to be in the 5 to 17-year age group.<sup>31</sup>

Archaeological and historical records show that displacement and migration have always been African realities. In themselves, the current population movements are not new phenomena and might not be viewed as producing a crisis situation. Traditional mechanisms within the community and extended family structures should protect children whose biological parents are unable or unwilling to care for them, as well as children who become separated from their families and communities. Chief among these, and typical of many parts of Africa, are systems of fostering and mechanisms of apprenticeship.

Fostering and the circulation of children within extended family structures are found in many African societies and have operated as traditional welfare systems to the benefit of young and old alike.<sup>32</sup> However, the scale of population displacement in the context of environmental degradation, depleted resources and structural adjustment may well be placing these mechanisms under too much strain. Where vulnerable children are concerned, there is a fine line between welfare and exploitation. Thus rural children sent to be fostered in towns so that they can have access to education may find themselves working as unpaid domestic servants. In Ethiopia, for example, traditional forms of fostering such as *Gudifecha*, *Yetut Abat* and *Yetut Inat*<sup>33</sup> have been used to deal with children orphaned or separated from parents by drought, famine and civil unrest. But these can also result in children being fostered for their labour value and thrown out when times get too hard to feed an additional mouth.

Likewise, apprentices may be exploited in sweatshops instead of learning skills that enable them to become independent adults. According to Alain Maurice's study of apprentices in Kaolack, Senegal, apprenticeship is the "hub of the system of unpaid labour" in

**TABLE 2** Populations of concern to UNHCR in Africa and Latin America, 1994<sup>30</sup>

	Africa '000	Latin America '000	World total '000
Refugees	6 752,2	109,0	14 488,7
Returnees	3 084,0	67,4	3 983,2
Others of concern	6,7	0,1	3 524,1
Internally displaced	1 973,1	8,0	5 423,0
Total	11 816,0	184,6	27 418,9

which boys circulate among workshops just as other children circulate among families. The form of exploitation, as Maurice notes, is very different to the "anarchic, individualistic" petty commodity production in Latin America because it is characterized by "paternalistic relations in the workplace", depending on interwoven kinship and age-set relationships.<sup>34</sup> I would argue that petty commodity production in Latin America is organized and is also a bearer of kinship relations that operate in ways that are not purely capitalistic, so that it is nowhere as individualistic as Maurice claims. Nevertheless, the intensity of the particular mix of kinship and age-set relationships he describes for Senegal, and noted elsewhere in Africa by many other ethnographers, is not to be found in Latin America, which is a further reason for developing models of childhood based in African realities and not imported from elsewhere.

A further specifically African mechanism, now often associated with streetism, is Koranic schools, to which parents may confide children for both educational and welfare reasons. In urban areas of Chad, The Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and northern parts of Ghana and Nigeria, the pupils of Koranic schools provide the income for the school by begging. Although begging is an integral part of the social institution of Koranic schools, concern is now being expressed in some quarters that pupils spend more time in begging than in school and are subjected to abuse, neglect and other maltreatment by the *marabouts* (teachers).<sup>35</sup> The relationship to widespread migration patterns can be seen in one case study of a Koranic school (or *daara*) in The Gambia, where the pupils, although all from the same ethnic group, came from Senegal, Guinea-Conakry, Mali and Mauritania as well as The Gambia itself.<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps the most significant factor in African childhoods as a whole is the fact that difficult circumstances are so often related to armed conflict. Symptomatic of this, is that part of the Consensus of Dakar devoted to Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances. The Consensus resulted from the OAU International Conference on Assistance to African Children in 1992. In Part 3, instead of introducing the usual melange of categories, including street children, it concentrates its four paragraphs entirely on children in situations of armed conflict and the need for conflict resolution. Although disabled and orphaned children and child labourers are mentioned briefly elsewhere, and the main thrust of the document is child survival and development, the priority given to children in conflict situations is both justifiable and particular to African countries. In addition to producing child refugees and children orphaned or directly injured, warfare can be considered as a major cause of streetism within some African countries. In Mozambique, for example, Ana Maria Loforte claimed that:

The majority of the children whom we find in the street are, first and foremost, a consequence of the war being waged against this country and the accompanying political, military, economic and social destabilization.<sup>37</sup>

### African street children literature

Child studies in Africa are fragmented and there is no developed discourse on African childhoods. Traditionally, the main themes in academic research on children in Africa focused not on childhood but on transitions, through the anthropological interest in initiation and puberty rites, studies of socialization and of intergenerational relationships of power. Childhood is seen as status and process, viewed

through the prism of adulthood, a stage of becoming rather than a state of being. In many cases, concentration on family structures has left children appearing as attributes of families. Whereas the discourse on children in Latin America, such as it is, has tended to be a discourse on street children, they do not dominate African literature in the same way. If there are any dominant themes related to difficult circumstances these are related to survival and development issues as well as to the importance of war and civil conflict in child welfare literature.

Currently, major sources of texts on children in Africa are inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, which means that data are collected within the framework of programmes rather than theory. Nevertheless there are some interesting indications of new approaches within the literature on street children that indicate the potential for a less limited approach, in which street children or streetism can be integrated into other perspectives that will break with the repetitive tendencies of street children work based on the "on"/"of" the street definitions. The topic of economic and sexual exploitation of children in Africa is part of the overall emphasis on children as victims, fitting within the concerns of a relatively well-developed discourse on child abuse and neglect that is largely the outcome of activities, of ANPPCAN, the African regional section of the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, which has been active in promoting and publishing research in this area as well as in advocacy for children's protection rights.

It is significant that the concept of abuse used by ANPPCAN and entering the African literature is not structured in the same way as that used in Northern literature. An account of the presentation given by an African ANPPCAN functionary at a meeting in Nairobi<sup>38</sup> makes this clear.

The following are the areas where child abuse is commonly evidenced:

- Child labour
- Children in prison
- Handicapped children
- Battering of children
- Children under psychological stress
- Abandoned children
- Children in war situations.<sup>39</sup>

Child abuse is seen as a feature of other social phenomena or situations, rather than as a phenomenon in its own right. Thus, sexual abuse and exploitation, for example, do not constitute a single category but are mentioned in this account in various places, under the headings of child labour, prisons, psychological stress and abandonment. Likewise, a case study of CEDC in Nairobi includes in a list of indicators "Child abuse, whether physical, sexual or child labour".<sup>40</sup> In another related paper, dealing with street hawking in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, child abuse is defined as anything that has a negative effect on child development. Thus street hawking is "next to emotional abuse because it subjects the child to long hours of child labour – starvation and deprivation of adequate care".<sup>41</sup> Child street work thus appears as neglect in the sense that it is the result of structural factors such as lack of financial resources, food and shelter, rather than being a personal factor as it is in the CEDC model. This begins to answer Dallape's call for a class analysis and also, interestingly, echoes indigenous Latin American interpretations of *abandonados* (abandoned children), which are the third category of the Unicef definition of street children, not as children who have been abandoned by their families and are found on the main thoroughfares, but as the majority of slum or marginalized children who are abandoned by the dominant elites.

What this signifies is that this way of conceptualizing abuse represents a different, and more contextually relevant, approach. In terms of methodology it requires appropriate, locally constructed research techniques rather than the use of imported schedules and other instruments. In terms of children's drawings, such as the boy with the hat, with which I began, the implication is not only that children's own explanations of their pictures should be taken into account but also that considerable work needs to be carried out into different cultural ways of seeing as well as the development of everyday visual cognition among children from different cultures and social groups.<sup>42</sup>

Thus the literature on street children in Africa at this point reveals no overall theoretical models or debates, which it has in common with all writing on street children. Yet, despite the fact that there has been no apparent



He helps the people. The ones that have no food and no clothes.  
A VERY GOOD PERSON (Patrick, age 13)

effort to develop an alternative approach to the Latin American model of street children, there are glimmerings of an implicit African approach that would contextualize the lives of children who live and work in the street in other aspects of African childhoods. This challenge should be taken up in child studies in Africa as a whole, given that it is nearly ten years since the then Director of the Undugu Society programme for street children in Nairobi wrote about programme-related research with these children:

First the team has to study the community and must determine which method will be most suited to the particular African situation. Most probably they will have to invent an African approach, based on the people's traditions, religions and superstitions. We are like a musical instrument; the music is produced by touching the cords in a right way. The cords are there everywhere, but the way of touching them to produce a melody is specific to each culture.<sup>43</sup>

## Notes and references

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He is at Madala; he is stealing fruit.

(John, age 13)

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5 See, for example, B Glauser, "Street children: Deconstructing a construct", in A James and A Prout (eds), *op cit*; R Lucchini, *Sociologie de la survie: L'enfant dans la rue*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996, pp 251–285; M Connolly and J Ennew, "Introduction: Children out of place", *Childhood*, vol 3, no 2, 1996, pp 131–146.

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16 See, for example, M Connolly, "Adrift in the city: A comparative study of street children in Bogota, Colombia, and Guatemala City", in N A Boxhill (ed), *Homeless children: The watchers and the waiters*, New York and London: The Haworth Press; R Lucchini, 1996, *op cit*.

17 A Veale and A Adefrisew, *Study on street children in four selected towns of Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Unicef and University College, Cork, 1992, p x.

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# The psychological assessment of South African *Street children*

a considerable body of scholarly, policy and popular literature deals with street children.<sup>1</sup> In the main, however, these writings are concerned with the occurrence per se of street children, historical and contemporary contexts for children's appearance and work on city streets, cross-national and cross-cultural comparisons, street children's family backgrounds, and the experiences of children on the street. To date, surprisingly few psychological studies of street children based on traditional methods of psychometric testing and clinical assessment have been published.<sup>2</sup>

It is clear that such studies may be theoretically and programmatically helpful. For example, there is a pervasive assumption that street children suffer psychological trauma and damage as a result both of destructive family backgrounds and their subsequent potentially injurious experiences on the street. Any simplistic assumptions about outcome have, however, been challenged, for example, in a recent review of evidence related to risk and resilience among South African street children with respect to their emotional and intellectual development.<sup>3</sup> Systematic studies among street children may shed light on areas of particular psychological vulnerability and contrasting fortitude among children who live and work in urban areas. With regard to programmes, the large number of non-governmental organizations working with street children around the world have access to few guidelines regarding optimal placement of individual children within available educational and social interventions.<sup>4</sup> As was our experience in South Africa, decisions with far-reaching consequences have to be made with regard to street children, affecting their return to community schools, their access to literacy programmes, to psychotherapeutic intervention, and so on. The development of methods of assessment on which such decisions could be based may be very helpful.

In 1988 the director of Street-Wise, a national non-governmental organiza-

tion providing feeding, shelter and educational programmes for street children, requested the first author to undertake a study to ascertain realistic educational goals for children in the programme in Johannesburg, at the same time establishing baseline data against which to evaluate the efficacy of the then existing Street-Wise programmes.<sup>5</sup> These programmes operate at different levels: basic lifeskill training, functional literacy and numeracy, special catch-up schooling, return to community schooling and vocational training. A number of factors were perceived to complicate decisions about where individual children would be best placed, including their poor scholastic backgrounds, the possibility of unrecognized perceptual and neurological problems, and the boys'<sup>6</sup> own changing agendas with regard to their future, including education and vocational choices.

## **Psychological assessments of the scholastic/intellectual abilities or potential of street children**

The issue of psychometric scholastic/intellectual assessment of black children (and most street children in South Africa are black) has been extensively, if informally, discussed in South Africa.<sup>7</sup> While there are manifest practical needs for classification, prediction and clinical understanding of the cognitive abilities of individual children about whom programmatic, welfare and intervention decisions have to be made, there are forceful arguments against embarking on such endeavours. It has been argued, for example, that such assessment may be neither useful nor sound.

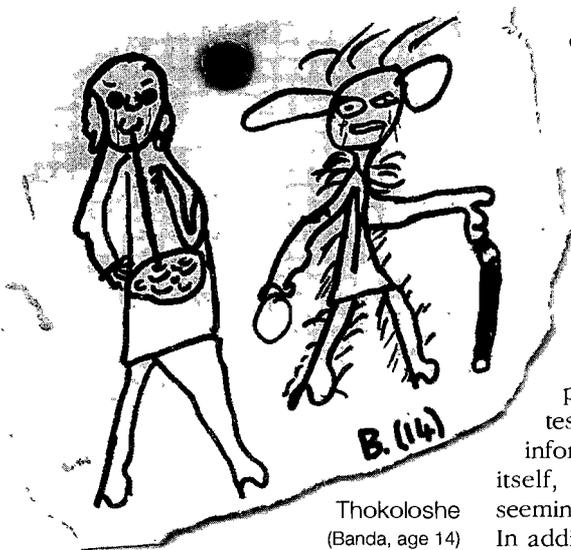
It is now recognized that global psychometric assessments through ability or intelligence testing are often employed simply for classification and diagnosis, and have limited usefulness in the design of remedial and other

*Dr Linda M Richter, of the Centre for Epidemiological Research in Southern Africa at the Medical Research Council, and Ms Michelle van der Walt, of the Institute for Behavioural Sciences at the University of South Africa, discuss general issues involved in the cognitive, emotional adjustment and neuropsychological assessment of street children.*



Brother and sister help each other. They going home. It is good to go home. They love each other.

(David, age 12)



Thokoloshe  
(Banda, age 14)

interventions.<sup>8</sup> As Miller-Jones<sup>9</sup> points out, most psychometric tests consist of such a jumble of psychological functions that a defective performance reveals very little systematic information about the nature or origin of the problems a particular child might be experiencing. In addition, recent developments in cognitive psychology have questioned the very foundations of intelligence and general ability testing. General factor ("g") theories of intelligence are giving way to more social constructivist theories which hold that cognitive abilities are contextually structured, supported and mediated.<sup>10</sup> One of the implications of this trend is the recognition of the error in the reasoning that if a child does not use or express an ability in a setting in which its use would be appropriate, one can conclude that *the child does not have the ability*.<sup>11</sup> Apart from the fact that cognitive functioning may be intrinsically context-specific, studies have also shown the degree to which performance on intelligence and other ability tests is powerfully influenced by non-ability factors – including the nature of the setting, characteristics of the tester, the degree to which the testee is aware of and familiar with implicit task demands, and so on.

Further, there are innumerable unresolved predicaments in cross-cultural testing, and the notion of culture-fairness in psychometric tests remains problematic.<sup>12</sup> In addition, local South African norms have been developed for only a limited number of psychometric tests for use among children and adolescents, thereby increasing the risk

of significantly underestimating the capacities of non-Western South African children. These risks are further compounded, in the case of street children, by several other factors. For example, many children have received little and erratic schooling, and schooling is probably the strongest determinant of the kind of test-taking know-how necessary for performance on psychometric tests;<sup>13</sup> for example, remembering information deliberately as a goal in itself, repeating or elaborating on seemingly obvious topics, and so on. In addition to impoverished scholastic foundations, the assessed intellectual abilities of street children are likely to be affected by numerous factors, including possible emotional trauma, undernutrition, and neurological damage or neuropsychological dysfunction caused by injuries and/or substance abuse. The cumulative, generational effects of their deprivation as members of broken and disorganized families, living in socially and politically oppressed communities, also has to be assumed as a background to the potential intellectual performance of children on psychometric tests.

Similar, though materially different, arguments to those advanced against psychometric testing of cognitive abilities, can be made against neuropsychological assessments and evaluations of emotional state and social adjustment.

### The South African study

#### Aims

The project of testing children to help the staff of Street-Wise make more informed decisions about educational planning for individual children was undertaken as an exploratory study. Very few psychological assessment techniques have been standardized for use amongst black South African children and the range in age and educational exposure of the children made it difficult to anticipate basal and ceiling levels of performance. The questions to be addressed included: which children had the ability to be returned to community schools; which children had special handicaps or perceptual problems requiring specialized assistance, and which children appeared to have neuropsychological dysfunc-

tions? As a secondary goal, we wanted to be able to describe some of the major psychological dimensions of street children in Johannesburg.

#### Methods

The methods used were selected to achieve these goals. The assessment procedures had to be available, appropriate, relevant and practicable. Three young black university students were employed to conduct the interviews and administer the assessment procedures. They were trained to conduct their examinations in a standardized manner, but also to employ their intuitive interpersonal skills to put the children at ease. Arrangements were made for the children to be entertained and fed while they waited to be tested and frequent breaks were scheduled to accommodate the boys' limited and untrained attention spans. All the materials used in the study were translated into Sizulu and Setswana and the children were assessed, as far as possible, in their home language. It should be noted, though, that most of the children spoke variations of a "tsotsi-taal",<sup>14</sup> rather than formal versions of an African language, English or Afrikaans.

A number of principles guided the selection of the specific assessment tools selected to assess the children:

- The cognitive measures should be relatively education-independent so that the same measures could be used with each child, regardless of the wide range in educational backgrounds.
- At least some of the measures should allow comparisons with children on an international level and should therefore be well known and widely used in intervention and evaluation research.
- At least some of the measures should allow comparisons with local black children of the same ages, who have regularly attended school and who come from a variety of socio-economic and family conditions. Some measures were therefore selected because a substantial quantity of local data using that method was available.
- At least some of the measures should attempt to assess cognitive strategies as well as intellectual level. Describing the types of cognitive approaches taken by largely

unschooled children may be very helpful in designing ways of teaching and motivating street children.

- The techniques for assessment should be interesting to a group of street-wise children, that is, while being simple, they should not be simplistic and, where possible, they should be computer-administered because of the children's enchantment with electronic "arcade games"

The areas of the children's functioning that we addressed in the assessments, together with the specific measures employed, are given below:

#### **Past and present nutrition:**

Height (as a proxy indicator of longer term nutrition) and mass (as a proxy indicator of current nutrition).

#### **Cognitive abilities:**

The Raven's Coloured Progressive Matrices,<sup>11</sup> the Developmental Test of Visual-Motor Integration,<sup>16</sup> a computerized version of the Category Test from the Halstead Neuropsychological Test Battery for Children (9-14 years)<sup>17</sup> and the Mazes subtest from the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC).<sup>18</sup>

#### **Integrity of cognitive and perceptual functions:**

The Developmental Test of Visual-Motor Integration and the Category test.

#### **Problem-solving capacity, motivation and persistence:**

WISC Mazes, together with a specially developed scoring procedure for the Category test. These attributes were also measured directly through an analysis of videotaped episodes of boys attempting to solve the Formboard puzzles from the New South African Individual Scale.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Level of educational concepts attained:**

The Aptitude Tests for School Beginners<sup>20</sup> and the Watson Number- and Reading-Readiness Tests<sup>21</sup> were used to assess the children's conceptual foundations for numeracy and literacy.

#### **Attitudes and values towards conformity:**

The Jealous Inventory.<sup>22</sup>

#### **Present emotional state and background factors:**

Five pictures considered salient to the children's lives were selected from the Michigan Picture Test<sup>23</sup> and administered to elicit projective accounts from the children of current emotional states and previous experiences.

#### **Personality and rated behaviour:**

The Nowicki-Strickland Locus-of-Control Scale<sup>24</sup> was used to assess experienced autonomy. Street-Wise staff were also asked to complete a behavioural checklist for each child.

#### **Psychopathology:**

A modified and extended form of Christiansen's checklist<sup>25</sup> was completed by shelter staff.

In assessing such an atypical group of children, several issues relating to performance had to be addressed. These included whether the children performed optimally on the tests; whether the information they gave about themselves was valid; and the reliability of their test performance given their unstable motivation, short attention spans and inexperience at concentrating on one task for any length of time. Reliability as assessed by a test-retest of educational concepts indicated that the performance of the children was largely unstable. This means that the results of the tests have to be interpreted with some latitude. In order to examine the validity of the results, the findings in respect of each child were discussed in meetings with Street-Wise

staff, and their consistency with staff perceptions carefully examined. In the main, the psychological findings were strongly corroborated by staff impressions. Only a selection of the results are presented in this paper as a vehicle for discussion.

#### **Results**

##### **Age:**

The boys ranged in age from 7 to 18 years (mean 13.5). More than half the children were between 13 and 16 years old. The greatest number of boys (72%) had left home and begun to work and live on the streets by the time they were 13 years old. At the time of the study, most of the boys (71%) had been on the streets for less than a year.

##### **Previous schooling:**

The distribution of years of previous schooling is shown in Figure 1. Sixty-six per cent of boys had received less than five years of schooling, which in South Africa is classified as "illiterate".<sup>26</sup>

##### **Family contact:**

Twenty-six per cent of the boys reported not having seen their families since leaving home. The remainder had some contact with their families, and 40% of the boys reported seeing their families at least once a fortnight.

##### **Growth:**

Mass is regarded as a good indicator of contemporary levels of nutrition and tends to fall rapidly when kilojoule levels are below those necessary for bodily functioning. On the other

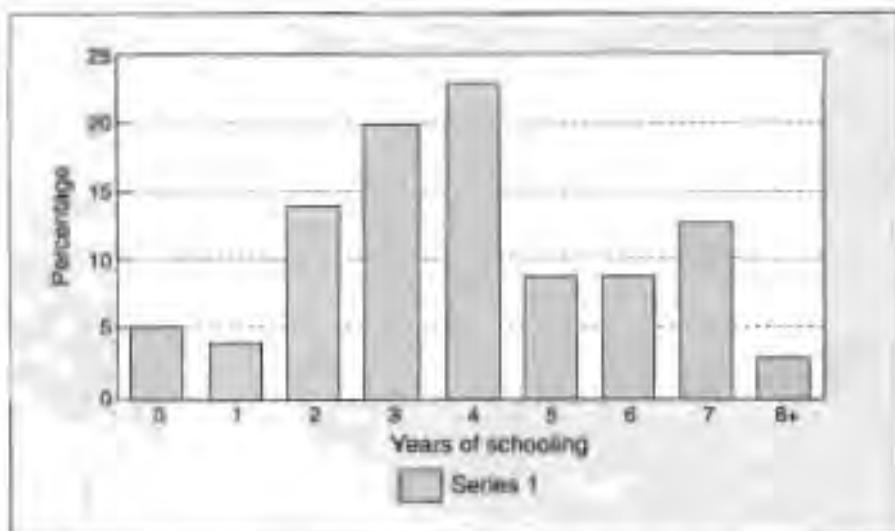


Figure 1 Years of schooling

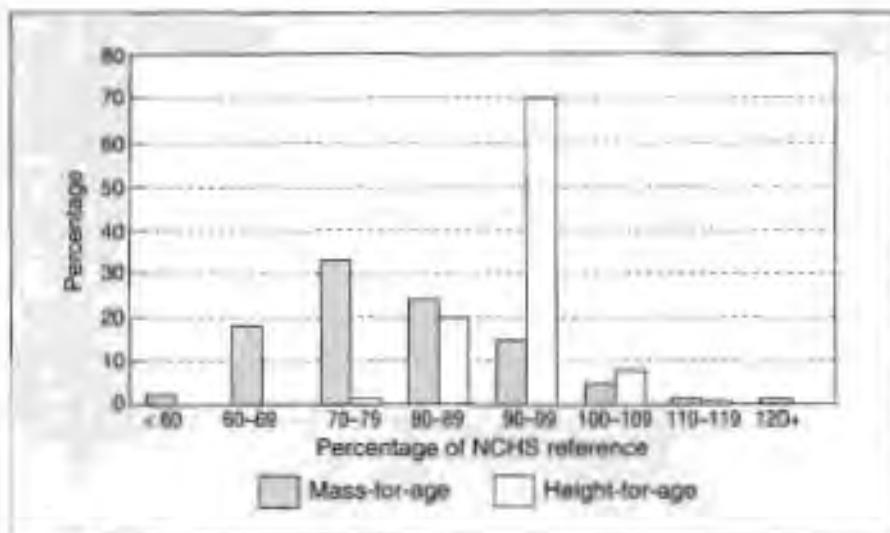


Figure 2 Mass- and height-for-age

hand, height is relatively resistant to short-term nutritional deprivation, but stunting of stature results from long-term nutritional inadequacy experienced in early childhood. In this simplistic sense, mass can be used to assess current levels of nutrition and height nutritional history.<sup>27</sup>

The actual height and mass measurements of the boys were converted to a percentage of the internationally accepted reference values<sup>28</sup> and the percentages of children in various mass-for-age (WFA) and height-for-age (HFA) categories are shown in Figure 2.

Twenty per cent of the children showed stunting (HFA below 90% of the reference value), and 53% were

undermass (WFA below 80%). The latter indicates recent undernutrition and may be attributable to the eating patterns of the children on the street. However, in order to place these findings in perspective, the mass of the street children is shown, in Figure 3, in comparison with two samples of black urban South African boys in the same age range.<sup>29</sup> This figure makes it clear that street children are not more undermass than black urban South African boys of the same age. While these growth measures may have implications for the cognitive performance of street children in particular, they indicate the generally poor living conditions of black children in South Africa.

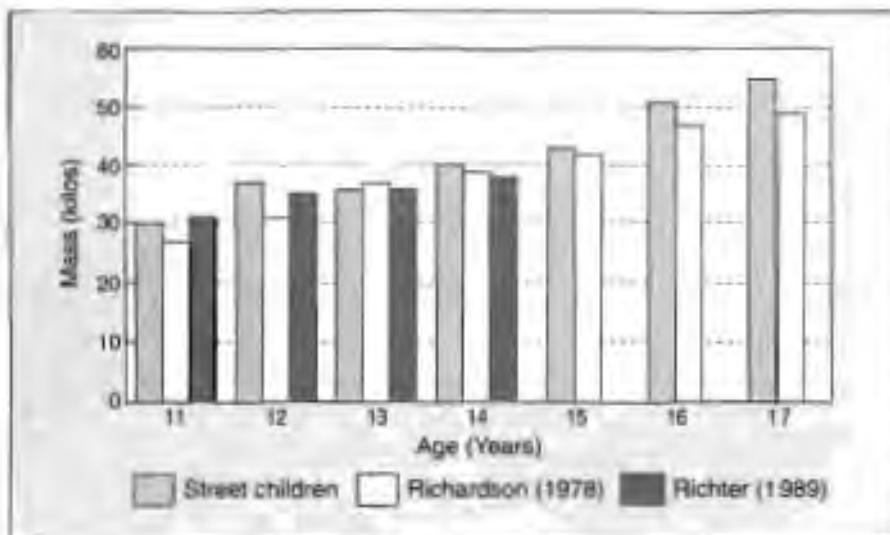


Figure 3 Mass - South African comparisons

**Cognitive/developmental assessments:**

The published norms for the measures were used to convert each boy's level of performance into an "age" score. These scores were then converted into an "age difference" score (the difference between chronological age and performance age). This index was based on the concept of "mental age" as used in developmental tests like the Stanford-Binet, and shares many of its weakness.<sup>30</sup>

However, the "age difference" score was used to estimate educational level. For example, to say a boy performed at the level of a seven-year-old was assumed to imply that he performed at the level of an educational novice, or someone in their first year of schooling.

The distribution of the "age difference" scores of the street children, on the Raven's Coloured Progressive Matrices, the Beery, the WISC Mazes and the Category tests, is shown in Figure 4.

As can be seen, almost all the children performed at levels very much below the western norms, with the majority of boys performing at levels six years or more below their chronological ages. What should also be noted, however, is that nearly a quarter of the sample performed on the cognitive tests at a level approximate to their chronological age, despite their adverse scholastic and intellectual backgrounds.

Again, in order to place the performance of street children into perspective, their scores on the WISC Mazes and the Category test are shown, in Figures 5 and 6, in comparison with normative data obtained from same-aged black South African children.<sup>31</sup> Surprisingly, black school-going South African boys from urban environments did not perform any differently from a group of largely illiterate street children on two of the cognitive measures. What explanations can be offered for this finding? Firstly, the schooling experience (between 3 and 7 years in the school-going group) may be too limited to produce significant differences in the abilities assessed by the tests. Secondly, it may be that the tests assess intellectual abilities which are relatively unaffected by exposure to formal schooling. That is, both tests may depend on logical thinking of the kind

which conceivably can be developed either by formal schooling or by the demands made on a child to cope alene in difficult circumstances. It is a truism that street children have to be quick-witted and smart to survive. However, it might equally be possible that primary education for black children in apartheid South Africa did little to enhance the development of logical thinking, over and above the influences of day-to-day informal learning and maturation.

Importantly, these results support the findings of Lewis Apteckar in Colombia<sup>22</sup> that street children do not perform as poorly as might be expected from their poor socio-economic backgrounds and frequently unstable life experiences. Quoting from a study of Guatemalan children,<sup>23</sup> Apteckar argues that street life may promote cognitive growth in children, rather than detract from it, through 'a large degree of self-managed, nonsupervised activities ... a high amount of social awareness of people, and a knowledge of their natural environments ...'.<sup>24</sup>

Time spent on the streets related to cognitive performance is that children who performed worst (had the highest performance-chronological age discrepancy) had, on average, spent nearly twice the amount of time on the street (an average of 22 months) as compared to children who performed best (an average of 11 months). The implications of these results are clear – the longer boys remained on the streets, the more likely they were to lose abilities and to acquire handicaps. The reasons for this trend probably include loss of motivation, the acquisition of values, behaviours and habits antithetical to sustained effort and concentration, and cognitive damage owing to drugs and injuries. It is also possible, though, that some boys might have abandoned school and taken to the streets because of educational and other failures associated with pre-existing disabilities. What is clear is that the cognitive disabilities of some boys will preclude alternatives to street life if they do not receive special educational help, at least to become functionally literate and numerate.

#### Problem-solving skills:

Problem-solving skills were assessed from video recordings of boys completing a formboard as well as from an analysis of item-by-item responses to

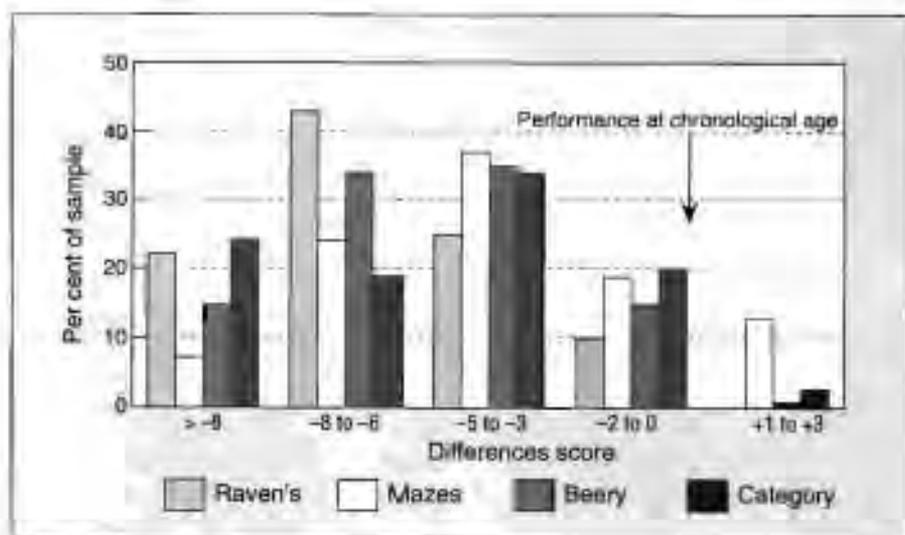


Figure 4 Cognitive test performance

the Category Test. On the latter test, children are required to deduce an underlying principle in each of six subtests, the manifestation of which changes every few items. The procedure thus offers opportunities to observe logical thinking, generalization, transfer of learning, memory, reaction to success and failure and so on.

The two tests gave different perspectives on the problem-solving styles and capacities of the street children tested. In comparison with videotaped observations of the way in which a sample of schoolgoing children in South Africa tended to solve the puzzle, street children appeared to be more confident about trying alternatives, more creative in the kinds

of solutions they tested, more determined to succeed and less deterred by failure. On the Category Test though, most of the street boys found it very difficult to uncover and generalize principles based on size, shape, position and proportionality. In addition, they also showed several errors of thinking which can be remedied by example, explanation, insight and practice. For example, regressive errors (using an old solution to solve a new problem), perseverative errors (reiterating a solution), and learning errors (responding in the same erroneous way on a subsequent occasion despite corrective feedback).

The problems experienced by the street children on the Category

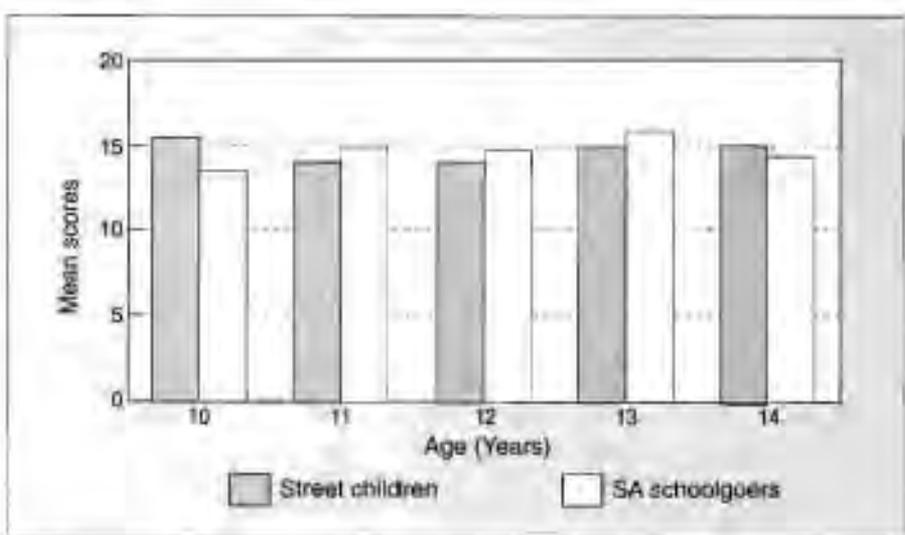
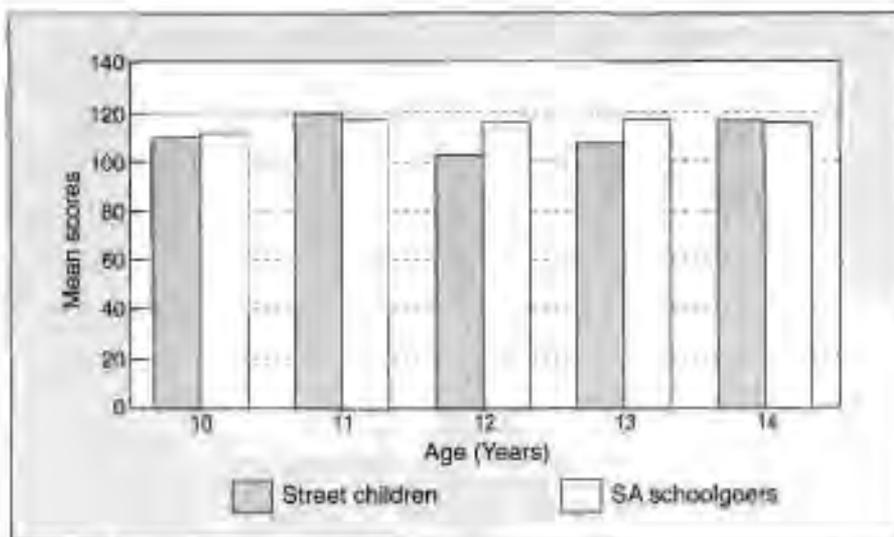


Figure 5 WISC Mazes: South African comparison



**Figure 6** Category test: South African comparison

Test reveal very clearly the disadvantages of being deprived of formal schooling. Cole and Scribner<sup>37</sup> maintain that one of the most striking differences between the cognitive performance of schooled and unschooled individuals is that the latter tend to solve problems in an individual and isolated way. That is, unschooled people tend to approach each problem as if it were a novel one; the problem remains situation-bound. Schooled individuals, on the other hand, find it much easier to perceive a problem as part of a general class of similar problems. This enables schooled individuals to learn from experience and generalize problem-solving strategies to new problems.

**Neuropsychological screening:**

Both the Beery and the Category Test are routinely used as neuropsychological screening tools. Thirty-three boys reported in interviews that they had received some kind of head injury; of these, 10 boys showed marked dysfunctions on the screening tests. Altogether, 27 boys were identified as potentially showing some kind of neuropsychological disturbance according to the following criteria: qualitatively disturbed performance on one or more tests; very poor performance across all tests; inconsistent with educational background; and unexplained inconsistencies across tests measuring similar abilities. Twenty-three of these, and seven other boys were later referred for neurological investigations consisting of a clinical examination,

an electroencephalographic recording, and further specialized neuropsychological testing. The primary aim of these investigations was to examine the possible effects of prolonged volatile substance abuse ("glue sniffing") on the boys' neurological status.<sup>38</sup>

The fact that nearly a third of the 97 boys tested were referred for neurological examinations, indicates that possible neuropsychological problems may be a commonly unrecognized difficulty experienced by street children. Although many of the children reported having had problems at school, it is impossible to say whether neuropsychological problems were one of the factors precipitating street life, through running away from accumulating failure at school and problems at home, or whether the neuropsychological problems are consequent upon the injuries and damage associated with living on the streets.

**Psychopathology:**

Psychopathology enters into discussions about street children in two ways. Firstly, there is a social services perspective according to which run-away children are classified as delinquent.<sup>37</sup> Secondly, throwaway and neglected children are assumed to experience a failure of nurturance, which is likely to be compounded by abuse and derogation on the street.<sup>38</sup>

In view of the above, street children might be expected to show higher levels of psychiatric symptomatology than other groups of young people. In a previous South African study,

which adopted a formal psychiatric approach to symptom description, it was reported that the typical presentation of street children could be classified as a non-aggressive undersocialised conduct disorder. Psychological adjustment of street children was assessed in this study through a combination of methods: children's responses to both structured questionnaires and projective pictures, staff ratings of boys' everyday behaviour and interviews with child care workers about perceived personality and behavioural characteristics.

The majority of boys were rated and described by staff as having some kind of adjustment problem, most commonly in the interpersonal domain. Some descriptions were indicative of serious emotional and/or behavioural disturbance; for example, six boys were chronic bedwetters, one boy had attempted suicide on two occasions, and one boy had been admitted to hospital in a psychotic state. About one third of boys were rated by staff as showing moderate depressive symptomatology and nearly half as showing moderate symptoms of anxiety, making these two problems more prevalent among the sample than symptoms of delinquency (22% of boys were rated as showing moderate symptoms of acting out). However, it should also be noted that nearly one third of the children were rated as showing adequate to good psychological adjustment.

The fitness inventory is a measure designed to assess disturbance and delinquency among teenagers in the United States, and therefore presents headlong all the problems of importing middle-class moral values into judgements concerning the adjustment or otherwise of street children in South Africa. However, two findings from this self-report measure were interesting. The first concerns the existence of a definite sense of sub-cultural values among street children which places them in conflict with most forms of social authority, and the second was low levels of assessed psychopathology on scales measuring Manifest Aggression, Withdrawal, Repression and Denial. While South African street children endorsed sub-cultural values which would put them at odds with dominant society they did not, as a group, appear to be psychopathologically withdrawn from or opposed to conventional society.

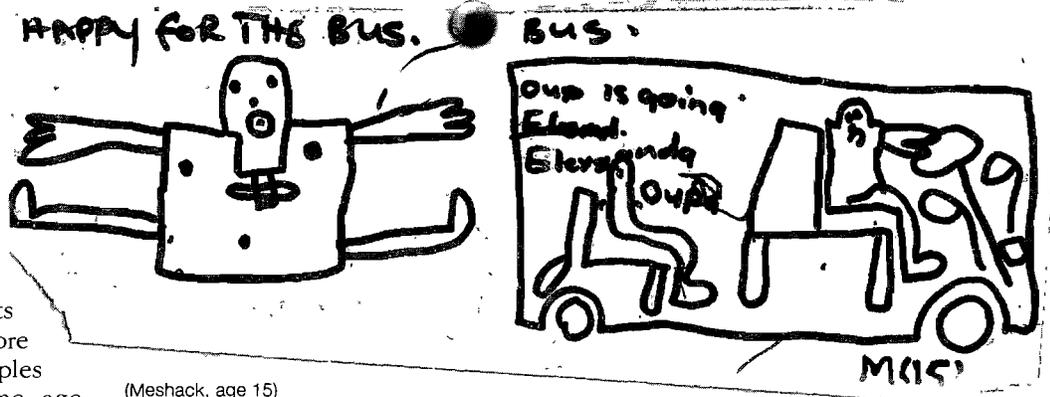
**Personality functioning:**

Personality functioning was assessed through the locus-of-control scale and the boys' responses to the projective pictures. For their age, the street children as a group tend to be internally orientated; that is, they tended to believe that they have control over or can influence events and people in their lives, more so than Anglo-American samples of youth of about the same age. Locus-of-control scores appeared to pervade many aspects of the children's functioning, both intellectual and social. For example, boys with a higher internal locus-of-control score showed less psychopathology, particularly depression, than boys with a more external orientation; they also performed better on the problem-solving tasks, and portrayed their relationships with peers as more positive and supportive.

Five projective pictures were presented to the boys. Although somewhat ambiguous because of their grainy black-and-white reproduction, the pictures showed the following:

- Picture 1: A mixed gender group of children playing a game like draughts
- Picture 2: Two adults, an adolescent and a child (a boy) sitting at a table with food
- Picture 3: A girl alone in a classroom
- Picture 4: Two boys with an adult in a bathroom
- Picture 5: A group of four children walking away from the viewer on a country road

In general, the pictures elicited from the boys rich descriptions of personal material. The verbatim responses of the boys were tape-recorded, transcribed, translated into English and coded according to themes which emerged from the descriptions. The categories used were selected because they conveyed information about the children's cognitive structuring of their world, their emotional reactions, and their relationships with peers and family. The degree to which boys identified themselves with the pictures is illustrated by one child's response to Picture 5:



(Meshack, age 15)

These children's hearts are hurt. They remind me of my mother when I was still a baby, when she said she wants to chop me with an axe. She said she hates me, its better to chop my head: ... You know my mother is a little bit of .... My step-father once beat my little brother with a *knob-kierrie* (a stick) and he died. You know I hate that step-father. If I can get a bow and arrow I'll injure him .... This kind of life is not good. We live like animals.

**Dimensions of people and the physical world:**

The spontaneous descriptions of the pictures given by the boys revealed their world to be perceived in very simple, undifferentiated forms; for example, people were described almost entirely according to simple physical dimensions; emotions tended to be categorized solely as undifferentiated happiness or unhappiness. The physical world was patterned along descriptions of the *veld* (the land) and the street. The most frequently mentioned place was a *shebeen* (a place where people drink alcohol). Very few boys mentioned the future. In general, the children appeared to have an extremely limited acquaintance with the dominant society in which people are usually described in terms of personal qualities, physical attributes, roles, emotional states, plans and so on, and where the social and physical world is made up of routines, places of work, services and other goal-directed environments. This apparent socio-cognitive deprivation is likely to have the effect of maintaining and reinforcing the exclusion of street children from mainstream society.

**Values:**

A number of boys made explicit value judgements of the people or situations

displayed in the pictures. Several boys made plain their clear appreciation of right and wrong, their sense of fairness in relationships and, sadly, their awareness of the imperfections of the moral order they have experienced. For example:

It is good to punish kids if they've done something wrong, but not let them go hungry. ... Such kids will hate you and go away from you.

The mother has gone to a *shebeen* to drink. She left her kids.

You may find the father is back from work and when he arrives home he becomes angry with everybody. ... It should not happen, but most of the time it happens.

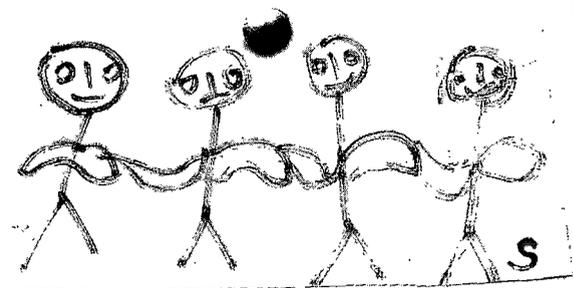
On the other hand, a few boys acknowledged that their own behaviour played a part in their move out of the house. For example, one child said that "Some kids run away from home because they have done naughty things, or stolen money."

**Fears:**

The darkness of the pictures suggested night and elicited talk about fears of the dark, which was associated in the minds of the boys with interpersonal violence and supernatural forces. Many children expressed fears about being alone, and they frequently constructed idealized escape routes from loneliness. For example, one boy asserted that the girl in Picture 3 was not alone, and that her parents were waiting outside in their car to take her home. Poignantly, several boys portrayed the world as one in which unspeakably "awful" things could happen to one. For example:

Liquor ... if you work you are fired ... and you'll never get a job anymore, and you will become ill and die.

Some fathers do not wash their kids be-



These boys are friends.  
They don't fight. (Stephen, age 12)

cause of liquor .... Sometimes they leave their kids ... and the kids are knocked down by cars in the street.

**Peer and family relationships:**

Peer relationships were generally represented as supportive, cooperative and pleasurable. Very few boys spoke of negative experiences with friends. In contrast, many children portrayed relationships with older or younger siblings as involving displacement, jealousy and resentment. Several boys spoke about having been forced to do wrong, or being beaten or left alone by an older sibling. Also, jealousy of a mother's attention to a younger child was mentioned in about a third of all responses.

Half of the sample spoke of hurt, pain, anger, rejection and aggression in family relationships. In the majority of cases these events and experiences were attributed to the moral laxity of parents – they drank, they didn't care, they abandoned children, they punished unfairly, and so on. No child mentioned economic hardship or other social problems attributable to the political order in *apartheid* South Africa as playing a part in their family difficulties or their present "homeless" conditions.

Family relationships were clearly an ambivalent and emotionally problematical area for a number of boys. Some children spoke sadly of a happy home which they had lost; others idealized the attributes of family life and parent-child relationships; there were also children who rejected any possibility of happiness existing in family relationships. Nearly half of the boys made explicit or implicit statements indicating a desire to return to their families or to find a substitute family or home.

**Conclusions**

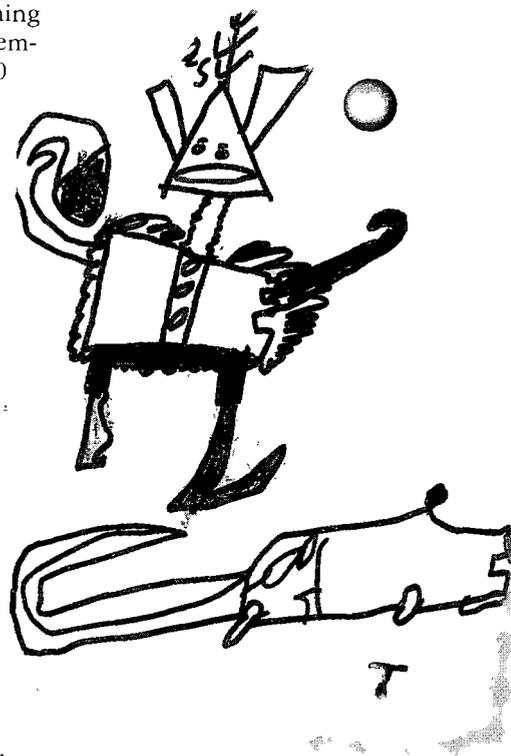
The sample of street children examined in this study were occupants of two shelters in Johannesburg. They were generally much younger than European and North American runaways<sup>40</sup> and most had left home before they had reached their teens. In general, the boys came from black rural and peri-urban areas close to Johannesburg.

Only 3 of the 97 boys were orphans, and two boys had been placed in the shelters by their parents who had no other accommodation for them. Nearly half of the remaining boys had frequent contact with members of their families; about 20 boys, though, reported never having seen any family member since leaving home.

It is important to try and arrive at some classification of street children because, as a group, they are so mixed and variable that general understanding is not possible. However, none of the psychometric data or the clinical material supported the commonly held distinction between runaways and throwaways,<sup>41</sup> classified on family history. The distinction does not seem to have much utility among South African street children, probably because most of the street children interviewed shared the perception that they were not wanted or that their families would be better off without them. One possibility for classifying the group which was suggested by the data is a categorization based on the length of time spent on the streets. In this group, three sub-groups were discernible: short-stayers, transients and long-stayers. Certainly, the implications of length of stay on the streets are serious, as illustrated by the negative consequences associated with extended street life found in this study. Such a classification scheme also has some elements in common with typologies applied to North American runaway youth; for example, the distinction between "floaters" and "runaways",<sup>42</sup> and between "missing children", "runaways", "absconders", "homeless children" and "drifters". Similarly, there was some suggestion that a typology based on psychopathological symptomatology was possible. About one third of

the children examined appeared to be adjusted and coping well; about one third showed some signs of pathology in one or more dimensions, and one third showed moderate to severe symptoms of depression, anxiety or acting out.

This psychological study revealed both unexpected strengths among street children and spirals of vulnerability. For example, one spiral of vulnerability was illustrated in the findings that the younger boys were when they left home, the less schooling they



**A VERY BAD MAN**  
This man is a wizard, he turns himself into a balloon and kills people. When he sees people at night he bites them and eats them up.  
Q. Have you seen him?  
A. Yes, in the forest, on the farms in Ciskei when I was looking after cattle. My sister's there. (Thomas, age 13)

were likely to have completed, and the longer they were likely to have remained on the streets before entering a shelter. Another was the finding that the longer boys remained on the street, the more likely it became that they would show symptoms of psychopathology and a more externalized locus-of-control; also, the more likely they

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were to fall into the lowest intellectual category in the sample. Unfortunately, the present study cannot shed any light on whether the boys in these spirals of vulnerability showed these deficits before they became street children.

North American studies are relatively unanimous in showing two common background factors among runaway youth. The first is a poor home environment, with low levels of perceived parental support, feelings of rejection, hostile and punitive forms of parental control, and family disorganization; the second is scholastic difficulties and failures. Almost certainly, both factors apply with equal force to South African street children. Conceivably, it is just as likely that some boys took to the streets because of their intellectual disabilities, school failure and other problems, as that some of them acquired problems and difficulties from having to endure the dangers and rigours of street life.

It is inevitable that in a study like this prominence is given to inadequacies, psychopathology, poor performance and other problems of street youth. The very point of the investigation was to uncover and describe problems which could be addressed in shelter and educational programmes. Nonetheless, the strengths of street children should not go unnoticed and without comment. In the psychological literature, the construct *resilience*<sup>43</sup> is used to describe children who succeed in intellectual, social or physical domains, despite hard and miserable backgrounds. It is thought that certain "protective factors" act to assist such children to overcome seemingly insurmountable disadvantages. Important among the protective factors described are: sociable temperamental style, nurturing relationships with one or more adults, experiences which help to contain distress or reconstruct it in positive terms, and so on. A sub-group of street children, probably about a third of the sample, show features of resilience. Their intellectual and problem-solving capacities are way above what would be predicted from their backgrounds. They also show little evidence of psychological damage or psychopathology. Understanding what has helped these children cope with premature challenges to their survival may provide the best models for programmatic interventions for street children. This understanding can only be achieved

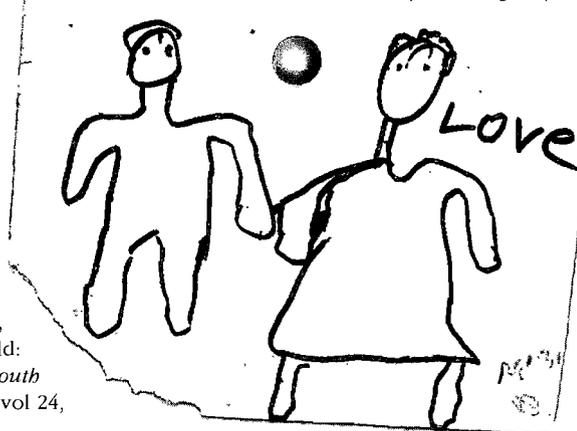
through studies of street children which employ research and clinical methods which help to clarify our thinking about street children and reveal to us new and different perspectives about how best to support street children and their families. This study was one such attempt. Traditional psychometric measures of intellectual functioning and social adjustment were used, in conjunction with information obtained from child care and outreach workers, to describe the psychological functioning of street children, at least as revealed within the view made possible by the methods.

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(Michael, age 13)



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# Street children

## and abuse of power

When a *pivetti* [street child] is killed, this is doing society a favour. What is being killed is not a child but a small bandit. Children are what live in people's homes.<sup>1</sup>

[Street children do not appear to receive attention during 'crime prevention' operations, but are a major problem to our members and residents.<sup>2</sup>

The above viewpoints of formal traders in Rio de Janeiro and Johannesburg have been echoed by countless similar individuals and associations.

Throughout history, street children have been considered as violent and threatening, either in groups or as individuals. In 1904, Montague, discussing the possibility of "England's ruin" by the threat that vagrants seemed to pose to law and order, considered that the Ragged Schools for street children "did a great deal towards turning aside the threatened trouble ... Lord Shaftesbury never tired of saying so. Cabinet ministers and judges of his generation allowed that it was true."<sup>3</sup>

The term "street children and violence" tends to conjure up an image of the children themselves as perpetrators of violence. What is less often considered is the nature of violence against street children. This is not surprising. Throughout the world little attention has been paid to the general victimisation of children, except in the case of sexual abuse<sup>4</sup> and violence against children is usually taken to imply violence in a domestic setting. The UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Article 19), for instance, mentions measures "to protect the child from all forms of mental and physical violence ... while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has care of the child." Had street children been consulted or considered at the time of writing, violence may well have taken on a broader meaning in the UN Convention.

To develop an understanding of the nature of violence associated with street children, this article will draw on

literature concerning street children in European history, current writings on developing countries generally, and specific examples from African countries. Some children find it difficult to talk about the violence they have suffered but many will readily portray their experiences through drawing. Requests to children to portray their violent experiences in drawings should never be made lightly since children may believe such solicitation to be tantamount to an offer of personal help which those making the request may not be willing or able to give.<sup>5</sup>

### Circles of violence

#### *Violence within families*

Family violence is commonly mentioned by street children as a reason for leaving home. Neglect and abuse by adults in their home environments are frequently cited.<sup>6</sup> Some of the "strollers" (street children) of Cape Town describe a familiar situation:

We [children] were just hit and kicked without reason, and I don't like that any more. My ma and pa fight nearly every night, then we also get hidings. I love my parents because I miss them, but I don't dig hidings any more. My dad invites his friends over and they smoke *dugga* [marijuana] and when they've left he kicks the door open and fights with us. Then he says to me, 'Come here, you son of a bitch'. Then I and my mother run out of the house ...<sup>7</sup>

Even indirect domestic violence affects children:

[T]hose people also drank a lot and I didn't like that. They fought so much at home. So I thought: I can't stay here, so I ran away from there and came here [to the city] to stroll.<sup>8</sup>

*Dr Christopher G Williams of the Global Security Programme, Cambridge University, examines the context of violence against street children.*



Parking cars

Photo: Laura Jeanes

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He is hitting other people at night. He is taking money when he runs the money falls. He is a ghost. (Jeremiah, age 14)

Within this social context, there are examples of parents deliberately increasing the levels of violence:

Well, I didn't want to go to school any more, so my mother took me [forcefully] to the police station for them to give me a hiding. They did, and I ran away.<sup>9</sup>

In both Namibia and Zambia, psychological and physical abuse are commonplace in the homes of street children,<sup>10</sup> and 89% of street children in Mwanza, Tanzania, cited neglect and violence at home as a reason for leaving. Some said that, to remain at home would have been equivalent to "dying".<sup>11</sup>

Life in South Africa's hostels for migrant workers from other countries in Africa provide a unique perspective on family violence. Sean Jones highlights the effects of alcohol and overcrowding in this setting:

Wife battering, physical assault, and murder all feature prominently in the children's diaries, and molestation and police brutality have been described by a number of children during interviews with them.<sup>12</sup>

Despite often appalling home circumstances, many children on the streets maintain some form of contact with their families. Although the contact is often of a positive nature, parents also sometimes use violence to exploit their

children. The case of sixteen-year-old Mehmet from Istanbul is not untypical:

My father made me steal... If I didn't bring back enough money, he would tie me up with a chain and beat me. It went on for seven years. I used to run away, and then go back. Now I will never go back.<sup>13</sup>

While it is commonly found that children in developing countries live on the streets because of poverty and the need to contribute to family income, family violence has also been found to play a significant part in child streetism.<sup>14</sup> Aptekar concludes that in developing countries, including Africa, poverty might well be "a necessary condition", with family discord "a secondary phenomenon", but that these factors might be reversed in the developed world.<sup>15</sup>

Rajani and Kudrati<sup>16</sup> raise the question of whether, in African countries such as Tanzania, there is not a "context of hierarchical tradition in which adults are permitted to do what they wish to their children". They point out that traditionally, and despite the ratification of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the concerns and priorities of adults virtually always take precedence over those which would be to the benefit of children.

#### *Violence between young people on the street*

People working with children on the streets hear daily stories of aggression between individual street children, but this is not widely documented. There are no known examples from the historical literature. In Brazil a sixteen-year-old purportedly killed "someone" in a disagreement over a measure of *dagga*.<sup>17</sup> This provides an example not only of the serious end of street violence but also of the context of this kind of crime.

Swart<sup>18</sup> reports minor squabbling between street children in Johannesburg when they are high on glue, and an instance when a boy picked up a broken bottle in the street and stabbed another in the stomach. But serious incidents such as this seemed rare. Fights about cheating during gambling, or about stealing, are more representative of the usual level of violence between street children. As Aptekar notes,<sup>19</sup>

misperceptions about the degree to which street children are violent towards each other are common. Documentation of street children in developing countries such as Latin America<sup>20</sup> and Africa, including South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, shows that older boys may be likely to take advantage of younger ones.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, younger children often take measures to avoid falling prey to older street youths.

Reports of violence between gang members are infrequent. Bothma<sup>22</sup> proposes that gangs in Cape Town were of more significance for "strollers" in prisons and reformatories whereas on the streets the gangs "had more symbolic than practical significance". Street children do fall prey to gangs. In one instance gang members comprising former street children took protection money from street children and either stabbed them or demanded sex if the children could not pay. In another, attacks were racial; a gang of white youths regularly seeking out and beating up black street children with chains and rubber tubing.<sup>23</sup>

There is little further evidence of gang violence towards street children in the literature. It seems probable that, if given the chance to talk without fear, street children would relate more examples of gang violence than ethnographic observation is likely to discover.

Very little work has been done to establish the nature and extent of child-on-child violence on the streets. But whatever the true picture, it seems rarely to be considered that children on the streets have a right to protection and justice when the perpetrators are other children.

#### *Violence from outside the street community*

##### *The public*

There is an increasing awareness of public violence against street children, but again this does not feature in historical writings. Pouring inflammable material such as petrol over the cardboard coverings which street children use as "blankets" and setting it alight is not uncommon.<sup>24</sup> In places like Johannesburg, street children take it for granted that some of them will be injured by hit-and-run motorists.<sup>25</sup>

On a more organized level, an official radio station in South America

openly "urged individuals to do away with street children physically", resulting in widespread violence towards the children as well as "the actual killing of two youngsters, on average, each day".<sup>26</sup> The actions of public "death squads" in Brazil, and lynchings, are now widely reported thanks to the work of agencies such as Amnesty International.<sup>27</sup> One estimate claims that the number of street children killed in Brazil exceeds that of war casualties in Lebanon.<sup>28</sup>

Public violence towards street children does not appear to be quite so severe in Africa as is the case in Latin America. Nevertheless, shopkeepers in Johannesburg are known to have kept boiling water and *sjambokke* (rawhide whips) on their premises to keep the children away,<sup>29</sup> eight street children died in a fire deliberately started in a shelter in Pretoria in 1989, and in 1995 a child died when a group of street children sleeping in a bus shelter in Johannesburg were sprayed with bullets by a passing driver.<sup>30</sup> Many other instances are probably unrecorded.

In other parts of Africa, street children clearly also encounter public violence although it is not always explicitly documented. One Zambian<sup>31</sup> study found that the ill-treatment of street children was "relatively common", with children in Lusaka and Livingstone reporting far greater levels of abuse and exploitation than those in Kitwe. Verbal abuse, including scolding and insulting the children, was often accompanied by physical assault. In Swaziland, street children listed their main needs as being firstly, material goods, secondly, education, and thirdly, "the desire for reduced animosity from the public".<sup>32</sup> Virtually all street children in Mwanza, Tanzania, list violence as their greatest fear and concern, however; violence by members of the public was seen as least severe.<sup>33</sup>

Adults whose professional duty is to act responsibly, often find the children a nuisance and may well treat them with cruelty. In southern Brazil, an eleven-year-old caught begging for food in a supermarket, was "seized by security guards, doused with cold water and shut in a deep freeze".<sup>34</sup> In Durban, a security guard beat children who were ill with typhoid with a *sjambok*, and drove them from a city shelter.<sup>35</sup>

Traditional practices carried into modern urban contexts may also propagate violence feared by street children. The South African press periodically reports instances of *muti* (medicine) murder; street children asked to draw "The most horrible thing that can happen to someone", revealed a fear that they might be kidnapped, killed and cut up by witch doctors.<sup>36</sup> Street children are an obvious target as few people will notice or complain if they disappear. *Muti* buyers are often businessmen seeking charms to enhance their businesses.

Violence in the form of rape, and drawing street children into prostitution, is widespread. Reports from the African continent indicate that sexual abuse of street children is common.<sup>37</sup>

In 1986 in the United States, the likelihood of children being sexually abused in the home was 30%, which increased to 85% on the streets and 100% in police detention.<sup>38</sup> Informal reports from those who work with street children throughout the world, indicate that this estimation is probably generally true for children elsewhere as well.

Judith Ennew criticizes the voyeuristic element in the reporting of child sex, pointing out not all street children prostitute themselves and that many do so only as a last resort. Moreover,

Far from being lucrative, child sex is cheap. That is one of the most insufferable features of its essential tragedy. Children do not have the power to ask for a high fee from adult customers.<sup>39</sup>

It is not the children, in the first instance, who seek sex from adults, but they are

particularly vulnerable to adult exploitation, and available for cheap sex to customers who are not primarily paedophiles, but who simply seek sexual gratification of any kind for the lowest possible outlay.... [T]he child's social status and small size provide a means of exercising power which is not otherwise available.<sup>40</sup>

One of the significant outcomes of violence from the public is fear.

This is probably increased by personal vulnerability. As Rajani and Kadrati point out:<sup>41</sup>

Discrimination fosters violence against children and allows it to pass without outcry. Virtually all street children identify violence as their greatest fear and concern.

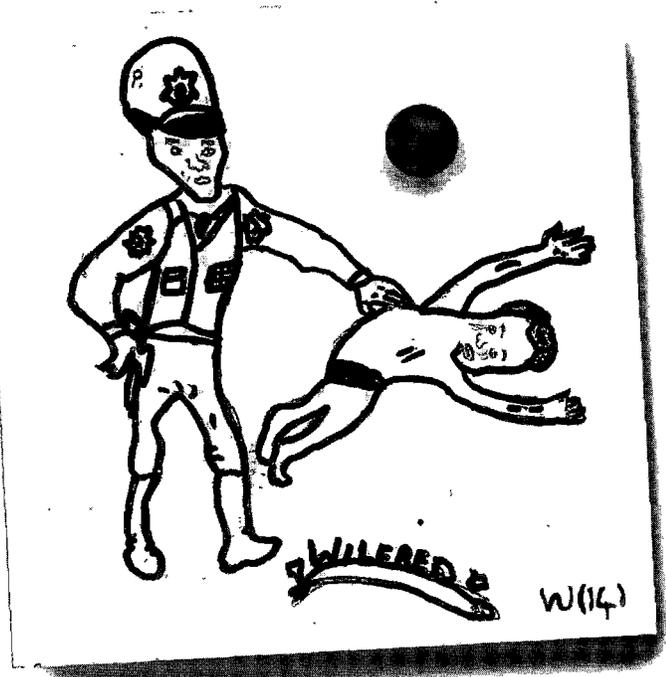
Young street children in Johannesburg will sometimes remain awake at night and sleep during the day because of fears associated with darkness.<sup>42</sup> This extends to a fear of the supernatural and of attacks from ghosts.

### **The police**

In most countries in the world the police victimize street children. Police involvement in "death squads" in Brazil and other South American countries is now common knowledge. As Aptekar<sup>43</sup> notes, the greatest fear of Latin American street children is not hunger, but police brutality, and "the same findings come from other parts of the world".

If arrested or taken "into care", maltreatment of the children often follows. The use of fists, batons, hosepipes, leather straps, belts, boots, electric shocks, dousings with thinners, teargas and insecticide, have all been reported.<sup>44</sup> Although in some instances, street children in South Africa describe the police as kind and considerate, when asked to draw "The police" most of the pictures they produced depicted violence against street children.<sup>45</sup>

(Wilfred, age 14)



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This is the police. It is outside Fontana in Hillbrow. The police kick the boy. (Lucky, age 14)

One child in Cape Town reported:

Sometimes they let us fly 'aeroplanes'. There's a long table and they grab you by the scruff of the neck then they say: 'Onto the table, like this ... [gesticulates, lying on belly]. Then there's a wall, and they throw you hard, and you sail [along the table]. Now, you can't protect yourself and hold onto anything. And when you've crashed [into the wall] you can end up being unconscious.<sup>46</sup>

Amongst street children in Tanzania, only four reported having a police friend; 72 reported having been beaten by the police, while 56 had been arrested on two or more occasions.<sup>47</sup> In Namibia, abuse of street children by the police has also been reported as familiar.<sup>48</sup> In Ethiopia, street children have reported more kindness than brutality, while those in Sudan have said that police have made a determined effort to be helpful.<sup>49</sup>

Aptekar proposes that the differences in police response towards street children in East Africa and in Latin America could be based in traditional family structures. He notes that in East Africa differences in family structure are not related to social class or political power as is the case in Latin America.<sup>50</sup>

### **Military activity**

The violence of war clearly causes children to end up on the streets. During and after World War II there were large-scale initiatives to address the problems of thousands of war-vagrant children in Europe.<sup>51</sup> More re-

cent reports talk of 20 000 children in Khartoum<sup>52</sup> and 200 000 in Mozambique.<sup>53</sup>

Children are also drawn into military activity, from their homes and from the streets. In Liberia, orphaned children were reportedly forced into combat, drugged, tortured and maimed<sup>54</sup> while children are widely reported to have been forced into combat in Mozambique.

### **Violence in institutions**

Street life can certainly be hazardous, but it is important to remember that many of the supposed institutional "solutions" may be worse. As previously mentioned, the statistical probability of a child being sexually victimized in detention approaches 100%. For many children, institutional life is harsh and being shut off from the world is devastating; they may also frequently be subjected to emotional, physical and sexual abuse from the staff and volunteers in projects set up to care for and protect them.<sup>55</sup>

State provision for street children, with few exceptions, aims to cleanse the streets of their presence rather than to address their best interests. While many countries have ratified the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, it is still true that, in general, children are not

placed in situations of care under the supervision of competent staff with adequate standards of safety and health, [but that] many are placed in adult prisons, in violent and overcrowded reformatories, or in orphanages staffed by

unqualified and often abusive personnel where pitifully inadequate resources make a mockery of any attempts to provide reasonable care.<sup>56</sup>

Child care institutions have an appalling record of child abuse. From FUNABEM in Brazil have come reports of child care workers who encourage children to go out and rob people and then to share the stolen property. Extensive physical abuse has been widespread; cases have been reported of workers waking up children with cold water in winter, stripping them and beating them. Some children have tried to commit suicide because they could not bear to live within an institution.<sup>57</sup>

An overview of staffing in institutions in Zimbabwe concludes that institutions for children are understaffed, leading to rapid burn-out. In addition staff are poorly paid and morale is low. Patience wears thin and the temptation to beat children is high. Street children in such institutions complain of beatings, poor food, boredom, hard manual labour and overcrowding. More than twice the number of children for whom provision has been made, are admitted, due to the shortage of available institutions. The children in them lose all personal independence, a characteristic of street life that is highly valued by street children.<sup>58</sup> In South Africa, the Bayhead Place of Safety in Durban was, for some years, notorious amongst street children because of the abuse and overcrowding they allegedly encountered there.<sup>59</sup>

In Cameroon, children allegedly spend long periods in prison without education or creative stimulation of any kind. The degree and nature of child abuse that would be likely to flourish in such settings is not detailed. An NGO has introduced recreational and cultural programmes, pending a child's release, to prepare him or her for re-entry to "The Foyer" a bridging programme into the community, and for a subsequent role in society.<sup>60</sup>

In Kenya it has been found that street children lose their resourcefulness in institutions and gain little, if anything, of value in its place:

[W]henver we take boys into an institution ... it takes away from them combativity for their own lives. In the streets they have to fight for their own survival. When they come to us they stop fighting, and that is a danger.<sup>61</sup>

Street children commonly complain that legislation which addresses their best interests is ignored. In Mwanza, only 10% of the street children studied had had any personal contact with welfare officers in the previous 12 months; and when probation officers were in court, "they often did not actively defend the rights of children".<sup>62</sup> A careful published comment about one child care detention centre ("Place of Safety") in South Africa, states that: "There is a need for improvement of cooperation with and family reconstruction services by agency social workers ... in order to realise the desired outcomes".<sup>63</sup>

Children are not only victimized by staff members of institutions but also by inmates. The case of Edyan, a Turkish street child, serves as a graphic example, and reflects the experiences of many street children in South Africa.<sup>64</sup>

Edyan ... arrived last week having been arrested for stealing a pack of biscuits. It's the first time he's ever been in trouble. The kid is only nine years old. ... the night of his arrival he was raped by all the older boys as part of the traditional jailhouse initiation rite.<sup>65</sup>

It is not surprising to find that a street child's view of life becomes dominated by such treatment. A thirteen-year-old South African street boy, when asked to draw "A picture of Hell" stated that "Hell is like a prison cell" and depicted some of the violent interactions which take place there.

### Cumulative social violence

Perhaps more important than noting separate examples of violence is the realization that for many street children, violence has been a cumulative, inescapable fact of life. Judith Ennew<sup>66</sup> reminds us that street children frequently come from abusing and neglectful homes, then experience abuse and neglect on the streets and in child care institutions, while rehabilitation programmes tend to be "under-resourced" and left to the initiative of non-governmental organizations.

The case of Jerry, a South African child who ended up on the streets, serves to illustrate the cumulative nature of the violence that can disrupt a child's life, and over which he or she has little control:

There was nothing that was not fine before the 'unrest'. At that time everything

began to go wrong. My brother and I fought because I became a 'comrade'. He tells me I'm bad. He assaulted me very badly once; I was so sore I couldn't go to sleep. I began to hate him. Now, when you went to school, you'd find the gangsters there waiting for you. They hit you with a stick, stab you with a knife, throw stones. They began to think they were big people. They went to drink at the *shebeens* [community drinking houses]. You could not go out walking or maybe the gangsters would be waiting for you or the police would take you or the 'comrades' who were drinking would trouble you. No good. And then we grew very angry with the 'informers' and the people started to *necklace* them [kill by placing a tyre around the neck, dousing with petrol and setting it alight].<sup>67</sup>

### Areas of concern

#### The denial of justice

There is an almost total denial of the right to justice for people, and especially children, who inhabit the streets. Extensive personal contact with street children in different parts of the world can only lead one to conclude that "summary justice" is commonly meted out to street children, despite Articles 37 and 38 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.<sup>68</sup>

A recent recruitment poster for the Metropolitan Police, London, depicted a young man living in a cardboard shelter on the street. It made the point that the police had a duty to serve him as they would other members of the public. A similar poster described the police responsibility towards young runaways:

Chris isn't a problem child. Just an unhappy one. We'll call his Mum to the station or take him home. We'll talk to her about helping him sort his feelings out and offer to put them in touch with other agencies who can help them both. He's lucky that the worst thing that happened to him was us. ... We're also aware of the need to work with parents, teachers and social workers to solve the problems that make children like Chris want to run away in the first place.<sup>69</sup>

Attempts such as these to develop police and public attitudes are rare.

However, ensuring true justice for street children is not a simple mat-

ter. One of the more benevolent police officers in Durban has said that while the police are required "to operate in terms of the law", there are insufficient and inadequate facilities and personnel available to work with children in need of care. He outlined the policy of his "Street Child Unit" as being to identify and remove the "real criminals" among the children, and the adults who exploit them; to help official and voluntary social workers to "rescue those children not yet lost



"Hell is like a prison cell." (Morris, age 13)

to society"; to prevent irate residents from taking vigilante action against street children; to discourage excesses in the behaviour of street children; and to make the urban environment less attractive to children seeking an alternative lifestyle.<sup>70</sup> A national lobby of persons working with South African street children, resolved that

A plea should be made to state departments and law enforcers to be more flexible in their application of the law...<sup>71</sup>

#### Violence from those with a duty to protect

Agencies with the responsibility of protecting children are often a main source of violence in the children's lives, as exemplified within this article.

Independent child protection agencies, with powers to inspect institutions and interview children on the street, are needed.

An informal deconstructionist analysis (ie what is missing or seemingly peripheral) of available data raises other important areas of concern.

### **Gender**

Violence affecting street girls is almost never mentioned, except with regard to rape. Certain studies<sup>72</sup> have found, for example, that the incidence for sexual abuse of young, homeless girls, is twenty times higher than that reported for women in general.

People tend to see children on the streets as vagrant, and, often in the case of girls, not to see them at all.<sup>73</sup>

It is of concern to note that reporting a violent act can precipitate more violence. In Pakistan, a fifteen-year-old, parentless girl reported being raped by her uncle and cousin. The case was not proven because there were not the required "four adult male witnesses". The girl was sentenced to 100 lashes for her crime of *zina* (ie in effect, the crime of being raped), which was later reduced to 10 lashes and three years' imprisonment.<sup>74</sup>

This example is probably extreme, but it does remind one that reports of violence by pimps, clients or others with power, can also culminate in greater violence against a female victim.

### **Race**

Similarly, violence on the basis of race or caste is rarely considered, perhaps because it is very hard to separate from other causes. Earlier in this paper, the gang of white children in South Africa who hunted black street children in order to beat them up, was noted.

The United States recently admitted large numbers of abandoned children from Vietnam, who were the product of the abuse of Vietnamese women by US soldiers. They were ostracized within Vietnam, because of their mixed parentage.

### **Disability**

Violence against children who have disabilities, particularly intellectual problems, is also hidden. Research consistently finds that disabled children are more often victims of child abuse within families.<sup>75</sup>

In many instances children end up on the streets because of a physical or mental impairment or a behavioural problem. Their families may find it impossible to cope with them due to inadequate social support systems. Disabled children often have little future other than begging. Children may also be disabled while living on

the streets, through traffic accidents, violence and drug abuse.<sup>76</sup>

Street children who are disabled may be spurned by their peers. In Bombay I witnessed the constant bullying of a child with mild learning disabilities (mental handicap) and a similar child in Johannesburg was frequently ostracized by others. This suggests the sort of problems that weaker children may face daily.

### **Fear of violence**

Very little thought is given to street children's fear of violence, long term or immediate, and the effect that this has on their behaviour.

### **Negative images**

Presenting negative images of street children is never mentioned as being a violent or abusive act.

Street children are frequently stereotyped as violent or criminal in the public media, which can incite violence against them.

### **Latent violence**

Some forms of violence are hidden and insidious; illness and developmental disability caused by pollution, for example. But, as the perpetrators are not readily identifiable, the circumstances are not seen as acts of violence.

Many street children suffer poor health due to their lack of hygienic living conditions. Scabies and lice are common scourges for street children, as well as a host of other more serious illnesses. These are exacerbated by the latent violence exhibited by health care workers who frequently chase them from clinics and hospitals because of the stigma of being a street child.<sup>77</sup>

The concept, latent violence, provides an elusive basis for seeking justice for street children. Yet for children in rich countries, issues such as pollution through cigarette smoking, or of lead in petrol and drinking water, are addressed in legislation and policy changes; in the United States, parents who have passed Aids on to their babies can be prosecuted.

### **Passive violence**

Malnutrition and the absence of medical care clearly causes injury and damage to children, but it seems difficult to attribute this to an active force. Can a force be "passive"? Is the neglect of the state an act of violence?

As Ennew<sup>78</sup> points out: "The inadequacy of social security systems for marginalised populations as a whole has adverse effects on the vast majority of the world's children." She points out too, that children who work tend to do so in the informal sector since it is usually illegal to work in the formal sector. Being shut out of the formal sector means that a child has no recourse to social insurance schemes, can be paid low wages, and may be exposed to personal hazards and other forms of exploitation in the workplace.

## **Using the law**

### **Violence against street children**

At least in theory, much of the obvious violence against street children is covered by existing national legislation. It is important to remember that crimes can be committed by "commission" (eg hitting someone) or "omission" (eg neglecting a duty to care). Therefore, "passive violence", such as injury or damage caused by neglect, may be embraced by legislation.

The problem lies in achieving justice for children who usually have no direct adult support, in countries where the law may have little practical meaning. A few organizations in South America run legal centres for street children which provide professional advocacy. In Brazil the Projica project aims to lessen violence against street children by involving local organizations (the press and human rights groups, and child welfare groups) in reporting cases of abuse. When a case has been reported, "the social worker will identify who is committing the crime and take legal action if necessary."<sup>79</sup>

Volunteer advocacy could usefully become a feature of street child projects, along the lines of the model of "Citizen Advocacy" within the disability rights movement.<sup>80</sup>

Educating street children about the law and their rights is probably one of the most important steps to take in their personal empowerment. It is possible to use law students as volunteers in this educational process, as the South African NGO, Street-Wise, has done. Drawing on the children's experiences in the streets, with the police, and in the courts, they use role-play to teach the children how they could deal with situations common in their lives, using a method devised by

McQuoid-Mason from the Faculty of Law at the University of Natal.<sup>81</sup>

**Fear**

Fear of violence may also be recognized within state legal systems. Part 1 of the 1986 *Public Order Act* (England & Wales) is an example. Section 4 includes as violence against individuals: “threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour ... with the intent to cause that person to believe that immediate, unlawful violence will be used against him”.

A violent act can also be by visible representation. Writing a slogan, such as “Kill street children”, may be an illegal act under national laws. Again within the United Kingdom *Public Order Act* (Part 4), a person commits an offence of violence if he/she “distributes or displays to another person any writing, sign or other visible representation which is threatening, abusive or insulting. Civil action may also be possible. A newspaper was recently successfully sued for describing a child with behaviour problems as “the worst brat in Britain”.<sup>82</sup>

**Violence by street children**

There can be little disagreement that street children are sometimes perpetrators of violence. There is often a pretence amongst those who work with the children that this is not the case, or should be ignored for fear of creating negative images. The attitude is understandable but unhelpful.

To address public concern it is necessary to find a way of thinking about violence by street children that is realistic but ultimately constructive. *Provocation* may prove a useful concept.

Under national laws, “self-defence” can mitigate violence. Much of daily violence by street children is probably seen by them either as defensive or as in retaliation. In international law, provocation by another nation legitimates massive acts of violence. Another aspect of the *Public Order Act* (UK), acknowledges provocation as a form of violence. Part 1, Section 4, makes it an offence “to provoke the immediate use of unlawful violence by that person or another”.

It is only the word “immediate” that prevents the *Public Order Act* from being interpreted very broadly. It might be argued that the entities which cause children to live on the

streets provoke their violent acts – the children are, in broader terms, victims.

Frequently street children are victims of violence by other street children and they deserve redress. Bullying between children in the richer countries is only being taken seriously following a number of suicides by victims.<sup>83</sup> “Crime between intimates” is a relatively new area of research. In minor cases of violence, mediation by trained volunteer mediators is one means to acknowledge the rights of the victim and censure the perpetrator without resorting to the law.<sup>84</sup>

**“Power-violence”:  
A conceptual framework**

Many aspects of violence in the lives of street children are conceptually elusive and much latent violence remains outside the scope of national laws. The relationship between power and violence provides a useful framework for thinking more broadly about violence associated with street children.

**“Power-violence”**

The type of violence discussed in this article is not natural (like an earthquake), nor related to personal violence (such as breaking one’s own property in a fit of temper). This type of violence *exists only through the exercise of power*. Judith Ennew’s analysis of sex work by children, quoted earlier, provides an obvious example. Violence of the type discussed might usefully be re-defined simply as *an expression of power that causes suffering*. Violence associated with street children is “power-violence”.

Theoretically, power only exists in relation to another entity. Clegg<sup>85</sup> elucidates:

The key to understanding resides in thinking of power as a phenomenon which can be grasped only relationally. It is not a thing nor is it something that people have in a proprietorial sense. They ‘possess’ power only in so far as they are relationally constituted to do so.

Understanding power relationally is theoretically valid, and is applicable to thinking about violence provided it encompasses *potential* power relationships.

A relational understanding of “power-violence” leads to obvious conclusions concerning violence reduction. Violence can be reduced by

*increasing the power of potential victims* (for example, by improving their knowledge of their rights and the law) or by *increasing their access to power*, and/or by *decreasing the power of the potential perpetrators* (for example by increasing the effectiveness of law enforcement). On a more practical level, abusive power relations between children may be reduced by first developing “social understandings” between groups such as boys and girls,<sup>86</sup> and then deciding on mutually beneficial strategies.

“Surveillance” seems a particularly productive approach to both increasing the power of victims and decreasing that of potential perpetrators. It makes it clear to perpetrators that their behaviour is being observed and recorded, which could form the basis for further action. Recourse to direct confrontation is not necessary. Foucault<sup>87</sup> discusses surveillance in institutional settings, but it can be seen in action in broader contexts. The strategy employed by *Amnesty International* – documenting and publicizing abuses of power and letting the perpetrators know, through thousands of letters, that their actions have been noted and are unacceptable – provides the obvious example.

Interestingly, surveillance has long been practised as a means to change the “deviant” behaviour of street children in institutions,<sup>88</sup> based on principles employed in prisons and mental asylums in the 19th century. Surveillance is widely used by state security forces to intimidate demonstrators and counter resistance (in the state’s terms, to reduce violence), often in the form of photographs and video. This tactic can be employed, sometimes quite legally, against the likely perpetrators of violence against street children. However, from personal experience, in countries such as Turkey, photographing police interaction with street children is not considered acceptable by the police. Challenging laws which prohibit filming public security services, on the basis of public accountability, would be a constructive role of international agencies.

We should not forget events in the United States which exemplify the power of the 81-second amateur video showing a black man, Rodney King, being beaten by four white policemen. The dismissal of the case led to riots on an unprecedented scale in Los

Angeles, and eventually to a re-trial.<sup>89</sup> It is interesting to conjecture the contribution made by the professional media to the reduction of violence by powerful entities – Tiananmen Square, the UK Poll Tax riots, South African township violence, and the Vietnam war provide obvious examples.

Art is another practical method of surveillance. The drawings of the police in this paper were technically illegal under the terms of South Africa's state of emergency at that time. Action was not taken by the state, though children's drawings of violence against them were published widely by a number of sources in South Africa and throughout the world. The fact that the South African regime outlawed any visual representation of its security forces, emphasizes the potential efficacy of surveillance.

Another view of "power-violence" appears as a paradox – violence might also be reduced by *increasing* the power of perpetrators, not over their potential victims, but over their own lives. Shopkeepers such as the one quoted at the start of this paper probably exercise power-violence over street children because they feel powerless against the possibility of theft by the children. In some cases street children are simply made the scapegoats for decreasing business gains when, in reality, recession or other factors play a major role in this respect. Increase shopkeepers' power over this situation (eg by helping them to access finance and planning consultants, as well as by insisting that street children who steal, return stolen goods, and by reducing the children's need to steal) and shopkeepers will be less likely to attack street children.

The important distinction is between the potential perpetrators' power over their lives and that which they can exert over potential victims.

On a different level, the technique of increasing personal power when violent acts are perpetrated is practised in some progressive forms of treatment for people with mental handicap who are aggressive. Giving such individuals the "power" to choose the way they spend their time, what they wear, and what they watch on television, instead of imposing rigid institutional discipline, is often an effective violence reduction technique.

Boredom has long been associated with wanton behaviour by young

people. Educating children to counter boredom can increase their control over their lives and reduce the possibility of violent behaviour towards others.<sup>90</sup>

A holistic approach to violence would therefore entail:

- (a) increasing the power of resistance and redress for potential victims
- (b) decreasing the power of the potential perpetrator over the potential victim
- (c) increasing the power of the potential perpetrators over their own lives.

To implement a holistic strategy may seem unrealistic, but the approach can be observed in a small way concerning passive smoking. In the United Kingdom, 80% of those employing more than 500 people have adopted non-smoking policies.<sup>91</sup> This reflects (a) and (b), above. Some have also given up smoking, which increases the power of the perpetrators over their own lives, reflecting (c), above.

#### **The immediacy caveat**

The standard concept of violence usually implies a degree of immediacy. See, for example, the terms of the UK *Public Order Act*. If a child dies through being stabbed, this is seen as the result of violence. If a child dies through drinking toxic waste or a foetus is aborted because of industrial pollution such as at the Union Carbide accident in Bhopal (India), this is not considered violent. Yet both circumstances are likely to fulfil the basic criteria of violence – "injury" or "damage" "inflicted" by "force" (if the child cannot prevent the polluting act nor avoid the pollution).

The immediacy caveat clouds the argument that acts such as polluting or smoking are violent – it increases the power of the perpetrator. The idea of "latent violence" needs to be developed, through questioning the implication of immediacy in the understanding of violence. Action against environmental pollution is a step in this direction.

#### **The social environment**

The key to developing the concept of "latent violence" seems to be in acknowledging the impossibility of identifying the individual perpetrator-victim link in many circumstances, and in recognizing the violent *environment*

in which the children must live when they have no power to change these circumstances.

It may seem idealistic and impracticable to hold those who control the social environment accountable for the violence within it, but on a micro-level it is happening. Again, smoking provides an example. In the United Kingdom, an employer paid out-of-court damages to a woman who became ill because of 14 months of passive smoking – inhaling the smoke of others in her office.<sup>92</sup> The woman effectively suffered "latent violence" (enforced, albeit cumulative, injury) from her colleagues, but it was the entity that controlled the environment (the employer), not the direct perpetrators, who was considered liable in law.

How idealistic is this approach to accountability? Public attitudes are changing. The following letter appeared in *The Guardian* (on 1 February 1993), a few days after the above passive smoking case:

Now that a passive smoker has secured £15,000 damages, will it be possible for the elderly, young children and people with respiratory problems and heart complaints, who are warned to stay indoors on severe pollution days, to seek redress from car owners and the Department of Transport? And if not, why not?

It is time to give victims a means of redress against elusive perpetrators, when the victim-perpetrator link is not direct, through making those who control a social environment accountable for power-violence.

#### **The UN Declaration on the abuse of power**

The UN *Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power* (1985) extends the concept of victimization within state laws to embrace the victims of "abuse of power" which may not be covered by legislation. It provides an international starting point for recognizing power-violence in relation to the social environment. It states, *inter alia*:

"18. Victims means persons who, individually or collectively, have suffered harm., including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial impairment of their functional rights, through acts or omissions that do not yet constitute violations of national criminal laws but of inter-

nationally recognised norms relating to human rights.

19. States should consider incorporating into the national law norms proscribing abuses of power and providing remedies to victims of such abuses. In particular, such remedies should include restitution and/or compensation, and necessary material, medical, psychological and social assistance and support.
20. States should consider negotiating multilateral international treaties relating to victims, as defined in paragraph 18.
21. States should periodically review existing legislation and practices to ensure their responsiveness to changing circumstances, should enact and enforce, if necessary, legislation proscribing acts that constitute serious abuses of political or economic power, as well as promoting policies and mechanisms for the prevention of such acts, and should develop and make readily available appropriate rights and remedies for victims of such acts."

are repeatedly victimized physically, sexually, and financially by other, older, wiser individuals.

This view is perhaps guilty of stereotyping. But to find this form of awareness from an academic who is not directly concerned with street children, emphasizes its pertinency.

The children usually have little chance of formal justice, and entities with a duty to protect them are a main source of violence. Data about violence on the streets usually omits girls, race, disabled children, fear of violence, violence through presenting negative images of children, "latent violence" such as pollution, and "passive violence" such as neglect of a duty to care.

In theory, much of the violence against street children is covered by national laws. But a more creative use of the law is necessary, for example, concerning violence related to visual representation. Greater advocacy for street children, professional and non-professional, is central. But, whilst an ordinary woman in a wealthy country can achieve redress against those who permitted a "violent" environment caused by smokers, justice seems impossible to achieve for the street child who is shot by a policeman. Most people remain ignorant of their legal rights; police are frequently corrupt, and the courts are rarely accessible to those without wealth and influence.

The concept of "power-violence" may help to develop violence reduction strategies irrespective of the effectiveness of law. "Surveillance" provides one basis for a practical approach. On a theoretical level, questioning the notion that violence must imply immediacy, and calling to account those who control the social environment, can contribute to current thinking about violence reduction. The *UN Declaration of ... Abuse of Power* provides a useful international conceptualization.

Throughout history, the traditional "cure" for children on the streets has been centred on education and/or welfare,<sup>94</sup> yet violence would probably be considered a greater and more immediate problem by many street children. Violence reduction should form a more prominent part of the overall strategies of projects and governments. It does not, because violence reduction is elusive conceptually.

One thought provides a practical starting point. Street children are

not simply perpetrators of, or victims of, violence. They are usually both. They are victims *in* violence. The cause is the abuse of power. But they are also *survivors* of violence – they have much to teach.

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The UN *Declaration* is ahead of its time, but the idea that perpetrators of power violence must be accountable, even if the direct link with the victim cannot be made, is growing, exemplified in legislation that concerns pollution.

## Conclusion – victims in violence

Street children are caught in inescapable, cumulative circles of violence. They can be victims and perpetrators. The international victimologist, Ezzat Fattah,<sup>93</sup> expounding a general theory that victimizers are inevitably victims as well, uses street children as a principal example:

The fallacy of the predator-prey model can be easily seen when one looks at street kids who constantly move from one role to another, sometimes within minutes or hours. Their daily experience makes it impossible to classify them under one of the two categories: delinquent or victim. For these kids violence and death are an integral part of their daily visual experiences. Their everyday existence is a chain of delinquencies and victimizations. They engage in illegal and high risk activities to survive and

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# An Imperfect Fit – Street children and State Intervention: The South African Case<sup>1</sup>

It is commonly accepted nowadays that the apartheid government in South Africa generated and exacerbated widespread poverty and unemployment in large segments of the indigenous South African population. State policy enshrined in influx control, the migrant labour system and the Group Areas Act contributed indirectly to the proliferation of street children in the country.<sup>2</sup>

In 1994, an article in the *Fordham Law Review* detailed the many ways in which street children had been humiliated and abused in South Africa.<sup>3</sup> It held out hope for them in the future, however, since the interim constitution adopted on 27 April 1994 included a justiciable bill of human rights.

In his first State of the Nation Address on 24 May 1994, President Nelson Mandela accepted, in principle, the "First Call for Children". He urged that street children not be overlooked in the proposed Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). On 16 June 1994, in commemorating the Sharpeville massacre, he reiterated his concern that their problems should be addressed constructively. He exhibited his concern in a very personal way by founding a presidential trust fund<sup>4</sup> to assist street children and children in prison. A year later he ratified the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and on 1 June 1996, he launched a national programme of action to improve the welfare of South African children.

The street children of the country were stirred by all the excitement. They trusted the new President's pledge to relieve their plight, crowding round TV sets in shelters for street children, or on pavements outside shops with live TV sets in the windows, to cheer his appearances. After his speech to the nation on 16 June, children from Street-Wise<sup>5</sup> spontaneously wrote to him as follows:

Dear President,

It is our pleasure to write this letter to you showing our great respect. We felt highly honoured when listening to the speeches you've made on television on June 16. We are very proud of you for showing inter-

est in us. According to our views you are a very good example to all the people in our communities ... to stop discriminating against us, but to accept us as members of the society. It will be our pleasure to meet you personally. On behalf of all the Street-Wise kids we would like to congratulate you for your effort. We wish you many successive years of your presence. Good luck from all of us.

Two phrases in this letter, "stop discriminating", and "accept us", encapsulate the extensive hurt and bitterness street children feel when members of the public deliberately ignore them or abuse them verbally and physically.

But although street children value the President's expressions of goodwill,

*Ms Jill Swart-Kruger, of the Department of Anthropology at the University of South Africa, examines provisions in the Child Care Act, recent proposed amendments to the Act, and other relevant Acts, and how these impact on the lives of street children.*



these alone cannot change their daily circumstances; the laws and other official procedures that impact directly on their lives are formulated in government ministries.

"Cool."

Photo: Terence O'Hara

## Official child care strategies

Like the street children, NGO personnel believed that the political mindset in South Africa, and hence also policies

concerning street children, would change dramatically after the democratic elections. This hope has, so far, proved unfounded.

Street children feel that, on a daily basis, their lives are much the same as they were before – despite the fact that South Africa has a new Constitution with a Bill of Rights. Numerous regional and local alliances meet regularly to discuss street children and the National Department of Welfare has a Working Committee on Street Children, apart from the National Plan of Action for Children launched in June 1996. The children themselves are conspicuously absent in most of these processes although they are occasionally consulted by some members of these forums.

Before April 1994, the treatment of children, including street children, was regulated by the Child Care Act,<sup>6</sup> the Child Care Amendment Act,<sup>7</sup> and the Children's Status Act,<sup>8</sup> as well as by certain sections of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act,<sup>9</sup> the Criminal Procedure Act<sup>10</sup> the Correctional Services Act<sup>11</sup> and the Probation Services Act<sup>12</sup>.

None of these Acts – which are still in force today – included any definition of street children.<sup>13</sup> Amendments to the Child Care Act, the Correctional Services Act and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, have been implemented since April 1994.

The Child Care Amendment Act, 1995, now includes street children in the category "children in especially difficult circumstances"<sup>14</sup> and also extends the grounds on which a court may find a child "in need of care". In terms of the Child Care Act<sup>15</sup> and of the Child Care Amendment Act,<sup>16</sup> a child designated as "in need of care", if brought before the courts, may be taken to a place of safety if this is considered to be in the interest of the safety and welfare of the child. Moreover, should anyone state, under oath, to a commissioner of child welfare, that a child within the area of jurisdiction is in need of care, a warrant may be issued, authorising a policeman, social worker, or any other person, to search for the child and place him or her in a place of safety until he or she can be brought before a children's court.

It is unfortunate, therefore, that virtually everything a street child is, and does, now designates him or her as "in need of care"<sup>17</sup> and thus open

to apprehension by the police, since there is a severe shortage of good short- and long-term facilities in South Africa for such children. Removing children from the streets to a place of safety is not necessarily in their best interests. Almost ten years ago, a specialist in child development found that children "in need of care" in South Africa were "forced to fit" into the child care system, rather than having treatment programmes tailored to their needs.<sup>18</sup> The situation today is not radically different to that prior to 1994 when conventional child care facilities were found to "contribute to the street child problem since they require prescribed behaviour and self-disclosure in return for service".<sup>19</sup> The comment of a police officer reflects the frustration of would-be reformers who overlook the role that street children can and do play in the shaping of their own futures:

... most street children refuse to be subjected to upliftment programmes within the context of an institution.<sup>20</sup>

Apart from the daily fear of being detained as "in need of care", street children constantly fear arrest since all their income-generating activities are illegal. In terms of South African law, children under 15 years of age may not do paid work.<sup>21</sup> Recent proposed amendments to the Basic Conditions of Service Act ignore street and most working children altogether since they focus on employment in the formal sector which is not the sector in which most children work.

The President's expressed desire to see prisons and police cells emptied of children was addressed in two ways. Firstly, amendments to the Correctional Services Act<sup>22</sup> prohibited the placement of unconvicted juveniles under the age of 18 years in prisons and police cells. Suitable alternatives were not, however, available.<sup>23</sup> Secondly, Schedule 1 of the Criminal Procedure Act was amended.<sup>24</sup> Formerly it listed various serious and petty offences and required juvenile offenders to be detained in prisons or lockups. Serious offences, requiring detention while awaiting trial, are now listed in Schedule 2 only, meaning that fewer juveniles, including street children, should be detained while awaiting trial.

South Africa has seven juvenile prisons and ten adult prisons with separate facilities for children. In January

1996, these services were expected to cater for 5 775 juveniles awaiting trial, and 8 959 sentenced juveniles. But while the Department of Correctional Services takes "all measures to ensure that sentenced and unconvicted juveniles are detained separately", the National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Rehabilitation of Offenders (Nicro) has found that juveniles may be kept in inappropriate accommodation for longer periods than are allowed by law, due to overcrowding in available facilities.<sup>25</sup> In 1996, the Correctional Services Amendment Bill again made the detention of children between the ages of 14 and 18 years in prisons and police cells possible, at the discretion of the courts, pending placement elsewhere.<sup>26</sup> However, by the end of August 1996, 557 unsentenced children awaiting trial were allegedly being held in prisons, illegally, under such appalling conditions that the Human Rights Committee of South Africa called for an urgent investigation into the situation.<sup>27</sup> Children younger than 14 years of age were in prison and many juveniles had purportedly committed only minor offences.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, despite the fact that unsentenced children were supposed to appear before a magistrate every fortnight, for review, many had been in prison for more than 40 days without being brought before a magistrate.<sup>29</sup>

The abuse experienced by children in prisons has been well documented.<sup>30</sup> The August 1996 outcry against the imprisonment of children again recorded some of these abuses – no access to clothing changes or bathing facilities, being sodomized, little access to social workers, poor nutrition and far too few child care workers.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, as Nicro has reminded us, juveniles who have committed petty offences and who have been detained with adult prisoners, tend to leave jail "having learned to master other crimes". Nicro has criticised rehabilitation programmes for young offenders as insufficient in number and often also as inappropriate.<sup>32</sup>

The shortage of facilities for juveniles is being addressed in some areas of South Africa but not necessarily in a manner which meets the approval of NGOs. Currently a new place of safety for 315 children, which includes a detention centre for 133 boys, is under construction in the

Northern Province at a cost of over fourteen million rand. It will be ready for intake in July 1996. Recreation, nursery school and schooling facilities will receive attention only *after* this, in the second phase of development of the institution.<sup>33</sup> It is unlikely that the frustration and despair which street children have expressed when in such environments will dissipate in such a setting. They have been explicitly indicated as future occupants despite evidence that many manage to escape even from buildings patrolled by armed guards and enclosed by high walls topped with razor wire. The autonomy street children have forged for themselves on the streets is markedly important in their lives and has been widely documented.<sup>34</sup> More than a decade ago African and international specialists on street children confirmed that incarceration in formal institutions breaks down a street child's spirit and coping strategies and does not replace them with anything of worth.<sup>35</sup> If the recommendations of the draft discussion document of the South African Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) are accepted as formal policy, this situation will change since the IMC has emphasized that any residential care programme for children should be purposive:

No residential care facility, be it shelter, children's home or secure care ... should merely offer custodial care to young people.<sup>36</sup>

In Gauteng, a new place of safety for 210 children, with a central care unit and four "separate secure care units" for children under 18 awaiting trial, is under construction. However, the Department of Welfare and Population Development in Gauteng is also working towards having the juvenile justice system reviewed in conjunction with the Interministerial Committee on Young People at Risk. It is hoped to develop alternative detention and community-based sentences for juvenile offenders, leading to more community involvement in their care and rehabilitation.<sup>37</sup> The draft discussion document of the IMC proposes that juveniles under 18 years of age should be dealt with as individuals, and that there should be an emphasis on "preparing the young person for his or her return to society from the moment" that the person is deprived of liberty.<sup>38</sup> If the above proposals are

implemented, the treatment of children, including street children, should improve if they are arrested, whether this be for vagrancy, petty theft, or more serious offences. It will doubtless take some years before such changes are markedly in evidence.

Only one amendment to the Correctional Services Act<sup>39</sup> has made a marked difference to street children – the abolition of court-imposed whippings. Street children have alleged for years that it is not uncommon to be arrested for petty offences which they did not commit and to be held in detention while awaiting trial before being charged, tried, sentenced to whipping and released onto the streets again.<sup>40</sup> In 1992, South African courts imposed over 30 000 sentences of whipping for adults and children.<sup>41</sup>

### The place of the street child in society

In South Africa today, as in the past, the notion that a child's place in society is in his or her family home, is still strong. This perspective was explicitly recognized in 1983 when the South African Children's Act was renamed the Child Care Act. The new title was chosen in order to reflect "the general principle that the family is the normal social and biological structure within which the child must grow and develop".<sup>42</sup>

This perception still underpins the political mindset in South Africa, and informs social policy, just as it does in many other parts of the world. Even at the 1995 World Summit for Social Development, an implicit general conception prevailed that children were

primarily passive victims or beneficiaries of adult actions.... [That they were] innocent, vulnerable, and dependent, and therefore societies' primary responsibility is to protect them from adult experiences, like war and work, so that they can develop in their separate spheres of school and play.<sup>43</sup>

This idea of the "otherness" of children and childhood is typically western. It carries with it "not only an assumption about the relative competence of children but also an assumption about their inferior status".<sup>44</sup>

Recent anthropological evidence from post-war Mozambique has shown that people unaware of the Western

model of childhood may well treat children as "active and resilient contributors to their families and their society". In a village ravaged by terrorist forces, Mozambicans liken their children to banana trees which no longer need shade after five or six years but grow so strongly that they can put out new shoots after forest fires. Children are highly valued contributors to basic subsistence work and those orphaned during the war have taken on parental responsibilities for younger siblings from an early age. The children appear to derive considerable self-esteem from the acceptance of their value in the community and post-traumatic stress amongst the children has not been a widespread consequence of the war.<sup>45</sup>

Unlike the street children of South Africa, these children's levels of understanding and their coping skills in difficult circumstances are not diagnosed as delinquent or deficient, but are recognized and incorporated in the sociocultural structure of the village. Unlike street children, they are not shunted to the periphery of the community in which they live and the work that they do is not denigrated. Those who highlight the coping skills of children in difficult circumstances are not advocating a childhood on the streets in preference to a childhood in a conventional family environment. Rather, they are pointing out that for many children a conventional family environment is not a reality and that children do consider and adopt other alternatives. Their self-sufficiency needs to be supplemented by the caring acceptance of other members of the community, and not eroded by thoughtless rejection.

Policy makers who measure children's work against a western model of childhood tend to adopt measures which will restrict such work since children who work are "not seen as capable human beings, but pitied because they are not having a 'childhood'".<sup>46</sup> They fail to recognize that most children in the world work, and often have to work very hard and carry a great deal of responsibility because of "the poverty and accompanying social disorganization of their families".<sup>47</sup> If the laws of their country forbid them to work, as is the case with children under 15 years of age in South Africa, working children are then also criminalized. This means that a child will have no means of redress when abused or exploited in

work situations. It also means that a child, when working, does so in a constant aura of personal insecurity through fear of arrest.

In South Africa the official response to the work of street children is restrictive and punitive. Begging, scavenging, gambling, "parking" and washing cars are common ways of obtaining not only money but also the harsh attention of law enforcement officers.<sup>48</sup> The Children's Status Act<sup>49</sup> speaks of parenting and guardianship but disregards children under the age of 21 who have to support themselves or their families. There is no space or place for street children in South African society.

He alleges that within a month he had been arrested for "parking" cars and that after a night in the police cells he was released without charge. A fortnight later, he alleges that he and four other street children were picked up while sleeping in a shop doorway, put in the back of a police van, sprayed with teargas, dumped outside the city and told not to return. He then traveled to Johannesburg and found a job helping a hawkker to sell oranges. He began to feel secure.

A few weeks later, local police removed the mattresses and blankets of all street children living in the CBD and said they should go home. They would allegedly repeat this action on a regular basis until the children left the city.<sup>51</sup>

and educational programmes for black street children in particular.<sup>53</sup>

While there are some law enforcement officers who respond empathetically to street children<sup>54</sup> others are, however, allegedly not only punitive but also abusive. This problem is probably exacerbated by the fact that provisions made for children in this country who are genuinely in need of care, are inadequate. A statement by the President, supporting street children, is insufficient. State ministries need to develop an integrated and proactive approach to street children in the country. Leaving the care of street children to innumerable NGOs, without adequate means of monitoring and assessing their interventions, is a risky policy decision, albeit possibly better than simply closing down all NGOs and leaving street children without resources of any kind. Official approaches that renege on a responsibility to set and monitor child care programmes have been strongly criticized:

Street children are ... frequently subject to physical, sexual and emotional abuse from staff and volunteers within projects which society has empowered to care for them. This is inexcusable harm. They have a right to expect that the staff of all projects and programmes set up for their benefit are properly recruited, trained, managed and supported. This means a duty on the part of society to set standards for work with this particular group of children to ensure the accountability of all programmes working on their behalf. Too often the attitude prevails that anything that cleans children off the streets must be good. If no one asks questions about the appropriateness of the staff and methods being used, children are placed even further outside the law than they were on the streets.<sup>55</sup>

It is, furthermore, imperative for welfare officials to develop means to identify those at risk of becoming street children, and to provide appropriate assistance to the families of at risk children.<sup>56</sup>

Until this is done, senior police officers will feel free to discount the voluminous allegations of abuse by law enforcement officers of street children, and to state, in writing, as did Deputy Chief Constable Mills,<sup>57</sup> of the Durban City Police:

... street children who are found in offence with any bylaw or statute, including sleeping in public places and on



"Tiekie-dice" – a gambling street game

Photo: Terence O'Hara

### Treatment by law enforcement officers

Whereas street children presumed that they would be safer on the streets once the apartheid regime had ended, this trust has proved unfounded. There have been increased reports of the arrest and/or abuse of street children by law enforcement officers in South Africa in recent years.<sup>50</sup> Fourteen-year-old Peter's story is not uncommon; he alleges that he has constantly suffered police harassment since working and sleeping on the streets.

Peter's father died in a brawl in 1994. When his mother remarried he lived with his unemployed grandmother who already supported two other grandchildren on her pension. He left school when he took a job in a shebeen to help buy food. He was always hungry so he went to the city to find a better-paid job.

Peter said he could not survive in his grandmother's home. He would not return there.

In view of the choices available to him, Peter's act of leaving home could be seen as an "act of empowerment".<sup>52</sup> Once on the street, he continued assessing available choices and acted in accordance with what appeared best in the circumstances.

Officially, police see the needs and personal circumstances of street children as different from other children "in need of care", and

The South African Police Service is of the opinion that the street child problem cannot be meaningfully dealt with by policing or by correctional measures. The solution to the problem rests with the community itself. In view of the above, the South African Police Service supports any lawful upliftment work

streets, will be removed to police stations or places of shelter notwithstanding that it may be "against their will." In such instances, the law takes preference over individual rights.

Now, just as much as in our apartheid years, the South African penal system impacts on street children: "It is under the law, and within the framework of structural violence and societal abuse that the rights of [the] ... children are most flagrantly violated".<sup>58</sup>

### In conclusion

It takes courage, determination, creativity, and an empathy for your fellow-beings to survive on the streets.<sup>59</sup> South African street children find society's denial of who and what they really are, deeply hurtful. For many of them, it is the most bitter of all their street experiences.

They are continually thrown back on their own emotional resources and those of their peers. Personal support in the form of understanding and acceptance by significant adults, hypothesized as important for resilience in children,<sup>60</sup> is not clearly evident in their lives. Despite this they seem to have a remarkable capacity to adjust to pressures on a daily basis.

However, the capacity of children to cope with daily pressures, depends on the extent to which such pressures are concentrated, and

Coping, through the use of a repertoire of psychological defences ... is a very different matter from exercising personal autonomy on the basis of access to a range of personal and material resources capable of 'empowering' children ... to make balanced choices and judgements about their futures.<sup>61</sup>

In addition to nurturing relationships, Richter and Van der Walt<sup>62</sup> have outlined other "protective factors" which bolster the resilience of children in disadvantaged circumstances and which help them to overcome seemingly insurmountable disadvantages. One-third of the sample of street children Richter assessed show unusual features of resilience. Moreover, "their intellectual and problem-solving capacities are way above what would be predicted from their backgrounds. They also show little evidence of psychological damage or psychopathology."

It is thus vitally important that more attention be paid to the strengths street children display in coping with daily adversities. Public perceptions (including those of officialdom) have become riddled with misconceptions and myths about street children. The difficulties the children experience while on the streets are given undue prominence and they are strongly criticized for their unwillingness to accept, uncritically, any and every effort to improve their lot, regardless of whether or not they feel that these efforts will adequately address their own aspirations. Punitive juvenile justice measures are easier to implement *en masse*

ethnographic findings that children are able to bring both "maturity and sophistication ... to their understanding of the world and their place in it".<sup>64</sup>

### Notes and references

- 1 An earlier version of this article was read as a paper at the Second African Regional Workshop of the International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development (ISSBD) in April 1996. Critical comment from colleagues, and especially Annette Cockburn, Simone Gampel and Sieben Kruger, is appreciated.
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On the street

Photo: Laura Jeanes

than are innovative and individually oriented programmes. But punitive measures usually address the most extreme and atypical of cases; they are out of place and unsuitable as a general approach with children.<sup>63</sup>

South Africa is committed to transparency and consultation with all role players in formulating its new dispensation. It is nevertheless vitally important for key strategists to ensure that policy is not guided by ethnocentric assumptions about children - to their detriment.

Anthropologists stress the necessity of avoiding ethnocentric judgements of others. However, the ethnocentrism of adults with regard to children is especially vigorous. Every adult has been through childhood and presumes to know all about it. This may account for the seeming resistance to

*versity. Psychological perspectives from South African research*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1994, p 111.

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- 4 The Nelson Mandela Children's Fund.
- 5 Street-Wise is a national NGO, founded in 1987, dedicated to empowerment, protection and community reconciliation for street children in South Africa.
- 6 Act No 74 of 1983.
- 7 Act No 86 of 1991.
- 8 Act No 82 of 1987.
- 9 Act No 3 of 1983.
- 10 Act No 51 of 1977.
- 11 Act No 122 of 1991.
- 12 Act No 116 of 1991.
- 13 T J Treanor, *op cit*, p 920.
- 14 Republic of South Africa, *Government Gazette*, 30 June 1995, 360 (16509), p 6.
- 15 Section 11 of Act 74 of 1983.
- 16 Republic of South Africa, *op cit*, pp 11-12.

- 17 Republic of South Africa, *op cit*, pp 14–15. The Child Care Amendment Bill, 1995, proposes that a child “in need of care” includes one
- who is abandoned or without visible means of support;
  - is without parents or guardians or over whom such caretakers cannot exercise “proper” control;
  - who does not regularly attend school;
  - begs;
  - is under the age of 15 and involved in street trading;
  - frequents the company of “immoral or vicious” persons who will corrupt or seduce him/her;
  - is in a state of mental or physical neglect;
  - is maintained in circumstances “detrimental to his interests” or in circumstances where “suitable provision” has not been made by parents or other caretakers.
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- 21 L Richter and J Swart-Kruger, “Society makes survival a crime”, RECOVERY, vol 1, no 4, 1996, p 15 of pp 15–19.
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# South African Street children

## At risk for Aids?

### Aids and the African adolescent

When Aids was first identified, it was believed to be a disease which was transmitted primarily through homosexual contact. Subsequently it has become clear that Aids is an "equal opportunity disease" to which everyone is susceptible.<sup>1</sup> In recent years there has been increasing concern about the susceptibility of adolescents to HIV infection and Aids because of the prevalence of unprotected sexual intercourse and the extent of teenage drug use.<sup>2</sup> Adolescents also typically perceive themselves as physically and psychologically invulnerable,<sup>3</sup> a perception which is believed to be at the root of much high-risk behaviour and which could account for what has been found to be their generally casual attitude towards risk for HIV infection.

Although African students in South Africa (in both Johannesburg<sup>4</sup> and Cape Town<sup>5</sup>) have a good basic knowledge of Aids (that it is incurable, and mainly a sexually transmitted disease), they have many misconceptions about transmission; this also appears to be the case abroad. The African youth in South Africa appear neither to perceive themselves at risk for infection nor to take precautions to prevent it.<sup>6</sup> These findings are of great concern since in Africa and elsewhere, girls between the ages of 15 and 24 years now comprise half of the world's cases of HIV infection; infection in males tends to peak about ten years later.<sup>7</sup> African adolescents in the South African township of Alexandra claim that they cannot get Aids since it is a disease "of the older people". Girls who are sexually active hide this fact from their mothers and seem to believe that they will neither fall pregnant nor be infected with HIV. For teenagers in Alexandra, Aids is unreal. When urged to stick to one sex partner they answer that this is exactly what they do. However, closer questioning reveals that this fidelity usually lasts for periods of about three months only. It is clear, therefore, that they do not have a full

understanding of the implications of their sexual activities nor do they accept that virus transmission routes have any relevance for them.<sup>8</sup>

Apart from seeing Aids as a distant threat, adolescents have also been found to have an antipathy to the use of condoms. There are two main drawbacks to their use: condoms are said to spoil sensation and condom use is thought to imply suspicion of either the sex partner's fidelity and sexual health or one's own. Two South African studies that examined African students' views on condom use found that students neither liked nor used condoms for the reasons given above. In addition they found community attitudes difficult to cope with;<sup>9</sup> many students said that visiting family planning clinics is embarrassing and that they are treated with hostility by cashiers when they try to buy condoms.<sup>10</sup> This is not uncommon elsewhere in the world; health and counselling services tend not only to be inappropriate, but also inconvenient and unattractive to adolescents.

*Ms Jill M Kruger, of the Department of Anthropology at Unisa, and Dr L M Richter, of the Centre for Epidemiological Research in Southern Africa at the Medical Research Council, discuss two important approaches in Aids education initiatives.*

Sleep

Photo: Terence O'Hara



This is the case despite the fact that there is extensive evidence that children become sexually active at an early age, that they will have had many sexual partners by adulthood and that they have high rates of STDs (sexually transmitted diseases).<sup>11</sup>

In addition to these drawbacks, African students felt that condoms were incompatible with notions of manliness and said that they were not readily available when sexual opportunities arose. They added that condoms "waste sperm" and said that if a condom should slip off and be left in a woman's vagina, this could lead to her death.<sup>12</sup> Although it is known that these objections have also been voiced by adults in other parts of Africa, documented material is difficult to obtain. In a study for the WHO (World Health Organization) in Rwanda, more than half of the women who said that they disliked condoms gave as a reason that condoms could remain lodged in the vagina after intercourse.<sup>13</sup> Sperm "wastage" may be associated with the belief that pregnancy should not be prevented during intercourse; in Africa female fertility still confers status and increases self-esteem.<sup>14</sup> For instance, the African high school students in Natal viewed condoms with suspicion because of their contraceptive properties, believing that fertility should not be inhibited. In addition, they objected to the retention of sperm in condoms as they believed that this not only inhibited full sexual satisfaction but also prevented a woman from knowing that her male partner was fully satisfied.<sup>15</sup> Condom retention and the notion of sperm wastage appear to be linked in that both are related to a traditional belief that in sexual intercourse there must be an intermingling of bodily fluids.<sup>16</sup>

### **Street children as a group "at risk" for contracting Aids**

As young people, street children have much in common with other adolescents, but some of their risk behaviours are more extreme. Not only do they have the adolescent's sense of personal invulnerability,<sup>17</sup> but they tend to become sexually active sooner (on average at about 12,5 years of age), and to have more sexual partners than home-based adolescents. Many street children are raped; the sexual abuse of street girls abroad is

20 times higher than that of women in general.<sup>18</sup> In America the likelihood that a child will be exposed to sexual abuse has been estimated to be about 30% when living at home, 85% when living on the streets, and up to 100% when in state detention.<sup>19</sup> About 70% of street children in the United States who seek assistance at emergency shelters have suffered severe physical abuse or sexual molestation on the streets.<sup>20</sup> Other articles in this volume show that the sexual abuse of street children is widespread in Africa.

Street children are commonly forced to engage in survival sex and find that their clients often prefer, and pay more for, penetrative sex without condoms. A man who has been "hustling" on the streets of America since he was 14 years old explained that persons who bought sex wanted to buy fantasy, not reality: "They want fantasies. ... Condoms aren't part of fantasies. Aids isn't part of fantasies, Aids has no impact on what's going on in the streets."<sup>21</sup> Survival sex includes marketing sexual gratification on the streets in less direct ways; for instance, through the open sale of pornographic material where such material is not banned. Ten-year-old Sasha, an *ulichnei deti* (street child) from Moscow regularly makes more money in two days than his parents do in a month, through his sale of pornographic magazines which exposes him daily to visual images of every conceivable form of sexual variety.<sup>22</sup> Apart from survival sex, street children also tend to have sexual partners of either or both sexes who may be engaged in survival sex and who do not use condoms. They distinguish clearly between the two forms of sex they have on the street; as one street youth in California explained, survival sex is "sex you gotta do", and sex with chosen partners is "sex you wanna do".<sup>23</sup> Because condoms are rarely used and sexual activity begins early, there is a high rate of pregnancy and STDs amongst street youth.<sup>24</sup> It is well known that having an STD increases vulnerability to HIV infection.<sup>25</sup>

The extent of hard drug use amongst street children in South Africa is unknown. There is a tendency to smoke *dagga* (marijuana) and to inhale the fumes of glue, petrol, benzine or thinners rather than to use hard drugs. In recent years there has been an increase in the smoking of "white

pipes", a mixture of ground Mandrax and dagga. A situational analysis of drug use amongst South African street children is urgently needed since it is common knowledge that drugs racketeering is on the increase in South Africa. In parts of Latin America, street children are extensively involved in drug networks and there is an added danger of their becoming HIV infected through the use of contaminated and shared injection needles.<sup>26</sup>

Because rigorous seroprevalence studies tend to be undertaken only in institutions, and street children lead a peripatetic lifestyle, the incidence of HIV infection amongst street youth is as yet unknown. However, some attempt has been made to test street children for HIV infection and the results indicate that seroprevalence rates tend to be higher than those for adolescents in general, ranging from 2% to 10% of street children in both industrialized and developing countries,<sup>27</sup> while rates for other groups of adolescents are in the region of 0,2% to 0,4%.<sup>28</sup>

### **Aids and African street children in South Africa**

#### *The street child phenomenon*

The majority of street children in South Africa, of whom there are an estimated 15 000,<sup>29</sup> are African, although there are large numbers of so-called coloured street children (ie children of mixed racial descent) in the Cape. This is partly due to the population distribution in South Africa, according to which proportionately fewer African people and more coloured people live in the Cape. Street children also tend to come from the lower end of the socio-economic scale; in Cape Town, 83% of a sample of street children came from homes where household income fell into the lowest of three segments for the population as a whole.<sup>30</sup> Although the personal history of every street child is different, poverty, exacerbated by the apartheid system, appears to be the root cause of African and coloured children ending up on the streets.<sup>31</sup>

As elsewhere in the world, South African street children are found in towns and cities but there have also been reports of children living alone or in groups in the veld and of children living on, in or near mine and rubbish dumps, mostly in close proximity to major cities. Children are generally about 10 to 12 years of age

when they first take to living on the streets but street children as young as four years of age have been found in Johannesburg and Pretoria.

**Aids-related knowledge, attitudes, beliefs**

In 1992 the South African Department of National Health and Population Development commissioned the authors of this article to undertake a study on the Aids-related knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and general sexual and behavioural patterns of street children in South Africa.<sup>32</sup> Except where otherwise indicated, the information in the following sections is from this study, which is referred to briefly where necessary as "the South African study".

The South African study was conducted in seven major South African cities and altogether 141 children between the ages of 11 and 18 years (mean age = 15 years) took part. Sixty-two of the children were living and working on the streets and 79 children who had been living on the street were housed currently in city shelters. Focus group discussions were arranged with groups of not more than 8 to 10 children at a time and were standardized by means of an interview schedule including a mix

of open-ended and closed questions. Responses were recorded and content analysis used to assess the data.

*HIV- and Aids-related knowledge*

None of the street children in the South African study knew what HIV meant, but all except five of them had heard of Aids and most knew that Aids is an incurable disease. Most of the street children knew that Aids can be contracted sexually and they referred to casual sexual encounters and anal and homosexual sex especially as routes of transmission. However, it became clear that they did not completely understand how Aids was transmitted since they also indicated other (incorrect) routes for transmission. Fairly mundane contact with infected persons, for example breathing the same air, was considered to put one at risk of getting Aids. These findings are illustrated in Table 1, in which the main transmission routes given by the children are summarized.

Table 1 shows that there were differences in the perceptions of South African children still living on the streets and those who had left the streets to live in city shelters, but in addition, it shows that street youth in Brisbane, Australia,<sup>33</sup> had some of the same misconceptions regarding routes of transmission as the South African

street children. American high school students<sup>34</sup> whom one might expect to be more conversant with transmission routes, had certain misconceptions as well. Whereas the American youth identified the communal use of toilet seats as a probable source of HIV transmission, the street children, most of whom seldom use toilets, identified communal street activities such as sharing cigarettes. As noted earlier, African scholars and students in South Africa also have misconceptions about Aids transmission.

The 141 children in the South African study had a limited and stereotyped notion of the people most likely to get Aids. Gay men (*moffies* or *bunnies*) and female prostitutes were considered to be most at risk for infection, followed by persons who lead a promiscuous lifestyle. In addition the children mentioned people who exploited them sexually or in other ways as people likely to get Aids. Only two groups said that street children were at risk of infection. While 5% of children said that only African people got Aids, the groups from Natal were adamant that African people, and the Zulu people in particular, could not get Aids. Most children (95%) agreed that men could get Aids from women and from other men; 99% agreed that women could get

**TABLE 1** Modes of aids transmission as perceived by South African and Australian street children and American school children

Aids can be transmitted by:	SA shelter groups (%) n = 79	SA street groups (%) n = 62	Total: SA groups (%) n = 141	Brisbane street youth (%) n = 40	USA high school students (%) n = 8098
Playing with or sharing injection needles	96	85	91	55	99
Anal sex	97	79	89		
Oral sex	68	100	89		
Receiving blood	66	69	67		
Donating blood	52	63	57		64
Kissing	56	73	63		
Drinking from the same glass	44	66	54		
Sharing a cigarette	47	56	51	53	
Breathing the same air	32	42	36	70	
Sitting on the same toilet seat	32	31	31		72
Touching someone who has Aids	22	34	27		

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Aids from men and 85% agreed that children could get Aids from adults. Only 66% agreed that children could get Aids from other children and 15% were convinced that children could not get Aids at all. The belief that children are invulnerable is, therefore, not as widely held among street youth as recorded earlier for the African home-based children in Alexandra.

In common with many adolescents, more than two-thirds of the street children in the South African study believed that people who look healthy could not have Aids,<sup>35</sup> and that it was possible to identify persons with Aids from their external appearance; on this basis one could associate or avoid associating with them. Some of the symptoms of Aids that they identified were: looking "thin"; being weak; having sunken eyes; having pimples or sores and being constantly itchy; being unable to walk; and losing hair. Some of these symptoms have been evident in pictures in the news media of persons dying of Aids and they are not, therefore, totally inaccurate. Nonetheless, they reflect the children's lack of knowledge about HIV infection and the latency period between HIV infection and Aids; they seem to presume that full-blown Aids develops virtually instantaneously, as do many other diseases.

Most of the children in the South African study knew that Aids is incurable but some believed that it could be cured by *sangomas* (traditional healers), who have extensive credibility in the African community in South Africa. In Alexandra township, for instance, 80% of the inhabitants seek treatment or advice from them regardless of whether they also approach western practitioners.<sup>36</sup> Recently it has been found that Tonga healers have doubled the white blood cell count of 26 HIV-positive patients whom they have been treating with herbal remedies,<sup>37</sup> thus the faith of African street children in the powers of traditional healers to treat Aids in the long term may not be so far-fetched as it currently seems to the western mind.

In the South African study, 99% of the children said that they knew what a condom was and 85% said that they knew how to use one. The Xhosa children in East London called them *isingxobosentonga* or *fakentongeni* which, broadly interpreted, means "a

sack for a stick". The Sotho children called them *kgohalopa*, a term derived from the phrase for "pull on boots". Terms derived from Afrikaans were *balreкке* (literally: ball elastic) and *pieprekkers* (literally: penis elastics), and English terms included *balloons*, *coats* and *bum suckers*. Although some children said that they had raided the rubbish bins of doctors and hair salons for rubber gloves from which they then cut the fingers for use as condoms, without first washing the gloves, most admitted to not using condoms.

### *HIV- and Aids-related beliefs and attitudes*

Homeless youth tend to be orientated to the present and this was also the case with the children in the South African study, whose priorities were found to lie in daily activities. The priorities for children in shelters were: cleanliness (100%), playing sport (90%), schooling (70%) and food (40%). For those still living on the streets, the highest priority was food (80%). Playing sport, schooling and clothing were less important (30%), and other priorities were money, sex, glue, avoiding the police, and cleanliness (10%). The children admitted that Aids prevention played no part in their daily lives.

The feeling that Aids is a distant threat is common among adolescents in general<sup>38</sup> and was also found among African students in Cape Town.<sup>39</sup> Kirby<sup>40</sup> and others have suggested that one of the reasons why adolescents find it difficult to see themselves to be at risk for HIV infection is because they have a limited personal knowledge of persons suffering from Aids and seldom know anyone who has been diagnosed as HIV-positive. Only three of the street children in the South African study said that they knew, or knew of, people with Aids. No street children they knew had ever been found to be HIV infected, which probably made the disease more remote for them. In 1989, over 60 street children in a Johannesburg city shelter, who agreed to HIV testing, were found to be free of infection<sup>41</sup> and 10 of the 141 street boys in the South African study had been tested for Aids. Of these, three had been tested on their own initiative and seven at the insistence of various authorities (in some instances their parents). Five of the ten boys were told

that the tests were negative; the other five were not told the outcome of the tests and presumed that they were negative.

The children's notions about the origin of Aids were vague, but most believed that it is a foreign disease which probably came from America and from white people. Some believed that homosexuals and exiles, "the city", African countries (such as Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Somalia and Tanzania), or inter-racial sex, were the source of Aids. Some street children, especially those in Natal who said that Zulu people could not get Aids, considered Aids to be a scare tactic of the South African government to pressurize Africans into using contraceptives, while others believed that it was a germ introduced by the government to wipe out the African population.

Despite all the street children's statements concerning who was or was not likely to get Aids, the most pervasive feeling among them was fear that they might get it. Pity was expressed for people who might have Aids, and anger because of the danger it posed as well as their lack of information about its source. It is probable that their feelings are exacerbated by their general lack of knowledge of what Aids really is and the mechanisms by which one may be affected. Other research has found that the less knowledge people possess about Aids, the greater their fear of it.<sup>42</sup>

Although the children expressed pity for those with Aids, they also took a strongly punitive stance, saying that they would not associate with such people, and recommending that they be killed or isolated from society. This feeling concurs with that of home-based adolescents in other studies.<sup>43</sup> Some children in the South African study felt, nonetheless, that they would treat friends who contracted Aids kindly, and that they would like to be treated normally by others if they were ever to get Aids. They were sure that this would not happen, however. Some said that if they were infected, they would take revenge by going out and having unprotected sex with white people, and in ten of the groups children said that they would commit suicide if they got Aids. These too, are not unusual responses; 21% of high school students in New York City said they would commit suicide<sup>44</sup> and clinicians working with HIV-positive

youth have reported that they go through a stage when they speak of actions to harm others.<sup>45</sup>

In the South African study, 75% of the street children said that they could prevent themselves from getting Aids if they used condoms. However, they strongly disliked condoms, giving the same reasons which we have already noted for African adolescents – the belief that sperm is wasted, that they generate mistrust of partners and spoil sensation. Their incomplete knowledge of Aids transmission led many children to the additional erroneous belief that prevention was possible by other means; some mentioned that proper eating habits, obedience to parents, home instead of street life, not sharing eating utensils with someone with Aids, and visiting *sangomas*, were ways in which one could protect oneself from getting Aids.

#### Aids-related behaviours

Throughout the world the sexual activity of homeless youth falls into three categories: rape, survival sex and love relationships, and includes anal, vaginal and oral sex.<sup>46</sup> This was found to be true for the street children in the South African study as well. It is not perhaps sufficiently recognized that adolescent girls, including street girls<sup>47</sup> engage in anal sex, frequently as a contraceptive measure.

Street children in South Africa are widely exposed to sexual harassment and rape on the streets and in detention.<sup>48</sup> Street girls in Cape Town have listed the fear of rape and sexual abuse as two of the main dangers of street life.<sup>49</sup> In the South African study one of the street children in a Cape Town group had been badly beaten up the night before the group discussion by a *bunny* (homosexual) and one of the Johannesburg groups told of a boy who had been forcibly sodomized two weeks previously and who had to be admitted to hospital for treatment.

The children in the South African study were hesitant to reveal their sexual activities. Nonetheless 53% admitted to engaging in survival sex but many of them said they felt unhappy, angry and fearful about doing this. Assault (of boys especially, by homosexual men) appears to be not uncommon in these situations. Some of the children said that they felt good about "doing" survival sex because it meant that they had money. It was clear from

the children's descriptions that they had multiple partners, often of both sexes, and that they did not use condoms. Women were said to pay the most for sex. The children, especially those from Pretoria and Johannesburg, said that survival sex was the best way to get money and that it generated a greater income than other street activities such as parking cars and begging.

The street boys were more open about their sexual behaviour in love relationships than about survival sex; it was common practice to have more than one girlfriend at a time and not to use condoms in these relationships. Their girlfriends also practised survival sex without the use of condoms.

Children in shelters went to doctors or to clinics. Children who receive medical attention are more likely to attract the attention of health personnel if they are HIV infected, and the self-selected recuperative behaviour of children on the streets places them at higher risk of non-detection should they become HIV-positive. The average latency period for the HI virus in healthy individuals is about 8 to 10 years but for street youth it is estimated to be about 3 to 5 years.<sup>51</sup>

Although the street children in the South African study were fearful of getting Aids and discussed various measures which they believed would prevent them from becoming infected,



Friendship

Photo: Laura Jeannes

In addition to the high-risk sexual behaviours of the children, substance abuse is common. About 60% of the children in the South African study admitted to having sex while under the influence of glue, *dagga*, or alcohol, and many said that they were more interested in sex and less likely to think of using condoms when "high". This ties up with other studies which have found that substance abuse leads to higher levels of high-risk sexual and other behaviours.<sup>50</sup>

Children living on the streets said they tended to avoid seeking medical help when they were ill and tried to sleep off their illnesses, whereas chil-

they did not put any of these into practice. It is not uncommon to find that behaviour is unrelated to knowledge, beliefs and attitudes; in the United States there is widespread concern that increased awareness and knowledge of HIV and Aids had not led to significant changes in risk behaviour. Although, for example, intravenous drug use decreased slightly and condom use increased slightly between 1988 and 1990,<sup>52</sup> there was an increase in the number of sexually active adolescents which statistically offset any benefits associated with these changes.<sup>53</sup> The trends reported here for South African street children have

been found to be similar for homeless youth in other countries.<sup>54</sup>

### Conveying the message about HIV and Aids

In the South African study, children still living on the streets said that they had obtained their information from radios, newspapers, magazines and "general talk on the streets". Since many street children are virtually illiterate it is unlikely that they would glean clear information from the written media. More of the children on the streets (56%) said that they discussed Aids with their peers than did street children who had taken refuge in city shelters (40%). These percentages reflect less peer discussion than has been found in some other studies; 81% of runaway and homeless American youth interviewed,<sup>55</sup> for example, indicated that they had talked to a friend about Aids.

Personal contact is a fundamental way of passing on information on the streets and Ennew<sup>56</sup> has urged those involved in Aids education to identify key personalities on the streets and use them as educators. She points out further, that those people unaccustomed to learning through two-dimensional media (such as posters, books and videos), often have a different perception of such media and it is important, therefore, not to start Aids education with videos and comics simply because it is known that children, in general, find these enjoyable. She recommends making communication props together with the children, rather than for them, if their use is felt to be imperative. Street children have demonstrated that they are able to identify their needs, to suggest solutions to their problems and to work closely with adults who seek to help them. They have proved to be effective as health promoters among their peers, especially with regard to drug and alcohol use and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>57</sup>

The fact that peer group instruction can be effective is borne out from the findings of a number of studies which show that the adoption of safe sex practices is highly dependent on reference group support and endorsement.<sup>58</sup> Peer-assisted HIV education has thus been recommended as a preferred method to adult-led classroom education. Apart from the importance

of peer group pressure on sexual practice, the credibility of peer-source information has been recognized as important since "the more credible the source the more likely it is that attitude change will take place".<sup>59</sup>

On the whole, the shelter children in the South African study demonstrated a better knowledge of Aids than did the children still living on the street. Most of them had been exposed to Aids education programmes and videos, either in the shelters or in schools. However, the deficiencies in their knowledge seemed to indicate that a once-off programme or talk is insufficient for entrenching knowledge. The children have other priorities, and any immediately irrelevant information is quickly forgotten or confused by additional input. One group which demonstrated fairly good knowledge about transmission routes lived in a shelter decorated with bright and simple pictures giving information about Aids. It seems, therefore, that Aids education should be an ongoing process, rather than an once-off intervention. In addition, routes of transmission highly salient to the children should be stressed relative to routes which have dramatic connotations, but are less salient to South African street children. For South African street youth, it is unprotected penetrative sexual activity rather than intravenous drug use which puts them at risk for Aids. The irony is that the same behaviours that increase an adolescent's likelihood of survival on the streets, including prostitution, contribute to his or her increased risk of HIV infection.

Aids education programmes need to take specific socio-economic and ethnic differences in value orientation into consideration. The widespread view of African people and of street children in South Africa that the use of condoms "wastes sperm" is of relevance in this respect, as is the value placed on pregnancy and childbirth in African communities. Street children also commonly have a low degree of self-efficacy and self-respect. Aids education can only succeed in the context of efforts to promote and assist their overall personal development.

### Conclusion

Those children who have little sense of self-worth and a large degree of fatalism in their make-up can hardly be

expected to protect themselves from contracting a virus of which they have heard but whose devastating effects they have not personally encountered. Aids programmes for street children need to be non-judgemental and need to encourage personal growth. Moreover, as one child in the South African study pointed out, it is only by addressing the issue of why street children are on the streets, combined with socio-political change, that the Aids epidemic can be controlled at street level.

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# Street children The core of and neglect

*Dr P Ebigbo, Deputy Provost at the College of Medicine, University of Nigeria, discusses the extent of child abuse and neglect in Nigeria, focusing especially on working street children.*

## Socio-economic factors

Nigeria is the largest black African country with, according to a recent census, a population of 88 million people. It is said that every fourth African is a Nigerian. There are several ethnic groups, but three major tribes comprise the majority of the people: the Igbo in the East, the Yoruba in the West and the Hausa in the North. Nigeria plays a leading role in determining the future of Africa both at the global and regional levels.

Although endowed with rich natural resources and extensive human resources, Nigeria has not developed the necessary technological, industrial, managerial and political know-how to pull its resources together in a sound economy to take care of the basic needs of its population. As a result, poverty and hard living conditions are prevalent, affecting children in particular. The country faces social upheaval, cultural conflict, gradual industrialization and imperfect attempts at westernization.

Traditional culture has been greatly affected and a major source of the

maintenance of this culture, namely the extended family system (which promoted a philosophy of "I am my brother's keeper"), is disintegrating. Consumerism, an attitude of "get-rich-quick", and westernization, have led to rural-urban migration and the emergence of the urban poor. These migrants take on menial jobs and form the bulk of the traders in the streets and markets.

## Neglect and abuse of children<sup>1</sup>

Children in urban areas are quickly caught up in the daily struggle for survival and material gain. A situation analysis of child abuse and neglect in Nigeria, undertaken through the medium of Nigerian newspapers, found that child abandonment, sexual abuse, child neglect, vagrancy, kidnapping and hawking were the most reported forms of child abuse and neglect.<sup>2</sup>

In many instances young girls and boys are sent from rural areas to families in the cities to serve as house-maids and house-boys. A 1975 study,<sup>3</sup> which examined house-helpers, found them to be of below-average intelligence and of lower intelligence than the children they looked after. This is thought to be due to the breakdown of the traditional foster culture which erodes children's avenues for personal growth. Children who work as house-helpers may also be required, either by their parents or by the families they serve, to sell items of food, clothing and general merchandise on the streets. Thus they become part-time street traders and subject to many of the damaging aspects of street life.

In the eastern and western parts of Nigeria children may attend morning or afternoon school and hawk goods out of school hours, though there are some children who trade on the streets the whole day. Their income helps their families or house-madams financially or pays for school fees. Although most Nigerian children return home at the end of the day, a

### GOOD

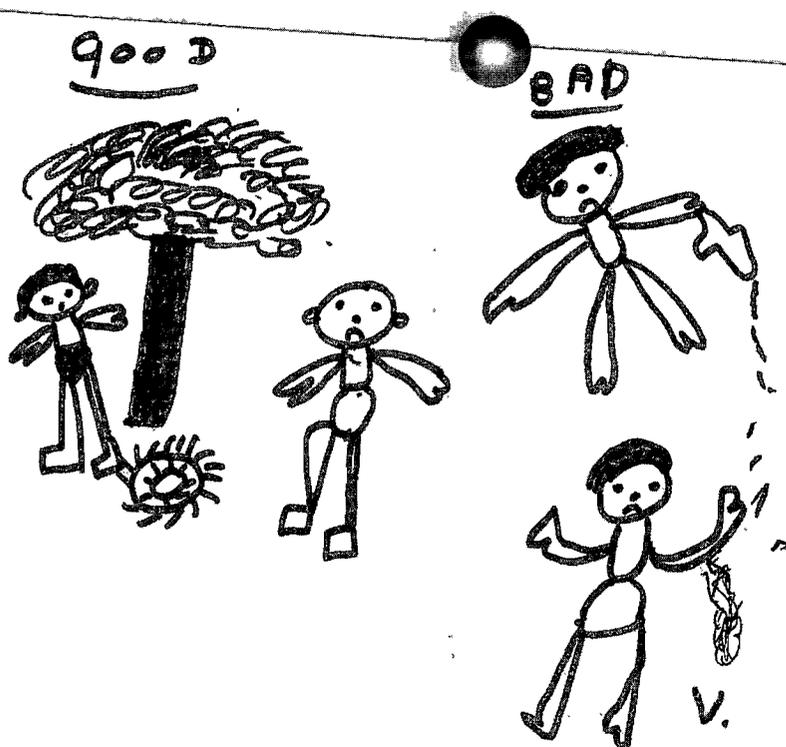
Training for cutting the trees. Is good get the job. Do the strong job.

### BAD (above)

Is police. Is shooting a crook. He must just catch him and put him in jail. Police mustn't just shoot people.

### BAD (below)

Indeda. He pinch maybe something from the shop. (Vusi, age 13)



# child abuse in Nigeria

growing number, including girls, subsist and exist on the streets.<sup>4</sup>

In northern Nigeria where the Moslem religion is predominantly practised and begging is allowed, young boys and girls lead handicapped adults about on the streets to beg. They receive a pittance for their services. Apart from this, because many parents believe that good parenting means that children should be brought up strictly and with religious training they send mostly male, but also some female children, to the so-called Koranic Mallams who are versed in teaching the Koran. Many of the Mallams are not educated in the western sense. Some parents, having entrusted their children to these religious teachers, never visit them or inquire about them subsequently. The Mallams consequently live off the children, sending them onto the streets to beg and to forage for food on refuse dumps. The Mallams often move from city to city and when they die, or if the beggars whom the children help, die, the children reportedly become delinquent street dwellers if male, and prostitutes if female.<sup>5</sup>

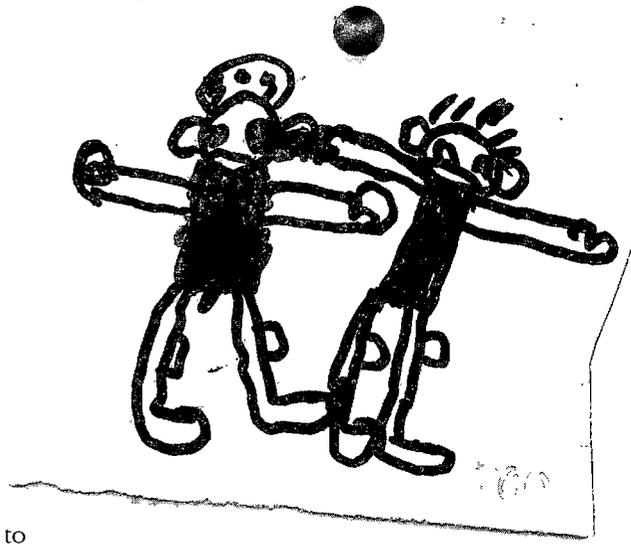
The Moslem religion which prohibits girls from becoming pregnant before marriage encourages early marriage, recommending that a girl should take a husband before her second menstruation. The tradition of early marriage is very difficult to change and has led to abusive practices which are condoned by parents. Many parents send their children out to the streets to trade in order to make enough money for their mothers to buy household goods for them when they marry. It is recognized that children may thus be exposed to suitors<sup>6</sup> and "careful" mothers lubricate their daughters' vaginas before sending them onto the streets so as to prevent serious injury if they happen to be sexually assaulted.

Hawking by boys and girls is thus widespread and parents clearly recognize that the practice holds dangers for children. According to Nzewi<sup>7</sup> a systematic survey of cases of sexual abuse of children in three major towns in

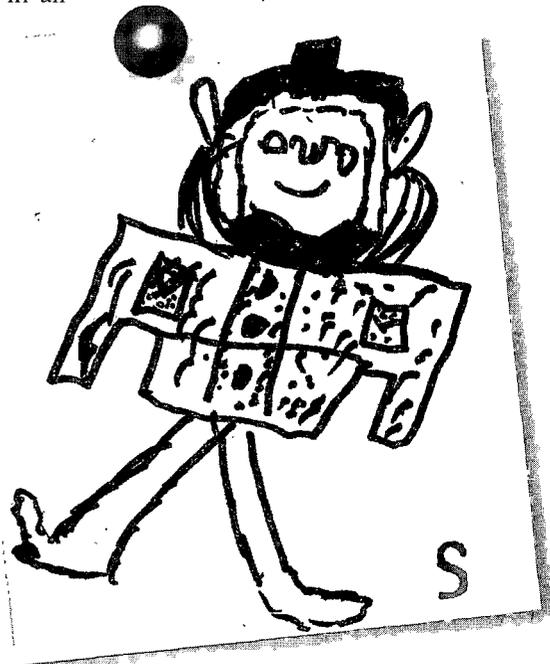
Nigeria indicated that 60% involved girls below the age of 12 years. Abuse occurred on three levels: exposure to overt genital seduction, exposure to genital stimulation and witnessing adults in the act of sex. Nzewi found in her study of 600 street and 600 non-street children in the three towns that street hawking is a major factor in all three levels of abuse.

Men may lure young female hawkers by buying up all their wares and giving them money in addition to this or they may pay them to run errands. The girls may be shown pornographic pictures in magazines or pornographic video films or the sexual organs of their would-be assailants.<sup>8</sup> Since the girls have been driven through poverty in the home to sell goods from door to door, their parents "are happy to receive money ... which may in certain instances be vital to the family survival".<sup>9</sup> The girls learn to beautify themselves daily to draw interest and begin to look forward to hawking. Parents are unable to intervene since the girls keep their liaisons secret because of societal taboos against sexual behaviours.<sup>10</sup>

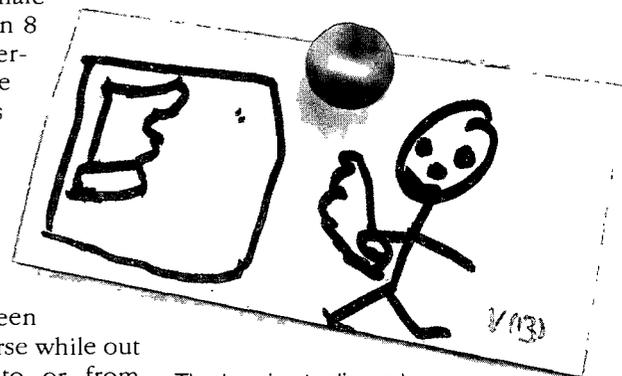
In an intensive study, 100 female hawkers and 100 female non-hawkers aged between 8 and 15 years were interviewed.<sup>11</sup> The average age of the girls was 12 years with a standard deviation of 3.4 for hawkers and of 4 for non-hawkers. Of the hawkers, 50% had had sexual intercourse during hawking, while 9% of the non-hawkers had been forced into sexual intercourse while out on errands or walking to or from school. This difference is significant.



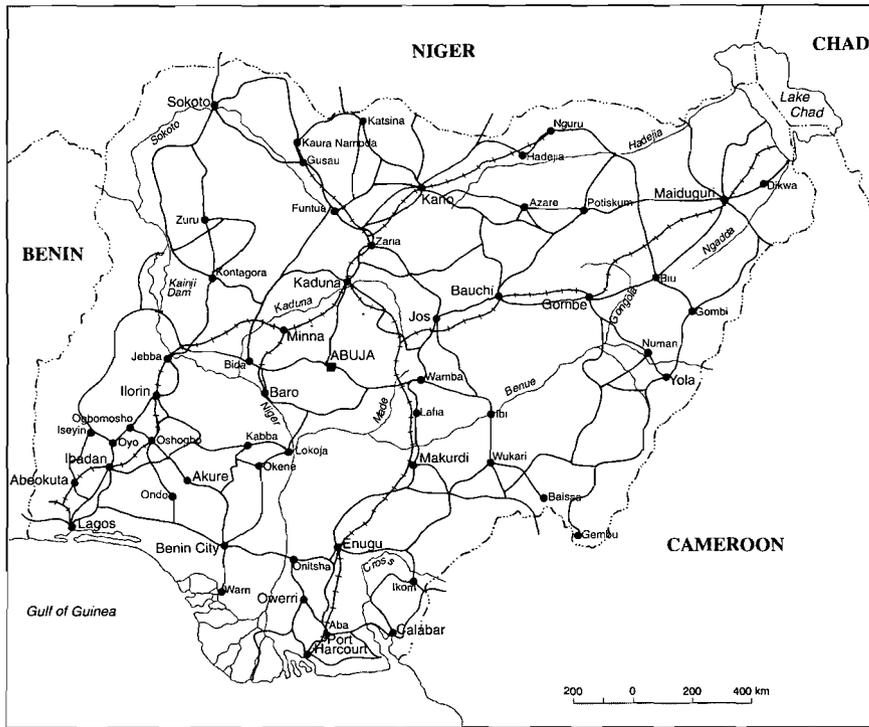
The boys are bad.  
They fight each other.  
(Tabo, age 11)



TV hero: Mr T.  
(Steven, age 11)



The boy is stealing a hen.  
(Vincent, age 13)



Nigeria

Of the 67 girls who were sexually abused, only seven reported the event to a parent or guardian and only one case was reported to the police but did not lead to arrest since the assailant escaped before the police arrived. Some of the reasons given by the girls for not reporting sexual abuse were: firstly, fear of stigma and ridicule, and a fear of reducing their chances of getting married if the abuse was made public. Secondly, abusers are sometimes relatives and family friends or familiar people and may be powerful people with widespread connections: 80% of the girls had seen the assailant before the day of abuse. Thirdly, rejecting enticements and inaccurate reporting of enticement could be termed disobedience and disrespect.

Half (50%) of the sexually abused girls were involved in ongoing sexual relationships with their abusers; 7% had been exposed only to minor molestations such as body touching. The small number of girls (3,5%) who had resisted sexual abuse gave the following reasons for doing so: firstly, they feared pregnancy and STD (sexually transmitted diseases). Secondly, they heeded their parent's warnings and were afraid that if they succumbed to enticements to sexual intercourse this would be discovered by people familiar to them. Thirdly, some had strong religious convictions. And lastly, they did not like the assailants.

In summary, it is clear that exposing young girls to hawking in Nigerian cities means that over half of them will either be raped or enticed into sexually compromising situations and virtually all of them will be sexually molested through touching and/or visual and verbal enticements to sex.

### Street children

As will be clear from the above section, when we speak of street children in Nigeria, we are speaking predominantly of "working street children" rather than of children whose sole means of subsistence and existence is the street. Although the latter are found in Nigeria, they do not form the majority of children found on the streets.

A nationwide study was embarked on by ANPPCAN (African Network on Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect) in recent years, led by the author of this article, to obtain an overview of the nature and extent of child abuse and neglect in Nigeria. There were three facets to the study: a street child density assessment, a survey of adult attitudes towards child abuse and neglect and a child attitude study (undertaken in junior secondary schools).

The street child density study was undertaken as follows: fieldworkers were posted to the busy streets of Kaduna (in the North), Ibadan (in the West) and Enugu (in the East). An actual count of children below the age of 16 found working on the street was made. Those who were merely passing by or who were accompanied by adults were not included. Counting was done from Monday to Friday for one hour each morning and one hour each evening. Over a one-week period, 414 children per street were counted in Enugu, 1 959 per street in Kaduna, and 1 931 per street in Ibadan. Considering a two-hour count per day for five days, this means that there is a street density population of 44,4, 195,9 and 193,1 working children per hour per street in Endugu, Kaduna and Ibadan. There was a 1:1 male/female ratio in Endugu; there were 20% more girls than boys in Kaduna and there was a 1:2 male/female ratio in Ibadan. In Enugu more children were observed on the streets in the evening, indicating that more children attended school in the morning and traded in the evening to supplement family income. In Kaduna and Ibadan there was no marked contrast in the number of children working

in the mornings and evenings. This seems to indicate that a large number of children do not go to school at all but are engaged all day in active trading.

### **Attitudes and perceptions of adults with regard to child abuse and neglect**

In the absence of reliable or available and accessible statistical figures from the ministry of social welfare, the police and the hospitals, it was decided to conduct a questionnaire survey among Nigerian adults. Amongst other matters they were asked whether they were aware of child abuse and neglect in their environments, whether they had actually seen or experienced child abuse and neglect and if so, what types. Bearing in mind the areas of child abuse and neglect already ascertained by previous studies, the questionnaire was designed to probe attitudes, perceptions and behaviour with regard to: general beliefs, physical punishment, hawking, early marriage, sexual abuse, handicapped children, house-holds/child minders, child abandonment and child begging.

Six hundred questionnaires were distributed, 200 each in Endugu, Kaduna and Ibadan. Of each 200 questionnaires, 50 were circulated to civil servants, 50 to professionals (doctors, lawyers, lecturers, accountants, etc), 50 to teachers (in primary and secondary schools) and 50 to traders (market men and women). Traders were interviewed and the questionnaires were completed on the spot, while others had to be filled in and returned.

The vast majority of respondents (80%) were aware of child abuse and neglect as a growing problem in Nigeria. Indeed, 76% cited specific instances of child abuse and neglect known to them. Despite this high level of awareness, there are still traces of apathy and ignorance. For example, 11% of the respondents said that they would ignore the sight of a child being abused or suffering neglect while 69% said that they would choose to discuss the problem with the parents or close relatives rather than to report it to the authorities meant to handle such cases, and 40% said that children are sent by God to help their parents economically.

The implications of these findings are twofold. Firstly, these viewpoints may be a reflection of cultural traditions that problems should be settled within the family unit so as to protect the fam-

ily against public shame and humiliation. (Earlier in this article it was noted that a reason given by young female hawkers for not reporting sexual molestation was the stigma and shame which accrued to them personally following such molestation.) Secondly, the findings reflect the ineffectiveness of institutional responses to a growing social problem. The welfare agencies have not been able to assert themselves effectively as an extension of the family problem-solving process, hence the reluctance of the public to turn to them for assistance.

Responses appeared to reflect some ambivalence with regard to physical punishment, 26% of respondents believing that this was the best way to handle children who misbehave and 85% admitting to beating their children in such instances. On the other hand, beating and excessive physical punishment are cited first, fourth and sixth in the three study zones as cases of abuse.

While the renowned discipline of the African child might be a valuable attribute in this age of unbridled liberalism, these child-rearing practices should probably be re-examined in the light of the brutality and injuries inflicted on young children in the name of discipline. It should also be remembered that excessive or unwarranted "discipline" can drive a child from home to live on the streets if there is no recourse available.

In the area of sexual abuse, twice as many respondents in Ibadan and Kaduna as those in Enugu felt that sexual abuse is a frequent occurrence. This could be attributed to the practice of early marriage in the north and the high rate of street trading by children in Ibadan. Seventy-five per cent of all the respondents said that street hawking occurred in their areas.

Handicapped children were believed to be particularly neglected.<sup>12</sup> While 90% of respondents felt that they should be given special attention, 61% attributed perceived neglect to the burdens a handicapped child placed on the family, financially and in terms of time, and 18% of respondents (28,5% in Ibadan, 17% in Kaduna and 19% in Enugu) felt that handicapped children constitute a shame to the family. While 52% found mental retardation difficult to manage, 12% found the same for blindness and 10% for epilepsy. No Enugu or Kaduna respondents reported feeling it was right to abandon a child

## **Nigeria**

Federal Republic of —

**Independence:** 1 October 1960.  
Former British colony.

**National Day:** 1 October  
(Independence Day).

**Leader:** Gen Sani Abacha, b 1943,  
Head of State since November  
1993.

**Capital:** Abuja. Lagos is the largest  
city and port.

**Area:** 923 768 km<sup>2</sup>. Population: 111  
mn (1995).

**Religions:** Muslim (majority) and  
Christians together about 85% of  
population.

**Languages:** English (official), Hausa,  
Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, Efik-Ibibio.

**Life expectancy at birth:** 52 years.

**Foreign trade:** Imports: \$6 600 mn;  
Exports: \$10 650 mn (1994).

**Principal exports:** Oil (90%).

**GNP:** \$29 995 (1994). GNP/capita:  
\$280 (1994).

**Currency:** \$1 = Naira (N) 85,4  
(March 1996).

**Background:** Africa's most populous country and leading oil producer has never been a single-party state but has spent most of its independent life under military rule. A heavily regulated transitional programme for the restoration of democratic civilian rule commenced in 1986 but came to naught when on 12 June 1993 the military government cancelled the results of the presidential election. Gen Babangida nevertheless transferred power to an interim civilian government, which was forced to resign by the military when on 17 November the defence minister, Gen Abacha, took over power. Meanwhile, public support for Chief Moshood Abiola, the apparent winner of the presidential election and who demanded to be installed as president, had created a highly unstable situation. Following the imprisonment of Abiola and other leaders, including former head of state, Gen Olusegun Obasanjo, there were local and international appeals for clemency. These appeals were extended to include a group of activists among the disadvantaged Ogoni community in the Niger Delta region, who had been brought to trial before a special tribunal. During the Commonwealth leaders' conference in November 1995, nine Ogoni activists, including well-known author Ken Saro-Wiwa, were sentenced to death and executed. As a result, Nigeria's Commonwealth membership was immediately suspended, while some countries, including South Africa, proposed the imposition of sanctions on Nigeria. Meanwhile, in October 1995, Abacha had announced a lengthy transitional programme that would return Nigeria to democratic, civilian rule in October 1998.

if it was born handicapped but 3% of Ibadan respondents did.

A handicapped child abandoned to street life would presumably suffer far more intensely than other children. The prevalent negative attitude to handicapped children would suggest that this population is suffering silently from neglect. Only 7% of the respondents admitted to having handicapped children but 83% said that it was a good idea to send them to special institutions. Although 29% disagreed, 66% agreed that it was of no use to send such children to normal schools.

There are very few special institutions for handicapped children in Nigeria. One deserving of special mention is the therapeutic day-care centre, Abakpa Nike Enugu, which caters for about 200 mentally retarded and severely disturbed children. Run by Mrs H Ebigbo (wife of the author of this article), it has a nursery and primary school, and an ultra-modern sheltered workshop and social education section. It was commissioned by Her Excellency, Chief Dr Mrs Maryam Babangida, the former First Lady of Nigeria. This institution plays an important role in the prevention of abuse and neglect of disadvantaged children and of expulsion from their homes to the streets.

The highest incidence of begging by children was reported by the Kaduna respondents (65%), followed by Ibadan respondents (57%) then Enugu respondents (38%). Handicapped children beg on their own on the streets. This was reported by 17% of respondents from Kaduna, 12% from Enugu and 9% from Ibadan.

These findings lead us to the following conclusions:

- Child abuse and neglect constitute a serious problem in Nigeria.
- Cultural practices and traditional attitudes are, to some extent, contributory factors.
- Institutions assigned the role of family and child welfare have failed to meet the challenges posed by this nationwide problem.
- The practices of hawking, begging and abandonment all place children at extreme risk of physical danger and sexual abuse.
- A number of handicapped children roam the streets without care.

### **Child attitude study**

This study was undertaken in schools from the three zones chosen for study. Care was taken to select schools with pupils from varying socio-economic backgrounds. Fifty students in primary six and the same number from classes one to three of junior secondary school were specially targeted so that they could be asked to complete the questionnaire unaided by field-workers. The questions were designed to give the consultants some understanding of the type of chores children are expected to perform before and after attending school, how they view physical punishment by teachers and parents and what they feel about nutritional standards.

It was found (94% of the responses) that once a child attended school it was very likely that he/she would receive three meals per day. Parents who are able to afford the extra expenses associated with education such as school books and uniform, also seem able to feed their children regularly. However, it would be worth while at a later date to investigate the content of the three meals in order to make some assessment of the nutritional content.

Sweeping the house before going to school is a common activity for most children. In Kaduna, some may even be expected to wash clothes and dishes and do other chores before leaving home for school. Just over half (52%) of the children reported spending from two to four hours per day on domestic chores after returning home from school. However, a fair number (20%) spend more than four hours on such tasks which may include washing clothes and dishes and cleaning their school uniform as well as preparing the evening meal.

These results differ somewhat from those obtained in the adult survey, where the majority of adults (77%) felt that it was good if the child was made to do domestic chores or agricultural work for one to two hours daily. Thus, while many parents may have good intentions concerning the number of hours a child should spend on domestic chores, the reality is somewhat different.

In Ibadan 20% of the children hawked after school yet most of them (76%) felt that they still had time for recreation. Recreation in Ibadan com-

prised playing with friends and playing football; in Enugu children mainly played and read. In Enugu and Ibadan children are likely to be scolded (40%) or beaten (37%) by their parents if they do something of which the parents disapprove. The same is true in Kaduna but to a lesser extent (23% and 18% respectively) although many (25%) will be given extra duties around the house as a punishment. About half (53%) of the children surveyed thought the punishment was sometimes too severe and a fifth (22%) have been seriously wounded through beatings by their parents. Most (89%) children who have been beaten by a teacher consider this to be acceptable. Very few (9%) requested treatment as a result of this.

The use of hard drugs did not appear to be a major problem in the schools surveyed; very few children (6%) reported that they had experimented with drugs. This is not to say that drug use is not growing and it may be a serious problem at a later date especially as almost half (49%) of the adults in the attitude survey believe that hard drug use is a problem for Nigerian children today.

### **The role of ANPPCAN**

The African Network on Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) came into being formally in Nigeria in April 1986 in Enugu, with a workshop on *Child Labour in Africa* sponsored by Unicef, the University of Nigeria and the Anambra State Government of Nigeria. This followed on a famous pre-conference in Nairobi in 1985.

The 1986 workshop noted with deep concern, amongst other serious situations of child abuse and neglect, the various forms of child labour in Africa which carry with them multiple forms of child abuse and neglect. Child labour in itself constitutes a form of abuse and neglect since it is exploitative and does not cater for the overall moral, physical, mental and emotional well-being of children.

The situations discussed in this article show the need for ANPPCAN to be vigorous in the pursuit of its role in filling the gaps left between child rights, family welfare, government responsibility and public perceptions. To meet the urgent need for action with regard to the street life of children

ANPPCAN has decided to found an institute for street child study and programmes.

As has become clear from this article, ignorance and poverty appear to play a major role in putting children out onto the streets either as child workers or as permanent street residents.

About 4.5 million Naira will be necessary for the establishment of the institute, which would consist of seven different departments:

- Sexual abuse prevention studies
- Exploitative child labour prevention studies
- Street existence prevention studies
- Data banking and networking
- Communication, social mobilization and advocacy
- Counselling and rehabilitation of street children
- Administration and legal action with regard to the rights of street children.

The major role of the institute will be the widespread dissemination of evidence to the Nigerian people of information obtained through research, on the following:

- accident rates of children while on the streets
- incidences of sexual abuse (whether of adult to child or child to child)
- incidences of child abduction and child killing
- disease rates (specifically with regard to STD and Aids contracted by children on the streets in comparison with other children)
- drug abuse rates of children on the streets in comparison with other children
- living conditions of children who have taken up permanent residence on the streets
- labour conditions of those who work as house-helpers.

In addition the institute will

- develop models for the alternative safe, and even creative engagement of children
- compute success rates of children
- produce advocacy materials addressing such issues as stressors in the community such as poverty, alcoholism, substance abuse, unemployment and poor living environment, punitive child-rearing prac-

tices and child vulnerability in the family situation, and the perpetuation of power imbalance between males and females.

All of the above-mentioned contribute either overtly or covertly to the abuse and neglect experienced by children, and especially by those who work and/or live on the streets of Nigeria. Further areas of activity of the institute will be to look into the pitfalls in law as it affects children and to insist, through research seminars and publications, that the rights of the child as stipulated in the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *African Charter on the rights and welfare of the child*, must be implemented in Nigeria. The institute will also help to disseminate various aspects of the Convention to help win attitudinal support from the society for it.

In the UN Convention the developmental thrust for the child has to be amplified. The history of the action for children by Unicef, starting in 1940, shows initial accentuation of humanitarian help for children. However, over the years such concepts as a Zone of Peace for children have emerged from a growing new ethic of care and concern for children. Consequently, it was declared that children must have the first claim on society's resources and through the UN Convention this emphasis has fallen on survival, protection, development and participation.

The ANPPCAN institute would help various NGOs working in the area of rights for children, especially with regard to street children. This would be facilitated by the involvement of the international organization, Childhope, which is specifically concerned with street children. As vice-chairman of the executive board of Childhope, it lies within the author's power to campaign actively for the acceptance and implementation of the articles in the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, throughout Africa. The establishment of a network of concerned agencies in this area should help to achieve popular participation in the acceptance of the Convention, as declared in the Arusha Declaration of the Unicef NGO Forum in 1990.

And finally, the institute would devote itself to social mobilization. Important personalities will be pressured to speak-up for street children.

Liaison with the media should help to ensure that eventually everybody in Nigeria will come to realize that there is no gain in sending children out onto the streets. Rather, much is to be lost.

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- 1 Also see P O Ebigo, "Psychosocial aspects of child abuse and neglect in Africa", in Peltzer and Ebigo (eds), *Clinical psychology in Africa (south of the Sahara), the Caribbean and Afro-Latin America: A textbook for universities and paramedical schools*, Nigeria, 1989, pp 401-424.
- 2 P O Ebigo "Situation analysis of child abuse and neglect in Nigeria: Making use of Nigerian daily newspapers", *Journal of African Psychology*, vol 1, 1989, pp 95-101.
- 3 G I Izuora, and P O Ebigo, "Assessment of house aids in Nigeria using the Draw-a-person Test", *The Nigerian Medical Practitioner*, vol 9, no 1, 1975, pp 21-23.
- 4 B Oloko, "Children's work in urban Nigeria: A case study of young Lagos street traders", *Unicef Staff Working Paper 4*, 1989, pp 19-30; P O Ebigo and G I Izuora, "Child labour in market places in the city of Enugu", in Bwibo and Onyango (eds), *Children in especially difficult circumstances*, Nairobi: ANPPCAN, 1985.
- 5 M N Kisekka (ed), *Children in Kaduna State, Nigeria; Problems and needs*, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria: Department of Sociology and Kaduna Child Welfare Committee, 1981.
- 6 Cf B Oloko, *op cit*.
- 7 E N Nzewi, "Street hawking: An etiological factor in the sexual abuse of children", paper read at the Second Biennial ANPPCAN National Scientific Conference on Child Abuse, Neglect and Survival in Nigeria, October 1988.
- 8 P O Ebigo and S Abaga, "Sexual experience of street trading girls in the city of Enugu", paper read at the ISPCAN 8th International Congress on Child Abuse and Neglect in Hamburg, Germany, September, 1990.
- 9 P O Ebigo, "Psychosocial aspects of child abuse and neglect in Africa", in E Nwogugu (ed), *Laws relating to children in Nigeria*, Enugu: Chuka, 1988.
- 10 Cf also M N Obiako, "Sexual abuse of children: The Nigerian styles", paper read at the launching conference of ANPPCAN, Nigeria, October/November, 1986.
- 11 P O Ebigo and S Abaga, *op cit*.
- 12 Also see H M Ebigo and P O Ebigo, "Neglect of mentally retarded children in Nigeria: The therapeutic day care centre and boarding school experience", in H M Ebigo et al (eds), *Child labour in Africa*, Enugu: Chuka, 1986; and T C Okeahialam, "The handicapped child in the African environment", in *The Child in the African environment*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1975.

# Street children in Nairobi

*Prof Louis Aptekar, of the Department of Psychology, San Jose University, California, examines the plight of street children in Kenya.*

In the past decade several studies of Kenyan street children have been conducted. Despite the abundance of information obtained from these studies, a number of critical questions about the essential nature of Kenyan street children remain unanswered. Are street children delinquent drug abusers, or merely desperately poor and uncared for? Is their plight the result of wisely having left abusive parents, or having unwisely left caring ones? Are the children on the street because living there is part of the culture of urban poverty in Kenya, or are Kenyan street children part of a deviant subculture?

This article discusses research that was undertaken to address these questions and examines some of the reasons why clear answers are not always forthcoming.

It is difficult to generalize about Kenyan street children because there are vast differences in their circumstances. Their ages vary widely (from 5 years to approximately 16), which consequently means that there are wide developmental, cognitive and psychological differences.

Kenyan street children have also – as in other parts of the world – been divided into two groups by some researchers: those who are working for their families (children *on* the streets); and those who are working for their own support (children *of* the streets). This has merit because many poor Kenyan children work on the streets as a normal part of their duties in the family's division of labour, and thus are not children of the streets. Wainaina,<sup>1</sup> for example, found that 85% of Kenyan children seen on the street were living with family. Their earnings contribute to the income of their families. Similar findings come from other places in the developing world.<sup>2</sup>

In many studies both groups of children are lumped together, thus inflating the numbers of street children (children of the streets), and making the problem of children's homelessness seem much larger than it is. However, the distinction "on" and "of" the streets

can be somewhat arbitrary and inaccurate, as many Kenyan street children frequently move between the streets and their homes. The attractiveness of the home versus the streets changes, depending on factors such as the season, the weather, conditions at home, whether friends are living on the street, the degree to which the police are harassing them, whether money is easier to come by on the street or at home, etc. The distinction between and "on" and "of" the streets also implies, at least relatively speaking, that the streets are a bad environment, and the home a good one. This might or might not be true, because, as bad as the streets might be, the child's home may be worse for the child's mental and physical health.

It is difficult to obtain accurate information from Kenyan street children, or about them. They have developed an extraordinary capacity to tell stories. Lying about their ages, family background, their reasons for being on the streets, and their current circumstances is a way of life for these children: indeed it has become an integral part of their survival skills.<sup>3</sup> (This characteristic is also shared with street children from other parts of the world.<sup>4</sup> See Richter,<sup>5</sup> and Swart,<sup>6</sup> for how street children and child care workers were affected by this in South Africa.)

Emotional reactions to the children make it difficult to remain objective and to report accurately about them. Researchers often succumb to describing these children in melodramatic terms. Unfortunately, this either understates or ignores the children's ability to cope in the face of difficult circumstances, or minimizes the children's problems, making them appear as heroic figures living the life of youthful adventurers.<sup>7</sup> Both scenarios are inaccurate, but it is difficult to draw a line between them because one cannot always tell to what degree the children are honest, to what degree one's own perception of them is accurate, or how readers will interpret what you have written.<sup>8</sup>

Most hypotheses about the origins of Kenyan street children point to family dysfunction as the major causative factor.<sup>9</sup> However, in spite of the apparent common sense of this assumption, it may well be that the families producing street children are not deviant. This might be particularly true if street boys and street girls are considered independently. A case can be made that street boys are taught by their unmarried and impoverished mothers to cope with the necessity of having to make do in a very limited economic environment by becoming independent at a far earlier age than the dominant society deems appropriate.<sup>10</sup> If this is true, street boys might be the more resilient of the boys among the urban poor. The less resilient boys are unable to leave home, and forced to live in circumstances that are inappropriate to their wellbeing. The opposite situation might exist for street girls. Mothers teach girls how to cope with the vagaries of poverty by staying at home, and out of the streets.

### Methodology

Our ethnographic study of street children began in 1992 with a small team of four American and two Kenyan researchers. Data were collected for three months in 1992. In 1993 we collected data for an additional three months. Funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF) in the USA made it possible to enlarge the research team, which worked intensively for an additional three months, from June to August of 1994. Data collection then continued on a smaller scale for the remainder of the year.

The 1994 research team consisted of four Americans and thirty Kenyans from several different tribal groups. Included were university professors, practitioners, policy makers and students. They came from diverse disciplines, including several psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, social workers, three demographers, a political scientist, an attorney, a physician, and several current and former street children.

In this article we concentrate on the ethnographic data that was obtained from the study. More than 70 in-depth psychological case studies of male and female street children – with varied street experiences and demographic characteristics – are currently being evaluated and written up for later publication.

We also have yet to analyse information that takes into account how



several different Kenyan sub-cultures, which have different child-rearing practices and family structures, help to create street children. This analysis will help not only Kenyan street children, but also street children worldwide.<sup>11</sup>

From the ethnographic data presented here we hope the reader will come to appreciate the child's subjective experience of living in the streets, which we believe is essential to the understanding of street children. By getting close to the children's perspective we will be able to show that they are not passive recipients of abuse or poverty. They are social actors who develop their own "microculture", which allows them to function in ways that reflect their own lives' concerns as well as the wide-spread cultural values that make up the larger culture in which they live.<sup>12</sup>

While larger scale perspectives using more distant data such as impersonal questionnaires often fall into the trap of ethnocentric assumptions, descriptive works relying on patient and detailed analysis of children's accounts can promote understanding of current prejudices, and shed light not only upon the children's lives, but also on society's reaction to them.<sup>13</sup>

Our research team was divided into five groups consisting of people from different disciplines, of men and women, and of street children or ex-street children. Some groups were composed entirely of Kenyans, most had at least one American. Data were collected in several different locations, though

Sleeping on the street.

Photo: Street-wise collection (Pretoria branch)

we focused on five primary areas which gave us information about the coping strategies of the children and the public's reaction to them.

In time, the ethnographers got to know the children by name and tribal affiliation. The validity and reliability of the information were checked by working in groups of two. One, for example, would ask the child's age, while the other would make an independent estimate of the child's age. Similar procedures were used for other factors, such as comparing the children's stated tribal affiliation with physical characteristics and language skills. The degree of discrepancy noted gave us some sense of the validity of the information the child was supplying.

One team worked in Nairobi city centre (south of River Road, east of Uhuru highway, north of the railway station, and west of Racecourse Road) where a large number of street children were known to congregate. Initially we moved around this area looking for all the "choums" (the homes that street children live in, really no more than a plastic sack high enough off the ground to crawl into). We canvassed the area during the day and at night, during the week and at week-ends, and in all kinds of weather. In time we had found all the choums, and knew the names and number of children in them.

Another group of ethnographers worked in Westlands, a commercial district with middle-class homes several kilometres from the city centre. Here we found two groups of street children. One lived in a garbage dump at the edge of the main shopping centre. The other came to an open field at the edge of a commercial centre where a small non-governmental organization (NGO) provided them with a hot lunch.

The children at the garbage dump, unlike the city centre children, did not live off tourism. Instead they worked by collecting and reselling odds and ends that they were able to get from local businesses. The children in the NGO feeding programme were not as completely "of the street" as the children living in the garbage dump, because they had a regular food supply and because we initiated an education programme and other organized activities.

The third group of researchers went to Soweto Village in the Kayole Estate to work with children in a pro-

gramme run by the African Housing Fund. This programme helped indigent mothers obtain skills that would help them earn a living. It also paid them to take care of street boys and girls, and these children had been living with their surrogate mothers for a few months.

The fourth group of ethnographers worked in Makuru-Reuben near the industrial area at a programme run by Feed the Children. Here nearly 50 street children of both genders lived and studied. Most of these children had been in the programme for a few months; some had recently arrived from the streets. Both the Kayole-Soweto and Makuru-Reuben groups were composed of boys and girls who were on the way out of the streets.

The last research group worked at an emergency shelter that housed girls who had come directly from the streets. Many of these girls moved between the streets and the shelter. We also worked with other programmes serving street girls directly on the streets in order to obtain sufficient ethnographic data from girls with little or no programmatic assistance.

The cross-section of places from which we collected data helped us get a sense of the differences between street children who lived wholly on the streets and street children who had various commitments to programmes designed to help them. We were also careful to collect data from boys and girls of different ages and tribal affiliations.

In addition to this concentrated effort, we collected data at various functions for street children, including theatrical performances they gave to the public (derived from an exceptional programme that trained the children expressly for this); during times the children were in contact with the police; when the children were making an en-mass public protest, at meetings of governmental programmes and NGOs working with street children, and from various individuals who worked with them.

Data on public attitudes toward the children were also collected. This was accomplished by examining press reports and other written documents, by talking to a variety of people (experts, pedestrians, store owners, restaurant patrons, bus passengers, etc) about street children at every chance, and by conducting focus-group discus-

sions. Each focus group lasted for two hours and consisted of various groups of Kenyans, including those who had worked with street children and those who had had no personal contact with them; people who had different social backgrounds and tribal origins; people of various ages; members of the government and private citizens; students and the uneducated; males and females. Three questions were asked at each of the focus groups: What is a street child?; Why do street children exist?; and What can be done to help them? Two group leaders were present for each focus group. One asked questions and facilitated discussions. The other recorded responses.

During the three months of intensive data collection I met with each sub-group of data collectors on a regular basis. We discussed the problems of over- or under-identification with the children, the frustrations of working with children in such difficult circumstances, and for the non-Kenyans, the hardships of doing cross-cultural research. This reduced the bias in the data collection.

Because we were aware that Kenyan street children were working and that the time they spent with us was time they could have been using to earn a livelihood, incentives were created which compensated for the loss of their time.<sup>14</sup> We bought the children food (usually bread and milk, but often chicken and chips), gave them lessons in writing and reading, took them to the doctor when they needed it, and gave physical exams to many of them. We also took the children on special outings, including trips to the National Museum, traditional dances and nearby game parks. We believe that our conversations with the children, when we asked them about their lives, their miseries, points of pride, and times of trauma, and which we listened to intensely, were of great help to them.

## Results

### *Estimating numbers*

We found that the public's perception of how many street children there were was very vague. The public's definition of street children was also vague. When members in the focus groups were asked to estimate the numbers of street children in Nairobi, the results ranged from 1 000 to 100 000. Their

estimates of street children in Kenya ranged from 5 000 to 1,5 million. Similar confusion was to be found in the press. For example, the *Daily Nation* reported on 6 June 1994 that there were 500 000 youth living on Kenyan streets, 300 000 of whom could be found in Nairobi. According to an article appearing in the same newspaper, several weeks later, the number of street children in Nairobi was 30 000.<sup>15</sup> In 1991, Undugu, the largest and most experienced group working with street children in Kenya, estimated between 5 000 and 10 000 street children in Nairobi.<sup>16</sup> These estimates vary so dramatically because different people refer to different groups of children. For those with the high estimates, the numbers include working children and street children and indeed any child whose appearance is less than clean and tidy.

In large part the inflated estimates have to do with the public's fear of an approaching menace, a fear which is diffuse, but which is fuelled by increasing economic insecurity.

Having more than 30 people work in the field for several months made it possible to develop an estimate of the number of street children in Nairobi. In the city centre we documented a dozen choums, each of which had approximately 10 members. We were also able to ascertain through our own data collection and from previous studies<sup>17</sup> that there were six additional areas in the city that also had, on average, the same number and size of choums. By multiplying the 120 street children found in the city centre by seven, we estimated 840 street children in the largest seven concentrations. There were of course many more street children. By using previously published works we determined that there were approximately 20 smaller places, with an average of eight street children per area (160), and an additional 20 areas with an average of six children (100).<sup>18</sup> This amounts to 1 120 street children organized into groups of children. Again using existing information, we were able to ascertain that there were on the average about half that many in custody (500).<sup>19</sup> Knowing that not all street children can easily be accounted for, we also estimate that there are an additional 300 who are irregular visitors. This amounts to about 1 920 street children in Nairobi. Thus, our

calculations suggest that the lower figure proposed by the Undugu Society is the most accurate.

It is important to remember that these approximations exclude working children and many other children who are in need of help. Additional statistical data currently being analysed will yield more accurate estimates.

### *Mental health and gender*

Although Kenyan street children are of both genders, they are far more likely to be male. In fact, the predominance of boys, 91% in a recent study in Nairobi,<sup>20</sup> is particularly striking since in many cultures girls are more likely to be abandoned and abused than boys.<sup>21</sup> If being a Kenyan street child were the result of neglect or abuse one would expect a much higher proportion of girls, because Kenyan girls are more likely to be abused and neglected than boys.<sup>22</sup>

The most common explanation for finding fewer girls in the streets is that (on the assumption that they have left their homes in equal numbers to the boys) they are taken off the streets to become prostitutes.<sup>23</sup> But before making such an assumption one would have to take into account that "prostitution" could have a different meaning for the street children than for the people who describe them as prostitutes.<sup>24</sup> It is also very difficult to ascertain the sexual practices of street girls. In the most detailed study of street girls, the girls were unwilling to talk about their sexual experiences in spite of the fact that the author had successfully worked with them for many years.<sup>25</sup>

Our research assumes that in order to understand the mental health of street children, one must first acknowledge and examine gender differences. We found that Kenyan street boys in our sample had rarely joined street life before the age of five, but that many were in full control of their lives by the time they had reached the age of ten or twelve. During these years they were (for the most part) able to maintain contact with their families, earn sufficient money on the streets to share with their families, develop many friendships, find the programmes available to serve them, and in many ways act like adults.

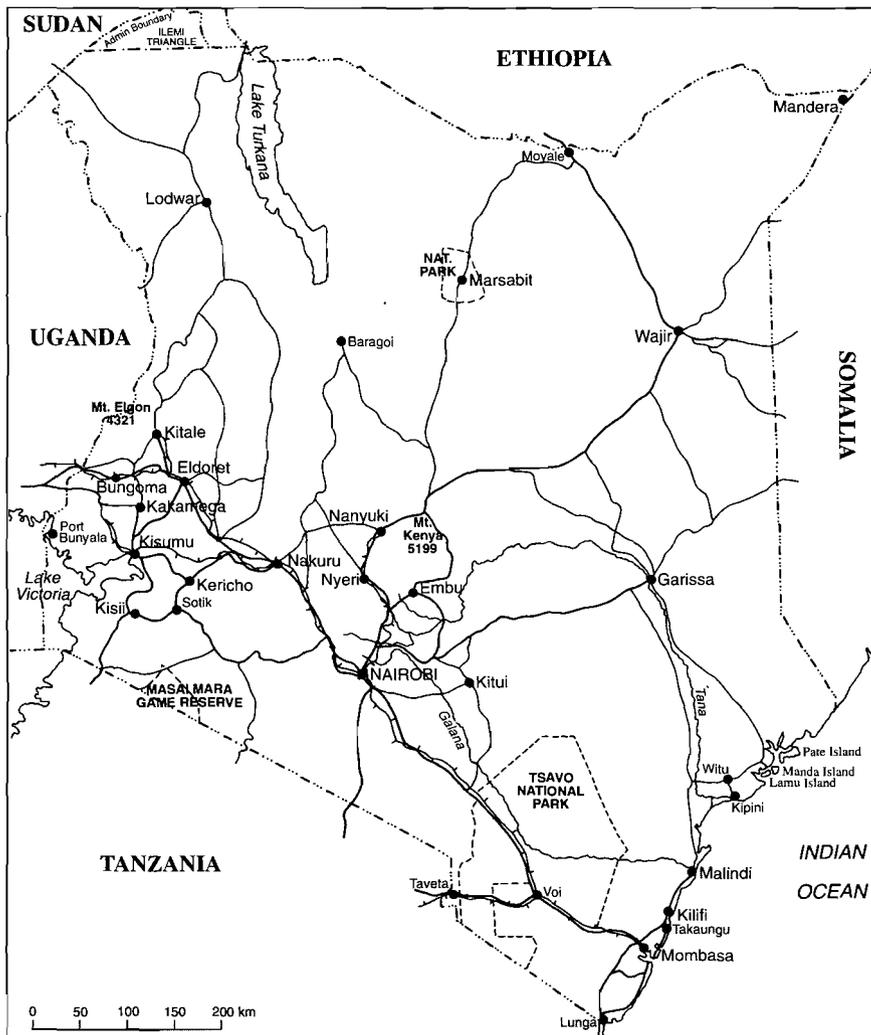
During puberty, as the boy's body image changed to that of an adult (at 13, 14 or 15 years of age), people

stopped seeing him as cute. As several older boys remarked, "they think we are dangerous criminals". This attitude was even expressed by several adults whom the children knew and considered trusted allies. As a result the boys found themselves having to accept the same kind of work as many poor adults (work for trade, piece-work, at best intermittent salaried employment) with the same type of relationship to the society (legal, semi-legal and illegal).<sup>26</sup>

The girls in our sample began street life later than the boys, usually not before they were 10 years old: the majority of street girls in Nairobi were between 10 and 13.<sup>27</sup> As the girls became pubescent they were perceived (and evaluated) in sexual terms. If they were not seen as "attractive" by men, they were shunned. Prostitution was therefore an alternative to being shunned. Thus they follow in their mothers' footsteps and have children – often by various men, who as a rule do not view them as legitimate wives, and thus unworthy of continued financial support.<sup>28</sup>

For both street boys and girls the approach of adolescence marks a particularly painful time. Not only do they have to deal with the expected physical and psychological difficulties of adolescence, they also have to move quickly into adulthood. If they are unable to proceed, the results can be quite serious. Boys and girls therefore develop different coping strategies. This in large part is due to their different histories of survival on the streets. The boys have been around for longer than the girls and they tend to have established coping strategy.

According to Muraya,<sup>29</sup> the leader of a group of street boys commonly takes on several street girls as "wives". The boys see that the "wives" are not bothered by other boys, in or outside of the group, and that they get enough to eat. In return the boys receive the sexual privileges of husbands. Additionally, some of the girls on the streets exchange sex for money on a limited basis (none of the girls in Muraya's study supported themselves solely from prostitution). We found the "husbands" had no conflict with this. They were content to live with the girls in the dual role as wife and prostitute. The girls in these groups quickly learn to accept the low status of women, thus perpetuating the value system that exists in the homes of their mothers.



Kenya

It is developmentally appropriate for girls of the same age to be deeply committed to same-sex friendships (see Aptekar<sup>30</sup> for a discussion on the psychological value of pre-pubescent children of both sexes playing with same-gender friends). Yet, in our study we did not find a strong group structure among the girls. Many girls coped as appendages to the boys, even though they did not receive the support they needed from them.

We found that street boys and street girls related to their families of origin differently. Almost all street boys remained connected to their mothers, indeed they often contributed part of their incomes to them. One of the ex-street boys working on the project, for example, routinely took a three-hour bus trip to give his mother half of what he had earned during the week.

Girls, on the other hand, tended to dissociate themselves from their mothers. In Muraya's study<sup>31</sup> "65% of the

street girls have completely severed family ties". We found that the girls knew less about their biological parents and often refused to talk about them.

While the boys were eager to make friends with outsiders, maintained caring family ties, and established close sibling-type relationships with other boys, the girls – even after considerable effort on the part of field workers (Kenyan women experienced in working with street children) to draw them out – remained distant. The girls did not have strong same-sex sibling-like ties; they accepted low status relationships with the boys; and they were not connected to their families of origin. Taken together, this information suggests that the girls had more emotional problems than the boys.

Thus, when street children are referred to in the aggregate, largely because they are mainly boys, it might be said they are making adequate adjustments to street life. However, if the boys and girls are separated, another picture emerges. The boys are coping far better than the girls.

This is of course in contradiction to public belief, which is based on press reports, personal observations, and the occasional personal contact. But there is always more to the life of street children than meets the eye. The becomes particularly clear when one considers the issue of inhalant abuse.

The abuse of inhalants also had a gender bias. Inhalant use is the boys' domain, as prostitution is the girls'. Over the years that we have been collecting data, street children and drug consumption have been portrayed as going hand in hand. In the past it was always possible to see the occasional child sniffing glue in public. But as each year passed, the picture of a child – arm bent at the elbow, his hand around a bottle nearly covered by his shirt sleeve – repeatedly inhaling, has become quite commonplace.

Because I had witnessed so many children inhaling glue together and in full public view, I began to think there must be more to their use of inhalants than the explanations most commonly given, such as to self-medicate fear and depression, to kill hunger, to provide strength to live in difficult circumstances, or that it is an indication of a pathological need for gratification.<sup>32</sup>

One evening I was visiting street children in the Little Mogadishu section of Eastleigh. There were about a dozen

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boys, on a small island of refuse in the middle of a busy roundabout, inhaling glue. Around them sped a steady flow of traffic. I observed them through the traffic, as did many Somali pedestrians. All I could see were many pairs of eyes peering over noses covered by paper bags or shirt sleeves. It occurred to me that as I and the others watched the boys' eyes, the boys were also watching us.

Across the island on the main corner of the intersection, another group of about 10 street boys was also consuming inhalants. Unlike the island boys, who were relaxed, these boys were in constant motion, playing various forms of tag. Although they chased each other at a full run and fought each other in mock battles of kicks and fists, they were moving fluidly between and among the pedestrians and cars. At times the boys stopped to ask for alms, to make up a story designed to make a pedestrian give them money, or to tell a shopkeeper they would watch his or her store in exchange for food.

The most striking phenomenon in these scenes (and later in many similar situations) was not that one or two boys had obviously overdosed (the ones most likely to be represented in the press or those who leave the most lasting impression on the observer), but that as every street boy in the group was inhaling, every passer-by was consumed with interest. Each group eyed the other as if they were shopping in a market filled with exotic goods. The two were interwoven, making me think that the psychological value of using the drug (getting high from it) was less important to the vast majority of these boys than its social value.

Knowing that the boys are very adept at manipulating public opinion, it is no accident that every passer-by sees the boys using the inhalants. In fact, if they had wanted to advertise their consumption they could not have developed a better strategy. Kenyan street boys come from traditional cultures where initiation into adult roles is a powerful experience, and one that is held in full public view of all the elders in the community. Staring down the pain of circumcision in front of one's parents and elders was needed to become a successful initiate.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, part of the wide use of inhalants in public could be seen as a way of declaring adult status to the community.

The boys also use inhalants to initiate and enhance friendships. In their

traditional cultures, boys are raised with other boys in age cohorts. Ties between them are lifelong (indeed they become "brothers") and intimate.<sup>34</sup> The boys still need and want this intimacy; and sharing in inhaling glue in full view of adults who do not approve builds group solidarity. As one boy in "Little Mogadishu" said to me as we both looked out at the Somali passer-by, "we are different than them. We are like each other. We do this because they don't approve of us."

Contrary to popular belief, boys do not use more drugs as they get older or spend more time on the streets. It is the younger boys who use the most drugs. Our findings were that the period of most use was from 10 to 14 years of age, which is precisely the time when the children most need peer support. This also suggests the social aspect of their drug use. Additionally, by the time the children had reached the age of 15 or 16, when they needed to drop their street-child identities and assume adult roles, most of them stopped using inhalants. Many turned to alcohol – a far more widely used drug in Kenya – which has more adverse effects and is associated with adults, not street children. (Similar findings in Latin American are suggested by Lucchini,<sup>35</sup> in Latin America).

Adolescent drug use is not necessarily correlated with impaired mental health, nor are the adolescents who use drugs more troubled than the adolescents who abstain.<sup>36</sup> Chadwick<sup>37</sup> showed that the abuse of inhalants does not necessarily lead to brain damage. In his study, the cognitive deterioration was small, and what there was of it had more to do with the children's poverty than it did with the use of inhalants per se. Chadwick also demonstrated that after the most chronic users stopped, the mental cloudiness that is associated with inhalant inebriation was reversed. Similar results come from a comparative study of Mexican street children.<sup>38</sup> Ortiz showed that the relationship between the use of inhalants, the destruction of mental functions, and the degree to which inhalants are addictive was not nearly as conclusive as the public was led to believe.

Close observation of Kenyan street children tended to confirm this. For the boys to function, they needed a high degree of cognitive skills. This was evident in Little Mogadishu where the amount of human traffic, to say nothing

## Kenya

Republic of —

**Independence:** 12 December 1963.  
Former British colony.

**National Day:** 12 December  
(Independence Day).

**Leader:** Daniel arap Moi, b 1924,  
President since 1978.

**Capital:** Nairobi, largest city. Main  
port Mombasa.

**Area:** 582 646 km<sup>2</sup>.

**Population:** 28,7 mn (1995).

**Religions:** Christian majority, tribal  
beliefs and Muslim minority.

**Languages:** English and Swahili  
(both official), Gikuyu, Kalenjin,  
Kamba, Luhya, Luo.

**Life expectancy at birth:** 59 years.

**Foreign trade:** Imports: \$2 000 mn;  
Exports: \$1 500 mn (1994).

**Principal exports:** Tea (20%), coffee  
and flowers.

**GNP:** \$6 643 mn (1994).

**GNP/capita:** \$260 (1994).

**Currency:** \$1 = Kenya shillings (Sh)  
58 (March 1996).

**Background:** Tourism is the largest foreign currency earner in a comparatively prosperous economy. The agricultural sector produces the principal exports (tea, coffee and horticultural products) in a country poorly endowed with minerals. While increasing cash crop production by peasant farmers is an encouraging feature of the Kenyan economy, the shortage of arable land and a population growing at the rapid rate of 3,3% are constraining factors. After declaring himself in favour of single-party "democracy" for Kenya, Pres Moi was at the end of 1991 persuaded by his own party (Kanu) to restore the multiparty system. Among the largest opposition parties formed was the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (Ford), which split into two opposing factors, Ford-Asili and Ford-Kenya. This enabled Moi to be returned to office on 36% of the vote in the presidential election on 29 December 1992. In the National Assembly election, which took place at the same time, the ruling Kanu won 100 of the 188 seats. The next elections are due towards the end of 1996.

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of the relentless stream of cars, trucks, taxis and other vehicles, was enough to make any movement dangerous. Negotiating this busy intersection demanded a good sense of who was where, and where everyone, including oneself, might be going. There were no traffic accidents and no pedestrians crashed into one another. Almost all of the children were capable of performing the necessary functions to obtain food and money.

Other aspects of the children's coping strategies also illustrated their ability to function rationally. For example, the boys are able to manipulate the legal system. Each time they are arrested they give authorities a different name, which means that they are always given the light sentences afforded first-time offenders. The boys also take advantage of their friendships with *totes* (young men who escort passengers into *matatus* [public transport mini-buses], collect their money, and tell the driver when to proceed) and drivers of the *matatus* who help them to travel free on public transportation. Indeed, when compared to other poor boys, street boys work and play in a far larger geographical area.<sup>39</sup> In this expanded geographical terrain the boys were capable of making the many entrepreneurial deals (finding things cheap in one place and selling them at a profit in another) that ensured their daily survival, and which took considerable cognitive skills. The street boys were also aware of the importance of making peace with social workers so that their medical needs could be met when they were ill or hurt.

As the profits of inhalants are not worth professional drug traffickers' time, the children escape the usual spiral of crime associated with drug abuse in the developed world. It also means that the children avoid the additional psychological burdens associated with drug abuse.<sup>40</sup>

The above combination of social, psychological, and cultural factors related to the use of inhalants by Kenyan street boys are not fully understood, but they should be considered before drawing conclusions about what effects the use of inhalants have on the boys' mental health.

Rather than dwell on the children's misery, we shall look at the problems the large majority of street boys, and to a lesser extent street girls,

have been able to overcome. In the process we shall also examine their resilience.<sup>41</sup>

### **Family dynamics**

The families of street children also tend to be described incorrectly. Almost all Kenyan street children grow up in a family headed by a woman, their fathers not being present or available. Two studies conducted ten years apart showed that in Nairobi nearly 85% of the mothers of street children were unmarried.<sup>42</sup> In the most recent study, nearly two-thirds of the households in the slums of Nairobi were headed by unmarried women.<sup>43</sup> Similar percentages were found in a recent sample of Mathare Valley.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to the fact that the homes of street children are headed by women, they are also headed by impoverished women. In one study, nine out of ten street children said that when they lived at home they went to school without anything to eat. Eighty-five per cent ate only one meal a day. Less than 10% of the parents earned more than US\$20,00 per month. Three-quarters of the street children in another study had lived in one room, without running water or indoor plumbing.<sup>45</sup>

Two of the three hypotheses that describe the origins of street children blame aberrant families who allegedly neglect or abuse their children. The third hypothesis identifies poverty as the main reason for children landing on the street. Our study showed that poverty was far more important than parental neglect.

What is often overlooked is the extreme difficulty that parents have in coping with their poverty; and the lack of social equality in Kenyan society.

It is easy to condemn the mothers if their poverty is not taken into account. For the past four years the African Housing Fund and other donor organizations have been funding several projects aimed at increasing the financial ability of mothers of street children.<sup>46</sup> Prior to 1990 many of these mothers were in the streets begging for alms with their children. Were they there because they were irresponsible or because they were poor and had no alternative?

One such mother who had managed to escape the horror of begging on the streets was a woman called

Ann. She had been married to a truck driver for nearly 15 years. Together they had six children whom they supported and sent to school until the untimely death of her husband in a traffic accident. Like almost all working families in the developing world, they had no economic reserves and her extended family's help faded when they too ran out of money. Her oldest boys, 15 and 13, left school (even though they had been doing well) and went to work picking up debris, rags and whatever else they could find of value on the street (the only jobs they could find). They came home at the end of the day with enough money to put food on the table, but not enough to pay the rent. Ann received an eviction notice, but by pleading with the landlord was given some extra time to pay her bill. Ann was forced to send her oldest daughter to work as a domestic servant at the home of a friend of her deceased father, where she was raped.

It was shortly after this that Ann resorted to begging on the streets with her two smallest children. Because begging with children is illegal, and because she did not have resources to bribe the police, Ann inevitably ended up in Langata Prison. Fortunately, she learned of the African Housing Fund, which eventually provided her with shelter and taught her how to make cement blocks used for home construction. After a few years she was able to earn enough money to support her children, send them back to school, and build her own home.

The traditional family structure, which took care of all members, is on the wane, and many modern Kenyan women have made a decision to cope with the low status of women in marriage by opting to have children outside marriage.

"About 40% of the mothers we spoke to ... felt that marriage 'spoils' a relationship and gives the man too much power and control over the woman."<sup>47</sup> Many mothers felt they were better off without husbands, who they said were too expensive to keep in clothes, food, and drink. Beside these reasons for not wanting husbands, the economic situation with increasing opportunities in the informal sectors and decreasing opportunities in the formal sectors, made men relative to women less marketable.<sup>48</sup>

Although the authorities consider families headed by single women to

be "broken", this is not the children's perception. The children grow up in situations where either legal polygamy or a series of semi-permanent relationships – often producing offspring – are the norm. Fathers are never expected to be permanently around the home, and thus it is not surprising that more than twice-as many street children thought their parents were married than actually were.<sup>49</sup>

These modern arrangements have produced a complex form of sibling rivalry. It is becoming increasingly clear that it may be a more prevalent reason for children leaving home than the oft-quoted abusive step-father or absent father. In the past this information was often obscured in studies relying solely on questionnaires that asked children whether family problems caused them to leave home. The children did not understand that family problems included siblings, so if they were not fighting with their parents they discounted family problems in their responses. Once we held detailed discussions with the children we discovered that many of them had left home because they were having trouble with their half-brothers or half-sisters.

I visited a mother of four boys and two girls (from three different fathers: the first had died in a car accident; the second was abusive to her; and the third had initially not told her that he was already married to another woman upcountry). She lived with four of the six children in one room no bigger than a small bedroom in a middle class home. The room was divided into different areas by two blankets. Behind one blanket was the mother's area; behind the other, three levels of shelves acted as beds for the children. In one corner was a one-burner stove that was surrounded by two pots and a stool. The only source of light in the house was from the front door. Open sewage ran from the front door, along the path leading away from the house where it ultimately merged with refuse from other homes down the hill.

The woman sold illegal beer in an attempt to support herself and her children. Her two oldest boys, half-brothers well into their teens, both lived and made a living on the streets. They came home periodically, usually with some gift, and were very welcome. They had been told to make a

contribution to the household shortly before puberty. The children accepted this, as they preferred the streets to the crowded conditions at home, which included a good deal of half-sibling jostling for very few favours.

Many experts would blame the mother for contributing to the delinquency of her minor children. However, it can also be seen more positively. She had taught her two oldest boys to make their own way; she had found a means to feed the other four children at home and was aiming to educate a number of her children.

To label this family dysfunctional because this mother has developed different criteria for supervision and protection than those espoused by the middle and upper social classes, is to compound rather than solve the problem.<sup>50</sup>

### Hostility towards children

Most studies from all over the world indicate that street children are treated badly by their communities.<sup>51</sup> They have been sold into what amounts to indebted servitude and have been murdered for no more than committing petty crimes or simply being naughty. In fact, more children have been killed in Brazil than died in the civil war in Lebanon.<sup>52</sup>

This past summer, a Kenyan street child was murdered, allegedly by a police reservist. The boy, later identified as Simon, was first said to be 13 years of age, then 15, and finally 18.<sup>53</sup> Whatever his true age, Simon was shot five times at point blank range, then kicked into the gutter and spat upon. Evidently, Simon had stolen a signal-lens from a parked car.<sup>54</sup> There had been no other complaints about Simon's behaviour.

What was it about this boy that aroused such anger? Was he seen in the context of a larger menace? Perhaps the reservist's actions against the street child could be viewed as part of the anger people feel towards the poor, blaming them for their own poverty.

Boyden<sup>55</sup> 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 going to school, and by assuming the right to enjoy the fruits of their work as

they choose (consuming drugs or alcohol).

In Kenya, as elsewhere, street children have come to represent the moral decay and large-scale social problems in their society, including inequality of income, and changing family values. When people look into the eyes of the impoverished street and working children in Kenya they are confronted by the breakdown of their society and the insecurity of the future.

### Services

In the course of our work we saw many programmes that serve street children in a variety of ways. It is not our intention to evaluate particular programmes. Almost every programme, as a minimum, provides something. The extent of the children's participation will show which are the most successful (except, of course, the programmes that incarcerate the children).

However, I would like to make a few comments. We found that there was a great deal of discrepancy between the programmes' "official philosophy" and what the children actually experienced. In some cases the official philosophy was quite benevolent, but the children appeared to be treated poorly by the people they interacted with on a daily basis. In other situations, the children appeared to be treated quite well though the stated philosophy seemed quite rigid. Much depends on the people who actually work with the children; those who wrote the goals or objectives and who collected funds to support the programme had a much smaller influence. This indicates the importance of evaluating programmes at grassroots level, rather than on the basis of secondary sources, from reading brochures, or from official representation from the board.

Competition between programmes, and among personnel working in different programmes, is also a worrying factor. Theoretical differences were used by one group to discount the work of another. Pieces of gossip about people were spread recklessly, and legitimate problems of an organization were raised to create innuendo, if not scandal.

A decade ago there were almost no formal programmes for street children in Kenya. Today, there are many, and one explanation for the tension

between them is that there is an overlap in services provided by them. More importantly, there are too many programmes of some types and not enough of others. There is a tendency of "over-programming" for food, recreational activities, and shelter, with the result that the adults working in these programmes have to compete with each other to maintain street children on their rosters. (The larger the number of children served, the greater the likelihood of receiving funding and staying in business – and, naturally, keeping one's job as an aid worker.)

Another problem related to interservice competition was that programmes become so attractive that they have the paradoxical effect of drawing more children onto the street away from their homes in the slums. At some point, programmatic efforts that are designed to return children to their homes or to find more restrictive environments than the streets, will have to take into account the inherent contradiction between services that are designed to take children off the streets, and the fact that the children have left their homes in favour of living on the streets.

The problem, as it now exists, is not so much to find food for the children. As a whole (there are notable exceptions), the children are adequately fed. What is needed now is to find ways to serve their vocational needs and desires for personal growth. This requires coordination among service providers, which, in an environment where there is fierce competition for scarce resources, is problematic. There are still very few programmes that help the child in a holistic way.

What is completely lacking, and what is probably the most important, is programmes designed to address and change public attitudes. This is not easy, and will take considerable coordination among a variety of people and agencies, and a reorientation to where a significant part of the problem lies. It will mean moving away from blaming individuals or groups, and offering solutions to some large-scale societal problems, including the deep social inequalities found in Kenya.

## Conclusion

The problem of street children in Kenya is complex and broad based as I have shown above. The situation re-

quires solutions that go beyond the immediate visible problems. And to do so we may have to follow the advice of the old African saying, "if you want to get to the root of a murder, you have to look for the blacksmith who made the matchet".

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# Working with **Street** boys in Harare

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and Prof M F C  
Bourdillon, of the  
University of Zimbabwe,  
consider ways of working  
with Zimbabwean  
street children.*

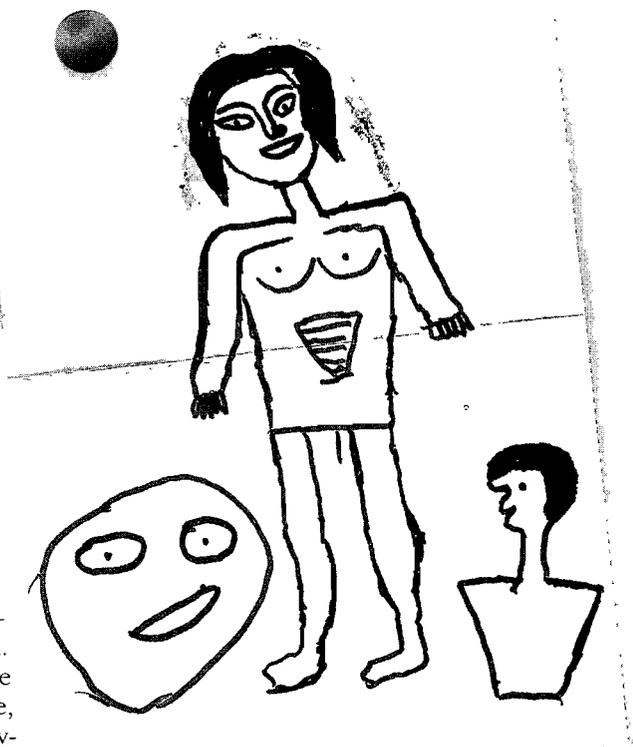
The authors are all associated with Streets Ahead, a voluntary organization registered to work with street children in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. The aim is to work with children on the streets by establishing some kind of drop-in centre, which would not force them out of the environment in which they have learnt to survive. The two principal authors of this article, Linda Dube and Leobah Kamvura,<sup>1</sup> were employed by Streets Ahead as field workers in March 1992. Dube, who is still with Streets Ahead, had already begun a sociological study of street children in the high-density suburb of Mbare, about 4 km from the centre of Harare. Kamvura is a trained social worker. Michael Bourdillon has been involved in the administration of Streets Ahead from its inception, and has collected material from the previous field worker, the late Maxwell Rupondo.

This article, originally prepared for publication in 1993, describes the experiences of the two field workers working with and for children in difficult circumstances. It looks at their initial assumptions about street children and shows how these assumptions have changed as a result of their interaction with the street boys. Although it has been painful at times, we have moved away from our initial impressions and assumptions about street children. This has resulted in changes in our focus on the problem with which we are dealing, and in our ideas on what might be the most suitable solutions to it.

The population of greater Harare is around a million. The city can conveniently be divided into the city centre, high-density suburbs and low-density suburbs. The low-density suburbs are where the middle and upper classes live.

Houses in the high-density suburbs are typically simple four-roomed buildings, but there is quite a variation in size and type. Families may rent a single room, or a rough wooden shack outside the main house, or perhaps even half a room. In the more densely populated areas, there are around 30 persons living on each plot, with only one official dwelling unit and normally only one toilet. There are several hundreds of homeless people living in Harare, sleeping on pavements in the city centre, in bus shelters or other spots around the city, or squatting in temporary shacks made from rough wooden poles and plastic.

Several categories of children are seen on the city streets.<sup>2</sup> In the city centre, there are perhaps a couple of hundred children making a living by directing drivers to parking places and guarding the cars while the owners are doing their business in town. These



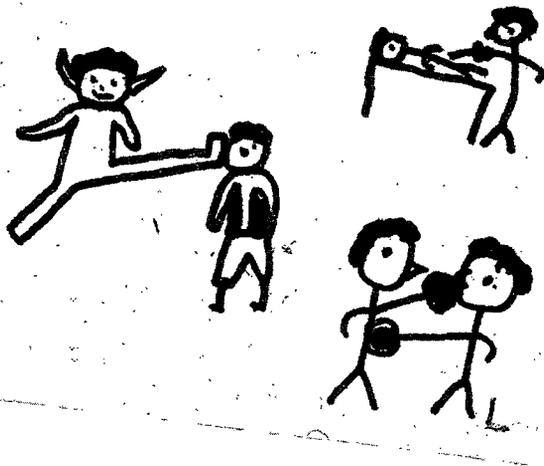
This is me when I'm a man. (Paulus, age 14)

range in age from the early twenties (especially where business is most lucrative) down to around 12. Many of these boys live on the streets at night, but are often smartly dressed and not obviously undernourished. These are the most visible street children in Harare, and they have attracted much publicity, both sympathetic and adverse. We also find the children of blind beggars with their parents on the streets. These at least have adults to care for them. In the evenings, a number of poor children come into town to collect scraps of food wherever these might be available. Again, these children usually have a home to go to, albeit an impoverished one. There are vendors of fruits and other small items. Although some of these find their way to the city centre, they are more common in the high-density suburbs. In the market places of these suburbs we find children earning money by acting as porters and in a variety of other casual tasks.

Very few young girls are seen on the streets. Even poor families are afraid to let their daughters out onto the streets. Girls who are homeless are very quickly taken up by "aunties",<sup>3</sup> usually women who are getting to an age when their attractiveness as prostitutes is on the wane. Such "aunties" can continue to make money by collecting under their charge younger girls with whom they can keep their clients content. The girls consequently have somewhere to stay and usually a good income and smart clothes.

The number of street children is expected to grow in the present economic climate. With the disastrous drought last year, combined with a failing national economy, more and more children are likely to find themselves neglected by parents or adult relatives who are unable to support them. Many Aids orphans find themselves dumped on relatives in the rural areas; the children do not know or like rural life, and the rural families are unable to support themselves, let alone additional orphans.

The children who live and work on the street refer to themselves as *multi-*



*bumba* (roughly "those who sleep under trees"). This corresponds to the classification "children-of-the-street" in much of the literature, as opposed to the "children-on-the-street" who spend their days on the street but who have some kind of home to go to. For our purposes, however, we extend the term "street children" to cover both categories. There is a gradual process by which children *on* the street become children *of* the street, and any intervention should pay attention to this process. We need to contact children not only after they have committed themselves to street life, but also while they are moving towards such a decision. Indeed, as Maggie Black points out,<sup>4</sup> the category of "street" may not be the most suitable point of intervention. We need also to go back into the communities from which the children come.

A study of street children in several cities in Zimbabwe<sup>5</sup> indicated that the vast majority of children working on the street (85%) lived in a family at least some of the time. Just under two-thirds had both their parents alive. A substantial proportion of all working children had unemployed parents.<sup>6</sup>

#### A VERY BAD MAN

The top one hits this one with a knife. This one stabs this one who is sleeping. This one is karate and this one is boxing.

(Lolo, age 11)

## Zimbabwe

Republic of —

**Independence:** 18 April 1980.

Former British colony known as Southern Rhodesia or Rhodesia.

**National Day:** 18 April  
(Independence Day).

**Leader:** Robert Mugabe, b 1924, in power since 1980, President since 1988.

**Capital:** Harare, largest city.

**Area:** 390 759 km<sup>2</sup>.

**Population:** 11,2 mn (1995).

**Religions:** Christian (about 50% of population) and ethnic beliefs.

**Languages:** English (official), Shona, Ndebele.

**Life expectancy at birth:** 60 years.

**Foreign trade:** Imports: \$1 680 mn;  
Exports: \$1 900 mn (1994).

**Principal exports:** Tobacco (29%), gold and other minerals.

**GNP:** \$5 424 mn (1994).

**GNP/capita:** \$490 (1994).

**Currency:** \$1 = Zimbabwean dollars (Z\$) 9,5 (March 1996).

**Background:** With the exception of South Africa, landlocked Zimbabwe has the most diversified economy in sub-Saharan Africa. Exports come from agriculture (especially tobacco and cotton), mining (including gold, nickel, asbestos, copper and chromium) and manufacturing (ferro-alloys, steel and clothing). Transport and other infrastructural services are well developed and the country has made great progress in expanding educational and health services. Economic growth has nevertheless been disappointing over the past decade and unemployment is rising. The country has sustained a multiparty system since independence but politics is dominated by the ruling party (Zanu-PF), which won 118 of the 120 elective House of Assembly seats in the April 1995 general election. Pres Mugabe was returned to office in the presidential election of March 1996.

Government is concerned with the problem of street children, as it is concerned about homeless adults in the city. The concern, however, pays more attention to the image of the country presented to visitors, especially prominent visitors, than to the plight of the children. The concern of police and other authorities is confined to activities of street children in the city centre. Their solution is from time to time to clean up the city by rounding up such "problem people" and removing them from the city. Most of the older street children have spent some years confined in a probation hostel in Kadoma, a town 105 km from Harare.

Although many members of the general public are sympathetic to street children, public opinion on the whole appears to favour the policy of the authorities. This view is frequently encouraged by press reporting that depicts street children as young vandals destined to become hardened criminals.

### Our assumptions

Initial contacts with street boys began in the business centre of Harare, because it is here that street children have attracted most publicity and attention. We accepted the common belief that this was primarily where street children are to be found. One of our assumptions was that most street children we saw in the city centre were totally abandoned children, who had no family and who by virtue of their being on the streets were desperately in need of help or assistance to get off the streets, because it was what they ultimately wanted. The problem appeared to be that there were no people or agencies ready to provide the necessary help. We therefore conceived of street children as desperately poor people, who like a drowning person would clutch any straw that was offered. We learnt, however, that this was not the case. Street children are choosy about what help they accept

We started with the assumption that because of the desperate situation of street children, they would be willing to join any programme intended to assist them in dealing with their plight. Thus, when we started interacting with the boys, we went into the city with the feeling of being saviours – going out there to save totally helpless poor people. A related assumption was that street children lacked critical reflection or assessment of their own problems,

and therefore needed people like educated and sympathetic field workers to do this assessment with them, if not for them.

Another of our assumptions was that street children needed sympathy, love and care. It was therefore necessary for us to demonstrate that we understood their problems and cared for them. In an attempt to lessen the disparity between them and us, we wore clothes that minimized the contrast even if they did not exactly match the attire of the boys. In the initial stages of interaction with the boys, we tried to be pleasant and to be seen as friendly people. We occasionally offered drinks and snacks to the boys, individually or to share as a group.

Our initial assumption was that the boys were aggressive in character. We assumed that such aggressiveness arose partly from an inadequate home background, and that the aggressiveness in turn aggravated the problems at home. We shared societal assumptions about the ideal characteristics of the environment children should grow up in, namely in a home with loving and caring parents, and that those children who have severed ties with their parents and family members are themselves the problem rather than fleeing a problem. A consequence of these assumptions was that the children on the streets became the focus of our attention, rather than the problems they were fleeing from.

### The reality

Over time, we found that the world of the street child is organized in its own way, and that the boys critically assess their own reality and anyone who is interested in knowing anything about their world.

For the boys to survive on the city streets, they have to exercise strict control over any penetration or prying into their world by anyone they look upon as an outsider. This is quite understandable, if only because in their daily struggle for survival, the boys engage in some illegal activities like petty thieving and pick-pocketing. Consequently, information is not freely given to anyone. The boys must first have confidence in that particular person.

The boys have some organization, which controls the definition of outsiders and contact with them. Nevertheless, the organization is weak and movement between groups is common.

Although street boys are unwilling to disclose information about themselves, they readily discuss what they have seen and heard about other boys in other groups.

The boys guard against any leakage of information because information facilitates control, especially by those who would like to detain the street boys in institutions or to otherwise abuse or exploit them. So, when the boys jealously guard the information about their world, they are trying to control their own destiny.

### Initial contact

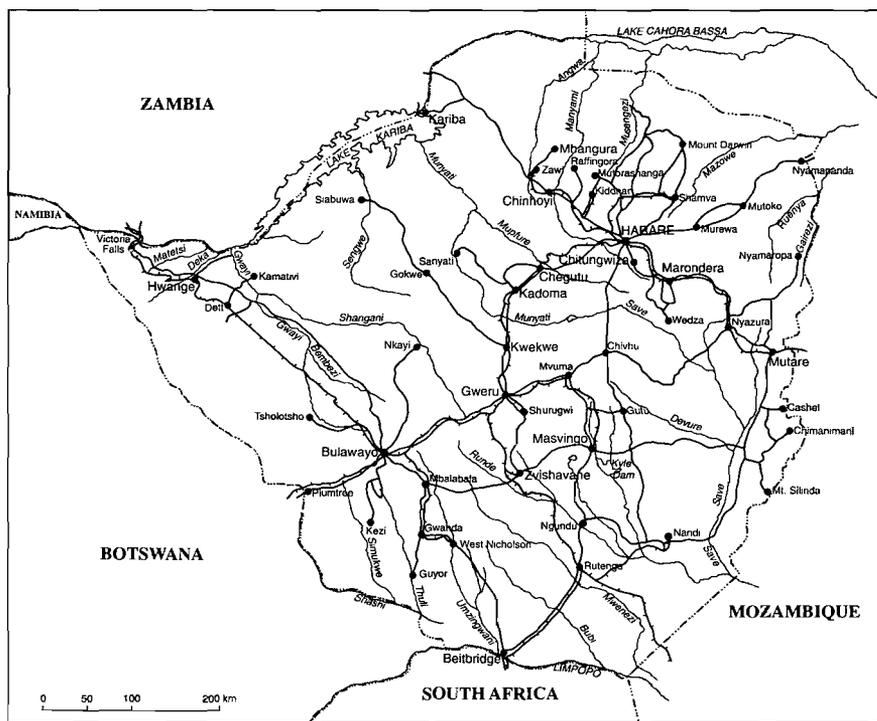
Before any meaningful programme can be attempted to involve and assist the children, information about them is necessary. The information is important in order to establish what the children's needs are, be they material, social or psychological. We need information on the children's family backgrounds in order to formulate a response which contributes to fulfilling those needs and minimizing the factors that predispose the young to becoming street children.

We have seen, however, that information is not readily given out by street boys for fear that it might be used to their disadvantage. The result is an element of lying. Thus some of the boys lie about themselves and their activities, not simply because they are dishonest in character, but because lying is a means to an end – that of power to make choices for themselves and to control their own lives.

It is possible, however, to gather information from the children over an extended period of time. As Roisin Burke *et al* warn us, the collection of information should be an ongoing exercise, because the children's stories change and evolve: "Children may lie to begin with or may be willing to share more information as time goes on."<sup>7</sup>

It is important to note that lying is not exclusive to street children; all people tend to lie when faced with threatening or unfamiliar situations. As Jill Swart noted: "Telling lies is not a defence measure used only by street children. It is common in research situations."<sup>8</sup> Generally, lying enables people being investigated to control interviewers' beliefs and to influence their actions.

That the boys lie about themselves shows that they reflect on and assess their own situation and try to control or manipulate those who would like to



Zimbabwe

know about them. Our initial assumption about street children as powerless can be accepted only with some reservation. Street boys, especially those who have severed their links with their home and family, value their independence and freedom on the streets, in contrast with those children who regularly go back home.

In order to minimize the incentive to lie, we avoided asking directly personal questions. We did not even encourage the boys to report about their colleagues, in case this should intensify mistrust about our intentions. Over time, the technique of just hanging around with the boys proved to be very fruitful because the children could with confidence initiate discussions, and were very keen to report on and discuss the lives of other boys. This served indirectly as a way in which we could detect whether certain information given to us was true or not.

Even when the boys lied, at least they were talking. One way by which the boys regulated entry into their group was by physical avoidance. When we were starting, we noticed that as we approached a group of street boys talking together, the group would begin to disperse. Some boys would pretend to be busy, moving around to check parking meters; others would simply move away. Then one or two of them would come forward to have a talk with us, and it

varied according to groups as to who these were. In some groups it was the younger boys; in other groups it was the older boys, who have a greater say in the lives and control of the whole group. The rest of the boys in the group would then linger at some distance, and regroup only when we left.

### The boys' world in the city centre

The lives of street boys, especially those of parking boys, revolve around an informal organizational structure. There are certain norms which govern street survival and which vary from group to group. It is a violent world. To survive on the streets the boys have to be tough, or portray the image of being tough, in a bid to avoid exploitation and abuse. An aggressive front is an aspect of street culture; it is also a defensive mechanism.

We noticed that most of the parking boys are children-of-the-streets and that groups of parking boys, especially in the city centre, tend to be more organized than other children on the streets. These parking boys live and work in hierarchical groups which seem to be organized around protection needs. Each group is headed by a strong elder boy who is usually referred to as the *monya*. The *monya* may be the initial colonizer of that particular space in which the boys work or he may have taken it over from other weaker and usually smaller street boys. The smaller boys have to pay tax to the *monya* who takes care of their protection needs against violence from other groups of street boys, since at times street boys raid each other to extort money.

Apart from protection, taxes may also be demanded for the use of space controlled by the *monya*. The *monya* may also demand sexual and other services from smaller boys in his domain. We have come across small boys moving away from their original territory to a less lucrative peripheral area, rather than pay taxes and render services to an older boy who has taken it over.

In the city centre, each group is made up of boys within an age range of about five years or less. It is very unusual to see a 12-year-old boy working with a group aged 18 and above. The central business district is the most lucrative for parking boys, and is largely controlled by older boys, while the

smaller boys are pushed out to the periphery.

We observed three groups of street boys within the central business district, each comprising about ten boys under a *monya*. In one of them, the *monya* charged \$2 per boy per day. This meant that the *monya* collected around \$20 a day from the boys. On average the boys made about \$20–30 a day each. If the *monya* also guarded cars on his own account, he could make \$40 or more in a day. Boys reported that some *monya* netted \$60 a day because they used their power to monopolize well-known and well-paying clients. However, not all *monya* spent each and every day working on the streets. Some were "absentee landlords" who occasionally showed up to monitor the boys and to collect their tax money. By way of comparison, an unskilled worker in regular employment in the industrial sector might receive somewhere around \$450 monthly, and domestic workers might receive a little over \$160 a month together with accommodation.

Small boys at the periphery of the central business district earned around \$10–20 a day each. Some of these boys were not under the control of *monyas*, and had little or no group organization. We also noticed that most of the boys at the periphery commuted home every day to high-density suburbs and residential places out of town. (The pattern of *mutibumba* in the heart of the central business district and children-on-the-street at the periphery is not to deny some mixing of the categories.)

We saw that these boys acquire good incomes on the streets, together with a degree of independence from controlling adults. They were not desperately in need of our help. Furthermore, street boys had been abused and exploited, even by some influential people in our society and organizations which had come to them with the intention of helping them. In particular, many had been incarcerated in prison-like reformatories under the official guise of putting them in a "place of safety" where they could receive



This one with the gun thinks he's the BIG boss. Bossing, bossing everybody all the time. He push this other one. Now this other one, he's fed-up. Slaps the big boss.

Q. Won't the big boss shoot him?  
A. Oh no, this one is too fast, running away.

(John, age 10)

care and education. Even the more sympathetic organizations tended to give assistance to the boys on their own terms, not those of the boys. In the end, the boys rejected the terms of outsiders when they foresaw that their independence and income would be taken from them. We were perceived by the boys as such outsiders: they assumed that ultimately our objective was to get them off the streets. Since the boys were uncertain about what would happen to them if they were taken off the streets, they were wary of committing themselves to anything.

What the boys wanted was a situation where they could voluntarily make their decision to leave the street, on their own terms and at their own time. This has important implications. We were forced to admit that the way some boys made the decision to leave home was rational and gradual rather than irrational and abrupt. The children seemed to be prepared to work and live at home until such time as life at home became impossible, which may have been on account of abuse, or poverty, or some other crisis in the home.

The boys in the city centre earned good money and were able to buy themselves adequate food and clothing. From us as an organization they wanted only some assurance of protection from the police. We could not offer this, although we made it clear to them that we were prepared to assist them as far as we could on any other matters where they wanted help.

**Working children in Mbare**

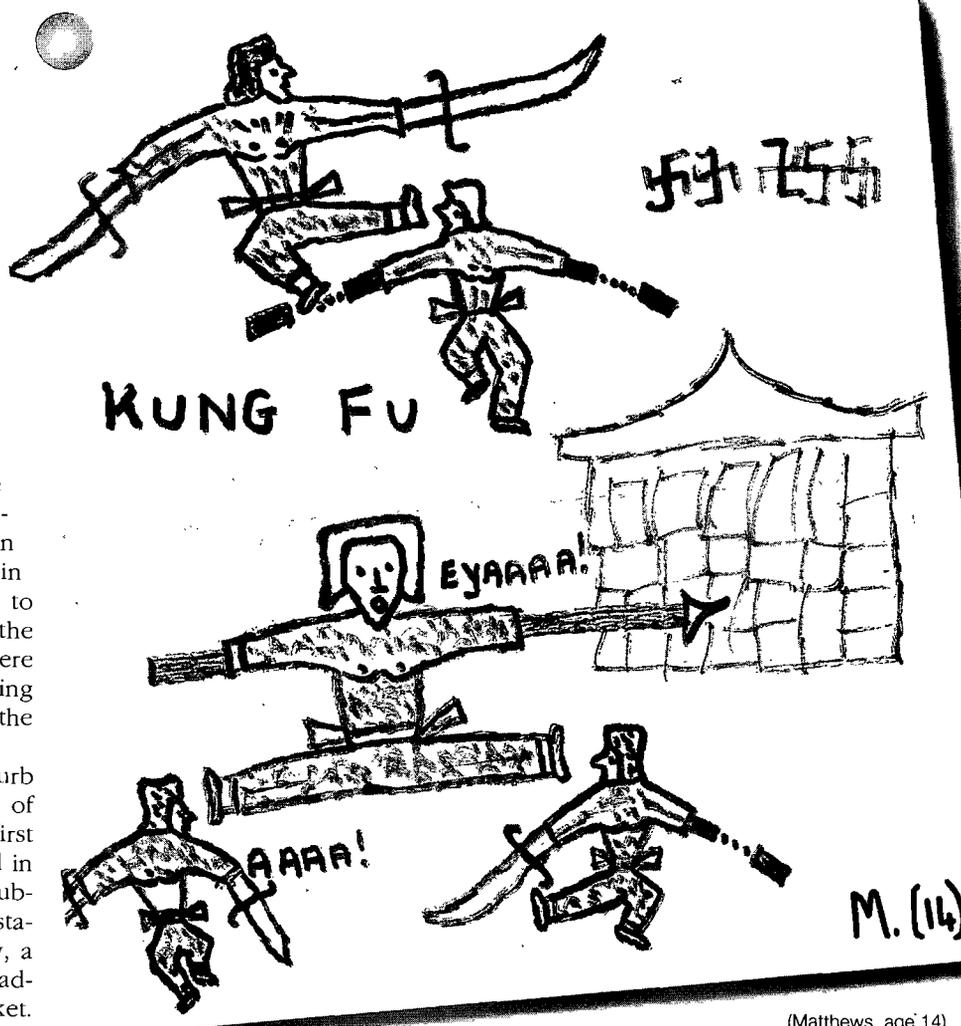
When we found that we were not able to offer help to the boys in the city centre on their terms, we decided to investigate the situation in Mbare for a while. As previously in the city centre, when we went to Mbare we also paid attention to the most visible working boys, who were parking boys and vendors, working around the main market place and the bus terminus.

Mbare is a high-density suburb approximately 4 km to the south of the business centre. It was the first African township to be established in the city. Mbare is a self-contained suburb, with two community halls, a stadium, a police station, a cemetery, a long-distance-bus terminus, a broadcasting station, and a very big market.

The oldest sections of the suburb of Mbare have seen the mushrooming of wooden shacks alongside houses. People living in these sections live in squalid conditions. The high incidence of working children in these sections of the suburb is an indication of the poverty existing there.

Most of the boys we found working within the long-distance-bus terminus were of Mozambican origin, either directly from Mozambique or from refugee camps in Zimbabwe's Eastern Districts. A rough count indicated over 200 boys here. Almost all of these Mozambican boys were vendors, selling cigarettes, sweets, and other small items for certain Mbare residents, receiving in exchange shelter within the already crowded and squalid shelter conditions. Some Mozambican boys, mostly in their early to mid-twenties, off-loaded greens and fruits from lorries at Mbare market.

Below is a brief description (translated from Shona) of conditions in Mbare from a conversation with Philip, a 19-year-old Mozambican boy,



(Matthews, age 14)

Kung fu movies are the best. One day I will fight kung fu.

who fled war to seek refuge in Zimbabwe:

Life is tough here. I've been working here on the streets of Mbare for two years now, working for a landlord, with whom I stay. I sell eggs, fried and boiled. Pay is mostly in kind, in exchange for shelter. The landlord is married, and has five children. They all live and sleep in the same room, subdivided by curtains; and I also stay with them as part of the family. The environment in no way permits or allows one to stay indoors by day. You've to be outside hanging around, but mostly working because there is no time to relax. At night it is a problem; young children crying, some people quarrelling and fighting next door. It is a lot of noise. It is unbearable; even some strange noises at night from the landlord and his wife.

Philip went to the landlord for a tea-break at 10.00 and lunch at 13.00, both meals being tea and bread. The only full meal was *sadza*<sup>9</sup> and relish in

the evening. Philip's landlord was a general worker in a metal workshop in the city centre, loading and off-loading goods and scrap metal from lorries.

Going on rough information from the vendors we estimated that on average they produced a profit of about \$80-100 per month on the goods they sold. The few who were prepared to talk about their position indicated that they were given \$20 or less monthly for their daily incidental expenses.

There were few Zimbabwean boys working in Mbare, probably well under 50. Some of these might have been involved in vending and in other odd jobs. Others earned money by minding cars. Car-minding in Mbare was exclusively for Zimbabwean boys. The car-minders tended to look down upon Mozambican vendors, and Mozambican boys in general, whom they regarded as criminals.

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We found it impossible to estimate the income obtained by car-minders in Mbare. We had no evidence that car-minding in fact paid well as compared to vending, but this was what car-minders thought. When business was slow for the car-minders, they went gambling in an attempt to supplement their incomes from car-minding. Others occasionally went into the city centre: boys who did this occasionally at first might slowly be drawn fully into the life of the *mutibumba* in the city centre. Although incomes of children in Mbare were much lower than in the city centre, there were some avenues for making money in Mbare.

All categories of working children complained that their work was dull and repetitive, even while they were proud of earning an income honestly. They wanted to do interesting things, but were not clear what these might be. They had ideas on other income-generating activities, such as cooking meals for workers in nearby industries, but lost interest when we tried to face the practical requirements for such activities. In discussions, they liked to switch freely and quickly from topic to topic, and quickly got bored if we tried to push a particular topic to its conclusion.

Some boys openly told us that they were making good money, and that when we came to hold discussions with them, we were disturbing their earnings. On our approach, some boys would simply dodge us and go gambling in their nearby hideout – according to them, in order to avoid income losses. This was similar to the behaviour we met in the city centre. At times the boys openly told us that they knew we were employed because of their existence on the streets, and that we received salaries because of that. One boy remarked, “You’re in a good job. You’re sociologists. Being educated is good.” He added sarcastically as he turned away, “What did you find out today?”

Now, we realize that even in Mbare we had been concentrating on the visible working child, especially within the busy market and bus terminus areas. Our experience in Mbare was not fundamentally different from our experience with the visible street boys in the city centre. The visible boys working on the streets, both in the city centre and in Mbare, were

those working children who had found something to do that filled a certain niche in their struggle for survival.

We believe now that the approach we took was not the most appropriate one to deal with street children and the problems they face. Rather than pay too much attention to those visible children working in the streets, we now wish to put more emphasis on the low-income areas from which the children come. Inspired partly by a visit to the Undugu Society in Nairobi,<sup>10</sup> we are now embarking on an awareness campaign targeted at parents of children in low income areas, so that any solution to the problem will come from the community. We are outsiders: we may understand the problem, but without involving the community we will remain outsiders, unable to help in the long term. In real life, each person solves his or her own problems, though they can receive advice from various people who sympathize with them.

One important issue which we need to appreciate is that street children come from our community, and principally from the low income section of it. In Mbare, owing to overcrowding in the home, children spend virtually all their daytime life on the streets as soon as they can walk, talk and play. Usually, to start with, they spend that time with their mother at the market stall or the road-side stall, occasionally helping with sales and arranging the stall. At times the child will wander away for a while, to follow its own interests without the mother’s knowledge. This will continue until the child goes to school. Consequently, some children growing up in low-income areas learn street work from their own parents who also may be street workers.

In places like Mbare, the demand for school places is far higher than places available, as a result of which government has introduced a system of “hot-seating”, in which one group of children use the school facilities in the morning, and another takes them over in the afternoon. As a result of this system, children can go vending or minding cars in the morning or afternoon when they are officially not at school. For some children this is done with the approval or encouragement of parents, while for others, persuaded by peers to get some pocket money, it is done without the parents’ knowledge.

### Lessons and conclusions

A number of lessons arise from our experience in work with and for street children or children in difficult circumstances.

The highly visible street children are not necessarily those in greatest need of material and social support. They have already devised means of meeting their most pressing needs, and they now guard these means and their independence jealously.

We need to be aware that the child-of-the-street has successfully freed himself from an intolerable situation at home, and is therefore relatively independent on the streets. The street child is accountable only to himself for what he does on the streets, even if his life is being wasted. In the circumstances he lives in, street life has been the best of the few alternatives he had to choose from.

The less visible children in slum areas or low-income areas seem to be the ones in great need of our assistance. Included among the less visible children are the girls who have been drawn into brothels, as well as children whose labour is being exploited by the adults who accommodate them.

Any programme meant to assist children in difficult circumstances should not end on the streets but in the communities where the children are born and grow up. A programme which ends in the streets is by nature dealing with the symptoms of a problem. It is remedial rather than preventive, because it deals with the problems of individual cases of children. The programme should pay attention to factors that predispose children towards the streets. In this way, it can not only deal with the symptoms of the problem but also become preventive in nature.

The capacity of children to determine their own destiny and to evaluate their own experiences has throughout history been underrated and undermined. The visible child in the street should be looked at with appreciation as a skilful survivor, who, against all odds at home and on the streets, manages to survive and has developed the means to do so.

The problem is that street children have been regarded as deviants who run away from parental control. Yet this is not always the case. These children, in most cases, are pushed

out of homes by circumstances beyond their control. They have made a rational decision to go onto the streets, and if they are to leave the streets for something better, they must be involved in the decision. Street children are not always willing to trade their independence for food, shelter and other needs.

### Notes and references

- 1 Where the first person is used in writing this article, it refers primarily to these two authors. Although Bourdillon helped to prepare the material for publication, he did not share the experiences that are described.
- 2 For a fuller description of street children

- in Harare, see M F C Bourdillon, "Street children in Harare", *Africa* (in press).
- 3 The term "auntie" (or *vatete* in Shona) is used in a metaphorical sense. The *vatete* (father's sister) in traditional Shona society is a person to whom children could appeal for help. She is also the one to advise on matters of marriage and sex. See M F C Bourdillon, *Shona peoples: An ethnography of the contemporary Shona with special reference to their religion*, 3rd ed, Gweru: Mambo Press, 1987, p 31.
- 4 M Black, *Philippines: Children of the runaway cities*, Florence: Innocenti Studies, Unicef, 1991, p 17.
- 5 B Muchini and S Nyandiya-Bundy, *Struggling to survive: A study of street children in Zimbabwe*, Harare: Unicef, 1991.
- 6 Muchini and Nyandiya-Bundy put this figure at 58%. An earlier study confined to

- Harare puts children with unemployed parents at only 30%. See Zimbabwe Council for the Welfare of Children, *Report on "Street Kids": A preliminary study of the problem of street children in greater Harare*, Harare: ZCWC, 1989.
- 7 R Burke *et al*, *Summing up our experiences in work with street children*, Harare: Red Barna, Zimbabwe, 1990, p 8.
- 8 J Swart, *Malunde: The street children of Hillbrow*, Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand Press, 1990, p 5.
- 9 *Sadza* is a stiff porridge, usually made from maize meal, and forms the staple diet of most of the Zimbabwean population.
- 10 See, for example, Undugu Society of Kenya, *Experiences in community development*, Biennial Report (1990-1991), Nairobi: Undugu Society, 1992.

# Uganda's Street children

Mr Max A Anyuru,  
Administrative Officer of  
the Friends of Children  
Association in Kampala,  
explores the dynamics of  
the Ugandan situation.

## The concept

The phrase *street children* is not new in the catalogue of problems that, over the last two decades, have characterized most urban centres in developing countries. It dates back to the beginning of the post-colonial era. Many people have tried to assign a precise meaning to the term. Some contend that street children are those "boys and girls who dwell and work in the streets with the purpose of making a living for themselves and their families".<sup>1</sup> Others maintain that street children are those young girls and boys who have made the streets their abode or source of livelihood, or both.<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that whether or not these children maintain ties with their families, they are left to their own devices with very little adult protection, guidance, or supervision.

While there is wide agreement throughout the world that street children denotes children in particularly difficult circumstances, it is also con-

sidered by many to be a term which is both offensive and stigmatizing. In every society the term carries a negative connotation. For example, in Amharic (an Ethiopian dialect), the children are referred to as *Doorrye* (literally meaning "one who belongs to the wilderness and is untamed") thus implying that the street child is out of control and does not comply with the guidance of his family.<sup>3</sup> In Luganda (Ugandan local dialect) a street child is referred to as *Muyaaye* (literally meaning "out of control"). It should be noted that in traditional African society a child is expected to comply with the will of the family, regardless of his or her own ideas and emotions – and in actual fact, many of the street children have gone to the streets on the instructions of their parents or other guardians. Yet this is ignored in the assignation of terms to children which describe them as uncontrolled and noncompliant.

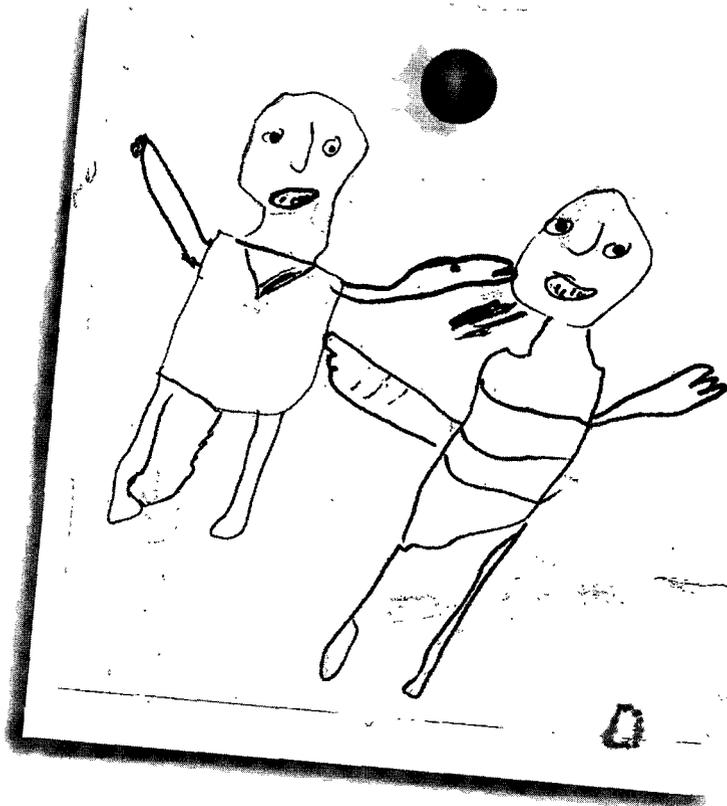
The view of the Friends of Children Association (FOCA) in Uganda is that the term *street children* is stigmatizing and leaves the children depressed and resigned to their fate. The current Chairman of FOCA, James Kaboggoza, has suggested the term *working children* as being most appropriate.<sup>4</sup> It has been argued that this term should be used by all persons working with or in the vicinity of street children, in order to create a friendly environment which preserves the children's personal dignity.

However, the term *working children* has been rejected by some persons who see it as geared to diverting the attention of the public from a dangerous problem. These persons have proposed the use of the term *disadvantaged urban children* instead, as one which would not offend any group.

It should be noted that the street children



(Patrick, age 13)



themselves do not feel offended by the use of the term *street children*. They say that the name suits their circumstances because they are on the streets and are earning their survival there and that the use of some other term would divert the attention of the world from their plight. They object to being referred to by this term when they are *not* on the streets, however.

### An urban phenomenon

The rise in numbers of adolescents and pre-adolescents working or living on the streets in the developing countries dates back almost two decades, but the pressure of their presence really began to be felt from about the 1970s. By the 1980s their numbers had reached an alarming level and had become a global concern.

In East Africa street children were first noticed in Nairobi in 1969; and by 1989 there were an estimated 3 600 of them there, with about 16 300 street children in Kenya as a whole.<sup>5</sup> In Kampala street children became noticeable in 1972 with the onset of Amin's "economic war"<sup>6</sup>; and in Uganda today, there are over 15 000 children on the streets.<sup>7</sup>

The 1979 liberation war that ousted dictator Amin left scores of children fatherless but the social disruption was contained to some extent by the strength of the extended family system. However, the 1980s saw an invasion of the streets of Kampala by scores of children. This period was marked by civil strife which raged within a short distance of the city centre.

A growing population, massive rural to urban migration, and the economic crisis caused by the fall in the market price of export goods such as coffee, disrupted the country and the urban centres became the destination of thousands of people seeking a haven from their problems and especially from the civil war. In times of crisis towns are seen as a source of life and livelihood and rural-urban migration becomes the

order of the day. In the flight of families to the towns, many children became separated from their families as family members unceremoniously dispersed.

About half the children who stay on the streets are city-born; while the rest come from rural villages. The problem of the influx of people from rural areas to towns was worsened by the proliferation of slums and squatter areas. Unskilled rural migrants would land in service-type jobs and earn so little that they could only afford to squeeze themselves into the growing slum colonies.

By the second half of the 1980s the number of children on the streets of Kampala had tripled. This was orchestrated partly by an increase in urban poverty. High inflation rates continued to lower the value of the already gravely devalued shilling. Despite wage increases, wages actually fell in real terms because the prices of goods and services rose sharply. Households in urban centres were no longer able to care for their children, who consequently took to the streets. Today, because of the household poverty in urban centres, many children are called upon to supplement family incomes through begging and informal petty jobs. Some of the children are even accompanied on begging missions by their mothers, who keep their distance and take the alms from the children only once the giver is

They are fighting for food. The one on the right says: "You give me food," the one on the left says "Don't swear at me because there's no food." One hits the other - his face bleeds.

(David, age 12)

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out of sight. If approached, the mothers play dumb.<sup>8</sup>

The effects of poverty became much more acute with the structural adjustment programme. As unemployment and inflation shot up, the government could not provide adequate access to basic services for the poor. Problems were exacerbated by the staggering national debt, which soared to about US\$5 billion, and on which a hefty part of the annual budget had to be expended.

Out of the total population of 18 million people in Uganda only 10% live above the poverty line. Yet about 30% of the population live in cities: it is clear, therefore, that the majority of urban dwellers live in slums. It should be noted that slum areas have a generally young population and at least half are below the age of 20. Unskilled or semi-skilled, the urban poor are mostly limited to the city's lowest paying jobs. To be able to survive they have to resort to alternative means, thus explaining the street child presence as an urban problem.

In addition to the question of poverty, cognisance should be taken that in Uganda the second half of the 1980s was characterized by civil war and cattle rustling which engulfed almost half the country. This meant that the government had to allocate a big portion of the budget to buying military hardware and paying military personnel, at the expense of other services, in order to counter the insurgency. These conditions created more street children, who were now appearing in towns where they had never before been seen. The street child population is a mobile one, which makes an actual count difficult. Yet in 1990, according to the population and housing census, Mbale Municipality, with a population of 53 634 people, had an estimated population of 4 000 street children.<sup>9</sup>

The large number of street children in Mbale is due to the massive population displacement that took place in the neighbouring districts of Kumi, Palisa, Soroti, Moroto and other areas. The town of Busia (on the Kenya-Ugandan border) has about 500 street children. Of the total number of street children in Uganda, about three-quarters are there as the result of war, cattle rustling and poverty. It should be noted that the figures above refer both to children for whom the

**TABLE 1** Estimates of numbers of street children in Uganda according to district

Name of district	Estimated numbers of street children
Gulu	1 200
Iganga	600
Jinja	800
Kampala	5 000
Kumi	1 800
Lira	960
Mbale	4 000
Soroti	3 000
Total	17 360

street is the place of abode as well as a source of livelihood, and to those who sleep at home but work on the street. Estimates of the numbers of street children for various districts in Uganda are set out in Table 1.

Looking at the situation more specifically we find that in Kampala about 37,5% of children on the streets are true street children whose roots are difficult to establish. Another 37,5% actually live at home and attend school but are sent by their parents to the streets to sell small merchandise to supplement family incomes. The remaining 25% are school dropouts who are idle but live at home.

The 3 000 children who sell small merchandise on the streets of Kampala at times and on days when they are not required to be in school may become *true* street children if circumstances warrant it. Children who are idle at home and therefore spend their days on the streets doing nothing are rare in most towns other than Kampala, as they are usually engaged in agricultural activities, but they are now also beginning to draw attention.

In addition to all the above, it should be remembered that, in the Aids pandemic, Uganda ranks among the top ten countries in the world. Today it is not uncommon to find households being headed by children, while a substantial number of Aids orphans are on the streets, especially those who are familiar with town life. The proliferation of street children who are Aids orphans is due to the decay of the traditional extended family system.

It is in the context of these larger realities that the growing presence of children on the streets should be analysed. As the country becomes

more vulnerable to external influences and demands, as government policies continue to pursue uneven development goals, and as basic social imbalances are sustained, more families will be marginalized and more children will be forced to live or work in the streets for sheer survival. In the face of both rural and urban poverty, policies such as the "civil service retrenchment" policy have regrettable social implications.

### The home origins of street children

Children, like adults, migrate to cities when the rural environment fails to meet their needs. Many of the families from which rural children come are large and have low incomes: hence having children working in the cities is often seen as a way of coping with economic difficulties. It is worth noting that, compared with city-born street children, the child from the countryside who comes to the city alone may face a double crisis. An adjustment has to be made to the harsh and impersonal city environment, and the anxiety of separation from the family has also to be dealt with.

Children who start off working on their own in the cities to help their families financially are, as has been noted, at risk of becoming "true" street children. Moreover, it has been noted that many of the rural children who have taken to the streets do not go to relatives in urban centres even when they are able to do so.

Reasons given by street children for their presence on the streets vary. Admittedly, the reasons given reflect the children's points of view. However, it is important that data on parents' relationships with each other and with their children be looked at. The effect on children of marital and family disintegration in urban centres is absolutely depressing.

In the first instance, children report that they do not usually go home every day because of abuse, brutality or neglect. They find living on sidewalks preferable to going home. They sometimes say that they no longer have homes to go to because their families have been evicted from their homes, or they have become separated from their parents or lack knowledge of their parents' whereabouts.

According to the children, they leave home to seek employment either

on their own initiative or at the urging of their families. They may leave when their families cannot meet their basic needs, when their parents separate, when they are orphaned, when they have difficulty in getting along with family members, to escape personal obligations in the family, or to seek adventure. Several children actually claim that they are on the streets because their parents are busy and they feel bored staying at home. This is especially the case with regard to children from very poor households.

### Characteristics of street children in Uganda

Children found in the streets can be categorized into four groups:

- children who live and work on the streets
- children who work on the streets and stay at home
- children who are idle but spend most of their time on the streets doing nothing
- children who go to school but work on the streets at other times, including in the evenings.

In Uganda about 25% of the children found in the streets are girls. This is not to suggest that girls are as few in number as the figure suggests; their lower visibility on the streets is due to the fact that they are usually occupied with domestic chores and work in kiosks and market places. Nevertheless, in the evenings some can be seen roaming the streets selling small merchandise (such as sweets, sodas, biscuits, roasted cassava, potatoes, soyabeans, groundnuts and popcorn) while others engage in "survival sex" (prostitution). They also offer sexual services to their male counterparts in return for money, shelter and food.<sup>10</sup>

The girls are sometimes decently dressed, as they tend to draw sympathy from a broad cross-section of the people. They are given second-hand clothes by sympathizers and in the homes where they work as housemaids and baby sitters. The money they get from domestic chores is used mainly for clothes and beautification. Since they often do not have anywhere to sleep, being dressed attractively means they are able to attract men who might give them accommodation and money in exchange for sex. But they

are not protected from the risks of unsafe sex and hazards of the streets such as rape. They suffer from sexually transmitted diseases including the dreaded Aids.<sup>11</sup>

Boys, on the other hand, are more visible in their street activities. They are commonly found in all public places like markets, bus and taxi terminuses, hotels and bars. They may be found scavenging for food from dustbins and from heaps of garbage. They are also found in isolated places engaged in illicit activities and circumstantially often bear the brunt of suspicion. They, to a greater extent than the girls, probably represent the true picture of the street child problem.

Most of the street children are versatile. They can do a variety of jobs depending on the time, the demand for certain services, and in some instances, their "territories". A baggage boy, for example, could also be a cleaner in kiosks, especially during lunch hours.

Despite the uniqueness of certain types of work and the versatility of the children, the range of options open to them appears to be limited. Like their parents, the children find that their work requires little or no formal schooling, is open to a mass of competitors, and is highly dependent on unstable market demands. Generally the street children belong to the informal sector of workers. They engage mainly in casual unregistered work not covered by existing laws on wages and working conditions. Consequently they are widely exploited. This is nothing new, but the inadequacies inherent in the labour laws should receive attention since so many children are basically unprotected from unscrupulous persons or groups.

The children's lives are seriously at risk on account of the conditions on the streets. Their places of "work" are usually hot, noisy and crowded and they constantly face the risk of accidents as they hurriedly cross the streets or scamper for safety in order to avoid mob justice and arrests. They also suffer from the debilitating effects of smoking, drinking and the use of drugs.

About a third of the true street children in Kampala are "vulnerable". These tend to be the younger children and are sometimes new to the streets.

They are not resilient enough to be "survivors" and will be happy and grateful to be taken to a place of safety. They value being given training opportunities. The other two-thirds of the children are less vulnerable because they have managed to find some form of work and shelter. The "vulnerable" street children are usually more ready to give reliable information about their circumstances. They are often children whose parents have died or have been displaced and they have taken to street life as a last resort since no other survival possibilities are available to them. Sometimes children have been brought from distant villages and abandoned in town because of the poverty in the countryside and a hope that some good person will assist them.

In reaction to a hostile public response to them, street children have adopted what can best be described as a group existence. Living in groups provides a means of security and protection for the individual child. Disputes between members can be settled in the group and basic necessities shared.

The status of group members is not identical. Some maintain close contact with their families, while others may be vulnerable or adventurers. Vulnerable children may be attracted to a group in which there are brighter and "tougher" children. However, there is usually solidarity and common understanding among members, and adherence to the norms of the group is maintained through severe discipline.

The group often provides care that would normally be given by the family. Members who have fallen ill or been involved in accidents are often cared for by their peers and there is a readiness to protect each other if confronted by hostile elements in the community. Often nicknames are used to conceal each other's identities. Each group has a specific name which serves to strengthen group identity. The names are usually, and characteristically, defensive.

The group bond is so strong that even if a group has to move to a different territory because of community threats, it will not easily disintegrate. In times of dire need and intense community pressure, membership of a group becomes paramount and imperative. Except in cases where children have ongoing contact with their

## Uganda

Republic of —

**Independence:** 9 October 1962.  
Former British colony.

**National Day:** 9 October  
(Independence Day).

**Leader:** Yoweri Museveni, b 1944,  
President since 1986.

**Capital:** Kampala, largest city.

**Area:** 241 139 km<sup>2</sup>.

**Population:** 19 mn (1995).

**Religions:** Christian majority about  
equally divided between  
Protestants and Catholics.

**Languages:** English (official), Ganda,  
Swahili, Lango-Acholi.

**Life expectancy at birth:** 43 years.

**Foreign trade:** Imports: \$980 mn;  
Exports: \$540 mn (1994).

**Principal exports:** Coffee (40%).

**GNP:** \$3 718 mn (1994).

**GNP/capita:** \$200 (1994).

**Currency:** \$1 = Uganda shillings  
(US\$) 1 000 (March 1996).

**Background:** The primarily agricultural economy of this landlocked country is recovering after many years of civil war. In a country characterized by ethnic diversity, the government restored the traditional kingdoms of the Ganda, Toro and Nyoro groups. Elections for a non-party constituent assembly took place in March 1994 and the new constitution was promulgated in October 1995. Pres Museveni was returned to office after winning a non-party presidential election in May 1996.

families and drop out to rejoin them, group membership may remain constant for long periods. New members are also assimilated from time to time.

Street children enjoy the freedom that street life gives them and while they will, under the right circumstances, accept help, training, support, and even care, they will not be easy to work with. They are independent individuals, often with no reason to trust adults. Many could end up in trouble with the law unless they are reached; it takes patience and tenacity but they are special children and it is worth the effort.

### Official responses to street children

The presence of children begging and scavenging from rubbish bins is an embarrassment to the public and city authorities, as is their engagement in illicit activities. They are widely considered to be undeserving of any treatment other than incarceration in institutions built for people who have committed criminal offences.

The street children are seen as outlaws and are often considered responsible for all the misfortunes that befall the city. Their fate is equal to that of a city dog; after all, they feed themselves on the remains from dustbins!

Very often, chases between city law enforcement officers and street children are witnessed. After a short while, the pursued children are captured and, with hands tied behind their backs, they are whisked off to the police station where they may be charged with several offences, including that of doing nothing. With rigour, they are packed into overcrowded cells. In areas where there are no facilities for the detention of youth, this is often with hard-core criminals who teach them other, worse offences.

A child's first arrest could also be a first-hand experience in violence. Apprehended children are often subjected to torture by adult prisoners, including being sexually abused. They may be made to carry the buckets of faeces when cells have no installed toilet systems. Physical beating is sometimes sanctioned by the police, as it is used as a method of extracting information from the children, especially in alleged robberies and other illegal activities. While it is known that widespread brutality occurs, what cannot be accurately gauged is the extent of phys-

ical and emotional harm which is inflicted on the children.

The commonest offences for which street children are apprehended include vagrancy, theft, gambling, fighting, being suspected of robbery and trespassing.<sup>12</sup> A few are arrested for drug abuse, pick-pocketing and vandalism. Others may be arrested for carrying out their activities in restricted areas. In some cases the arrest or restriction of street children is ordered for political reasons.

Although activities such as theft cannot be condoned, to arrest a child merely on the suspicion of an offence having been committed is an extremely harsh measure against those who are vulnerable and do not know their legal rights. Even for adults, being arrested and jailed can be very unpleasant, to say the least. For children the experience can be harrowing, especially if they are treated unjustly and arrested on mere suspicion. It is therefore not unlikely that children treated in this way will show fear and hostility towards the authorities once they are released and develop antisocial behaviour.

Records from police stations show that at any time over 60 street children are under arrest in the city of Kampala alone. Of these, about 60% are released and the charges against them dropped.<sup>13</sup> At the juvenile court in Kampala (the only juvenile court in the country), over 15 children are brought to court every morning, charged with criminal and civil offences.

The city authorities treat the street children in a manner akin to that of garbage disposal. They ferry them to a central site for disposal and wish to see them herded into institutions where their stinking clothes and tattered appearance cannot interfere with the city aroma. Removal from the general community is considered justified; as one authority remarked: "They contribute nothing to social development." As a result, their welfare is not budgeted for by city councils.

Despite the fact that city councils do not provide services for the children, the efforts of NGOs working to help the street children are frustrated, especially when they apply for allocation of land for their projects. This is a clear testimony to the characteristic indifference of city officers with regard to street children.

Even the street children who have managed to get merchandise for hawking and vending have become targets for

the city authorities. They often have their merchandise confiscated and sometimes spend time behind bars for "operating illegal business". Yet these children are mostly dependent on the mercy of the adult merchants who give them the items so that they can earn some commission to survive in non-illicit ways. The commission such children earn is used to buy food and to rent rooms in the slums. The act of confiscation may therefore be seen as tantamount to sending the children to prison or pushing them into real destitution or into criminal activities to survive.

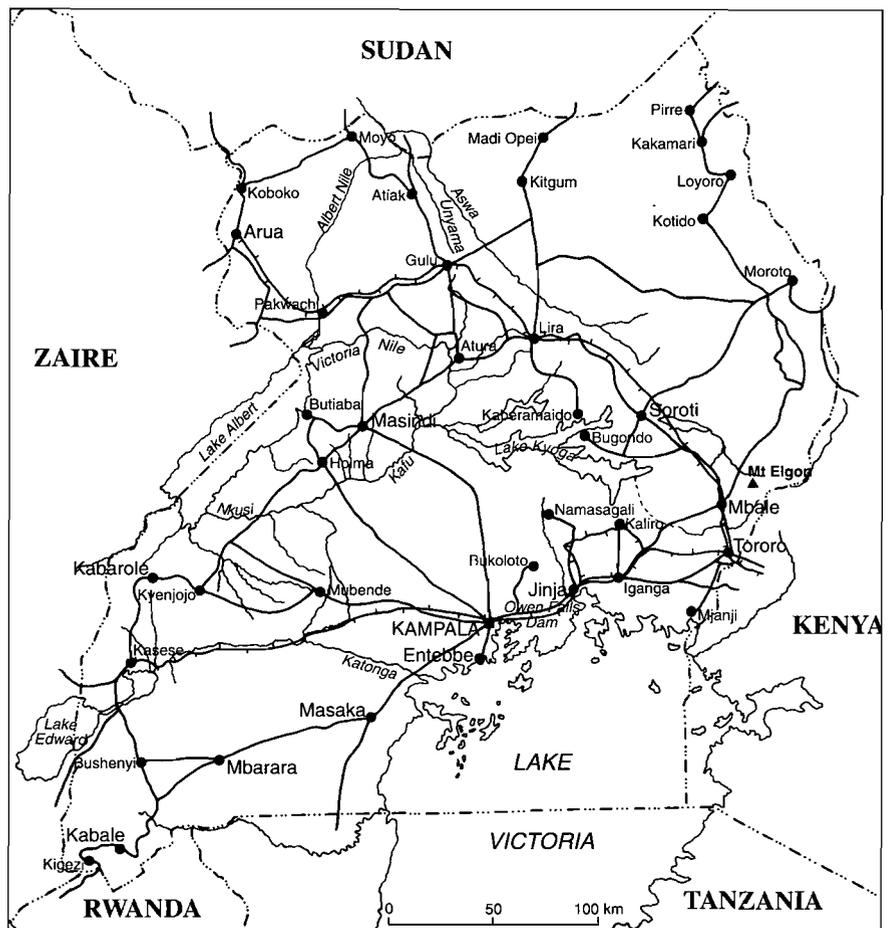
### The public's response to street children

The prevalence of homeless people among people with a more settled way of life usually evokes mixed reactions. Street children are perceived negatively by society and tend to evoke unpleasant feelings. There is a strong feeling of resentment against them and they are seen as a liability to the more settled community. Rather than seeking a positive solution to the problem, members of the community publicly express discontent about the street children in their midst, not realizing that their own children are potential street children.

Dallape and Teferi<sup>14</sup> have observed that public reaction to street children is that of "fear and anger". They add that fear emanates from "a feeling of threat" and that this threat is, more specifically, "imagined to be focused against the self or one's property". Anger derives from a feeling that the children should be taken care of by someone so that they would not "be there to pose real or imagined threats".

The reaction to this fear and anger is "self-protective". It may take the form of giving the children money or other inducements to leave the area, of verbal aggression, and of venting aggression on the child through physical violence. Since street children are perceived as guilty of posing a threat to the community they consequently have to prove themselves as trustworthy in time in their interactions with members of the community.

This can be very difficult as the public has failed to distinguish between *vulnerable*, *resilient* and *adventurous* children. In common with city authorities, they see all street children as bad and as associated only with bad things. Street children are, *outlaws*, who are to



be dealt with by the strong arm of the law. Punishments are meted out to them with impunity because the children are suspected of being thieves or spies for thieves. They may be beaten by individuals or flogged by mobs on suspicion of misbehaviour. The children are also often subjected to vulgar and obscene language.

In addition to the above forms of non-recognition, certain sectors of the community take advantage of their deplorable living conditions and use the children exploitatively. Unemployed adults use knives and razor blades to extort what little money the boys have made; other members of the community confiscate the children's personal belongings and do not consider this to be a form of theft.

The community tends to ignore children dealing in and using drugs, because it is the main supplier of items such as glue, petrol, marijuana and *Mira* bought or used by the children. The business community uses the children to load and offload weights which are far beyond their own weights. Under-aged children are often seen offloading

Uganda

hundreds of sacks and bunches of *matooke* from the trucks that bring them from up-country. Others, under the guise of apprenticeship, are used for heavy labour.

In spite of their services to the community, the children are treated with suspicion and contempt. There is strict supervision of their work, yet they commonly get only food or accommodation in return for a whole day's arduous work. Apart from this form of exploitation, there is sexual exploitation, which has already been mentioned in this article. Both girls and boys may provide sexual services as a means of survival but the sexual exploitation of girls appears to be more widely evident, although homosexuals in the community may use force to gain favours from the boys.

In addition to exploitation in the workplace and for sexual purposes, there is exploitation of the children by criminals.

Because the children are small and swift and can more easily command sympathy than adults if "caught in the act", they may be enticed into assisting with car robberies and house-breaking. Police and juvenile court records show that two in every ten children apprehended are involved in robbery. The children are well rewarded by the adults who use them and may become hard-core criminals themselves as they do not want to return to scavenging after having enjoyed the better lifestyle which robbery makes possible.

Travellers who use street children as porters may find this service helpful but some lose their luggage in the process while other have their bags slit and some of the contents removed. Travellers who have fallen prey to these tactics of the street children react to offers to carry luggage with caution, and sometimes with brutality.

While there is extensive evidence of daily brutality and exploitation of street children, there are also individuals and organizations which are sympathetic to their cause and plight. They do not see the existence of the children as an inconvenience and a pestilence but as a normal occurrence in a developing society and consider the children to be potentially productive individuals with rare survival talents. While it has been found extremely difficult to foster these children it is not impossible and many of the children have responded well.

### **The aspirations of street children**

Those children who valued schooling but were pushed onto the streets because of hard economic conditions often aspire to finish their schooling. Some actually do combine schoolwork with working on the streets to supplement their families' incomes. Although they have to study "in instalments" they make an effort to obtain a formal education because they believe that this could help them to obtain better jobs.

Others want very much to find stable jobs and earn a living wage. They are disgusted with the casual nature of the work they do and hope either to find regular work or to become gainfully self-employed. Many desire to be rich one day. Still others wish to be reunited with their families. This is a common aspiration amongst those who were displaced by wars and drought. These are what we have termed the vulnerable children. They seldom see any rewarding future as deriving from street life.

Most street children, including the sexually exploited, plan to marry and have families one day. The sexually exploited want to start new lives but do not see how they can abandon their trade as this is the only way they have found to survive effectively. There are some children who do not have any plans for themselves. They feel bitter and hopeless and have thrown their future into the abyss of indifference. Their only ambition is very immediate – to be able to "eat every day".

### **Society's response to the children's plight**

Because the nature of the street child problem is very broad and because there is no single reason for children's presence on the streets, there is no definitive approach to their plight. In recent years local and international organizations have sprung up. These have not focused directly on street children, however, but on children *in difficult circumstances*. The focus has been on orphans, the disabled, the children of refugees and very young abandoned children. Very few organizations have programmes specifically for street children, but when they do, they tend to offer remedial services such as food, clothing and shelter.

In Uganda, international organizations with offices there, such as Save the Children Fund, Inter-Aid International, and Christian Children Fund, have given assistance. Others, like Childhope International, Child Alert, Children at Risk, and the German Youth Sports Federation have, through their agencies, sponsored work with street children. Many others not mentioned here have also contributed.

There has been heated debate on the best approach to street children. While some organizations have adopted the common remedial philosophy of providing shelter, food and clothing, others have opted to pay school fees for children of school-going age. Some have taken the approach of family strengthening and such organizations have helped several families to engage in productive income-generating activities. This approach assumes that it is poverty in the home which led to the estrangement of the children, whereas in the first approach the assumption is that a lack of basic necessities in the home is the basic cause of estrangement. Most of these services are supported by international organizations.

Some local and international organizations criticize these approaches, believing that while it is desirable that children should be raised with all the basic necessities available to them, to set up organizations which cater for all their needs creates a dependency syndrome which, in effect, ruins the future of the child.

These organizations further urge that institutions should not be built up for the containment of street children from which they are eventually discharged when they come of age, as this is tantamount to child abuse. In order to avoid such criticisms most organizations which assist street children have included training in technical skills in their programmes.

An example of an organization which does not run homes for the street children but which assists them in other ways is Foca (Friends of Children Association). Foca is engaged in training the children in skills such as carpentry, tailoring, blacksmithing, radio repairs, bicycle assembly and repairs, charcoal stove making, welding and fabrication and aluminium work.

It is believed that with these skills street children can be self-employed

and will be able to employ others. Experience has shown that most of the trained former street children have become workshop instructors and artisans and actually train newly-recruited street children. Training is, however, a very expensive venture requiring extensive human and material resources. Local organizations require assistance from international bodies in this respect, otherwise they face major limitations in the curricula which they can offer.

In addition to skills training, the Foca children attend non-formal schools where they are taught basic literacy and numeracy as well as simple book-keeping and management, family planning and Aids awareness. This is intended to help them not only to become successful entrepreneurs capable of running their own workshops but also to give them knowledge that will help them to take responsible decisions with regard to their personal lives.

Since most street children are either illiterate or have had their schooling curtailed at the elementary level, the combination of basic education with skills training is important for them to be able to compete effectively in the labour market.

Foca also has resettlement programmes whereby both untrained and trained children are reunited with their families. Organizations like Africa Foundation Inc offer accommodation as well as training to street children.

Because NGOs that offer assistance to street children frequently differ in their philosophies it is some-

times difficult to reconcile them. It is probably advisable for all approaches to be blended into one comprehensive approach. This can only be done if all NGOs come together and create a central pool where various activities can be combined. Since NGOs have considerable expertise in their various fields this could provide a valuable service to the children.

One of the most important features of programmes for street children, however, is that solutions must be arrived at together with the children and must not be orchestrated for them. They know best what they want and when they need it.

### Conclusion

As has been shown the presence of street children is indicative of basic structural problems in society. Apart from these, however, the proliferation of values which emphasize material gain should be noted as contributing to the increasing exploitation of young people by adults. These values appear to have seeped into the consciousness of many street children as well.

The presence of street children cannot be dismissed lightly. If the neglect and deprivation which has continuously characterized their lives is constantly ignored their numbers will grow. The gloomy picture of over 100 million children roaming the streets of the world will remain to haunt those who, for political reasons, have decided to implement policies that worked off the lives of common people.

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# The plight of Street children in Zambia

*Mr Jonathan Phiri, Kitwe's Street Committee chairman and Unicef's regional representative, describes Zambian efforts to come to terms with a growing problem in a climate of economic decline.*

After attaining independence most of the Third World countries in Africa wished to accelerate economic growth by promoting both heavy and light industries in urban and rural areas. They believed the benefits would "trickle down" to better the living standards of all citizens in their countries. Political leaders in these countries called for concerted efforts to eradicate the offshoots of poverty, namely hunger, disease, illiteracy and unemployment. The initial progress made in this regard quickly disappeared, and they remain dominant problems.

In Zambia, youth unemployment continues to be a serious socio-economic problem. Unemployed youth constitute a large – and rapidly increasing – number of the children on the street in the urban and peri-urban areas of the country. The children on Zambia's streets are an eyesore and not a source of pride. They reflect the existence of fundamental problems within Zambian society. Behind the street children lie the serious plight and urgent needs of all children in the country.

The country's nose-diving economy has been blamed for the increasing number of children who seek a livelihood on the streets.

## **"Mishanga boys and girls"**

It is commonly thought that all Zambian street children are street residents. They are considered noisy, highly visible, problem-causing young people. They are mostly perceived as youngsters whose survival lifestyle is irritating to everyone, and embarrassing to politicians. Their presence provokes negative reactions which range from anger to fear. All these emotions culminate in harassment of the young people.<sup>1</sup> Often they are assumed to be without families, either

through being orphaned, or through being abandoned by reckless, uneducated and irresponsible parents. Despite this, they are viewed not as the victims of injustice, but rather as the perpetrators of it, and are often considered to be responsible for their own unfortunate condition. Youngsters who work on the Zambian streets are frequently called *mishanga* (single cigarette) boys and girls, whether they sell cigarettes or not.

Only a small proportion of Zambian street children actually live on the streets; a far greater number spend a great deal of time there, engaged in economic and recreational activities. Most of the boys and girls have a family and some kind of home to which they return regularly. Although the street provides a daily source of livelihood and is the centre of their activities, it is not their usual night shelter. In one study of 673 working street children, only 34 said they lived on their own. However, the numbers of orphaned, abandoned and destitute children without homes has been increasing since the early 1990s.<sup>2</sup> Street children, therefore, include those who are workers, not only on the streets, but also in places of business such as shops, restaurants, and private residences. Most of these child workers are of an age ranging from pre-school to youth, but the majority fall within the ages of 8 to 14 years.

The number of children working on the streets of Zambia has yet to be established, but a survey<sup>3</sup> of street children carried out in three Zambian cities showed that there could be as many as 35 000 working street children, and in addition, 350 000 vulnerable children who are potential candidates for the street. About 7 800 of the children were thought to be in Lusaka, 3 900 in Kitwe, and 600 in Livingstone. Bemba is spoken by about two-thirds of the street children in Kitwe; in Livingstone, the language most spoken is Lozi (by about a third of the children), but a very wide range of languages is spoken in the capital city, Lusaka.<sup>4</sup>

A study<sup>5</sup> of street children in 1991 found that there were fewer girls on the

School

(Tabo, age 11)

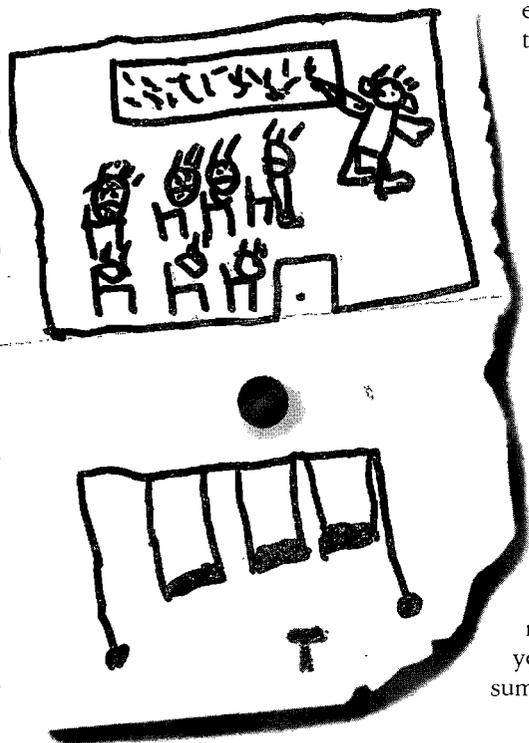




Photo: Street-wise collection (Pretoria branch)

streets than boys; in Kitwe they comprised 37% of the street children, in Livingstone, 42%, and in Lusaka, 22%. Subsequently, a study<sup>6</sup> of street children in one centre in Lusaka found that a most 90% are boys, that they are physically abused by the public, which leads them to react defensively to people, that many eventually drop out of the schooling system altogether, that they develop skills which will help them to survive on the streets, and that some of them use drugs. Zambian street children may be harassed by the police and are sometimes detained unlawfully in police cells for days on end, without being charged. The paramilitary, known as *bakaponya*, some of whom are former street children, also bully street children.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the above characteristics, Taçon and Lungwangwa<sup>8</sup> have noted that many street boys smoke cigarettes or *dagga* (cannabis) and drink alcohol; that malnutrition and venereal diseases are rife; and that pregnancy and child abandonment are not uncommon amongst street girls. Their report also documented the fact that most street children are not happy with their lifestyle and hope for a better future that could include education and the acquiring of valuable skills which will enable them to be gainfully employed.

Sawekema<sup>9</sup> has listed children's street activities in a compound in the southern part of Lusaka as follows: they sell food items such as vegetables, fruit,

fish, beans, buns, groundnuts, sugar, cooking oil, sweets, maize meal, sugar cane and popcorn. They also sell non-perishable items like cigarettes, matches, candles, stones, braziers, car wires and second-hand clothes known popularly as *salaula*. Their gambling games include: "Try your luck", "Aka red" and "So Joe". In addition they carry baggage for people, guard cars and beg for money.

### Economic and social factors leading to streetism

Zambia, like most countries in Southern Africa, is in an economic crisis. The symptoms are there for all to see. Foreign debt and the cost of servicing it is growing. Imports exceed exports, government spending has outstripped revenue and there has been a shortfall in foreign exchange. Wages fail to keep pace with soaring prices, and people increasingly have insufficient food to eat. Some analysts blame the government's domestic policies, while others argue that Zambia's problems are due to changes in the world economy. In the mid-1970s the world price of imports, especially of oil, rose sharply, and interest rates increased owing to financial policies followed by the North. These changes exposed the weakness of Zambia's colonially established economic structures and it therefore soon found itself in a position of having to turn to the

## The plight of *street children* in Zambia

IMF for help. However, the management policies in the IMF structural adjustment programme, aimed at reducing consumption, increasing savings, and improving the structure of demand in favour of investments, meant that the help came on terms which served to deepen the economic crisis. The *kwacha* was devalued by 10% on 17 March 1978. To allow market forces to determine the exchange rate of the *kwacha*, foreign exchange auctioning was introduced in October 1985.

This led to an increase in the real unemployment rate, while living standards rose steeply. The subsidy on staple maize meal was also removed,

ers rose in number from 2 700 000 to 3 500 000. The economic climate in the country at the time made it impossible to create the necessary volume of new jobs and people had to find themselves employment in the informal sector. By 1986, 77,2% of Zambia's total labour force was working in the informal sector.

Part of the vulnerable population of job seekers were women and school-leavers, and especially youngsters who had dropped out of school. Street selling became a logical option for poor children seeking some means of employment. Though street selling generates very little profit, it is often the only means of survival available, not only for children, but often also for their families. About 41% of street children give their earnings to their parents or guardians; an analysis of what they spend money on other than this, shows that most of it is used for survival essentials while a little is used for recreation and a very small proportion (about 7%) for educational needs.<sup>13</sup>

A high population growth rate has worsened the problem. The annual economic growth rate was 1,4% in 1990, but the population growth rate was twice as great (3,2%). Clearly, a doubling of the population every ten years would place a tremendous burden on public institutions and infrastructures. Zambia has been unable to maintain services sufficiently at either national or local government levels.<sup>14</sup> For children from poor families, special problems arise in such instances. Children with many siblings are likely to face tremendous hardships. Their parents or guardians will be unlikely to be able to care for them adequately, so they may be pressed to find their own solutions on the streets. The following family could serve as an example:<sup>15</sup>

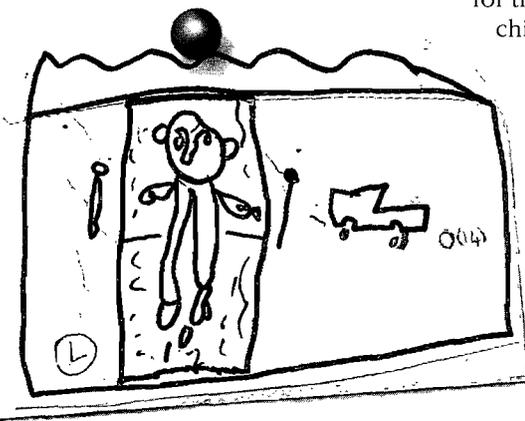
[A]lmost all members of the family were engaged in streetism. This family lived in Libala Stage Three, in a two-bedroom house. The eldest woman could have been in her late 50's or early 60's. She was mentally sick and moved in the streets talking to herself. Her eldest daughter is in her early 40's, had no proper education background, and had been employed as a barmaid (waitress) during her prime days. She had six children, from four different fathers, the last of whom had [recently] deserted her.

She now started going to hotels in the hope of getting men to help her out, but these clients became fewer and fewer as she advanced in age. In the end she became a pimp, organizing beautiful girls for men at a fee. She is currently very thin after being treated for tuberculosis. In the meantime, her two other sisters died and left a total of nine children to be cared for. The female children have not been exposed to good education due to the poor family background, and are now also patronizing bars and hotels. The eldest boy tried his hand at repairing radios and televisions, a skill which he learned from his brother-in-law, but could not continue this trade due to poor orientation to the profession. All the young children are now out on the streets selling different items... in September 1991, one of the daughters was being buried after dying from a long illness.

The house has literally nothing. Children sleep on the mats (*impasa*) and there are no chairs. The house usually appears deserted; the girls sleep during the day and become active at night, while the boys are out selling on the streets during the daytime hours.

The inability of the schooling system to stretch its limited personnel and material resources to provide basic education for all Zambian children, has also contributed to streetism. In cities like Lusaka, Kitwe and Ndola, it has been difficult to enrol even seven-year-old children. In 1991, only 73,7% of school-age children in the Copperbelt and 71,5% in Lusaka Provinces were able to enter primary school.<sup>16</sup> Youngsters who cannot attend school are prime candidates for early street life.

Urbanization is directly related to the incidence and condition of street children. Zambia is the third most urbanized country in Africa, after South Africa and Algeria, and over 50% of its population is urbanized. The highest concentration of this urban population is in the Copperbelt (43,5%) and Lusaka Provinces (31,7%).<sup>17</sup> High urbanization can result in overcrowding and discomfort. When combined with economic deterioration and a shortage of basic services, it can lead to misery, hostility and even violence. In Zambia, unemployment, food shortages, and a lack of housing and recreational facilities affected the most deprived segments of the population. The street, in many instances, then became an attractive venue for play and work for the youth.



The malunde is in jail.  
The police catch him for nothing.  
(Oupa, age 14)

which affected vulnerable people in the urban areas most seriously, especially street children. This led to the well-publicized food riots of 1986.

The level of inflation leapt from 21% in 1987 to about 130% in 1991. Reports from the Prices and Incomes Commission indicated that levels in the intervening years of 1988, 1989 and 1990 were 54,4%, 168,2% and 124%, respectively. By 1994, the average Zambian was reportedly living below the poverty datum line,<sup>10</sup> and in 1995, 78% of Zambians were said to be living in absolute poverty.<sup>11</sup>

According to Taçon and Lungwanga,<sup>12</sup> unemployment is one of the most pressing problems facing Zambia. From 1980 to 1989, employees in the country's formal sector decreased in number from 380 000 to 371 000 – a drop of 2,4% within one decade. This was accompanied by a 30% increase in the labour force – job seek-

Some researchers have questioned the fact that a poor economic situation is the main origin of child streetism in Zambia, and have proposed that the neglect and abuse of children also play a role, as well as single parenthood.<sup>18</sup> But we should not lose sight of the fact that although family members often help each other in times of hardship, poverty can contribute to poor family relationships and create situations of stress that lead to the abuse and neglect of children.

A recent complicating factor in streetism is the high prevalence of HIV infection in Zambia which has left many children orphaned. Such children often add to the burden of aged relatives, especially grandparents,<sup>19</sup> and some of them end up as street children.

## Interventions

### Training

It is difficult for street children to state their needs and aspirations. Traditionally, African children have been expected to conform to adult expectations and have been brought up to be submissive and respectful to their seniors in extended families.<sup>20</sup> The safety net provided for Zambian children through such family structures has been damaged, through various socio-political factors, some of which have already been discussed.

It is important that interventions in the lives of street children should take historical and socio-economic circumstances into account, as well as communications from the street children themselves and research information. Jaramba<sup>21</sup> has pointed out, however, that researchers who work with street children are often treated with suspicion and hostility; even some of the children's parents may be "outrightly hostile". Jaramba also reports taunts from passers-by; the leader of a group of teenage boys shouted at him: "You wouldn't dare ask me, garbage, because I have a nuclear punch that should adequately deal with the likes of you."

According to Taçon,<sup>22</sup> the general response to street children before 1991 was for the police and social workers to pick them up, detain them and send them for judgment. They would then be taken home, or sent to closed centres (for "protection"), or to a reformatory (for "re-education"). These proce-

dures were very expensive, and also counterproductive. Youngsters were labelled for life, taught criminality, taught dependency on the state, and to live within institutions rather than within society.

However, Zambia is a signatory to the *International Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Growing complaints about street children in the country led Unicef and the Zambian government to initiate a study in 1991 to assess the nature and extent of the problem.<sup>23</sup> Among the recommendations, intervention goals were suggested. These concluded that as the Convention embraces three pillars of child rights, namely protection, respect and opportunity, the Zambian intervention would be called "PRO-child". Protection provides for the growth and development of children and prevention of child exploitation and abuse. Respect provides for a child's legitimate entitlement to participate in matters related to his or her own life. Opportunity provides for a child to have access to education and vocational training as well as to recreational and cultural activities so as to grow to adulthood and to be able to enjoy a life worth living.

A workshop followed in 1992, at which governmental and non-governmental organizations made recommendations on what should be done with regard to street children in the country. A national coordinating committee was then also created since it was agreed that there should be rehabilitation centres for street children which recognized the need of the children to earn and to learn.

Four years later, we may well ask: is Zambia able, today, to provide full protection, respect and opportunity for the street child? It is doubtful that one would comfortably respond with a strong, positive answer. The precarious economic situation that Zambia continues to face does not seem to promise hope in this respect. Since the days of Kaunda, social policy has valued the family and the retention of children within it. As a result, only 4 of the 15 orphanages established in Zambia by missionaries before independence in 1964 remain. The Department of Social Welfare, which was supposed to meet requirements set out in national development plans in the time of Kaunda's rule, has been unable to do so because of a



Fighting for money. (Christopher, age 13)

shortage of funds and personnel.<sup>24</sup> Child and family services have become increasingly restricted as the economic resources in the country diminish and the population increases, generating more needy children.

However, the Zambian government, non-governmental agencies and the churches have come up with initiatives for interventions. Most of these initiatives have focused on skills training, namely carpentry and motor mechanics for boys, and sewing and knitting for girls. At the time of writing, Kitwe had six training centres for boys and girls, which offered, in addition to the training already mentioned, skills in panelbeating and electronics for boys and cookery and baby care lessons for girls. The training programmes have not been run very efficiently as the local government has lacked funds for materials and tools. The Zambian Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM), also located in the city of Kitwe, has skills training centres solely for the dependants of mine employees and both the YMCA and YWCA offer training programmes.

Unfortunately, the land has not yet attracted young people in Zambia. There are quite a few training centres for farming in the country but not many young men, let alone young women, have been keen to take up farming as a career. The older street children – those between the ages of 16 and 20 years – would rather be on the street than take up agriculture for a livelihood.

The churches, such as the Catholic Church, the United Church of Zambia, the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Reformed Church in Zambia, offer skills training programmes for youngsters in an effort to

# The plight of *street children* in Zambia

## Zambia

Republic of —

**Independence:** 24 October 1964.  
Former British colony.

**National Day:** 24 October  
(Independence Day).

**Leader:** Frederick Chiluba, b 1943,  
President since 1991.

**Capital:** Lusaka, largest city.

**Area:** 752 614 km<sup>2</sup>.

**Population:** 9,5 mn (1995).

**Religions:** Christian (about 50% of  
population) and ethnic beliefs.

**Languages:** English (official), Bemba,  
Lozi, Nyanja, Tonga.

**Life expectancy at birth:** 48 years.

**Foreign trade:** Imports: \$845 mn;  
Exports: \$1 075 mn (1994).

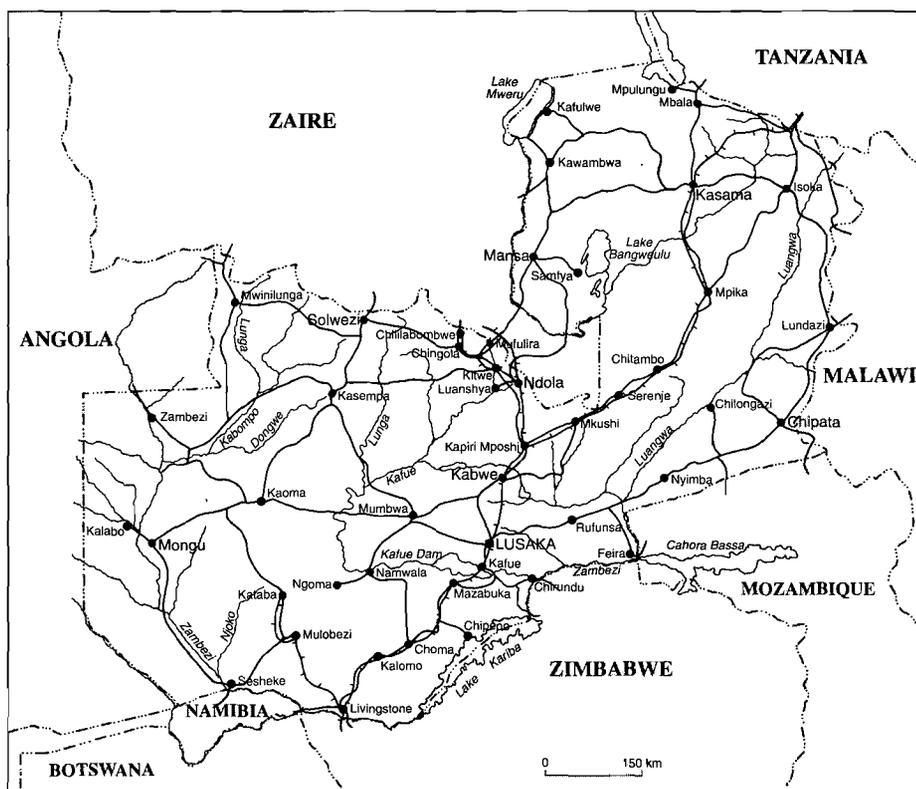
**Principal exports:** Copper (82%) and  
cobalt.

**GNP:** \$3 208 mn (1994).

**GNP/capita:** \$350 (1994).

**Currency:** \$1 = Zambian kwachas  
(ZK) 1 100 (March 1996).

**Background:** Landlocked Zambia's foreign earnings depend almost entirely on copper sales but with the world copper price having declined since the 1970s, the country has landed in difficulties. Declining copper reserves are forcing the government to attend to the agricultural sector which has great unrealized potential. Following the restoration of multiparty politics in 1991, the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) won a landslide victory in the National Assembly elections on 31 October of that year. At the same time, Frederick Chiluba, the MMD leader, defeated Pres Kenneth Kaunda in the presidential election. Having been forced to implement harsh economic reforms instead of delivering on its pre-election promises of rapid improvement in living standards, the new government is facing growing disillusionment among its supporters, who often go on strike – which in turn impedes economic revival. Both presidential and general elections are due in October 1996.



Zambia

attract some street children to them and away from the streets. Unfortunately, street children have turned a blind eye to such beacons. All the training programmes for the youth in the country put together cater for only a small number of school leavers, turning the larger portion of them to the streets.

### HIV/Aids education

In late 1989, when the Aids epidemic had reached alarming proportions, a team of three persons from the Copperbelt Health Education Project came up with the idea of disseminating information on HIV and Aids to street children. It was clear to the three (Dr Rao, Dr Mouli and this author) that while school children had received Aids messages, the street children had not.

The majority of street children were involved in informal employment, especially street selling, for survival. Many girls had ended up as domestic servants, barmaids or entertainers at night spots, while others sold groundnuts, matches and candles on street corners. All these youngsters were at high risk of contracting HIV. The "sugar daddy" phenomenon put considerable pressure on young girls to have sex for money, especially in the urban areas where there were few realistic alterna-

tive occupations for out-of-school, jobless young women.

It was against this background that the Copperbelt Health Education Project group decided to approach the youngsters directly to learn about their needs and problems. Through focus group discussions with street children, the team learnt that Aids was not one of their main concerns. They also expressed curiosity, rather than concern, about the effects of alcohol, *dagga* and tobacco, but above all, they were worried about their economic situation.

Armed with this information, the team designed a five-day crash course in survival skills to address the expressed concerns and particular needs of these youngsters. Street children were recruited from their work places through peer leaders. They were brought to a designated church building, a community centre, or a school building, where a classroom was allocated for the course. Resource persons for lectures came from law enforcement officers (the police), agriculturalists, commercial and industrial experts, social planners, managers, the clergy, and medical practitioners. Funding was provided by Unicef and Norad.

The general objectives of the course were the following:

- To provide out-of-school youngsters with practical information on topics that concerned them and affected their lives.
- To encourage them to examine their lifestyles and the options before them.
- To help them to make informed decisions about their economic situation, their health, and their sexual behaviour.

All topics, except agriculture, were presented to the girls as well as the boys. Instead of agriculture, the girls were taught sewing and knitting and how to say "no" to boys' advances. The participants were encouraged not to view themselves as failures, but rather to develop strategies for survival in the prevailing harsh social and economic environment. Most reported that the sessions on running a business were the most useful. Taking this information into account, the health education programme now emphasizes the importance of staying healthy in order to keep earning money: "Staying healthy is good for business".

During the crash courses, no youngsters are taken for HIV testing. It was left entirely up to them to choose whether or not to go for testing. Part of the crash courses aimed at giving the youngsters an informed opinion on how HIV was contracted and how to look after an Aids patient. They were given the opportunity of going to observe Aids patients in hospital on a given day. Such exposure, the organizers believed, would conscientize them for behaviour change.

### Advocacy

Advocacy for street children is very important. It can

change minds and mentalities, which can in turn, alter priorities, establish new policies, and design better programmes. Without moving the way people see and feel about street children and about working with them, very little else can be expected to improve. We cannot speak of programme planning and alternatives if we cannot alter the misunderstandings that have created the street children's current difficult situations.<sup>25</sup>

The Voice of the Street Children, a theatre group born from the study mentioned in the previous section of this article, has had as its sole purpose publicizing the plight of street children in the country.

Performances by the group have taken place at open markets and on street corners where the general public has been afforded the opportunity to understand the children's problems and how society views them. In this organized drama, the street children have reached more people through entertainment and hard-hitting messages about their daily individual and collective problems at the hands of the law enforcement officers, as well as the negative attitude of society (as a whole), than in any other way.

### The future

The problem of child streetism in Zambia cannot be overemphasized. It is immense, requiring concerted efforts in marshalling resources to enable the sustainability of meaningful programmes and projects to improve the quality of life of street children.

The joint initiative of Unicef and the Zambian government in 1991<sup>26</sup> established important principles, long-term goals and 15 far-reaching recommendations. Three of these need to be mentioned here because they could be the pillar for solving the problem of streetism.

The first was that priority be given to developing multi-purpose activity centres which place special emphasis on open education, vocational training and income generation for street children. The second was that family or inter-family income-generating units be established, including the setting up of local revolving funds to provide loans to facilitate their initial financing. The third recommendation was that all initiatives developed with and for street children and their families embody a plan for achieving self-sufficiency and auto-determination within a reasonable space of time.

As we have seen, some of these proposals have fallen by the way, largely because of a lack of funds. However, community involvement in programmes and projects for street children is to be encouraged throughout the country. If national planners, grassroots-level leadership and indeed street children themselves, take up these recommendations seriously and make full use of local resources, something positive might be achieved in the long term.

The only resources from the international community should be cap-

ital. Dignity comes from a hand-up, rather than a hand-out.

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# Street children

## in Swaziland

*In Swaziland, street children are a relatively new and scarce phenomenon. Ms Tizie Maphalala, of the Department of Psychology at the University of Swaziland, explores the relevance of existing hypotheses about street children in the light of research conducted in Mbabane and Manzini in 1995.\**

Swaziland is a small country, occupying an area of 17 364 km<sup>2</sup>. It shares part of its eastern border with Mozambique; the rest is encircled by South Africa. The population at the last census was 681 000, with a population growth rate of 3,4%.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that by the year 2016 the population could be over two million.<sup>2</sup>

In the Swazi way of life, the state of parenthood is highly regarded. Traditionally, women are valued for their fertility, particularly if they produce sons. This is because Swazi law and custom dictate that the family heir must be male, hence the perceived need for women to bear at least one son.<sup>3</sup> Polygamy is common and is endorsed by customary law. Gule<sup>4</sup> reports that the average number of children borne by women in the 45–49 age cohort in 1986 was 6,9 (6,6 for those married by civil rites and 7,3 for those married by customary law). According to Swazi culture, child-rearing is the responsibility of the extended family and the community, not just of the child's parents.

Those who research street children normally differentiate between children *of* the street (those who live without adult supervision and work to maintain themselves) and children *on* the street (those who also work but return home at the end of the day). Street children have existed in urban settings in South America for many years, and in post-colonial Africa their numbers have been rising at a phenomenal rate, but in Swaziland they are a recent phenomenon and there is, therefore, a paucity of information about them. Their number is relatively small but evidently growing. In 1992 a survey found that only 2 out of 73 children who were identified as being "in difficult circumstances" could be described as street children.<sup>5</sup> However, a year later, the same researchers counted 123 children in Mbabane and Manzini whom they classified as "street children".<sup>6</sup>

In his review of research on street children in the developing world, Aptekar<sup>7</sup> reported that the majority of street

children were boys; that they were older than five years but not old enough to be "perceived as adults"; that they were likely to maintain some contact with their parents even if they did not reside with them; that they tended to originate from female-headed families; and that they were likely to be victims of poverty rather than family abuse.

The primary task of this article is to report the findings of research conducted in 1995 in the two largest cities of Swaziland (Mbabane and Manzini), with a view to providing a preliminary characterization of street children in Swaziland.

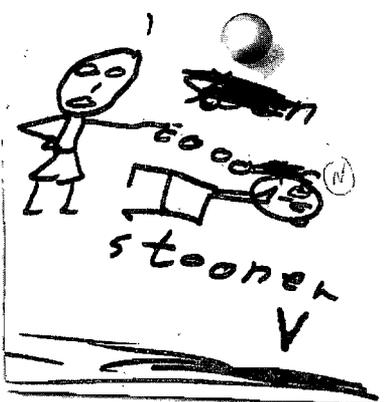
### Methodology

Programmes that cater for street children were identified in the country's two largest cities, Mbabane and Manzini. The programme in Mbabane is administered by a non-governmental organization and offers midday meals three days per week (on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays) as well as providing a life-skills programme and recreation for the children. In Manzini a church organization runs a programme which has established shelters for street children and also provides formal schooling and vocational training for them. The environment for the children at the Manzini site is more structured, and caters for both girls and boys on a daily basis.

A sample of 39 street children, 21 in Mbabane (from a maximum of 38 children who use the facility) and 18 in

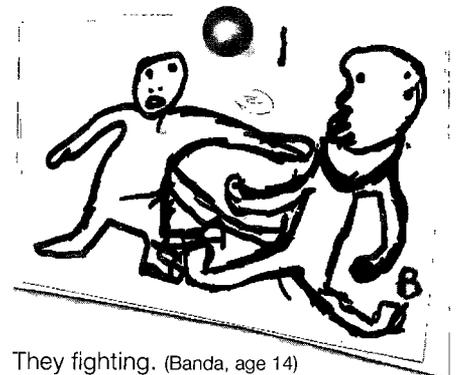


Fighting.  
(Christopher, age 13)



He hit him with a stone. Is bad.  
(Vusi, age 11)

\* Originally presented as a paper at the African Regional ISSBD Workshop in Lusaka, Zambia, in April 1996.



They fighting. (Banda, age 14)

Manzini (from a possible total of 25 children at the school) were selected for in-depth interviews. Twelve of the 18 children from Manzini were resident in the programme's shelters while 6 lived at "home".

Data were collected by five research assistants who were students of the faculty of education at the University of Swaziland. The students worked as volunteers to assist in running educational programmes set up by the researcher at the two identified sites. They spent six weeks with the children prior to data collection, in order to develop a cordial relationship and a sense of trust before the data collection process began.

whilst 18 or 46% were interviewed in Manzini. The research design aimed at capturing equal samples from both cities. However, when it was realized that some of the children attending school at the Manzini-based programme were not street children they were discarded from the data set.

**Gender distribution**

The majority of the street children in both cities were boys. However, there were some girls at both data collection sites. Altogether, there were 31 boys, 19 in Mbabane and 12 in Manzini; and 8 girls, 2 in Mbabane and 6 in Manzini. These male:female ratios are representative of those of the total population at each site.

**Age**

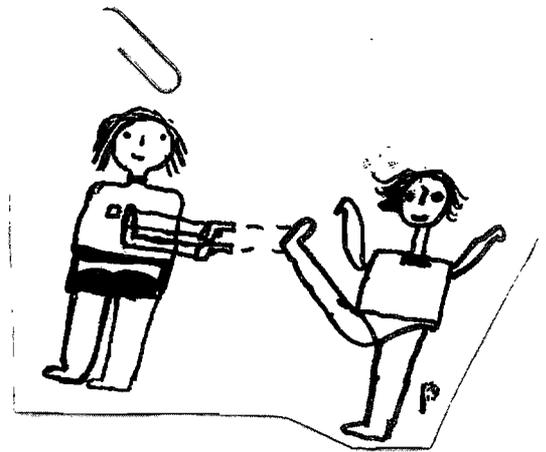
The children's age range was 7 to 20 years. Almost half of them (48,7%) were between the ages of 13 and 15 years.

**Place of birth**

Only three (7,7%) of the children were born outside Swaziland. Of these, two were born in South Africa and one in Mozambique. Of those remaining, 15 (38,5%) were born in the Hhohho region where Mbabane is the largest city; and 13 (33,3%) came from the Manzini region. Only 5 (12,8%) children were born in the Lubombo region adjacent to the Manzini region and just one child came from the Shiselweni region, which is the region furthest from the two cities. The majority of the children appeared to have been born and to live within the city's periphery or nearby rural areas.

**Living arrangements**

The children's living arrangements were ascertained by asking the same question in different forms at different points in the interview, ie "Where do you live/sleep now? Do you sleep in



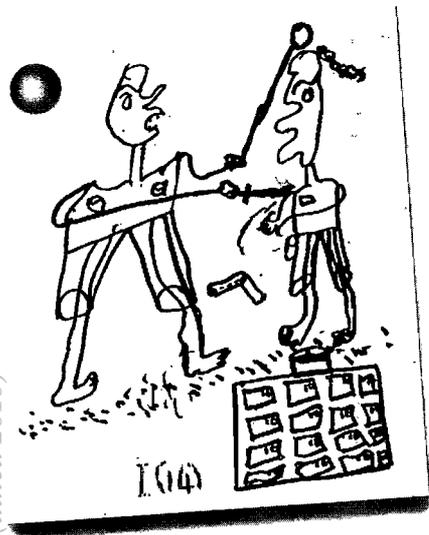
The bad man shoots the good man with his gun. But the good man stops the bullets with his foot. (Pule, age 13)

the streets? Where do you normally sleep at night?" The results indicate that there are three categories of "street children", based on the children's own accounts of their living arrangements. These are children who sleep/live on the streets, those who live in shelters, and those who sleep at "home".

The children who slept at "home" were not necessarily living with parents; in fact, 6 of the 16 lived with grandparents or other members of the extended family. One of those living at home in the Mbabane sample actually alternated between the streets and home.

**Reasons for being on the street**

The most common reason given by the children for coming onto the streets was economic difficulties (66,7%). Of this group, 12,8% said that their education had been interrupted because their families could no longer afford to pay their school fees. They reported that they were trying to secure the means to enable them to return to school, either by finding a sponsor or by collecting a large enough sum of money. Other reasons furnished, albeit to a much lesser extent, were that they left home to escape physical abuse inflicted by family



A bank teller comes from work, he meets a tsotsi who wants to rob him. The tsotsi hits him on the head, he's bleeding. The gun falls down.

(Isaac, age 14)

The children were interviewed individually, using an interview schedule developed by Aptekar and colleagues which had been used in Nairobi-based research. Each child was also given two psychological tests, the *Draw-A-Person* and *Incomplete Sentences*, designed to provide information concerning the children's emotional and intellectual functioning.<sup>8</sup>

**Results**

*Characteristics of the sample*

**Distribution by locality**

A total of 39 children participated in this study. In Mbabane, 21 children or 54% of the sample were interviewed,

**TABLE 1** Living/sleeping arrangements of the children (N=39)

Living/sleeping arrangements	Number in Mbabane	Number in Manzini	Total
Home	10	6	16 (41%)
On the streets	11	0	11 (28%)
At a shelter	0	12	12 (31%)
Total	21	19	39 (100%)

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**TABLE 2** The children's views about their future (N=39)

View of the future	Living at home	Living on street	Living in shelter
Bright	35%	9%	69%
Bleak	38%	45%	23%
Don't know	37%	46%	8%

**TABLE 3** Children's feelings towards mother (N=39)

Feelings	Living at home	Living on street	Living in shelter
Positive	100%	70%	62%
Negative	0%	10%	23%
Don't know	0%	20%	15%

**TABLE 4** Children's feelings towards father (N=39)

Feelings	Living at home	Living on street	Living in shelter
Positive	13%	30%	31%
Negative	87%	70%	23%
Don't know	0%	0%	46%

members, ie father, stepfather, mother, stepmother (17,9%); to seek adventure (5,1%); and to escape conflict situations in their communities, ie those from South Africa and Mozambique (7,7%). Of the eight girls in the sample, seven were on the streets for economic reasons and one had been sexually abused.

The longest time a child had spent on the streets was seven years. The average time on the street was found to be two years, while almost half (44%) of the children had been on the streets for less than one year.

**Family background**

The number of siblings that the children reported varied from none to 11 and the average number of siblings

was found to be four. According to Swazi custom, children who have one father but different mothers are regarded as brothers and sisters. However, it is also common for the mother to have children with different fathers. If these children live with their mother they regard themselves as brothers and sisters. In interviewing the children, a sibling was interpreted as being any other person with whom the child shared at least one parent.

The children were asked whether their parents were alive. Almost half of them (49%) indicated that their mother alone had been responsible

for their upbringing; 15% had been brought up by both parents; 13% by a grandmother; 8% by their father; and the remaining 15% by other relatives.

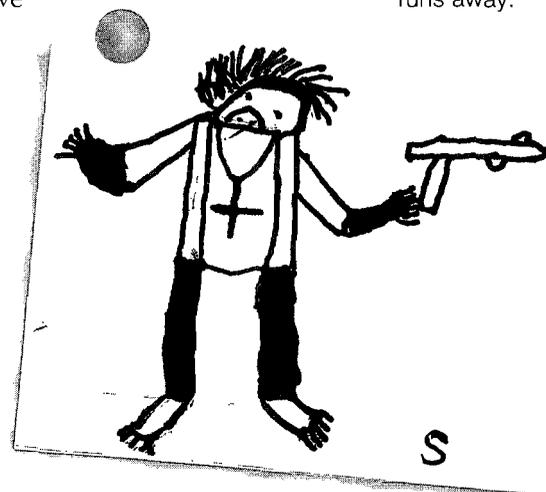
**Birth order**

It was established that almost a third (30%) of the children, including two of the eight girls, were first-born children. All of them said that they had come to the streets unaccompanied. Altogether, more than half (56%) of the children came to the streets on their own, while the rest were accompanied by a sibling, friend or relative.

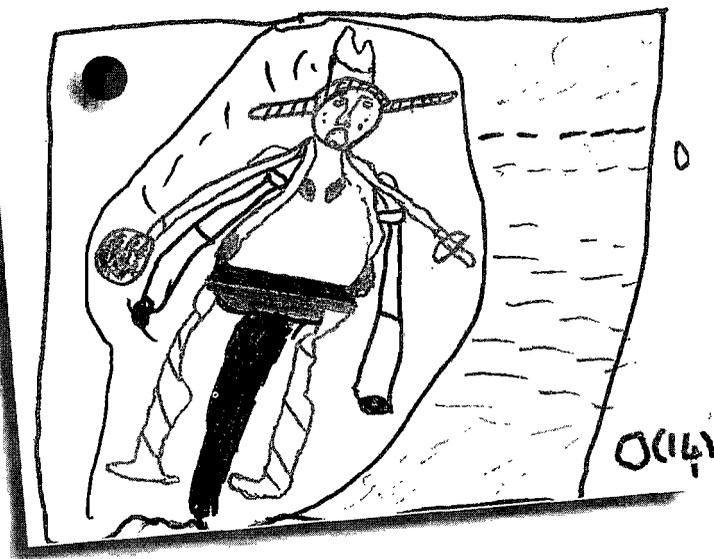
**Mental health**

The children's mental health was analysed using direct questions from the interview schedule, *Incomplete Sentences* and the *Draw-A-Person Test*.

This is the terrorist. Pretends to come from the church. Kills people, runs away.



(Samuel, age 13)



The tsotsi stuck him with a knife. Now he must use the crutches. (Oupa, age 14)

**How they viewed their future**

Of all the children interviewed, 41% believed that their future would be bright provided that they were able to secure an education, a skill, a job and money, which they believed were requirements for self-sufficiency. The children who were not sure about what the future held (44%), had the same sentiments as those who believed their future was likely to be bright. The remaining children (15%) believed that their future was likely to be bleak and that their situation was hopeless. Table 2 shows their views about their future.

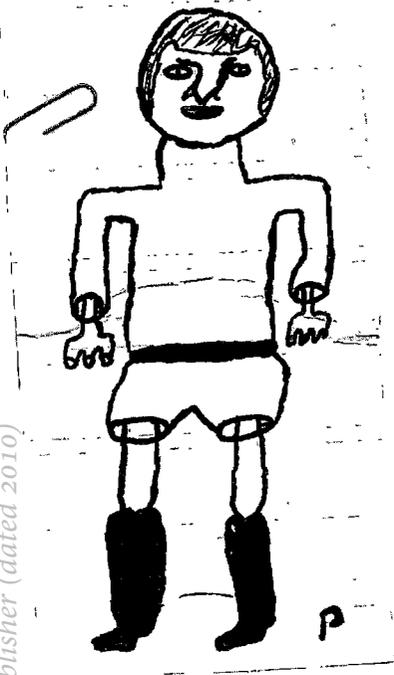
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**TABLE 5** Scores on Draw-A-Person test (N=34)

Score	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
< or = 70	6	17,7	17,7
71 – 80	8	23,5	41,2
81 – 90	8	23,5	64,7
91 – 100	5	14,7	79,4
101 – 110	1	2,9	82,3
111 – 120	3	8,8	91,1
121 – 130	3	8,8	99,9
Total	34		

Mean = 87,6  
Standard error = 3,3

Median = 84  
SD = 19



This is a bad man. Is standing on the corner waiting for taking people's money. (Peter, age 14)

The children cited their immediate needs as being money and other material requirements such as clothing, education, shelter and (to much lesser extent) being with their families.

**The children's perceptions about other people**

Over one third (36%) of the children had positive feelings towards other people, asserting that people were "kind", while 28% had negative feelings towards others. These children alleged that people were cruel, uncaring, and did not keep promises. The remaining 36% were ambivalent, and indicated this by saying that "peo-

ple are sometimes good and sometimes bad". About 72% of the children had positive feelings towards their mothers; only 11% had negative feelings towards them, and 17% said that they did not know how they felt about their mothers. However, 49% of the children had negative feelings towards their fathers while 32% felt positively towards them and 19% were unsure of how they felt.

Tables 3 and 4 show the responses of children based in Mbabane and Manzini towards their parents. The data show that children living in shelters are less likely to harbour negative feelings towards their fathers than those living at home or in the streets.

When the boys were asked about their views on girls, almost all (70%) made hostile comments. The most frequently recurring were: "They are not to be trusted", "they are prostitutes". All the girls had negative perceptions of boys, they were said to be "bad" and "cruel" and seemed to be regarded as enemies.

**Needs and wishes**

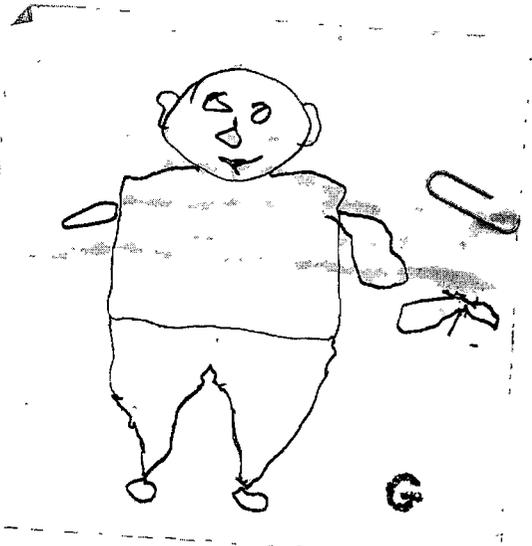
The children's needs as well as their wishes were analysed. At the top of the needs/wishes list were material things such as clothes, shoes and money, among other things. For the children living on the streets the next most important need/wish was shelter, while for those living at home and in shelter it was the desire to go back to school/to get an education. The third most important need/wish for children living on the streets was emotional; it was articulated as a desire

for reduced animosity towards them by the public.

**Intellectual maturity**

The *Draw-A-Person* (DAP) test can be used to get an impression of a child's general ability. The drawings were each analysed by the researcher and two assistants using the quality scale scoring system; converting quality scores to standard scores.<sup>9</sup> The scores of this group ranged from 61 to 130. Details are set out in Table 5.

T-tests revealed that there was no significant difference between scores on the Draw-A-Person Test and varied living arrangements of the chil-



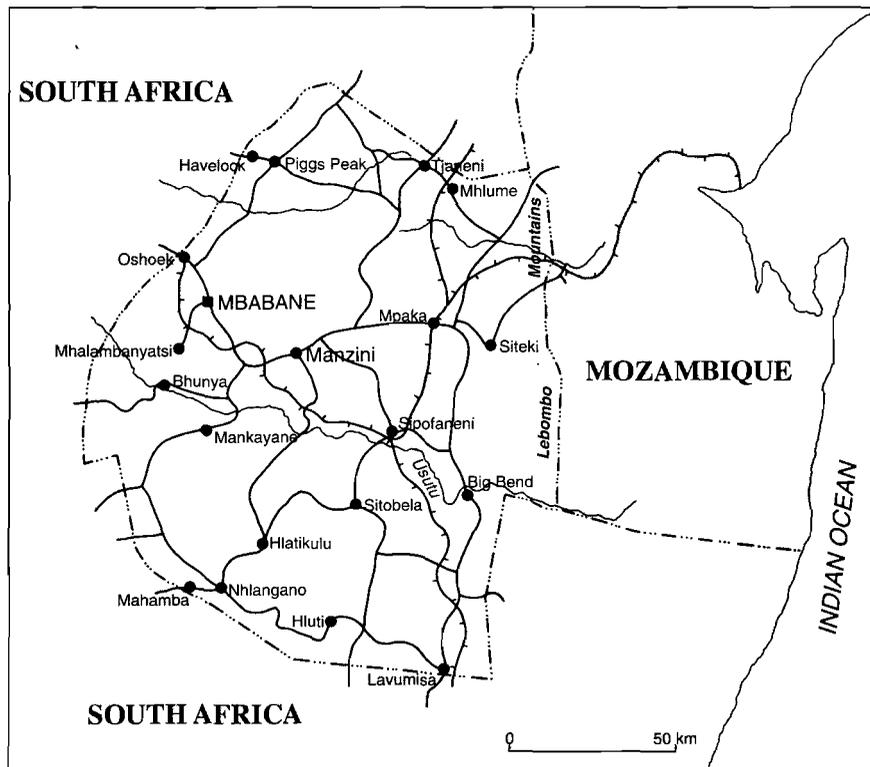
This is a bad man. He shoots people and kills them. He is a very bad man. (George, age 12)

dren. T-tests also showed that there was no significant difference between scores on the Draw-A-Person Test when gender was taken into consideration.

**Discussion**

The accuracy of information obtained from street children is largely dependent on the relationship between the researcher and the child. In this study, care was taken to build up a trusting relationship between the children and the researchers before the collection of data began. In addition, the researchers not only interviewed the children, but also visited their homes. This was done to reduce the likelihood of misunderstanding the children's "stories", by matching them

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Swaziland

with other factual information. The fabrication of information is understood by researchers to be a survival tactic for street children.<sup>10</sup>

**Demographic and psycho-social findings**

The actual number of street children in the country is not known. In their survey and subsequent classification, Kanduza and Magonga<sup>11</sup> relied primarily on the children's explanations as to why they were on the city streets during school hours. Even though the number of children in this study is not indicative of the actual number of street children in Swaziland, the numbers are representative of the population in each of the locations. The information obtained, therefore, serves to provide a useful start to an attempt to comprehend the Swazi street child.

The majority of the children in each of the two cities are boys, a finding which concurs with Aptekar's<sup>12</sup> assertion that street children are primarily boys. Most of the Swazi street children originate in the regions within which the cities of Manzini and Mbabane are located, a finding which upholds the hypothesis that street children are not likely to be migrants from distant regions.<sup>13</sup>

Economic adversity is by far the most common reason for leaving home.

Physical abuse inflicted by family members was the second most common reason given. This finding supports Kanduza and Magonga's<sup>14</sup> assertion that poverty is the primary reason for children advancing into the streets.

More than half of the children ventured onto the streets on their own; of these, almost one third were first-born children. Nine of the 11 first-born children were male and 4 of the 11 children living on the street were first-born. This finding lends support to what can be described as the psycho-social influence of Swazi family child-rearing practices with regard to first-born children. Males in particular are expected to assist in providing for the family, especially in times of economic hardship.<sup>15</sup>

More than two-thirds of the children interviewed had at least one parent alive at the time the study was conducted, while almost half of the children reported that their mother had been the primary person responsible for their upbringing. This finding does not fully support the hypothesis that street children are most likely to originate from female-headed homes.<sup>16</sup> The children generally had positive feelings towards their mothers, a finding which is consistent with that reported by Swart<sup>17</sup> for Johannesburg street children. Conversely, the children tended to harbour negative feelings towards their fathers.

The children's expressed needs and wishes were those that could be termed "basic human needs", ie food, shelter, clothing, money to pay for school fees, and emotional needs – the need to belong. The children who lived in shelters tended to have a more positive view of their future than those living on the street, who did not believe that there was much hope for them in terms of a better life. Those living at "home" were only slightly more optimistic than the children living on the street.

The views of the children with regard to the opposite gender indicated that more than two-thirds of the boys had negative opinions of girls, while the girls considered boys to be unreliable/untrustworthy. This result is consistent with McLean's<sup>18</sup> findings in her investigations into Swazi adolescent attitudes and behaviours.

The results of the *Draw-A-Person Test* provided an indication of general performance. In this study, the scores attached to the children's drawings were used for between-group comparisons with regard to level of intellectu-

al functioning as evidenced by the quality of the drawing. The child's level of schooling or school experience was regarded as an important factor in determining intellectual functioning. Since the children's school experience varied greatly, the quality of the drawings could possibly be attributed to factors such as lack of experience with pencil and paper, rather than below age-group norms. In addition, the documented norms for assessment of the DAP Test are for children from western societies; there are no norms for Swazi children as no empirical studies using drawings have been conducted in the country. It is, therefore, not possible to make inferences about the children's intellectual functioning from the results obtained. This does not, however, nullify the usefulness of the data obtained. While the drawings must be interpreted with care, they do provide some insight into the psychological condition of their authors. A detailed interpretation falls outside the scope of this paper, but three drawings have been included on p 288 overleaf as an illustration of the material collected.

## Conclusion

This study aimed at providing some insights into the demographic and psycho-social situation of street children in Swaziland. The research revealed that street children have the same basic needs as other children, namely love, security and physical care. Obviously street life cannot adequately fulfil these needs and the children develop various coping strategies to help them deal with their situation. Some of these strategies are perceived as deviant by mainstream society and this leads to members of the public viewing the children with contempt and hostility.

A review of the findings of this study suggests that the children who live on the streets are the most vulnerable group; they generally have positive feelings towards their mothers, harbour negative feelings towards their fathers, and believe that their future is likely to be bleak. It is becoming evident that the traditional Swazi socio-economic role of the extended family and community in child-rearing and provision of the child's needs can no longer be taken for granted. Therefore, strategies should be developed to address the needs of children living on the streets in particular, as well as strategies to curtail

the problem of children coming onto the street.

## Notes

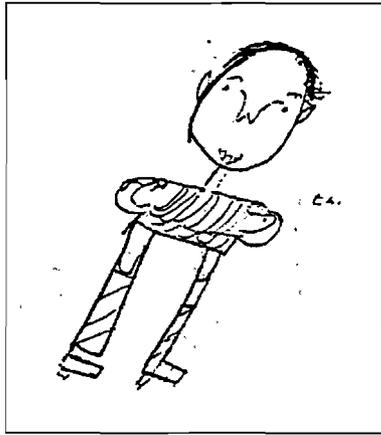
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## Swaziland

Kingdom of —

- Independence:** 6 September 1968. Former British protectorate.
- National Day:** 6 Sept (Independence Day).
- Leader:** King Mswati III, b 1968. Proclaimed 1983 and inaugurated April 1986.
- Capital:** Mbabane, largest town.
- Area:** 17 365 km<sup>2</sup>.
- Population:** 950 000 (1995).
- Religions:** Christianity (about 50% of the population) and ethnic religion.
- Languages:** English and Swazi (both official).
- Life expectancy at birth:** 57 years.
- Foreign trade:** Imports: \$825 mn; Exports: \$800 mn (1994).
- Principal exports:** Sugar (25%), foodstuffs and woodpulp.
- GNP:** \$1 048 mn (1994). GNP/capita: \$1 160 (1994).
- Currency:** \$1 = Emalangeni (E) 3,65 (Jan 1996). On par with SA rand.

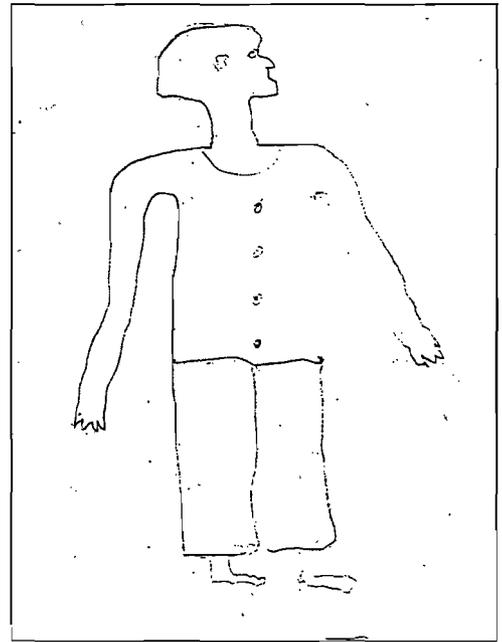
**Background:** A small landlocked country with a viable economy that has shown comparatively high growth rates. Sugar cane production is the mainstay of the economy. The country has large coal reserves and produces asbestos and diamonds. Tourism in Swaziland is an important industry. The economy is nevertheless heavily dependent on that of neighbouring South Africa and income earned from the country's membership of the Southern African Customs Union (Sacu). Swaziland is one of only three monarchies in Africa and is ruled by a king wielding executive power. The country has a non-party system with electoral procedures based on Swazi custom. However, encouraged by democratization in South Africa and elsewhere in Africa, political parties have been formed and they are demanding a multiparty system. In January 1996 a general strike, called by the trade unions in support of the political demands, disrupted the country.



**Figure 1** Drawn by a 15-year-old boy living in a shelter. This drawing falls below 1 SD of the mean for the drawings of children living in shelter.

This boy came to the streets alone at the age of 11 years. He is the eldest child, with four siblings. His mother is alive and he gets along well with her even though they rarely see each other. He left home to escape the poverty experienced by his family. Before deciding to leave home he used to help raise money for food for the family by selling bottles. His view of the future is positive, if he "is able to go back to school". He perceives people to be "cruel" but believes that his mother is a "good person when she is not drunk". He perceives girls to be "prostitutes". He is currently enrolled in an educational programme for street children.

This boy has no siblings and does not get along with his mother at all. He came to the streets at the age of 11, soon after his father died. He intimated that his mother drank alcohol excessively and that she would not buy food and stopped paying his school fees, forcing him to drop out of school. He believes that his future is likely to be bright if he is



**Figure 2** The author of this drawing is a 12-year-old boy living in a shelter. The quality of this drawing places it a little above the mean of other drawings by children living in a shelter.

able to go back to mainstream education and train to become a mechanic. He believes that people in general are all right, that his late father was loving. He believes that his mother does not care for him. His perception of girls is that they are a "nuisance".



This boy came to the streets alone at the age of 13 years because there "was not enough money for food for the family and so [I] had to drop out of school". He has two siblings. Both parents are alive; he gets along well with his mother but he does not know his father. He believes his future is bleak: "There is no future for street children," he says. His immediate needs are "to go back to school, to have a home and to acquire some clothes". He believes that people are cruel and uncaring; his mother is a "good person," his father is "irresponsible" and girls are "prostitutes". If he can go back to school he wants to become a lawyer or policeman.

**Figure 3** This drawing belongs to a 15-year-old boy living on the streets. The quality of the drawing places it 1 SD above the mean of the drawings made by children living on the street.

# AFRICA FOCUS

disputes between states are a natural feature of the international order. Most frequently such disputes these days are about trade regulation and discrimination. Sometimes they are about the alleged harbouring of terrorists or international criminals. There are also disagreements about contested territorial sovereignty and the secession and recognition of new states.

In a way it is surprising that such disputes and conflicts over sovereignty are not more common in Africa. Given that the process of transforming the myriad societies and cultures of Africa into fifty or so states was packed into the historically brief space of eighty years, what is remarkable is that this imposed and essentially artificial system has not been more seriously challenged.

Instead the leaders of the successful revolt against colonial rule and their successors have made no attempt to overturn this alien system of states or its political framework in favour of a return to a more organic system based on pre-colonial African formations. They have sought, rather, to maintain the arbitrarily demarcated artificial boundaries of the colonial period virtually at any cost. Indeed, the successful preservation of the external framework of imposed state structures has been one of the more striking achievements of the political leaders of independent Africa.

Sometimes, in the eagerness to defend the often absurd boundaries laid down in Berlin in 1884-85 the foreign policy of African states has led them all too easily from farce into tragedy. One such instance is the conflict between Nigeria and Cameroon over the ownership of the Bakassi peninsula. This has dragged on now for more than 25 years, mostly by diplomatic means and threats, but sometimes violently. At the moment the forces of Nigeria and Cameroon face each other along a 40 km front, sometimes no more than a 100 metres apart. Their patrol boats constantly run the risk of hostile collision and ambush in the narrow channels of the area. International efforts proceed to effect a solution, but the protagonists show little sign of flexibility, or a willingness to countenance any action their own peoples might construe as weakness.

## A question of Efiks

The Bakassi peninsula is an area of some 1 000 km<sup>2</sup> of mangrove swamp and half-submerged islands protruding into the Bight of Bonny (previously known as the Bight of Biafra). Since the 18th century the peninsula has been occupied by fishing settlements, most of whose inhabitants are Efik-speaking. Today those communities, dotted around the peninsula in corrugated iron huts and shacks, have grown to number some 250 000 people. They have no electricity, no potable water (this has to be fetched from the mainland), no roads, and only such educational and health facilities as they can provide themselves. At first sight, it seems surprising that so neglected and unpromising an area should have excited such attention from the governments of Nigeria and Cameroon over the past 25 years or so, to the point when full-scale war has occasionally seemed imminent. The latest round in the confrontation over Bakassi began at the end of 1993, and still flares violently from time to time. The matter is now before the International Court of Justice at the Hague (ICJ) and has also drawn the notice of the UN Security Council and the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

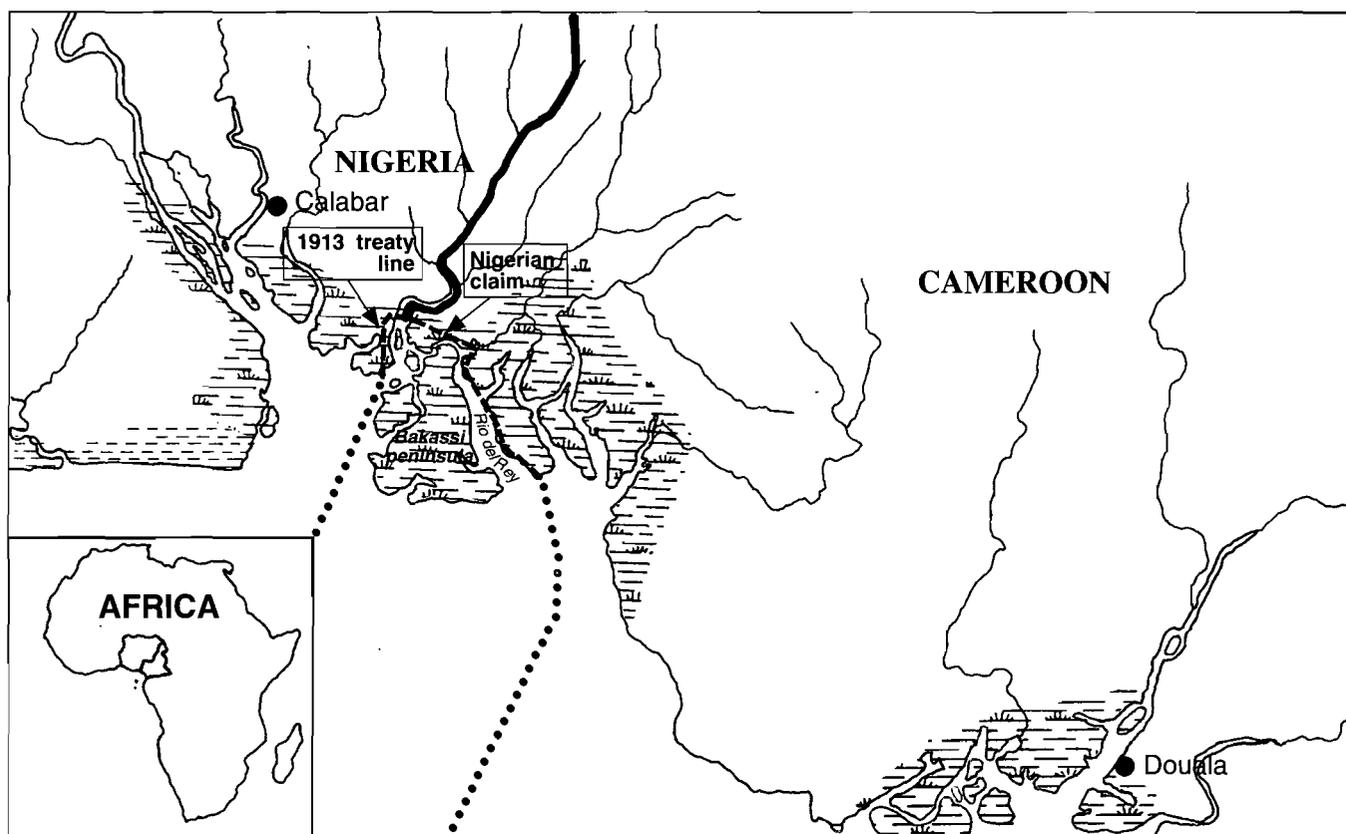
Cameroon and Nigeria share a border of some 1 700 km, several parts of which are poorly defined and now and then contested. In part, no doubt, their governments welcome an opportunity to beat the patriotic drum, in the hope of diverting their peoples from dangerous internal squabbles to focus on a common external enemy. Neither country enjoys a stable internal political or economic life. Nigeria, a state whose rulers have often expressed aspirations to a continental leadership commensurate with its size, wealth and population, is a crippled and frustrated giant, its body politic repeatedly threatened or racked by ethnic, linguistic and religious strife, and its economic health debilitated by the exactions of military regimes and their corrupt business associates.

Cameroon is dwarfed by its neighbour, but suffers from many of the same ailments, albeit on an appropriate scale. The polity is divided along regional, religious and ethnic lines, with the addition-



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Bakassi Peninsula

al overlay of Anglophone and Franco-phone rivalry. President Biya's forced conversion to multipartyism in the 1990s lacks conviction. Tactical mistakes by his opponents allowed him to escape defeat in the legislative elections of 1991, but only wholesale fraud let him retain office, by a narrow margin, in the presidential elections of 1992. The economy is in ruins and oil revenues disappear into accounts under presidential control. Even the oil will shortly run out. At present Cameroon produces some 120 000 barrels per day (b/d), but existing reserves will be exhausted by the year 2005, with disastrous consequences.

Herein lies the reason for the uncommon interest in the Bakassi peninsula, which has been described as an oil-soaked sponge. The demarcation of the international border would also have a significant impact upon the delimitation of territorial waters, which, their fishing potential apart, also cover areas rich in Bonny light crude. For Cameroon in particular, a share of these spoils would provide a welcome economic and political lifeline. For Nigeria, they would open the way to further extension of the country's oil and gas wealth through exploitation of the continental shelf off Bakassi.

### From Berlin to Ambazonia

In June 1884 the German government proclaimed a protectorate over the Cameroon region, and that October notified the other European powers and the USA, in general terms, of the extent of this territory. On 23 July and 10 September 1884 the kings and chiefs of Old Calabar signed a treaty placing their territories under the protection of Great Britain. That same September other kings and chiefs of the region, including those of Bakassi, signed treaties acknowledging that their territories were subject to the authority of Old Calabar and were therefore also under British protection. The Berlin Conference of 1884-85 recognized the validity of the British claim to this area as the Oil Rivers Protectorate, which became part of the Niger Coast Protectorate in 1893, and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria in 1900. In 1906 Southern Nigeria, still including the Bakassi peninsula, came under the administration of the Colony of Lagos, but in November 1913 the Protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria were amalgamated into a single Nigerian Protectorate, though Lagos remained a separate colony. By now, however, the status of Bakassi was al-

ready in question. Since 1884, it had been accepted that the boundary between British and German spheres of influence ran along the east bank of the Rio del Rey. Agreements signed on 11 March and 12 April 1913 redefined the maritime boundary as the Akpayafe River, placing the Rio del Rey and the entire Bakassi peninsula under German authority. When the kings and chiefs of Old Calabar protested to the British parliament that it had no right to sign away their territories, they received the assurance that there was no intention of doing so. Nevertheless, it appears that the demarcation of the new boundary went ahead, and was interrupted only by the outbreak of war between Britain and Germany in August 1914.

Circumstances now apparently made the 1913 agreement all but irrelevant, not only because of the scale of the carnage in Europe, but because in 1916 British and French colonial forces eventually conquered the German colony of Cameroon, which was divided between them in 1919 under mandates of the League of Nations. The Bakassi peninsula formed part of the British mandate, along with a broad strip of territory along the Cameroon-Nigeria border. For now, British Cameroons was administered from

Lagos, virtually as an integral part of Nigeria. For the next forty years the old boundary between Nigeria and Cameroon thus ceased to be a matter of any importance.

It may seem odd, therefore, that the current Cameroonian claim legally rests largely upon the status of the 1913 agreement. The Nigerian position is that the agreement was never ratified by the British parliament, and therefore is not a treaty in force. Other, neutral, authorities have pointed out that the agreement was not an international treaty in form, and that it was made in circumstances in which the two governments were bound to accept the delimitation of the commissioners, provided the latter acted within the scope of their authority. On this view, ratification may neither be here nor there, though the commissioners' work was certainly left incomplete.

In February 1961 the 1913 agreement again came to the fore, when the UN conducted a plebiscite in the British Trust Territory of Southern Cameroon to allow the local population to decide whether they wanted to form part of independent Nigeria, or become part of Francophone Cameroon. The plebiscite included the people of the Bakassi peninsula, which Nigeria, rejecting the 1913 delimitation, now claims to have been an irregular procedure. Nonetheless the majority of people in Southern Cameroon Trust Territory decided to throw in their lot with independent French Cameroon, in a federation which appeared to give them a guarantee of autonomy. There was significant opposition in parts of Southern Cameroon to incorporation, notably in the Bakassi peninsula, some 90% of whose population was of Nigerian origin.

To complicate matters further, the people of the old Southern Cameroon Trust Territory have since launched their own political campaign for autonomy or even independence, claiming that the late President Ahidjo's abrogation of the federal constitution and promulgation of the United Republic of Cameroon in 1972 constituted a violation of their federal rights guaranteed by the UN. Since then, the Anglophone south-west of Cameroon has remained the heartland of opposition to the government of President Biya in Yaoundé, though it has lately garnered ever widening support from non-Beti Francophone elements in the country. Indeed, there is an extreme

view which argues that the Bakassi peninsula should not be a point at issue between Nigeria and Cameroon at all, because the territory forms part of Southern Cameroon, which claims that the UN had no legal right to hold a plebiscite in 1961 and demands recognition of its independent sovereignty as the state of Ambazonia.

### Joint commissions

In 1965 the Nigerian government initiated a joint commission with Cameroon to settle their ill-defined border, which was giving great freedom of action to smugglers. The process of marking the border was interrupted by the crisis of 1966 and the ensuing Nigerian civil war. Cameroon took some advantage of the chaotic situation in Biafra to assert its authority in the disputed coastal region, and the Nigerian federal government was only too grateful that Cameroon prevented the flow of war material to the secessionists.

In 1970 the Nigerian and Cameroonian government reconstituted the joint commission, which accepted the Anglo-German Agreement of 1913 as its point of reference. Disagreement between the parties centred upon the definition of the course of the Akwayafe River. In the midst of this series of delimitations, in April 1971 General Gowon visited Yaoundé and signed charts defining the new maritime boundary. Subsequently the commission redefined the maritime boundary as the Ngoh/Coker line. This remarkable finding transferred the control of the Calabar channel to Cameroon and was shortly retracted by the Nigerian government. Gowon again went to meet President Ahidjo in Garoua in August 1972. Another meeting in Kano in 1974 moved matters further along, though the Nigerians succeeded only in having the boundary shifted slightly to the east of the Ngoh/Coker line, and had to concede the presence of Cameroonian oil rigs in the Calabar channel. From 30 May to 1 June 1975 Gowon and Ahidjo met at Maroua, by which time the Cameroon authorities had already passed decrees renaming the settlements on Bakassi. The Maroua Accord certainly conceded Cameroonian sovereignty over Bakassi, and a lot more besides, but two months later Gowon had been ousted by General Murtala Mohammed, whose Supreme Military Council simply refused to ratify. Murtala Mohammed subsequently repudiated the Maroua Accord, saying

he would sooner go to war. His successor, General Olusegun Obasanjo repeated the repudiation in August 1977.

Nevertheless, the Maroua Accord, with the 1913 Agreement, remain central to the Cameroon government's case.

Until now, there appears to have been little trouble on the peninsula. The first serious skirmish between Nigerian and Cameroonian forces occurred on 16 May 1981, when Nigerian patrol boats came under fire on the Akwayafe River. Five Nigerians were killed and three seriously wounded. Nigeria's demand for an apology and compensation were initially refused, and relations between the two countries took an ominous turn. In July 1981, however, Cameroon undertook to pay compensation, and the crisis eased, with plaudits to Nigeria's President Shagari for his restraint and for containing his hawkish military. The incident led to the resuscitation of the joint commission and the border dispute was officially reopened.

These discussions had little real effect, however, and the inhabitants of Bakassi continued to protest to the Nigerian authorities in Cross River state of the exactions of Cameroonian gendarmes, who demanded payment for fishing licences. Later raids by the gendarmerie were evidently more violent, involving looting, rape and the destruction of fishing equipment. Throughout the 1980s relative quiet in Bakassi was punctuated by the sudden descent of Cameroonian gendarmes; then in May and June 1991, the Cameroonians entered nine fishing villages, hoisted their national flag and announced that they were renaming the settlements. They also promised that health and education facilities would be provided, though they demanded the payment of taxes.

By this time the governments of Nigeria's President Babangida and Cameroon's President Biya were far too occupied with their shared experiences of the difficulties of "democratization" to allow the possession of a few fishing villages to stand in the way of good neighbourliness.

The joint commission was reconvened for August 1993 and talked of the need for a final and definitive settlement, in a communiqué which was full of harmony and promises of joint ventures. By now, of course, Babangida was approaching the end of his rule, and he stepped down on 26 August in favour of an interim ad-

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ministration under the nominal leadership of Ernest Shonekan. A period of grave domestic instability followed, culminating on 17 November with the announcement that Shonekan had been replaced by his deputy, General Sani Abacha.

One can only speculate whether it was this change in the leadership, and the firm re-entrenchment of the soldiers at the head of affairs that triggered the next moves on Bakassi. In any event, on 21 December 1993, a battalion of Nigerian troops occupied Diamant and Jabane, two islands on the peninsula. The Nigerians subsequently advanced a number of contradictory explanations for their apparently provocative action. According to one official version they had sent troops to the border following incidents in which a number of villagers had been killed by Cameroonian gendarmes. Another official submission maintained that the soldiers had been despatched to avoid clashes in the area between peoples from Cross River and Akwa Ibom states, both of which are also pressing their claims to Bakassi under Nigerian jurisdiction.

By 13 January 1994, the joint commission was again in session, but by the end of the month the fishing communities were bombarding Calabar and Abuja with requests for assistance against the Cameroonians, and early in February some 18 000 fled into Cross River state.

### **Guns at Bakassi**

A number of official visits were exchanged between the two countries in January and February 1994, but Nigeria was evidently also reinforcing its presence in the area, and on 18 February the Cameroonians claimed to have come under concerted attack as Nigerian forces attempted to cut off Bakassi from the mainland. Biya immediately announced that he was appealing to the UN Security Council, the International Court of Justice and the OAU. Cameroon intended to use these international bodies to confirm its ownership of Bakassi as reflected in the Anglo-German Agreement of 1913, the 1961 referendum and the Maroua Declaration of 1975.

Nigeria's government expressed surprise that Cameroon should seek to internationalize the conflict, a theme which has been repeated until today. Nigeria, perhaps conscious that its legal title to the disputed territory

was far weaker than a claim based on the Nigerian provenance of most of Bakassi's population, sought to settle the matter bilaterally, where Nigeria's overwhelming military and economic clout could also be expected to influence matters.

Cameroon was only too aware that its 12 000-strong armed forces would be no match for Nigeria's army of 80 000, and further angered the Nigerians by seeking to offset this military imbalance by appealing to France for assistance in terms of the two countries' defence agreement of 1974. The arrival of a French frigate in Douala on a courtesy call, and the holding of Franco-Beninoise manoeuvres early in March 1994, created a great deal of excitement in the Nigerian press, outraged that France was encouraging Cameroon in its provocative behaviour.

In fact, the French government found itself in a difficult position. It had recently shocked Francophone Africa by forcing a 50% devaluation of the CFA franc, the defence of which had hitherto symbolized France's commitment to its ex-colonies, but was now proving too expensive to sustain. Paris could hardly afford to confirm Francophone Africa's fears of impending desertion by refusing moral support to Cameroon, a country it had continued to provide with aid even after Biya's cynical electoral manipulations had alienated other donors.

French commercial interests were alarmed at the Nigerian press onslaught. There are some 130 French companies doing business in Nigeria, some of them in the immensely profitable oil and gas sector. Under Babangida's rule they had done particularly well, for the general was something of a Francophile, with property in that country, and had received a measure of diplomatic support from Paris in return for his favours to French energy interests. General Abacha and his advisors were far less sympathetic to France, which many saw as the principal historic obstacle to Nigeria's regional hegemony. Suddenly the French found themselves excluded from the most lucrative oil-lifting contracts. Nevertheless, Nigeria remains the long-term prize for companies such as Elf-Aquitaine, with production of crude set to expand from the current 2 million b/d, and gasfields awaiting investment and exploitation. Even were Cameroon to secure Bakassi and its energy resources, there is no way that this could compensate for exclusion from the

Nigerian market. In any event, the escalation of hostilities in the area could easily lead to the mutual destruction of vulnerable oil installations, hardly a prospect appealing to the oil majors.

Faced with this conundrum, Paris apparently decided to send a small team of military advisers to Cameroon, and made available a token aerial component. This was probably as much to compel Biya to exercise restraint, and to keep a watch on the situation, though the Nigerians persisted in accusing France of sending numerous bodies of troops, especially once Nigerian military reverses required explanation.

### **Assault on the summit**

Diplomatic exchanges continued through March 1994, raising hopes in Nigeria that a summit could be arranged between the two presidents. Nigeria, however, found unacceptable the Cameroonian demand that it must first withdraw its forces from the peninsula. The OAU was now called in, and in April 1994 a fact-finding mission visited both countries. Cameroon persisted in basing its claim upon the treaties and agreements since 1913, while Nigeria emphasized the need to consult the inhabitants of the peninsula, a ploy denounced from Yaoundé, which pointed out that so many Nigerians were living in other West African states as to render none of the latter immune to attempted annexation on the grounds now being proposed.

While the diplomatic posturing and public relations exercise continued, desultory fighting broke out again in May, and Togo's President Eyadéma began serious attempts to mediate, probably encouraged from Paris, where Biya made his appearance at the end of the month. A week later Cameroon, with French assistance, again approached the International Court of Justice at the Hague.

By mid-June 1994 Togolese mediation appeared to be bearing fruit, and a rare moment of reconciliation between Biya and Abacha was engineered at the Tunis summit of the OAU. There were undertakings to meet again in Lomé, and the two countries' foreign ministers met in Kara, Togo, for preparatory talks. Yet while Nigeria studied the Togolese proposals for a settlement, there was still no sign of the promised summit. Within Nigeria itself, the security situation had deteriorated alarmingly fol-

lowing the arrest of Moshood Abiola, though Nigerian officials maintained that it was the need to prepare for the Ecowas summit in July that caused the postponement of the Biya-Abacha meeting and not the domestic unrest.

Attention now shifted to the preparation of cases for presentation in the Hague, and on 16 March 1995 Cameroon presented a dossier of 617 pages and archival documents to the Court. Nigeria now had nine months in which to prepare its response. The remainder of the year passed relatively quietly on Bakassi, with only one report of military clashes, in August. In the international arena Cameroon fared rather better than Nigeria, succeeding in its application to join the Commonwealth, notwithstanding a dubious human rights record. At the same time Nigeria faced world opprobrium following the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues, and found its Commonwealth membership suspended. This isolation would serve to confirm Abuja's strategy of seeking a bilateral or at worst Africa-mediated solution to the Bakassi issue.

On 13 December 1995 Nigeria's submission arrived at the Hague, questioning the competence of the Court to decide a border issue at dispute between two members of the Lake Chad Commission. Before the Court could make a ruling, it was again approached by Cameroon, protesting against a renewed Nigerian offensive in Bakassi on 3/4 February 1996. Cameroon asked the Court to rule on Nigeria's aggression, to demand the withdrawal of forces to positions held before the fighting of 3 February, and the cessation of all military activity to allow the court to gather evidence *in situ*.

Togo now entered the frame again, organizing a meeting between the rival foreign ministers in Kara on 17 February. Here they expressed regret for the incidents earlier in the month, agreed to a ceasefire, and undertook to organize a presidential summit under Eyadéma's auspices later in March. Nigerian military sources were less inclined to take a diplomatic stance, and in response to Cameroon's expressed wish that the Togo initiative of 1994 be followed up, with the mutual withdrawal of forces, said that the situation had changed since then.

Three days later there occurred the most serious outbreak of fighting yet on the peninsula. Cameroon al-

leged that the Nigerians had again attempted to advance from their positions but had been driven off with heavy loss. The customary pleas for restraint were received from the OAU the Security Council and the ICJ. A UN mission was despatched to the region on the ICJ's recommendation, and on 15 March 1996 the Court made an interim ruling. This found that the evidence in support of Cameroon's allegations of Nigerian aggression was contradictory and insufficient for a categorical ruling to be made. Nigeria promptly hailed this as a victory. The other parts of the ruling, that both sides withdraw from positions occupied since 3 February and that the ceasefire agreed at Kara be observed, were simply noted.

Barely a month later, between 21 and 24 April, the fighting began again in earnest. Both sides accused the other of aggression, and of using heavy mortar bombardments and even helicopter gunships. Reports at the time spoke of a total Nigerian deployment along the front of 2 300 troops, with another 3 000 in reserve and 4 000 at the rear in Calabar. Cameroon was said to have deployed 500 troops in the territory. France now began to press urgently for restraint, and the arrival of the UN mission in mid-May seems to have persuaded both combatants to greater discretion.

There were indications, though, that despite a numerical superiority, indeed perhaps because of that superiority, Nigerian logistical services were unable to cope with supplying the frontline forces in the difficult terrain in which they were deployed. As a result a number of Nigerian troops appear to have died of thirst and starvation, and in mid-May some 80 Nigerians, isolated from their comrades, surrendered to Cameroonian forces to avoid a similar fate.

With military matters apparently moving in his favour, Biya was willing to heed Paris's calls for magnanimity, and sent a personal invitation to Abacha to attend the OAU summit in Yaoundé in July. The UN mission now announced that the two leaders would shortly hold their long-awaited summit in Togo, though neither capital confirmed this. Nevertheless the assumption in some quarters was that a summit would be convened in Kara, Togo, on 20 June. In the event the Cameroonian delegation never ar-

rived, and Yaoundé denied any knowledge of the arrangement, wondering what purpose such a meeting could serve while judgement was still awaited from the Hague.

On 7 July Nigeria issued a strong warning that Cameroon was preparing an offensive, though this was discounted by most observers as providing the necessary excuse for Abacha to avoid travelling to Cameroon for the OAU summit the following day.

By the end of September, matters still seemed no nearer solution. The ICJ had announced no new findings, and a UN mission to the region proved to have a goodwill rather than fact-finding brief. Cameroon was showing increasing signs of confidence, however, dismissing as pure fabrication Nigerian accusations that it was preparing an offensive, and calling for a mutual military withdrawal from the peninsula.

### Stalemate?

Biya has behaved himself according to Paris, and his opposition has been muted by his defence of Cameroonian sovereignty. How Abacha will react should the ICJ's decision go against Nigeria is another matter. There has been no denial of speculation that he intends to stand as a candidate in the next presidential elections, thus extending his rule as a "civilian", in the Rawlings manner. Should this indeed be his intention, the damage of a public humiliation in Bakassi would do incalculable damage, not least within the armed forces themselves.

Whatever the final outcome of this contest, if there is one – though, in economic terms, Cameroon needs it rather more urgently than Nigeria – it seems most unlikely that the people of Bakassi will count among the winners. Once a judicial or diplomatic settlement is reached establishing sovereignty over the peninsula, the entire region of Bakassi and its offshore waters will be opened to untrammelled exploration and exploitation by the oil companies. Bearing in mind the fate of other politically impotent communities such as those of Ogoniland, it would indeed be tragic if the people of Bakassi eventually came to reflect upon the days when the worst they had to fear in their harsh lives was the isolated depredations of the Cameroonian gendarmerie.

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# BOOKSHELF

- **Between liberalization and oppression: The politics of structural adjustment** edited by Thandika Mkandawire and Adebayo Olukoshi. Oxford: CODESRIA, 1995. 430 pp. ISBN 2 86978 053 2

No one can fail to be aware of the incredible impact that the IMF and the World Bank have had on Africa. Their structural adjustment programmes were deliberately designed to shock African economies into free market reform and ensuing stability. But when "getting the prices right" first swamped the World Bank's economic plans in the early 1980s, few bothered to analyse the politics of a reform package whose immediate impact was violent and unsettling.

While Africa has come a long way since then, the goal of market reform must be as important as the task of understanding the politics of unleashing the forces of the market. Not least, is the question of democratization, which the Bank itself now attempts to force through with loan conditions.

This book is the culmination of intense debate by African authors across the continent. Three sections make up a comprehensive analysis of adjustment regimes, their perspectives and the political context in which they have survived, or not. Country case studies in both Anglophone and Francophone Africa round up the analysis.

- **The open sore of a continent: A personal narrative of the Nigerian crisis** by Wole Soyinka. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. 170 pp. ISBN 0 19 510557 5

In *The open sore of a continent* Soyinka explores the history and future of Nigeria in a compelling jeremiad that is as intense as it is provocative, learned and wide-ranging. Soyinka argues that "a glance at the mildewed tapestry of the stubbornly unfinished national edifice is neces-

sary" to explain where Nigeria can go next. He traces the growth of Nigeria as a player in the world economy, from the corrupt regime of Babangida through the civil war occasioned by the secession of Biafra under the leadership of Chief Odemegwu Ojukwu, the lameduck reign of Ernest Sonekan, and the coup led by General Sani Abacha.

In the process of elucidating the Nigerian crisis, Soyinka opens readers to the broader questions of nationhood, identity and the general state of African culture and politics at the end of the twentieth century. He addresses such questions as: How do we define a nation: is it simply a condition of the collective mind? Is it Geography, or is it a bond that transcends accidents of mountain, river and valley? How do these varying definitions of nationhood impact on the people who live under them? Soyinka concludes with a resounding call for international attention to this question, declaring that we must address the issue of nationhood to prevent further religious mandates and calls for ethnic purity of the sort that have turned Algeria, Rwanda, Bosnia and Sri Lanka into killing fields.

- **Transforming capitalism and patriarchy: Gender and development in Africa** by April A Gordon. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996. 219 pp. ISBN 1 55587 629 3

Using insights from feminist theory and political economy, Gordon examines the implications for women of current economic and political reform efforts in Africa.

Much of the work on women in Africa argues that patriarchy and capitalism have collaborated in the exploitation and control of women to support dependent capitalist development; therefore, both are antithetical to the interests of women. Dependent capitalist development, however, has been a failure. And now, Gordon contends, the interests

of patriarchy – in its current form in Africa – and capitalism no longer coincide. Further capitalist expansion requires improving the status of women, who now have a chance to improve their opportunities and alter patriarchal structures.

Nevertheless, the mutuality of capitalist and feminist interests is only partial. Gordon points out that if women are to avoid merely substituting one form of patriarchy for another (ie that typical of Western capitalist societies), they must develop new strategies and alliances to shape a future beyond dependent capitalist and patriarchal inequalities.

■ **The legal status of women and poverty in Tanzania** by Magdalena K Rwebangira. Research report no 100. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1996. 58 pp. ISBN 9 17106 391 9

This paper was originally written as part of the background paper on poverty assessment and presented at a workshop organized by the Government of Tanzania and the World Bank in Arusha 14–20 May 1995.

The objectives of the study have been to analyse and describe how the legal framework, social practices and attitudes in Tanzania differentiate between women and men and what relation such differences have on the poverty situation. The study also identifies expected legal changes as well as changes needed but not yet decided and the future impacts of these changes on poverty development.

## Book reviews

**Transcending the legacy: Children in the new Southern Africa** by J Balch, D Cammach, P Johnson and R Morgan (eds). Amsterdam: AEI, SARDC, Unicef, 1995, 242pp. ISBN 90-72458-45-1

Nelson Mandela's forward to this book begins thus:

We in southern Africa are building a new future. And that future belongs to our children. We have begun to make the decisions and the changes which will ensure that their lives are better than ours, and that their future is full of hope instead of hardship. But there is a long road ahead.

I would like to lift four points of emphasis from this quote and relate them to the overall thrust and the content of the book. The first is an emphasis on "southern Africa" as a region. The second is its "children". Third is an emphasis on the beginnings of reconstructive "change". Fourth is the emphasis on "hope", and fifth is the "long road". Each of these is relevant to a review of the book as a whole.

The book is the product of a collaborative effort between the Africa-European Institute (Amsterdam), the Southern Africa Research and Documentation Centre (Harare) and the Eastern and Southern African Regional Office of Unicef (Nairobi). It focuses on countries in the Southern African Development Community, and apart from papers which address issues and developments in the region as a whole, there are specific contributions from Angola, Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. It is divided into five parts, each of which addresses key issues in relation to children and society: education, physical health; involvement of communities and civil society; women and children's rights and rehabilitation; and children and the economy.

The emphasis on "Southern Africa" is valuable in a number of important ways. It points up commonalities on a range of issues from health to the position of women and children in society; it underlines interdependencies in the region, whether economic, social or academic; and it indicates a shared concern with social reconstruction, if the children of the whole region are to have a "better future". Most important, in my view, is the emphasis on shared understanding. With commonalities related to emergence from the colonial past, to social and economic realities, to cultural frameworks, so much can be learned from each other in this region which we are unlikely to learn, for example, from more distant social contexts and experience. The papers in this book represent a significant shift in this awareness and a very real contribution to the pool of information and understanding which is beginning to develop in relation to the region. "Transcending the legacy of apartheid" – implied in the title and explicitly developed in the editorial introduction – comes across as a little too forced as a metaphor for the region as a whole. Although destabilization in the region was undoubtedly related to the past apartheid government in South Africa, and although transcending the legacy of apartheid remains a central and specific

issue for those in South Africa, the struggle to emerge from colonialism, in its *variety* of forms, and to deal with the complexity of current realities, is the more common thread which is emphasized, and genuinely emerges, from papers across the region.

It is somewhat redundant to pick up on the theme of “children” as the book is explicitly directed that way. Nevertheless, the emphasis is still important. As Nelson Mandela states, the “future belongs to our children”. What this book contributes, in particular, is a focus on different dimensions and interdisciplinary insights – represented in its five parts – all of which relate to both the plight of children, and possible solutions to the social and structural issues involved. Each dimension is critical.

The emphasis on reconstructive “change” emerges in various ways. As a unifying theme for the region, it is epitomized in political events which have dramatically transformed – or are transforming – a number of countries in the region since the 1980s. It emerges most clearly in a shift in focus from a preoccupation with conflict to a concern with reconstruction. The focus on children in this process of reconstruction is both poignant and urgent. In most countries in the region – as the statistics demonstrate – children have, in a variety of ways, been placed at great risk. The impetus for this change is timely and the book contributes to our understanding of how it might be maintained.

If reconstructive change is to be maintained, “hope” is essential. For different readers, different dimensions of hope might be kindled through this book. In my reading of it, the strongest dimension of hope emerged through the description of community oriented experiences and approaches which have really worked in different countries in the region, including experiences from Zimbabwe, Botswana and Tanzania. The sense of people owning, and gaining greater control of their own issues and resources, appears to be a vital – and very possible – ingredient in the development of the region.

Finally, that the whole process involves walking a “long road” is a sobering but ultimately salutary awareness. As emphasized by a number of papers, the extent and depth of some of the child-related issues facing the region is daunting. Awareness of the

“long road” helps to put these issues in a time perspective. The evolution of solutions, rather than instant cures, is what we must look to. The thrust of this book, and individual papers within it, most certainly contribute to such a regional evolution of solutions.

Professor David Donald  
*Education Faculty*  
*University of Cape Town*

***Childhood: A Global Journal of Child Research***, vol 3, no 2, May 1996. ISSN 0907-5682. “Children out of place: Special issue on working and street children” by Mark Connelly and Judith Ennew, (eds), London: Sage, 1996, pp 131-296.

This collection of fifteen articles arose from a workshop organized by the Norwegian Centre for Child Research. The editors and some of the authors point to the growing number of people interested in street children, and the lack of awareness of the growing body of research data that is being produced throughout the world. F Bemak’s observation (p 149) is to the point: “... we have a wide array of programs that have no central core or basis, other than good intentions”. These need to be combined with knowledge and understanding to produce results.

The volume is a useful compilation of articles from people working with street children throughout the world. Articles range from brief comment of three pages, to fairly substantial accounts of research and projects. There is much basic advice and a useful bibliography at the end. It would be a good place to start for anyone about to embark on research on street children or on any kind of intervention into their lives.

The aim of the workshop was to present ideas and innovations rather than to present results, and the editors had reluctantly to cut the results out of some of the articles in order to save space. This is a pity. Whether we are looking at research methodology or ideas for intervention, results are important to assess the usefulness of the ideas presented. The serious reader will have to move on to some of the fuller literature to find these results.

The focus of much of the volume is on research methodology.

There are several comments on the weakness of survey techniques. There is an interesting account of collecting biomedical information in Nepal (Rachel Baker *et al*); but I am left wondering whether the limited data acquired is worth the time and the expense, and particularly the imposition on the children. Participatory and child-centred techniques are clearly now acceptable, and there are some useful tips by Firew Kefyalew on ways of achieving the participation of the children in the research process. Related to this is the need to respect children’s preference for the streets, and to provide possibilities for care on the streets rather than forcing them into institutions (Einar Hanssen).

Some of the papers point to the need to break down stereotypes of street children. Street children often experience less stress, and are better nourished, than children in slums and rural areas (Henk van Beers, p 196). Children can use the access to other domains (Ricardo Luccini, p 241). But for the most part, we do not meet the children in this volume.

Luccini also points out that urban children may be worse off than their rural counterparts, and Fabio Dallape in the concluding article points to the need to see street children in the broader context of urban poverty and an unjust distribution of resources. He points to the problem in helping a few to escape an impoverished environment rather than encouraging the community to change the environment. When children come onto the streets, they attract attention, which can be used to draw attention to the needs of the communities they come from.

Overall, the volume is a useful introduction to work on and with street children. It raises a number of useful ideas. But the reader will need to move on to other sources for more detailed information and argument.

Prof M C Bourdillon  
*Department of Sociology*  
*University of Zimbabwe*

**“Street and Working Children: A Guide to Planning” (Development Manual 4)** by Judith Ennew. London: Save the Children, 1995. 184p.

This is a useful book, written by an anthropologist with extensive experience in working for children. It uses



Alone

Photo: Street-wise collection (Pretoria Branch)

the findings of much academic research to provide practical guidance for non-academics working with children in a variety of ways. The author is very well informed, and presents her ideas systematically and clearly.

An opening chapter on "Understanding street and working children" seeks to challenge the reader's presuppositions about childhood. It emphasizes the need to consult children about their needs and wishes: a theme throughout the book is the need to treat children with respect. It ends, as do nearly all of the chapters, with a series of questions, designed to make readers clarify their own ideas about their aims in working with these children.

There follow two chapters on research. The first covers existing material, and has suggestions on how to side-step the suspicions of officials who may be wary of making information available. The second covers first-hand research among children. This includes suggestions on how to involve the children in the research, pointing out that although they are often overlooked, they can be reliable collectors and recorders of data.

The longest chapter is on project options. It includes useful comments on the provision of shelter, education, vocational training and income generation, working with the communities from which the children come. The author points out a number of common needs of street and working children, including health problems that may be peculiar to their situation. An important aspect of this chapter is its warnings about the numerous ways in which projects can go astray.

There is a chapter on organizing human resources, including tips on how to deal with authorities. A final chapter deals with common problems encountered in work with street children, and suggested solutions.

The author comments on the dangers of creating emotional or other kinds of dependency in the children; on dealing with authorities and the law; on accidents and death; and even funding (I question the author's aversion to begging). The book ends with four practical appendices: a checklist and flow chart for planning; a number of observation charts to suggest how children's activities may be recorded; a valuable annotated guide to currently available publications by other authors; and addresses of useful contacts in various countries.

Each chapter points to common pitfalls, and provides suggestions for overcoming them. There are numerous boxes containing apt quotations and vignettes from published studies of street children, to illustrate and give life to the points made in the text. Each of the substantial chapters ends with a series of questions to ask. Each chapter can be used independently of the others.

Every organization dealing with street and working children should have a copy of this very useful volume. The copyright allows reproduction for teaching purposes (but not for sale).

M F C Bourdillon  
*Department of Sociology*  
*University of Zimbabwe*



*Dr Denis Venter,  
Executive Director and  
Head of Academic  
Programmes, Africa  
Institute of South Africa*

## Africa Institute

### Institute Council

At an Annual General Members' Meeting on 12 September 1996, **Dr Enos Mabuza** (Mabuza & Associates) and **Mr Noam Pines** (University of the Witwatersrand) were elected by members to fill the vacancies on the Institute Council caused by the retirement (on rotation) of Mr Junior Potloane and Ms Thami Tisani.

**Dr Sipho Buthelezi** (University of Fort Hare) was nominated as a representative of the Committee of University Principals (CUP), to take the place of Professor Ephraim Mokgokong. At the first Council Meeting following the AGM, **Mr Bongani Khumalo** (Eskom) was elected Chairman of the Institute for the term 1996 to 1998. The other members of the Institute's Council are: **Professor Charles Dlamini** (University of Zululand), **Professor Tom Lodge** (University of the Witwatersrand), **Dr Subithra Moodley-Moore** (University of Stellenbosch), **Dr Chris Scheffer** (Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology), **Mr Bob Tucker** (E-Bank), and **Professor Marinus Wiechers** (University of South Africa).

### Seminars and visiting scholars

Several meetings were held in the Institute's ongoing series of African studies seminars: **Dr M Crawford Young** (Professor of Political Science, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Wisconsin, USA), a well-known figure in African studies and in the teaching of political science in the United States, conducted a public seminar on "Ethnic conflict and pluralism in Africa" on 12 July 1996; **Dr Chester Crocker** (former US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, and Professor of Diplomacy, Georgetown University, Washington, DC), who played a significant role in the Namibian and Angola peace initiatives in the 1980s, addressed a meeting on 15 July 1996 on "Prospects for peacemaking in Africa"; and **Dr Louis A Picard**

(Professor of Political Science, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA) gave a talk on 1 August 1996 on "The states within the state: Institutional transformation and governance in a post-election South Africa".

**Professor Ahmad Abdel-Halim Mohammad Aly** (Department of Economics, Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt) was at the Institute from 3 to 31 August 1996 on a visiting foreign research fellowship, funded by the Centre for Science Development (CSD) at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). While at the Institute, he conducted research on "Economic cooperation and development in Africa", and presented lectures and seminars at a number of tertiary education and research institutions in the country. Presentations at the Institute were an internal seminar on "Prospects for, and the challenges of, promoting intra-African trade: An Egyptian perspective" on 13 August 1996; and a public seminar on "Can South Africa boost regional integration in Africa" on 20 August 1996. Professor Aly is the author of *Economic cooperation in Africa: In search of direction* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Colorado, 1994).

During September 1996, two academics paid brief visits to the Institute: **Professor Richard Haines** (Department of Sociology, University of Port Elizabeth) did research on industrialization policies in Southern Africa; and **Dr Heather Deegan** (Senior Lecturer in Comparative Politics, School of History and Politics, Middlesex University, London, UK) researched the role of civil society in South African politics. Although both of them were temporarily attached to the Institute as visiting research fellows, their visits were funded from private sources. Dr Deegan also gave a public presentation on "Islam and Africa: An alternative development agenda" on 19 September 1996. In her talk, she examined the Islamic development agenda which is presented by Middle Eastern countries as an alternative programme for African states. This



development strategy includes not only religious instruction, but also political and economic prescriptions which, in part, mirror those of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Also during September 1996, **Dr Chris Bakwasegha** (Head of the Conflict Management Division, Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, Organization of African Unity (OAU), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia) paid a highly successful visit to the Institute. The assistance of the Institute was offered to the OAU Conflict Management Centre in the compilation of profiles on African countries, and a database on African conflict situations.

## Conferences, study/liason visits abroad, lectures

**Mr Kenneth Kotelo** (Head of Communications at the Africa Institute) attended an information seminar on "Promotion of regional cooperation by the European Union" in Brussels, Belgium from 21 to 28 September 1996, co-sponsored by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the European Union (EU). Participants had extensive discussions with members of the European Parliament and with EU officials.

**Mr Richard Cornwell** (Head of Current Affairs at the Africa Institute) also delivered a number of presentations: on 29 June 1996 he lectured on "The politics of development in Southern Africa", to the Unisa/Thutong students in Pretoria; on 22 July 1996 he delivered lectures on "Superpower interests in Africa", "RSA in Africa" and "Political tendencies in Africa" at the Naval Staff Course in Muizenberg; on 1 August 1996 he delivered a lecture on "Development challenges in Africa" to students and staff in the Sociology Department, University of Port Elizabeth and to teachers and students at Etembeni Community College, Port Elizabeth; and on 15 August 1996 he spoke on "Piecing together the Nigerian puzzle: Is there a policy for South Africa?" at a meeting of the Pretoria branch of the South African Institute of International Affairs.

At the invitation of the Brazilian government, **Dr Denis Venter** (Executive Director and Head of Aca-

demie Programmes) paid a brief visit to Brazil from 22 to 29 September 1996. He participated in the "Brazil-South Africa seminar", organized by the International Relations Research Institute of the Brazilian Foreign Ministry on 24 and 25 September 1996 in Rio de Janeiro. This was in preparation for the state visit by the Brazilian President, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, to "South Africa later in the year. At the seminar, Dr Venter presented a paper on South Africa, Brazil and South Atlantic security: Towards a zone of peace and cooperation in the South Atlantic".

Dr Venter has also been invited to spend the period from 9 October to 21 November 1996 on a visiting research fellowship (in terms of a mutual cooperation agreement) at the Afrika-Studiecentrum, Leiden, The Netherlands. During his sojourn in Leiden, he will conduct research for a book entitled *Malawi: From one-party rule to political pluralism*, give a seminar in the Centre for African Studies, University of Copenhagen, Denmark, and speak at a meeting of the Southern Africa Study Group, Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, UK. He will also present a paper at the Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association in San Francisco on 25 November 1996.

## Publications

**Denis Venter** published a chapter on "Africa and the new world order: From marginalization to regeneration?", in N N Vohra and K Mathews (eds), *Africa, India and South-South Cooperation*, New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1996; and "Regional security in sub-Saharan Africa", in *Africa Insight*, vol 26, no 2, 1996.

**Richard Cornwell** published "Suid-Afrika en Afrika" in *Wêreldspektrum Boek van die Jaar*, Cape Town: Pat Lubbe Publikasies, 1996.

**Pieter Esterhuysen** (Head of Publications) published "Suid-Afrika se bure" in *Wêreldspektrum Boek van die Jaar*, Cape Town: Pat Lubbe Publications, 1996; and the *Africa Map and Fact Sheet*, which form part of the Institute's educational publications services. **Madeline Lass** published "Die vrou in Afrika" in *Wêreldspektrum Boek van die Jaar*, Cape Town: Pat Lubbe Publications, 1996.

## Award

A fellow of the Institute, **Dr Thandika Mkandawire** (until recently Executive Secretary, Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (Codesria), Dakar Senegal), has been nominated by the Board of Directors of the US African Studies Association for the 50th Anniversary Distinguished Fullbright Fellowship.

## African studies

### Forthcoming conferences/seminars/lectures

The **Southern African Friends of Cambridge University** and the **South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA)**, are hosting the second annual lecture of the Cambridge Southern Africa Lecture Series at Jan Smuts House, Braamfontein, Johannesburg on 5 November 1996. The speaker will be Professor Njabulo S Ndebele, Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of the North and the subject of his address is "Creative instability: The case of the South African higher education system". For more information, contact Patricia Jacobs, South African Institute of International Affairs, P O Box 31596, Braamfontein 2017, Johannesburg; tel: 27-11-339-2021; fax: 27-11-339-2154.

A conference on "Humanitarian support operations: The challenge", organized by the **Institute for Defence Policy (IDP)**, Midrand, the **Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung**, and the **University of South Africa (Unisa)**, Pretoria, in cooperation with the **South African Medical Service**, will be held on 5 November 1996 in the Senate Hall, Theo van Wijk Building, Unisa, Pretoria. For further details, contact Nicola Steyn, Institute for Defence Policy, P O Box 4167, Halfway House 1685, Midrand; tel: 27-11-315-7096; fax: 27-11-315-7099.

The "Foreign minister's annual address", presented by Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad on behalf of Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo, will take place at the **South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA)**, Johannesburg on 7 November 1996. For more information, contact Patricia Jacobs, South African

Institute of International Affairs,  
P O Box 31596, Braamfontein 2017,  
Johannesburg; tel: 27-11-339-2021;  
fax: 27-11-339-2154.

A public seminar on "South Africa and Europe: Potential for a new partnership", to be addressed by Mr Neil van Heerden, Executive Director of the South Africa Foundation, Johannesburg and former South African Ambassador to the European Union in Brussels, will be held at the **Africa Institute of South Africa**, Pretoria on 19 November 1996. For further details, contact Elize van As, Africa Institute, P O Box 630, Pretoria 0001; tel: 27-12-328-6970; fax: 27-12-323-8153; e-mail: africain@iafrica.com

### Call for papers

The biennial conference of the **South African Historical Society** on "Land and social problems in the history of South Africa" will take place at the **University of Pretoria** from 5 to 9 July 1997. For more information, contact Cobus Ferreira, Secretary, South African Historical Society, c/o Department of History and Cultural History, University of Pretoria, Pretoria 0002; fax: 27-12-420-2698; e-mail: vnickerk@libarts.up.ac.za

The 5th triennial international conference on oral tradition will be hosted by the **Centre for Oral Studies**, University of Natal, Durban, and will take place in the Howard College Theatre, University of Natal from 16 to 18 July 1997 on the theme: "Oral tradition and its performance: Beyond the verbal/non-verbal divide". Papers are invited on any aspect of cultural heritage and its enactment: cultural heritage meaning all traditional orally delivered forms of art and ritual, and all forms of art and rites acquired through imitation, such as music, costumes, dances, choreography, wall-paintings, drums, engravings, carvings, decorations, weaving, effigies, beadwork, masks, body-adornments, body paintings, icons, landscaping, codes of gestures, attitudes and conduct, and the human voice (solo and in chorus); and enactment comprising gestural, aural and oral performance, as well as the study of performers, participants and audience. Particular attention should be paid to the context of texts – text being used in the broadest sense of the term, referring to all repositories of meaning. Performances or recordings in any form are invited. The closing date for submission of titles

and abstracts is 31 March 1997. For more information, contact Professor E Sienaert, Director, Centre for Oral Studies, University of Natal, Private Bag X10, Dalbridge 4014, Durban; tel/fax: 27-031-260-3043; e-mail: sienaert@mtb.und.ac.za

The **Royal African Society** is to hold its 11th biennial conference on "Partnership in Africa's economic development" from 28 to 30 September 1997. For further details, contact the Honorary Secretary, Royal African Society, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, Russel Square, London WC1H 0XG, UK; tel: 44-171-323-6253; fax: 44-171-436-3844.

### Fellowships

Applications for the **Social Science Research Council-MacArthur Foundation Fellowships on Peace and Security in a Changing World** are awaited until 15 November 1996. For more information, contact the Social Science Research Council, Program on International Peace and Security, 810 7th Avenue, New York, NY 10019; tel: 1-212-377-2700; fax: 1-212-377-2727.

# Correspondence

*Dr Elaine Windrich, visiting scholar, Africa Studies Center, Stanford University, comments on Prof Patrick Chabal's article, "The curse of war in Angola and Mozambique: Lusophone African decolonization in historical perspective", which appeared in Africa Insight, vol 26, no 1, 1996:*

May I call your attention to some of the statements ... which I found at best superficial and at worst misleading? While these statements do not affect the general thrust of the article, with which I mainly agree, they could influence future writers on this subject to repeat them as "conventional wisdom".

1 On the elections in Angola: the author writes that "contrary to expectations, they returned a majority for the government in power" (p 5). But whose "expectations"? Obviously, the US observer mission in Luanda predicted a Unita victory because the Bush Administration (through the CIA) were financing the Unita campaign. Those who believed them were similarly duped. But it soon became obvious during the campaign (even to Savimbi's South African advisers) that Angolan voters, after 30 years of war, were not likely to elect the party which had inflicted death and destruction on the Angolan people in partnership with an apartheid regime.

2 On the elections and war: The author writes: "The leader of the opposition refused the electoral verdict. War started again" (p 5). Savimbi was not then or now "leader of the opposition". Unita was one of 17 parties opposed to the MPLA, but the only one referred to as "the armed opposition". Savimbi may now be aspiring to that title.

To write that "War started again" without clearly specifying that only Savimbi/Unita were responsible for starting it leaves the impression that the war was something that just happened, like an "act of God".

3 On the Lusaka Protocol of November 1994: It is very misleading to write that it was signed "(But not by the two leaders)" (p 5) because President dos Santos had every intention of signing it until Savimbi refused to do so and sent the Unita party secretary in his place, thus obliging dos Santos to respond in kind.

It is also misleading to describe the Lusaka Protocol as an agreement between government and opposition "to work together to allow the long-delayed second round of the presidential election to be held" (p 5). This is by far one of the least important provisions, since elections are by mutual agreement postponed indefinitely. The Protocol is mainly about the disarming of Unita troops, the integration of about half of them into the Angolan national army and the appointment of Unita officials to all levels of government.

4 On violence in Africa: The author writes that "Although there had been in Africa some anti-colonial violence (Cameroon, Kenya, Congo) the Lusophone experience of armed struggle was essentially new" (p 6). But what about the armed struggles pursued by Zanu and Zapu in Zimbabwe, Swapo in Namibia, EPLF in Eritrea, the ANC and PAC in South Africa, all in the same period?

5 What is the meaning or distinction between "the Lusophone anti-nationalist wars" (p 6) and the "Lusophone nationalist wars"? (p 7).

6 Also on violence: The author writes: "Savimbi's notion that he can claim power at the barrel of the gun is similarly the outcome of a political process where violence has become endemic" (p 8). But if violence had become "endemic", Savimbi was the cause of it, not a passive victim of "a political process".

7 The discussion of the failure of "socialism" or "command economies" (pp 10-12) does not take into

account the significance of the Portuguese exodus (and a scorched earth one at that) which removed the skills necessary to make any economic system work. Without entrepreneurs free enterprise could not flourish; without trained personnel a command economy could not be successfully implemented.

In the reference notes (p 12): While David Birmingham's *Frontline Nationalism in Angola and Mozambique* is the only source described as "partial", Fred Bridgland's "official biography" of Savimbi escapes this or any other such classification. No sources are cited for the elections or peace agreements, although in the 42 references over a third of them are to the author's own works, one of them several times.

*Patrick Chabal, Professor and Head of the Department of Lusophone African Studies at King's College London, and Research Fellow of the Africa Institute of South Africa, replies:*

- 1 The expectations that Unita would win were widespread at the beginning of the electoral campaign and were fuelled by some of the "polls" conducted at that time which indicated a potential Unita victory. As the campaign went on, however, Unita started losing ground.
- 2 Given the percentage of the votes received by Unita in the legislative elections (34%) and that received by Savimbi in the first round of the presidential elections (49,5%), it is beyond question that Savimbi was *de facto* (and in the same way as would apply in any country) the leader of the opposition. The other opposition parties put together only received a minuscule proportion of Unita's vote.
- 3 The Lusaka agreement was **not** signed by the two leaders. The agreement to hold the second round of the elections was part of the Lusaka agreement.
- 4 I was referring here, as any attentive reader would have realized, to violence **before** the beginning of the Lusophone nationalist wars (1961-1964). ANC violence before that date did not compare with the Lusophone nationalist wars.
- 5 This is **obviously** a typographical error: it should have read "anti-colonial wars"!
- 6 No comment.
- 7 No comment.
8. I use "partial" in the sense of "less than complete" as is allowed in the English language.

# New publications from the Africa Institute

## **Southern Africa: Prospects for Economic Development**

Erich Leistner and Richard Cornwell

Now that South Africa and Mauritius have joined the Southern African Development Community (SADC) the subcontinent undoubtedly has better prospects for economic progress than any other part of Africa.

Erich Leistner and Richard Cornwell turn the spotlight on the 12 SADC member states, discussing their prospects for economic development and political stability. Their studies are based on the latest available information on economic policies, production, infrastructures, public and private finance and external economic relations. In addition, overviews of human resources and development are included.

The following countries are examined: Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

These country studies supplement previous Africa Institute publications on regional economic cooperation in Southern Africa by providing essential background material on the individual countries involved.

The book consists of 271 pages (A4 format, soft cover) with simplified monochrome maps of each country.

**Price: R200,00** (incl VAT) US\$100

Single chapters on individual countries can be ordered: R20,00 (US\$10)

## **Democratisation in sub-Saharan Africa: Transitions, elections and prospects for consolidation**

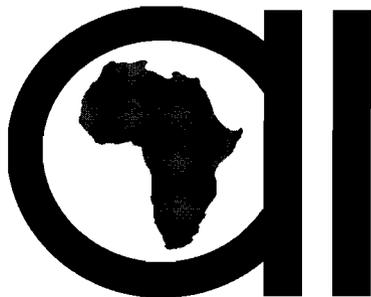
Willie Breytenbach

Are elections sufficient to consolidate emerging democracies? Professor Willie Breytenbach analyses Africa's "second liberation" in the light of its disappointing experience after the first wave of elections in the 1960s. He concludes that the "second liberation" may also prove abortive and considers ways in which democracy might be successfully consolidated.

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