



University of Dundee

Africa Consultation Report for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment on Children in Street Situations

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Africa Consultation Report for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment on Children in Street Situations February – March 2016

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1. Introduction

This report is of the Consultations that took place across Africa for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment on Children in Street Situations, involving participants of the *Growing up on the Streets* (GUOTS) research project. Street-connected children and youth are a highly marginalised group and in fulfilling their right to participate in matters that affect them, listening to their opinions, drawing on their experience and ideas, a much richer understanding of the complexity of their lives positively contributes to policy development.

The children and youth involved in GUOTS are street-connected, spending much if not all of their time on the streets. The majority of children and youth work on the streets. Many live in public shelter – shop fronts or market stalls. In Harare, however, the majority of children and youth live on the streets and in Accra, many children and youth lived in informal settlements prior to government demolitions in 2014. As such, the children and youth involved in GUOTS are extremely marginalised and vulnerable, exposed to violence, exploitation and the harsh realities of street life on a daily basis.

In Africa, consultations with 203 street-connected children and youth took place in:

- Accra, Ghana, 4-6 March 2016
- Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo, 23-25 February 2016
- Harare, Zimbabwe, 9-11 March 2016

The street children and youth's ages ranged from:

- Accra: 12 to 25
- Bukavu: 13 to 21
- Harare: 14 to 26

The Figure shows the balance of female and male participants in all groups. The Table summarises all the participant data.

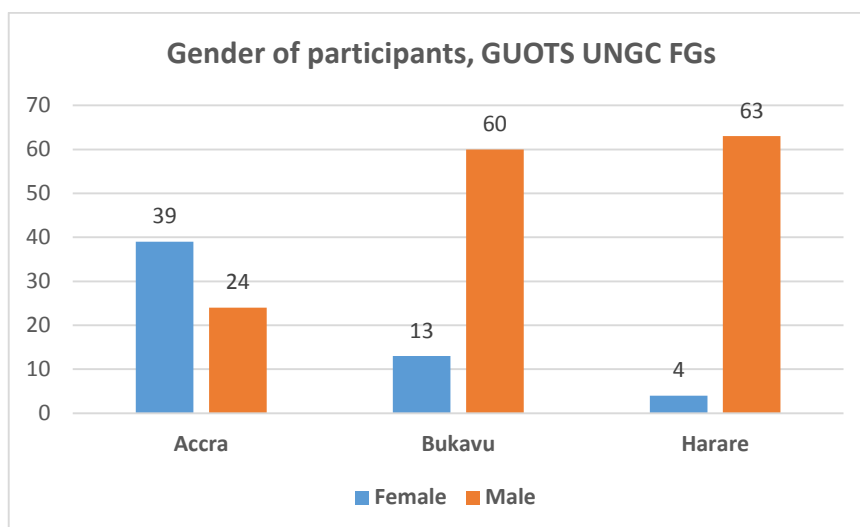


Figure. Gender of all participants, GUOTS Focus Groups in the three cities

	Accra	Bukavu	Harare	Totals
Focus Groups	6	6	6	18
Total participants	63	73	67	203
Female participants	39	13	4	56
Male participants	24	60	63	147
Mean age	20	17	20	(19)

Table. Summary of UNGC Focus Groups in the three cities

GUOTS is a longitudinal, participatory research project that has worked with around 200 street-connected children over a period of three years as they transition from children or teenagers to young adults on the street. All of the participants involved in this Consultation therefore are currently street-connected children, or if over the age of 18, were recently street-connected children and are currently street-connected youth.

Even when legally considered children, i.e., under the age of 18, many children engage in adult behaviours and activities. This is due to their independent status of living and working on the streets, often without family support.

2. Background

2.1 Background to *Growing up on the Streets*

GUOTS is a longitudinal research project, where data collection has been undertaken between 2012 and 2016 with young people in the cities of Accra, Ghana; Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo; and Harare, Zimbabwe. The aim of the research is to understand street-connected children and youth's capabilities on the street in their daily and future lives, in order to improve support in policy and practice to help street children and youth have adult lives that they have reason to value. In each city six young people were trained in basic ethnographic methods, becoming researchers, investigating into their own lives and the lives of 10 young people within their social network. The cohort of 66 young people in each city provides a regular narrative on their lives and contributes to thematic discussions structured around a set of 10 capability indicators, covering: friendship, plans for the future, resilience, access to food, protecting health and wellbeing, building assets (including possessions, education and skills), earning to meet basic needs, play, shelter, and safe movement. The research has been structured to be embedded in the lives of the young participants to avoid disrupting existing social and support networks that young people have established, and rely upon, in their communities. A primarily qualitative approach has been adopted for the research, using ethnographic reporting through weekly interviews by the young researchers, supplemented by thematic focus groups and annual quantitative surveys of participation to establish membership and collect demographic and economic information.

The research is a partnership with young people and local practitioners hosted by non-governmental organisation (NGO) partners. A peer network of expert practitioners reviews the research findings, contributes to and champions the project. Ethical approval was obtained by the University of Dundee, where data capture and analysis takes place, using the coding system established for the project in NVivo, a qualitative data analysis programme, allowing comparison of themes across the three locations. StreetInvest provides programme management support to the research partners and their child safeguarding policy was utilised.

The research framework has provided an opportunity to document everyday life in the three cities at a level of detail that has not been undertaken previously with street children and youth in Africa. It has established a framework and local structures where participants are familiar with the purpose of social research into their lives and experienced in sharing their ideas in a focus group setting.

2.2 Background to the three cities

The experiences of growing up in poverty and the aspirations that young people have for their adult lives are very similar across the cities; what differs are the strategies and responses to specific environmental, political and economic conditions. Street-connected children and youth devise ways to cope in adverse situations where they are unable to obtain access to protection and support, and adapt when situations change. Accra, for example, has large informal settlements and widespread street vending, allowing some young people to earn enough money to rent a shack, or “kiosk”. During the period of research, from June 2015, the city authorities launched a series of demolitions of informal settlements which displaced shack dwellers. The opportunities to vend in Accra mean that many female participants do not engage in prostitution as their main source of income; whereas prostitution is the primary source of income for girls in Bukavu and Harare. For boys, theft is now the primary source of income in Bukavu as, during the period of the research, the city authorities began to actively prevent street children and youth from earning money from washing cars. In Harare, boys earn money by sweeping markets and emptying bins as well as stealing. Boys in Bukavu sleep on verandas or occasionally in shared shacks; girls sleep in bars where they find clients for sex work and some minimal protection from frequent experiences of gang rape on the streets. In Harare, informal shacks or settlements are not tolerated by the authorities, so both male and female street children and youth sleep on the streets or in alleyways with pieces of cardboard as bedding. The effects of the civil war in Bukavu have caused children to connect with the streets, but other causes are also present in Bukavu as in the other two cities, namely parental separation and many families living in poverty.

An in depth examination of the multiple and different situations on the streets are covered in the GUOTS Briefing Papers on [research principles](#), [methodology](#), [shelter](#), [accessing food](#), [work and earnings](#), and the [voices](#) of street children and youth in knowledge exchange events. Further Briefing Papers covering the remaining capabilities are forthcoming; the next being on ‘Safe Movement’, to be published in May 2016.

GUOTS young researchers were provided with training to enable them to participate in local knowledge exchange events held with service providers, advocacy groups and government departments. The [Growing up on the Streets Knowledge Exchange Training Pack](#) was developed from this, and has subsequently been used successfully in March 2016 at the Street Child Congress in Rio de Janeiro, culminating in the 2016 Rio Resolution. Our experience has shown the importance of this type of training to enable the engagement of street children and youth in consultations.

3. Street-connected children and youth's views – an overview

The established focus groups of young researchers and their peer networks were asked to discuss and give their views and opinions on the four issues requested by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for the General Comment on Children in Street Situations:

- The right to freedom of association and assembly (Article 15 UNCRC);
- The right to special protection and assistance for children deprived of a family environment (Article 20 UNCRC);
- The right to an adequate standard of living (Article 27 UNCRC); and
- Developing rights-based, holistic, long-term strategies to prevent children developing strong street connections and to support children in street situations.

Street-connected children and youth in Accra, Bukavu and Harare lead complex lives, facing daily challenges and barriers to their survival.

In these Consultations most of the children and youth recognised a right to be on the street, but articulated the difficulties associated with street life; namely in accessing other rights including the right to have food, water, shelter, access to medical treatment and education and to go home to live with their families. The young people involved in these consultations felt that they had fewer rights and less access to legal protection than children and youth that were not living on the streets. This disparity manifests in their everyday experiences of violence and lack of support from local and national government agencies.

The reasons for connecting with the streets are complex and different for each child. Common experiences however indicate migrating from rural and poverty stricken areas because there is not enough money or food to support the whole family. Maltreatment at home also causes children to move to the street. In Bukavu, the civil war had a significant effect on families and many children were separated from their parents, or in fleeing war, connected to the streets. An appreciation of the varied experiences causing children to connect with the streets aids in understanding the children and youth's approach in responding to the questions put forward in these Consultations.

Freedom to be on the streets, move on the streets and live in peace there were key concerns for the children and youth. This is because the street is their primary means of survival – it is where they work and live; eating, sleeping and socialising there. Given their lack of formal education and hence access to well-paid jobs, street children and youth work in the informal economies; selling goods on the street, washing cars, begging or commercial sex work. For many of the children and youth the street is also where they source food, cook and eat. It is also where they sleep.

And yet, the street is also the site of incessant violence. Children and youth across all three cities reported huge levels of violence, primarily from the police and security forces. Street children and youth are violently removed from the street and beaten up. They are chased away from their sleeping places and therefore often are sleep-deprived. Their businesses are destroyed with police taking their stock and earnings away from them. The excessive violence that they experience, particularly at the hands of the State, deepens their distrust of local State authorities and the government generally.

This violence serves to stigmatise the children and youth, locating them at the margins of society. This is heightened by the minimal family, NGO and government support that they receive. They come to depend on themselves for survival. It is on the streets too that they forge great friendships – supporting one another through hardship, violence, hunger and illness. The support networks that they develop on the streets become family and even if they leave the streets are a constant pull back to street life.

The street children and youth's key recommendations for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment on Children in Street Situations focussed on their right to be on the street – as this is the only place where they can survive – and in making their lives on the street better, creating greater opportunities to develop in life:

- Provision of identity documents to be recognised as citizens and access government services
- Stop police violence so that street-connected children and youth can live in the city without constant harassment
- Street-connected children and youth should have freedom to move in the city and to work there without constant removal or prevention
- The government should create jobs for street-connected children and youth

3.1 The right to freedom of association and assembly (Article 15 UNCRC)

ACCRA

In Accra, children and youth asserted their right to be on the streets, whilst recognising that this right is ambiguous. They stated their freedom to be on the street and to work, moving where they wished, but stated that they do not want to be harassed for being in the wrong place, thus indicating that they can feel out of place on the streets. As such, being on the streets can be understood to be a necessity as much as a choice and is driven by poverty.

- *“We have the right to move within our areas without restrictions”* (A-RA4 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“It is my right to continue to live where I am now, no police or anyone must worry me or sack [remove] me from the place”* (A-RA5 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“When we go to sell, the task force [police] will seize our goods...So they have been worrying us a lot; and that tells us that they want us to go back to our villages”* (A-RA7 Focus Group, Accra)

Life in the children and youth’s home villages is one of extreme poverty and the city provides greater opportunities to work and earn money. Many street children and youth have to work; without the ability to work they struggle to survive:

- *“Everyone has the right to come to the city to hustle [work]. Maybe you are from a poor home if you want to make it in life, you will have to come to the street to live your life”* (A-RA2 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“At home food to eat was sometimes a problem; so I decided to come to Accra and live life here; I have now been able to open a shop for my mother where she sells sundries”* (A-RA3 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“We have the right to work hard so that we can leave the streets”* (A-RA4 Focus Group, Accra)

Not all, however, are solely concerned with working on the streets. Some want to be with their friends there and have fun or benefit from freedom.

- *“It is not everyone who has travelled to Accra because of work that is a hustler; some people have come here because they just want to have fun”* (A-RA7 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“Some of the benefits on the street are sometimes when you are home, you are not hard; or tough; so others can dictate to you; your mother can even decide for you; maybe you know you are not good academically [but] your mother wants you to go to school; but when you come here, you will have your own freedom to do anything you choose to”* (A-RA4 Focus Group, Accra)

The majority earn money through street vending, but the girls also reported sex work as a way to make money:

- *“If I don’t go to work in the night as commercial sex worker...I will not get money for food”* (A-RA8 Focus Group, Accra)

On the streets, however, the children and youth experience discrimination and this extends to the city council task force that takes their business stock and stops them from selling without a licence. These licences, however, are difficult to acquire without sufficient funds and generally the street children and youth cannot afford the licences:

- *“When you try to sell pure water or any other thing the city authorities will be worrying you”* (A-RA2 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“Sometimes they will beat you and you can’t do anything”* (A-RA2 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“These days, even when you go to sleep the task force will be chasing you”* (A-RA3 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“The task force who take licence...asked me to pay for licence...The goods I was selling was not even enough so I had to beg him...When you go to their office you will have to pay 60 Ghanaian Cedis [c.£12]¹; I don’t have that amount of money, if I do I would have bought more soap to sell”* (A-RA8 Focus Group, Accra)

Despite such challenges, there are clear benefits, or reasons why children and youth connect to street life. A key benefit is being free to look after themselves:

- *“I will not be able to feed myself” [if not on the street]* (A-RA2 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“I have been supporting my younger siblings who go to school, so if I should be sacked [removed] from the street my siblings are going to lose their education”* (A-RA2 Focus Group, Accra)

BUKAVU

In Bukavu, children and youth also asserted their right to be on the streets where they live and work. Again, the ability to earn money is essential to their survival:

- *“It is my right to live on the street because I can no longer be able to live in the quarter [formal residential area]”* (B-RA4 Focus Group, Bukavu)
- *“When I am prevented to get into the streets, I am also prevented to earn money for my life”* (B-RA1 Focus Group, Bukavu)

¹ All local currency conversions are to pound sterling

- *“The help I need on the street is to have liberty or freedom to move around without any worries and troubles on the street”* (B-RA2 Focus Group, Bukavu)

They also, however, recognised the rights of children to live at home with their families and off the streets:

- *“The child has the rights to live at home, and the mother has to buy clothes and not wander here and there in the street. The child has the rights to take a bath, to eat well without lacking anything necessary for a child”* (B-RA2 Focus Group, Bukavu)
- *“No one has the right to stay on the street. If there is a way out, one cannot live on the streets. Life is hard and there is no other way out, that’s why one lives on the streets”* (B-RA4 Focus Group, Bukavu)

And some felt that as street children and youth they do not have rights:

- *“[A street child has] no rights because there is no one to give him his rights on the street”* (B-RA4 Focus Group, Bukavu)

The police and security forces prevent the children and youth from being on the streets. They are arrested and put in prison, beaten up, prevented from working and disrupted from sleeping through police disturbance. Furthermore, the police take their money. As they are prevented from working street children and youth sometimes steal to survive. “Thugs”, adults in the community, also prevent them from being on the streets:

- *“[The police and civilians] catch you, beat you, take away the valuables you have got...but they also ‘eat’ [take] them by selling those stolen items and benefit from the money earned from the sale”* (B-RA5 Focus Group, Bukavu)
- *“If I do not steal, I cannot get to eat”* (B-RA2 Focus Group, Bukavu)
- *“If I worked and earned some money and wanted to go to the market...the police prevent me to enter the market. They stop me and snatch my money and let me go my way. When they do that they also steal as I do”* (B-RA2 Focus Group, Bukavu)

HARARE

In Harare, children and youth live and work on the streets:

- *“When I wake up at our hide out, in the morning I wash my clothes and go look for food. After that, I would go to [the] gardens where I would just sit. At twelve o’clock I would go to Anglican Church to get food. At four o’clock I would go to the taxi rank to tout”* (H-RA4 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“I spend the day vending”* (H-RA5 Focus Group, Harare)

- *“I may collect empty plastic containers and sell: if I get 200 or 300 plastic bottles, I will get a dollar. In the evening, I may have two dollars, which I will use to go to the films hall to sleep. However, my hope is to find better things to do”* (H-RA6 Focus Group, Harare)

Some children and youth recognise their right to be on the street, but in the same way as in Accra and Bukavu, recognise the complexity of this right; and their right to have sufficient support to avoid needing to be on the streets:

- *“It is good when I get money on the streets I can buy whatever I want. It is bad in that when I am hungry I would have to steal”* (H-RA3 Focus Group, Harare)

They have to earn money to buy food; hence without money they will go hungry. Since their ability to work is hindered by violent interference from the police, some children and youth report receiving food handouts from adults in the community. This is infrequent however, and as such, is not a reliable source. They often look for leftover food in bins outside shops and food stalls:

- *“My friends...from the flat houses...sometimes come to us to give us handouts”* (H-RA1 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“If I do not find food it would be a problem. I will search for food in the bins in order to survive”* (H-RA6 Focus Group, Harare)

Street children and youth sleep on the streets. But, the police chase them away from their sleeping places, destroying whatever is there, and taking away their business stock and any money they have:

- *“Only the police come and beat us up while we are sleeping”* (H-RA1 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“My base is the only place where I make money so when they chase me away I will be affected”* (H-RA6 Focus Group, Harare)

Police round up children and youth to physically remove them from the street:

- *“We were many children that were caught and put into a lorry. In the lorry we are told to lay down and not see where we are going. Along the way they would drop us off the lorry in groups of fives...The police does that to us”* (H-RA2 Focus Group, Harare)

Summary across the three cities:

In Bukavu and Harare the street children and youth both live and work on the streets; in Accra, many live and work on the streets, sleeping in public spaces, but some live in informal settlements. Across the three cities it is clear that the children and youth depend upon the streets for their survival. Freedom to move within the city is therefore essential to their livelihood; they need to be able to

move within the city to work and make money. The children and youth experience violence daily from police and security forces whose aim is to remove the children and youth from the streets or prevent them from being there. Many children and youth report physical harassment and intimidation for being street-connected.

Recommendations:

- **Police and security forces should not discriminate against street-connected children and youth – leading to their arbitrary arrest and removal from the streets**
- **Police and security forces should not use violence against street-connected children and youth**
- **Local authorities should recognise the reality that street-connected children and youth need to work to survive and should provide protection from exploitation and the worst forms of child labour rather than restrict their ability to work in the streets**

3.2 The right to special protection and assistance for children deprived of a family environment (Article 20 UNCRC)

ACCRA

Street children and youth receive minimal assistance from the government:

- *“We all need laws that will protect us but because we live on the street...we just find our own way to protect ourselves; [because] we don’t have any protection”* (A-RA8 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“I get support from friends, NGOs”* (A-RA8 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“We the street children have been surviving on our efforts and hard work...Water and everything I will need will come from my own pocket”* (A-RA5 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“I don’t know what the government has done for us”* (A-RA2 Focus Group, Accra)

Friendships on the street are very important; and friends become family on the street, helping to care for and supporting one another. Friends become so important because of the absence of family members in their daily lives and the lack of government services that they have access to:

- *“We have been supporting our friends when they are sick. When the person goes into labour we contribute money to help the person. When the person’s child falls sick, we contribute money to support her. The person may have been supported by the NGO; they don’t give help twice...so we have been supporting our friends when they need help”* (A-RA2 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“We have become friends and brothers and sisters”* (A-RA3 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“We have been supporting ourselves; a friend can be arrested and one of us among us will lead to collect donations of 1 or 2 Ghanaian Cedis [c.20-40 pence] to go and bail the person”* (A-RA4 Focus Group, Accra)

Some of the children had stayed in a government or NGO-run home. The government homes were generally worse than NGO homes:

- *“At the Home you will not be allowed to go out, because there will be security at the entrance. We can’t stay there; you know we have lived and grown on the street, so life at the Home will be different”* (A-RA2 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“If I was living on the street I can work and make some money, but at Home getting 1 Ghanaian Cedi [c.20 pence] will be a problem”* (A-RA2 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“Will the home take care of me and my children? They will not allow you to go and work and that place is not made for family”* (A-RA2 Focus Group, Accra)

BUKAVU

A similar situation is reported in Bukavu:

- *“No one takes care of me. If I do not manage to work and earn money myself, I must die of hunger and miss everything necessary for my life”* (B-RA1 Focus Group, Bukavu)
- *“The only shelter the government offers to us is prison and dungeon”* (B-RA1 Focus Group, Bukavu)

Direct assistance to street children and youth in Bukavu falls to individual acts of kindness. And it is friends on the street who provide most support:

- *“There are some good mannered women who help us...I throw away their house wastes and they give me food and pay me 500 francs [c.38 pence]”* (B-RA2 Focus Group, Bukavu)
- *“There is a brother downtown...If he meets you on the streets and finds that you are hungry, he must pay you even a doughnut or a sandwich or even take you at his home to eat food which you share with his children”* (B-RA5 Focus Group, Bukavu)
- *“My friends cannot leave me when I am being beaten; they must defend me and make me flee”* (B-RA2 Focus group, Bukavu)
- *“We love one another in our group. So when one is in need we manage to help him”* (B-RA3 Focus Group, Bukavu)

The police and security forces are the main State authority that the children and youth encounter on the streets, but these experiences are filled with violence. Often they are arrested for no reason, or on suspicion of having committed an offence; something that they attribute to being street-connected:

- *“The police stop us and start beating us for no reason. We did not even steal anything but the police beat us too much as if we were snakes or criminals and they can even kill us that way”* (B-RA2 Focus Group, Bukavu)
- *“The ‘Force Vives’ [voluntary security force]²...can kill a person. They have a new style of beating street children...when they catch you, they put you into a tyre with the head in the tyre and the buttocks outside the tyre; then they start flogging you on the back and buttocks. When they release you, you cannot leave that place because of pains. Unless someone lifts and carries you on the back, you can spend even three days without leaving that place. If you are unlucky they flog you on the bad part of the body and you can have an internal haemorrhage that can lead you to death”* (B-RA2 Focus Group, Bukavu)

² Informal civilian security forces operating in Bukavu include the ‘Volunteers’ and the ‘Forces Vives’. Whilst having no formal power, both operate at a street level, accusing street children and youth of crimes, seizing their possessions, beating and detaining them

- *“The police are the people who are supposed to protect you. But when you meet him on the street at night, he is the first to ask you for fucking you...If you refuse they threaten to rape you. Thus you are obliged to ‘let them have what they need’ so as not to be arrested. Then you wonder, ‘are the police for protecting people or what?’”* (B-RA6 Focus Group, Bukavu)

Moreover, it seems that in prison the police commit acts of torture against the children and youth, with reports of water being used to harm them:

- *“Once I am caught, I am flogged or put in a dungeon where they pour a lot of water on me and I must spend even four days therein”* (B-RA1 Focus Group, Bukavu)
- *“[X] was caught by the ‘Forces Vives’ the day before yesterday, they dived him into the very dirty water to such an extent that blood came out of his nose”* (B-RA2 Focus Group, Bukavu)

Education and job creation, however, came up as something that the government could provide to better care for street children and youth:

- *“I want the government to give jobs to our parents, to have all the children go to school freely without paying money. We have decided to live on the street because of failing to go to school. Our parents are poor and have not means to school us.”* (B-RA1 Focus Group, Bukavu)

HARARE

The situation is similar in Harare with little or no government assistance. Several individuals, agencies and churches provide (sporadic) access to food, blankets, education, and a drop-in centre with washing facilities.

The children’s homes that are run by the government are in a poor condition. There is little food, little education and the children often run away, back to the streets – to their friends and the support networks that they know. The children have better opportunities to survive on the streets than in a children’s home:

- *“I refused to live like cattle, so I ran away from the children’s home”* (H-RA1 Focus Group, Harare)
- *I left...after the organisation that put me there refused to pay my school fees”* (H-RA1 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“I got seriously ill so I decided to leave the place”* (H-RA3 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“Life was hard at the children’s home, we did not even have shoes to wear”* (H-RA2 Focus Group, Harare)

Friends in Harare, as in the other two cities, are a source of support on the streets:

- *“No one is helping us. We are helping ourselves”* (H-RA5 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“My friends stay on the streets and we gamble together...when one loses the winner would give him a small portion of the winnings”* (H-RA3 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“We give each other ideas”* (H-RA2 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“We can share our food”* (H-RA2 Focus Group, Harare)

The police is the main governmental body that the children and youth interact with on the streets and the police frequently discriminate against the children and youth. The police do not protect the children and youth:

- *“In case of a theft in the area, we are police’s number one suspect”* (H-RA1 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“Police harassing us while we are sleeping”* (H-RA2 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“The council workers are cruel, they raid and take our things”* (H-RA1 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“They treat us as animal, they can raid us and lock us up in cell for three weeks and they would only give us dry bread for food”* (H-RA4 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“You just protect yourself and avoid meeting the police. If I see them I will run away even jumping over concrete walls”* (H-RA2 Focus Group, Harare)

Since the police often take their money or it is stolen from them, they are not able to save and have to spend all their money as soon as they get it. Their interactions with the police are also filled with violence:

- *“When one street kid steals a cell phone all street children will be rounded up and beaten up”* (H-RA2 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“Even the police are beating us up when we do not have money”* (H-RA1 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“I was walking at night with my new shoes and then I met some police officers who beat me up for being a street kid with new shoes”* (H-RA4 Focus Group, Harare)

Summary across the three cities:

In all three cities the street children and youth reported minimal care and protection received from the government. In fact, their main interaction with government bodies was with the police or security forces (as the government body with the most visible presence on the streets) was one of violence and intimidation that prevents and hinders their survival. Some children and youth have lived in a children’s home, however, these are frequently inadequate to provide a good standard of care and



the children frequently leave these homes to look after themselves on the streets. Friends are the main support network for street-connected children and youth.

Recommendations:

- **States should provide training to police and security forces to ensure better understanding of the complexity of street-connected children and youth's lives – to stop the violence and enable their survival**
- **Children's homes do not provide adequate care for street-connected children and youth and moreover many do not want to go there – they should not be removed from the street and placed in children's homes as a matter of course**

3.3 The right to an adequate standard of living (Article 27 UNCRC)

ACCRA

In Accra the government has demolished many of the areas where children and youth live. These are informal settlements and whilst very basic and unsanitary, these areas provide shelter where the children and youth can sleep, keep their belongings, store stock for their businesses and save money. Some street children and youth have their own children and without this shelter, it is very difficult to keep their children safe. When the government demolished their homes it significantly disrupted their lives and they were forced to live in the open where it is much more unsafe:

- *“Some of [the city authorities] used force to sack us...they came to demolish the whole place, they didn’t relocate us or give us any place to go” (A-RA2 Focus Group, Accra)*
- *“We lost a lot of our belongings because of that I had to come and sleep in the open and so I lost my money and phone” (A-RA2 Focus Group, Accra)*
- *“[Sacking] will increase street life. I will be tempted to join girls in sex work. When I should go to sleep in front of shops I may be raped; so the best option for me would be to join my friends in sex work” (A-RA7 Focus Group, Accra)*

On the streets, street children and youth can feed and look after themselves, more than at home in their villages:

- *“I used to stay with a certain woman this woman maltreated me; she doesn’t give me enough food to eat but when I moved here, I cook and eat to my satisfaction; I am able to work and make some money. When you are living with someone you will not be given proper treatment” (A-RA4 Focus Group, Accra)*

Medical treatment is denied to street children and youth because they are unable to afford it:

- *“The government has introduced health insurance it is good, but if it can’t be used to access service and I fall sick as a street [child], what will I do? Water is now going to be increased to 30 pesewas [c.5 pence]...government should let these things be cheap so that we can access them” (A-RA7 Focus Group, Accra)*
- *“There should be a clinic where hustlers can go for treatment without the health insurance” (A-RA5 Focus Group, Accra)*

Moreover, accessing formal education can be problematic for street children and youth when they have little money and others have little money as well:

- *“My schooling ended when I didn’t have money to feed myself and others though the organization who sponsored me paid for all my schooling expenses. The person is helpless so if you want to support the person I think all those aspects should be considered. I didn’t*

perform well at SHS [senior high school] because I had to come back home on vacations to work to make money to feed myself. So these are some of the things that I think will help a lot if they can provide all these things” (A-RA4 Focus Group, Accra)

BUKAVU

In Bukavu, the children and youth find it difficult to access clean water. Sometimes, adults in the community give them water, but other times they are charged for it. When they have no money they drink from the lake:

- *“Sometimes people refuse to give us water. When we ask, they refuse and say that we pretend to ask for water to drink, but we are in search of what to steal in people’s houses. They drive us away from their houses. When I am driven away I am obliged to pay even water for 100 francs [c.8 pence] and go away” (B-RA1 Focus Group, Bukavu)*
- *“To get water to wash at [X] I must fight and sometimes get wounded. You cannot get water at [X] if you have no money and you cannot have money if you don’t prostitute yourself. If you have no money they may even ask to have sex with you in order to have water to wash your body with” (B-RA6 Focus Group, Bukavu)*

The children and youth also struggle to obtain food and suffer from hunger as a result. Often they will steal to get money for food. Furthermore, even with money they are not able to spend time obtaining food due to the often violent presence of police and security forces:

- *“Sometimes when you go begging and you receive nothing, you are obliged to look after yourself in one way or another. You must then steal if you are not given food” (B-RA5 Focus Group, Bukavu)*
- *“I cannot get to eat because...they must be in all the areas where I manage to earn money to get to eat...That is why some of us suffer from hunger because they do not have where to earn money because of the police”(B-RA2 Focus Group, Bukavu)*

When they do obtain food and try to cook it, the police sometimes take or damage it so it is inedible:

- *“Sometimes we do not cook our food because of some police officers. When they find us cooking they take our pots and food...They eat and arrest us and go to put us in a dungeon where we pass the whole night and release us in the morning” (B-RA1 Focus Group, Bukavu)*

The only shelter the government provide for street children and youth is prison:

- *“The only shelter the government offers to us is prison and dungeon”* (B-RA3 Focus Group, Bukavu)
- *“It is very impossible for the government to offer you a shelter to sleep in. The government can only help us in three ways: whether they put you in prison or they kill you or you rest in the dungeon”* (B-RA3 Focus Group, Bukavu)

Girls will sometimes find shelter through engaging in sex work, but this is not consistent. They may stay with clients or in bars. Boys may sleep in shops:

- *“We sleep at the zone in a shop near the church. We sleep in a shop but the other members sleep outside because the room is too small to contain all the group members. The girls sleep in a place in the market”* (B-RA3 Focus Group, Bukavu)
- *“You may take refuge in somebody’s kitchen or toilets. At dawn if you are found by the owner...you will be jeered at and shouted at ‘that’s a witch, that’s a witch!’ around 5 am We are chased everywhere”* (B-RA6 Focus Group, Bukavu)

The children and youth struggle to access healthcare because of their status as street-connected.

They are discriminated against:

- *“If...you go to a dispensary, you will be asked ‘where do you live?’ When they hear that you are from the street they immediately think that their medicines will be lost for nothing because I won’t pay. Then they shit [neglect] me. That’s why you realise that I have no right there”* (B-RA4 Focus Group, Bukavu)

HARARE

In Harare, children and youth scavenge as a primary means to obtain food. They will eat leftover food that they find in bins to stop themselves from going hungry:

- *“When we do not have money, we would be going from bin after bin looking for food”* (H-RA2 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“Considering the bad food we eat, I must say God looks after us”* (H-RA1 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“Some people would feel pity for us and give us food but not every time”* (H-RA3 Focus Group, Harare)

Street children and youth in Harare have established bases on the streets where they sleep at night, for instance, the park or outside a specific shop on cardboard boxes. When sleeping on the

streets they often do not manage to sleep well as the police will chase them away and beat them up. Therefore, some children use drugs to help them sleep.

- *“I have never met anyone who offered me shelter”* (H-RA4 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“We have no good place to sleep. Food from the bins causes illnesses. Then there is the lice that bite us especially if you do not bath or change your clothes”* (H-RA5 Focus Group, Harare)

When they stay in housing, this shelter is temporary and sporadic, dependent on acts of kindness from others in the community, or conditional on the children performing sexual acts in return for somewhere to stay:

- *“Some homosexual men would invite you to their houses so that they can have sex with you. However, some kind people may invite you to their homes also”* (H-RA6 Focus Group, Harare)

As in the other two cities, in Harare, the children and youth struggle to access healthcare:

- *“When you get ill on the streets there is not much help except from your friends”* (H-RA3 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“Our life is not healthy. If I fall ill, my friends cannot help me; I would have to borrow money to get health treatment”* (H-RA1 Focus Group, Harare)

Summary across the three cities:

Across the three cities the street children and youth reported an inadequate standard of living. Access to food, water and shelter is limited, and often further restricted because of violent interference by the police – including demolishing their shelter and ruining their food. As a result of the negative stigma of being street-connected and lack of sufficient funds, the children and youth struggle to access medical care.

Recommendations

- **Police should not prevent street-connected children and youth from eating, sleeping and working on the streets as the street is their primary means of survival**
- **Access to healthcare should be free for street-connected children and youth**

3.4 Developing rights-based, holistic, long-term strategies to prevent children developing strong street connections and to support children in street situations

ACCRA

For children and youth in Accra, street life can be preferable to their life with their families. In their home villages, there is often less money and domestic violence. On the streets children and young people can survive:

- *“There is nowhere you can go to live life unless you come to the street”* (A-RA2 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“The one I was living with finds it difficult to give me food to eat. She [would] maltreat me and I sometimes starve myself the whole day... I decided to leave the place”* (A-RA2 Focus Group, Accra)

It was suggested that the government could provide them with a sleeping place – but not a children’s home, a boarding house where they can rent rooms, but still go out to work:

- *“The government should provide us with a sleeping place so that when we wake up in the morning we can go and sell...to feed ourselves so that in the evening we know that this is my sleeping place where you go and rest”* (A-RA5 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“Just like a boarding house...you access yourself and know that you can now take care of yourself and rent”* (A-RA2 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“Renting is difficult, especially in Accra; when you don’t have 500 Ghanaian Cedis [c.£100] or more you will not be able to rent a room; and getting that amount of money is not easy. The government must think of us and build for us”* (A-RA3 Focus Group, Accra)

The ability to work is fundamental to their lives – and the children and youth recommended that the government help them to find jobs:

- *“If maybe he is a thief and there are more job opportunities for him, I don’t think he will like to continue stealing. If there are no jobs for us and the government also doesn’t do anything about our plight it means those bad things will continue”* (A-RA3 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“When we don’t get support from government but the task force are told to allow us to work, I don’t think we will go into hardship”* (A-RA7 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“We will be happy if more crèches can be created for mothers to leave their children there while they go to work”* (A-RA2 Focus Group, Accra)

Education was seen as a right, but only if the children deemed it useful to their life:

- *“You have the right to attend school but it is your right to decline it”* (A-RA7 Focus Group, Accra)

Another suggestion was for informal education, or skills training so that they can create their own businesses to be self-sufficient:

- *“I think skills training will be very important. An example is maybe the government will open a factory where shoes are made, the government will go round for hustlers to come and learn that trade”* (A-RA2 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“If the government is able to provide jobs for us I think that will help a lot”* (A-RA4 Focus Group, Accra)

When skills training has been provided however some children and youth doubted its value:

- *“The training they have acquired doesn’t go far...I have not seen much progress in their lives after the training support. The only thing I see them do is maybe plaiting the hair for some of us”* (A-RA3 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“If the person completes the apprenticeship and doesn’t have anywhere to start work, the person can’t begin anything until all the things are in place. So in that case the person will perhaps decide to go and sell pure water or something”* (A-RA3 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“Most of the NGOs when you express to them that you want to attend school, they don’t want to listen to you. They only give support for learning trading skills...Sometimes they complete the training and they can’t work with the skills they acquired because the duration to learn the trade was very short”* (A-RA4 Focus Group, Accra)

The issue of identity documents repeatedly arose during the Consultations; identity documents to show citizenship and to aid with gaining work permits and medical insurance. Although some suggestions were to remove the requirement for work permits and medical insurance cards for street children and youth as the cost is a barrier to getting them. With a work permit, or exemption, street children and youth can work in the streets, mainly selling goods, without the police taking their stock away:

- *“If you should ask [an uneducated] person to bring certificates before s/he can work, that will be difficult”* (A-RA2 Focus Group, Accra)
- *“We don’t earn much from what we sell...we the street children should be exempted from the licence because we are suffering to build our lives”* (A-RA3 Focus Group, Accra)

BUKAVU

Some of the children and youth in Bukavu said that it would be good to leave the street and go home, but they do not go home because there is no money there. Their families still live in extreme poverty and they are unable to find jobs and survive at home:

- *“I can like to leave the street life, getting a home where I can live with my parents and have an income generating activity which I can undertake”* (B-RA5 Focus Group, Bukavu)
- *“The government should employ us and not...abandon us in the street. We cannot live without working...and so that we become useful for ourselves and for the society”* (B-RA2 Focus Group, Bukavu)

Although some children did not feel that the government could or would help them:

- *“The government cannot help me in anything because they are thieves and looters. The police and agents of the government arrest and impose us fines even though we did not steal anybody’s property. So the street children see that the government cannot help them with anything”* (B-RA2 Focus Group, Bukavu)

One of the main points coming out of the Consultations in Bukavu was that the authorities should stop threatening and attacking the children and youth, and leave them to live in peace. The children and youth want to access enterprise and the informal economies of the cities. They want to run their businesses and save money, without being thwarted constantly:

- *“The government should let me do my business, walk freely without the police to stop me”* (B-RA1 Focus Group, Bukavu)
- *“I need protection when I am running my business in the streets but I do not have anybody to protect me...That is why I do my best to protect myself in the streets”* (B-RA2 Focus Group, Bukavu)

Street children and youth also recognised the help that they needed with regard to accessing basic necessities such as food, medical treatment and education:

- *“I can live well if only I have got food and a place to sleep”* (B-RA4 Focus Group, Bukavu)
- *“I want the government to help have an easy access to medical treatment. Once we fall ill and go to the hospital, the nurses drive us away because we have not parents who will pay the medical expenses”* (B-RA1 Focus Group, Bukavu)
- *“[If I am appointed President] I can divide the street children in two groups. Those who are still too young I must organise how to send them back home and those who are adults I can build a centre to education them so that they become useful in their lives through different vocational trainings”* (B-RA1 Focus Group, Bukavu)

- *“They should school us free of charge. You may be living on the streets but studying. And then you may get your State diploma and have access to a work which will help you in your life.”* (B-RA5 Focus Group, Bukavu)
- *“I wish the education were free of charge. If the school is free of charge nobody can stay on the streets.”* (B-RA5 Focus Group, Bukavu)

HARARE

Street children and youth recognise their strong connections to the street; noticeable in the reports of leaving children’s homes, but also in their approach to their lives there:

- *“I will not leave the streets because I am like someone who is glued to the streets. I will not be able to leave the streets on my own”* (H-RA6 Focus Group, Harare)

Furthermore, the general consensus was that the government would not help street-connected children and youth; the ‘help’ is often in the forms of beatings, poor conditions and street removal:

- *“The government must not help us, we will help ourselves because they are cruel to us”* (H-RA1 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“They want to help us but they beat us at the same time”* (H-RA1 Focus Group, Harare)

Despite this, the children wanted the government to help provide jobs. There was recognition however that the country’s economy needs to improve to aid job creation generally:

- *“If they want us to leave the streets, they must give us jobs”* (H-RA1 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“The city council must give us vending licences so that they do not raid us...[they] cost 100 dollars...[and] may expire after one week”* (H-RA1 Focus Group, Harare)

Access to a place to stay and education were also recognised as necessary for development:

- *“Rights are things that a human being needs, for example, I must have a house to stay, and go to school.”* (H-RA5 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“[To leave the streets I need] a place to rent...and I would be able to come to town and work and return home”* (H-RA2 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“Education is the key of life: if you do not have education, you are just like nothing”* (H-RA3 Focus Group, Harare)

The main suggestion from Harare, however, was the need to have birth certificates and identity documents so that the children and youth can work:

- *“It is our right on the streets to get identity particulars”* (H-RA5 Focus Group, Harare)

- *“You cannot get a job without an identity card”* (H-RA5 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“Being drunk does not prevent you from going to work but without an identity card you cannot be helped”* (H-RA4 Focus Group, Harare)
- *“If I could get identity particulars and a job I will leave the streets”* (H-RA6 Focus Group, Harare)

Summary across the three cities

Although the children and youth were somewhat dubious about the government’s willingness to provide support for them, they came up with some key areas in which developments could be made. These centred on the creation of jobs and skills training, education and having identity documentation, to enable access to State services.

Recommendations:

- **Street-connected children and youth should be provided with identity documents that show their citizenship and eligibility to access State services**
- **The government should provide skills training that is relevant to the local labour market and economy and create more jobs for street-connected children and youth**
- **The government should provide cheaper rental properties for street-connected children and youth**

4. Conclusion: Recommendations for the General Comment

Street-connected children and youth lead extremely difficult lives with limited access to their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. These Consultations revealed that children and youth face daily challenges in obtaining the basic necessities to live – namely, food, water, clothing and shelter – and in accessing services that enable them to be healthy and develop – namely, medical treatment and education or skills training.

One of the biggest obstacles encountered in their daily lives is violence from police, city authorities, or security forces. They are discriminated against for being street-connected, physically beaten on the street and forcibly removed from the street. In Accra, the government’s demolitions of the informal settlements where they lived forcibly pushed them to sleep on the streets. These violent actions prevent street children and youth from being able to survive, hindering their access to food and shelter and living in peace, free from violence.

Most of the children and youth asserted their right to be present in the street – in the main to work, but also to be with friends and escape poverty in their home villages. This right however was held in tension with a recognition that living and working on the streets is not an ideal environment, due to the incessant violence and discrimination they face there, and the lack of access to food, water, healthcare and education. The main recommendation that arose in all three cities was access to identity documents and licences that would allow them access to services and enable them to work without adverse interference from the authorities.

The street children and youth made clear recommendations as to how their lives could be better; reinforcing the importance of their participation in policy development on matters that affect their lives. These recommendations appear after each sub-section in section 3 and are restated here:

The right to freedom of association and assembly (Article 15 UNCRC):

- Police and security forces should not discriminate against street-connected children and youth – leading to their arbitrary arrest and removal from the streets
- Police and security forces should not use violence against street-connected children and youth
- Local authorities should recognise the reality that street-connected children and youth need to work to survive and should provide protection from exploitation and the worst forms of child labour rather than restrict their ability to work in the streets

The right to special protection and assistance for children deprived of a family environment (Article 20 UNCRC):

- States should provide training to police and security forces to ensure better understanding of the complexity of street-connected children and youth's lives – to stop the violence and enable their survival
- Children's homes do not provide adequate care for street-connected children and youth and moreover many do not want to go there – they should not be removed from the street and placed in children's homes as a matter of course

The right to an adequate standard of living (Article 27 UNCRC):

- Police should not prevent street-connected children and youth from eating, sleeping and working on the streets as the street is their primary means of survival
- Access to healthcare should be free for street-connected children and youth

Developing rights-based, holistic, long-term strategies to prevent children developing strong street connections and to support children in street situations:

- Street-connected children and youth should be provided with identity documents that show their citizenship and eligibility to access State services
- The government should provide skills training that is relevant to the local labour market and economy and create more jobs for street-connected children and youth
- The government should provide cheaper rental properties for street-connected children and youth

Key recommendations that came up across the four discussion areas and apply to aspects within each are:

- **Provision of identity documents to be recognised as citizens and access government services**
- **Stop police violence so that street-connected children and youth can live in the city without constant harassment**
- **Street-connected children and youth should have freedom to move in the city and to work there without constant removal or prevention of surviving there**
- **The government should create jobs for street-connected children and youth**

This report was prepared by Natalie Turgut, Consortium for Street Children and Lorraine van Blerk, Wayne Shand, Patrick Shanahan and Janine Hunter, *Growing up on the Streets*. The Consultations were organised by *Growing up on the Streets* and StreetInvest with technical expertise from Consortium for Street Children. The Consultations were funded by Comic Relief, Backstage Trust and William A. Cadbury Charitable Trust. GUOTS Project Managers helped facilitate the Consultations and contributed to this report: Selassy Gbeglo (Accra), Thomas d’Aquin Rubambura (Bukavu) and Shaibu Chitsiku (Harare). Finally, we gratefully acknowledge the contribution of the 203 young researchers and participants who shared their experiences with honesty, passion and sincerity.

“We, the people who live on the street, our rights are not respected. We claim our rights to the authorities; they neglect, drive us away and call us ‘animals’, they say we deserve to be imprisoned because we are the people who sleep on streets. We wish we were given freedom to move and run our business in the future, we want to behave so that people will respect us, like the other people do who have dignity...Living on the street does not mean that we cannot have rights.” (B-RA3 Focus Group, Bukavu)

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