Assessing the Effects of Streetism on the Livelihood of Street Children: A Case Study of Kumasi (in Ghana).

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Abstract

This study employed the livelihood approach to examine the effects of streetism on the livelihoods of children who live and make their living on the streets of Kumasi. The study examines the causative factors that push children on to the streets, their encounters and experiences in their attempts to cope with street life. The study used both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data was collected from 50 street children in eight areas in Kumasi where the street children are predominant. The study identified that children who live on the street adopt a range of survival strategies, both legal and/or illegal, to confront the challenges of urban street life. The study further identified that the plight of children arises not so much out of negative experiences they have gone through such as child abuse or child neglect but broadly to the absence of and inadequate programmes resulting from the low-priority placed on issues related to child welfare in the country generally. These challenge human right and underpin injustice in the country. The problems street children face can be corrected overtime through working with the affected children directly and by addressing the symptoms indirectly. Promotion of preventative services and programmes in the communities where the children come from can also help in addressing causal factor.

Key Words: Livelihood, Street children, Survival strategies,

INTRODUCTION

The youth constitute the most important human resource potential that can contribute significantly to the overall development of a nation. There is seemingly little being done at the local and national level to harness this tremendous potential which will determine the strength and resilience Ghana needs in pursuing the socio-economic and political development goals of the nation. Even though naturally parents and guardians are also expected to ensure that their children are well-catered for socially, morally and educationally; the situation prevailing in major cities in Ghana is quite different. It is unfortunate and disturbing in Kumasi to see children in every corner hawking, carrying luggage and engaging in trickery just to stay alive. The number of street children in Ghana generally and in Kumasi in particularly, is increasing in such an alarming rate that the issue has become a concern to policy makers besides becoming a real social problem.

The street children are viewed worldly as problem (because some of them steal to survive) rather than people whose first habitat is the street. Obviously, extreme deprivation and social exclusion create opportunities for engaging in crime. A Roman statesman once said "poverty is the mother of crime". However, little evidence exists to suggest that street children actively or deliberately plan criminal activities. They perceive themselves as discriminated against and hated. The plight of these street children is the result of social change of varying degrees, changes which destabilize life. Most of these vulnerable children squatter on the street as a result of poverty, social unrest, lack of social conscience, waywardness and have nobody to look up to for their social and economic survival due to the breakdown of the extended family system, which hitherto served as a unit for social cohesion and solidarity (Indyer 2005). These factors serve as a chain of synergism which denies the victim basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, shelter, and health and more significantly parental love and affection. Subsequently, most of these children in Kumasi sleep on pavements, in front of stores and on benches especially around Adum Pampaaso, Kejetia, Roman Hill and Race Course at the mercy of unscrupulous people like rapists resulting in furtherance of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.

Most indicators confirm that street children have been disadvantaged in the realm of economic and social development (UNICEF 2005). A pedantic view of the social context of streetism shows that almost all children that take the street as their refuge are due to some form of abuse or neglect, whether by the immediate family or by society at large. Some children are on the streets because their families are desperately poor. Focusing on the children and their families alone has the tendency to relate the problems to poor policies and actions on the part of the state and society. According to UNESCO (1995), "street life is made up of latent or open violence, of selfishness and solitude. The child will want to escape and has to be helped to do so…It is obvious that the street cannot be an environment where, in the long run, the child can develop in positive way".

The children on the street are stigmatized worldwide because they do not have power to demand attentions from public and private agencies. They are vulnerable to numerous risks including HIV/AIDS due to their nearly

universal involvements in "survival sex" (prostitution). The street children are relegated and nobody cares how they eat, sleep or access health care and society forget that the children on the streets are victims of circumstances. Whether it is a matter of neglect or direct abuse; the interests of children are ignored. Ignoring these physiological needs of street children by misconstruing the problem they represent is not only injustice against humanity according to the Children Act of 1998 (Act 560) but also defeats the purpose for which Ghana signed the (Article 27 of the UN) Convention on the Rights of the child.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for the study was cross-sectional survey. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were used in order to gather data. These include focus group discussions and administration of questionnaires to 50 street children. Literature review was done to examine the general state of streetism globally, and in Ghana and in Kumasi in particularly. Other methods are in-depth key-informant interviews to interview government officials responsible for welfare programmes of street children. Observation method was also used to observe the day to day activities of street children in eight areas of Kumasi where street children are highly concentrated. These areas are Adum Pampaso, Kejetia, Roman Hill, Bantama, Race Course, Aboabo, Moshie Zongo, Oforikrom and Anloga. The study area is shown in figure 1 and 2.

Questionnaires administered to the street children also collected information about their families. This addressed issues on demographic, education, present living situation, health, and addiction status of the street children.

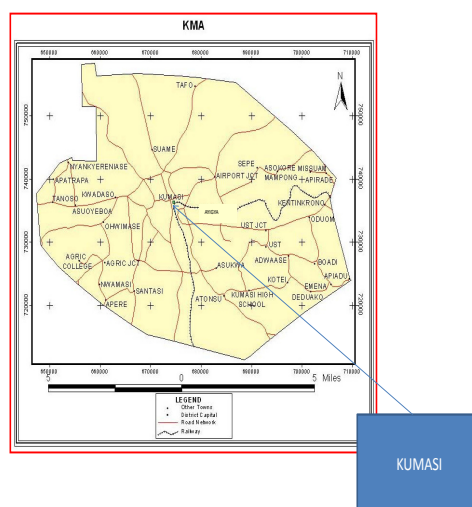**Figure 1: Map of Ghana Showing the Location of Kumasi**

Figure 2: The Study Area in the District Context

Source: KMA, (2006). Municipal Development Plan, Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly

The Street Child

The United Nations defines street children as: "any boy or girl … for whom the street in the widest sense of the word … has become his or her habitual abode and or source of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised, or directed by responsible adults" (UNESCO 1995).

There are three important elements in this definition: the time children spend on the street, the street as a source of livelihood, and the lack of protection and care from adults. These three elements informs this paper

Types of Street Children

A lot has been written to define street children, but the primary difficulty is that there are no precise categories, but rather a continuum, ranging from children who spend some time in the streets and sleep in a house with adults, to those who live entirely on the streets and have no adult supervision or care.

UNICEF has developed a typology which recognizes that there are different types of street-children and which differentiates between children according to their degree of involvement in street-life and family contact. According to Hatloy and Huser (2005), these typologies include the following:

Children on the street are those children who are engaged in some kind of economic activity but might go home at the end of the day and contribute their earnings to their family sustenance. They may be attending school and retain a sense of belonging to a family. As a result of the economic fragility of the family, these children may eventually opt for a permanent life on the streets.

Children of the street are children who have in some sense chosen to fully participate in street-life and not only for economic reasons. They usually have a family accessible to them whom they may visit from time to time, but the street is their principal home. Children of the street lack homogeneity and clearly identifiable traits that set them apart from the rest of street children, share some distinctive life style which may be sometimes considered deviant by society.

A sub-category of street child in the UNICEF typology is that of "abandoned children." This category is also children of the street but is differentiated by the fact that they have cut off all ties with their biological families and are completely on their own. This category includes orphans, runaways, refugees, and others who have no home to go to, perhaps because of the death or rejection of parents, and or the unavailability of extended family.

Another sub-category is that of Children at high risk. They are generally urban children who because of extreme poverty and deprivation in their homes, or inadequate care and supervision by parents who are working, are at

high risk of becoming involved in street-life. These children often spend a considerable time in the streets and are at high risk of becoming street children.

It has been difficult to uphold the typology of children "of the street" and "on the street" established by UNICEF to differentiate street-based or home-based street children. In practice this definition was found unsatisfactory as children themselves defied these generalizations. Many children sleep both at home and on the streets as and when they choose.

The Livelihood Approach
The Sustainable Livelihood (SL) Approach was developed in the 1990s to better understand and disaggregate the efforts of the poor to earn a living and their long-term strategies for survival. According to Chambers and Conway (1992), the concept of SL depends on capabilities, assets and activities of the poor which are all required for a means of living. A person or family's livelihood is sustainable when they can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance their capabilities and assets both now and in the future without undermining environmental resources.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach views the world from the point of view of individuals, households and social groups who are trying to make a living in volatile conditions and with limited assets. This approach puts people at the centre of development and provides a framework for understanding the opportunities and assets available to poor people and the sources of their vulnerability, as well as the impact of external organizations, processes and policies on them (Scones 1998; Girmachew, 2006).

The Sustainable Livelihood Approach represents links between some selected factors in its analytical framework. It sees assets (in terms of capital) as fundamental to livelihood analysis. It further emphasizes structures (or organizations) and processes (societal norms, incentives, policies and laws) which influence the access, control and the use of assets. Livelihood structures are complex, usually revolving around the incomes, skills and services of all members of the family in an effort to reduce the risks associated with living near subsistence. This approach looks positively at what is possible rather than negatively at how desperate things are. Using Sustainable Livelihood analysis helps highlight the key strengths and also major constraints to livelihoods. Everyone's livelihood is made up of these three components –activities, assets, and entitlements- together with the short term coping mechanisms and long term adaptive strategies that the person employs in times of crisis so that in adjusting to hardships, loss and change, s/he can maintain a livelihood (Girmachew, 2006).

Relevance of the Livelihood Approach to Street Children
This framework is used to understand the lives of street children who are also on the street to earn a livelihood from street based activities to meet basic needs for survival. The livelihood approach is used to deepen the understanding of factors limiting street children access to productive resources, assets and opportunities and strategies they employ in tackling them.

The concept of diversification is helpful in assessing children's activities in the process of maintaining their daily life. Street children engaged in a diverse range of activities which mainly takes place in the informal sector in order to earn a living. As urban livelihoods are characterized by a dependence on cash incomes often earned in the informal sector, this paper explores the efforts of street children to increase their incomes while on the streets and reduce their poverty levels.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
One of the specific objectives of the study was to examine the factors that push children onto the street. The results of the study showed that children on the streets of Kumasi originate from various ethnic and geographical backgrounds such as Dagomba, Sissala, Mamprusi Akans, Fante, Anlo and Ga Adangbe. The majority (86%) of the street children came from households with more than four children. The large number of children in a household could create competition for the available limited resources.

The findings showed that children coming from the same geographical area and/or ethnicity are often involved in similar occupations or activities. This is partly because street children were recruited and socialized into their street carrier by their friends and by co-ethnics who are already into it and serve as advisors and support base for new entrants.

Although some studies such as "Forum on Street Children in Ethiopia" (FSCE, 2003) reveal that most street children come from female headed households, this study shows that nearly half (46%) of the street children

come from two-parent headed households, suggesting that the availability of both parents does not guarantee that children may remain at home because many rural children come to the city to support their parents. Many of such children find work easily on the streets.

According to the findings of the study, 52 percent of the street children attended primary school while 38 percent have never enrolled in school and only 8 percent attended junior high school. However, the majority (90%) was not attending school at the time of interview. The reasons given for not going to school include among others, the need to start work in order to contribute to household income. The street children interviewed said they discontinued education not because they are indifferent to schooling but mainly as a result of lack of assistance from families (because of families' economic difficulties and disharmony). The finding shows that about half of the children (49%) dropped out of school because there was no one to assist them. Regardless of their school enrolment status, however, the street children wished to go to school to change their present life style.

Survival Strategies for Street Children
The findings show that street children's survival strategies are complex and interwoven. The basic need of life that may be essential for an individual to reach self-sufficiency includes but not limited to food, water, shelter, and clothing. These four are indispensable to the existence of street children. The highly commoditized urban sector depends on cash. Goods such as water, food and housing have to be bought in the open market. Poor households in Kumasi buy water, among all other needs. Survival for street children means obtaining food, clothing and shelter, and protecting themselves against violence and other forms of abuse. These burdens of survival in the urban areas that parents are confronted with become the push factors that drive children to work on the streets. Only 20 percent of the street children relies on their family for their daily meal and these are children who exodus to the street to supplement their family income. The findings shows that 8 percent of the children beg for food (usually from food vendors working in places where the children are located such as schools and restaurants/chop bars) whilst 10 percent scavenge and 62 percent of them buy their own food because they work and earn some income on the street. Those who go scavenging are street children who depend on leftover food most of the time as a way of feeding themselves.

Although one of the major definitions of the term 'street children' lies on where they spend the night (UNICEF 1996), this study confirmed that mobility between sleeping places makes the definition of 'street children' blurred. The findings show that 60 percent of the street children studied is "children of the street" because they spent both day and night on the street, whilst 40 percent of them reported they have family contacts on daily basis and therefore could possibly be described as "children on the street". According to the findings, their mobility on, in and out of the street depends on the availability of income (affordability), experience of street life, harmony or disharmony with families or relatives, informal networks established with their social groups and other social segments in the street. The study also showed that they choose a place to spend the night based on its social, security and economic advantages, and therefore they do not have permanent sleeping places.

With income from working on the street, some of the street children (54%) said they could afford to buy better second hand clothes at cheap prices but 36 percent begged for clothes and 10 percent depended on their families for care. Street children learn to behave, dress and act as children in need on the street to be efficient in begging and finding jobs.

Multiple Professions
The findings show that children who live on the street do not form a homogenous category neither do they earn their living similarly. They undertook a wide variety of activities which mainly take place in the informal sector such as petty trading, shoe shining, unit transfers, carrying luggage era cetera. They took advantage of opportunities based on the nature of the reward or the benefit they draw or a combination of these two. They do not have any fixed jobs on the street. It was observed that street children's choices and outcomes of career were profoundly influenced by age, gender, ethnicity, place of origin and informal networks. As mentioned earlier the work they engage in is marginal, and most of them find out at this stage that their expectations cannot actually be realized. The street kids are generally load carriers, hawkers, cleaners, as guard to blind men, shoe shines boys, drivers mate, commercial sex workers (for the girls). The teenagers engage in illicit activities like shoplifting, pick pocketing, sales of harmful drugs (Fig. 3).

They engaged in activities within the limitations of the contexts and resources available to them. Their activities in the public space were however, constrained by city authorities and the police since many of them are also perceive by the public as social deviants and are therefore vices to public security.

It was observed that urban space is a key element of physical capital in livelihood strategies for the street children because they use the public space for economic purposes though differently. Although they mostly did not have a fixed career, they were engaged in certain activities for earning money as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: The Means of Livelihood of Street Children
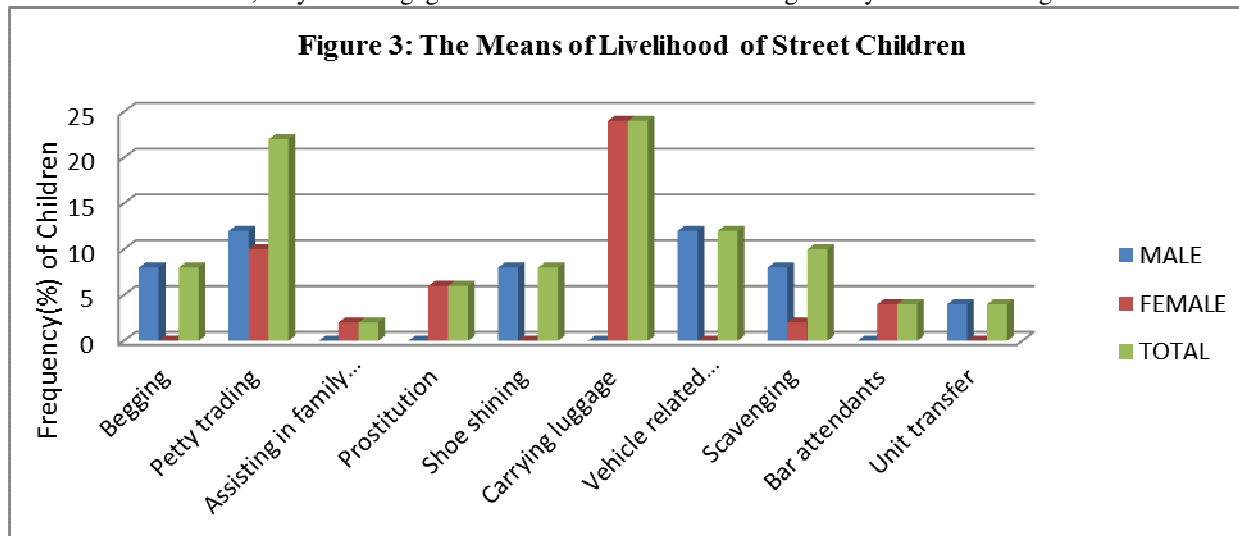
Source: Authors Construct from Field data, 2011

Labour is the most important asset that children have which helps street children to generate income. Most of the street children depend on their labour to generate income as shown in Figure 3.

Eight percent of the street children said they beg in public spaces such as shopping areas and along busy streets or at the junctions near traffic lights, among others. However, working street children were not involved in begging as they consider it as a shameful act. Moreover, within groups of friends the high earners share out the income or use it for group consumption. Only 10 percent of the street children engage in scavenging as a means of livelihood. They collect scraps from garbage and dumps to sell. However, searching for food from garbage bins is not the primary source of food for most street children. The garbage bins were identified as important source for old clothes, shoes and plastic wares which they sell for money. According to the findings, street boys mostly scavenge early in the mornings in order to be the first to search through the previous night's rubbish for items to sell.

Some of the street children (6%), according to the findings, were forced into commercial sex work by peers who knew the potentials of earning good money from this source. Although only 6 percent of the children are engaged in commercial sex works, the risk associated with it is great and causes a lot of panic to any responsible person who gets to hear of its and hence their unwillingness to openly declare that they are engaged in commercial sex. However, the street children engage in this profession said it is considered as a temporary alternative to economic distress and is not an occupation that one is willing to declare and depend on in the future. Many young girls use prostitution as a means of survival in terms of supplementing their income and so it is difficult to call them commercial sex workers but is an occasional prostitute. They are however at greater risk of acquiring HIV infection and other STDs because of multiple partnerships. The findings shows that 90 percent of the street children lack detail knowledge on STDs and had less power to negotiate safe sex and 34 percent said they have been raped before. The street girls explained that they are raped when they are attacked in the night by criminals and the only way out for them to be spared for other harms was to be raped. Others sleep on the street with their male peers who end up raping them instead of the original intention of providing them security.

Eight percent of the children (boys) were engaged in shoe shining but have fixed places where they work while others are mobile. The mobile shoe shine boys attract fewer customers because many people do not trust these boys as they most often are perceived as thieves and or accused for doing work. Lack of fixed work space exacerbates this accusation.

This study shows that 24 percent of street children mostly hang around Adum-Pampaso, Central Market and along the railway line that passes through the commercial business district (CBD), where many people patronise for various activities in the city and so work as porters, carrying luggages in return for some money. Passengers perceive them as thieves and as a result opt to handle their belongings on their own.

Kumasi is a rapidly growing city where street trade is a common phenomenon and so 22 percent of the street children also sell different items and commodities on public spaces and on sidewalks as a way of survival. The type of commodity displayed on the street varies by time, season, holidays and location. The majority are peddlers who move from place to place to sell commodities whiles others do so only at major roads intersections in the city.

The research findings show that 12 percent of the street children are engaged in vehicle related activities such as car washing and watching. According to some of the street children, car washing is a tiresome work but rewarding compared to other street jobs. They also call passengers for "trotro" drivers and act as bus conductors.

The above shows that street children depend on the efforts of a combination of portfolios of activities for survival. They draw on their diverse forms of assets (negotiating skills, labour and social networks) in the process of making a living on the street. Their survival skills and various copping strategies toughen them to survive on the streets. Although street children mostly pursue marginal jobs, they do not have the same range of livelihood outcomes. Some street children really struggle for survival. When survival becomes an issue, long term strategies tend to be constrained by the need to fulfil the most basic necessities of life.

Institutions Responsible for Street Children

A consideration of the social context of streetism shows that almost all of the children who exodus onto the street does so due to some form of abuse or neglect, whether by the immediate family or society at large. Much more harm done to street children results from child neglect than from direct child abuse. The failures of governments in relation to children are partly due to unfavourable policies and programmes, but more often to the absence of and inadequate programmes. Children's programmes are often treated with low-priority in national budgets. Children, who are the human capital and the future assets of every nation could be adequately cared for if they were considered as high priority in government circles.

In fact there is no widespread societal motivation to harm children for its own sake, out of intrinsic hatefulness. But there is a well-established pattern of accepting the sustained and undeniable harm that befalls children as societies pursue other interests, while acceptance of their harmed indirectly, as a kind of collateral damage from other activities regarded as more important. The Department of Social Welfare in Kumasi has introduced sensitization programmes in schools and communities; working in partnership with the Metro/Municipal, Districts Assemblies, NGO"s and individual's to remove children from the street and to monitor the progress of the children removed. This programme appears to be a temporary solution as it does not address the root causes of poverty in the households of these street children. Many of these children do not get any support from government institutions because it is also difficult to target them for specific activities. Only 2 percent of the street children interviewed recounts that they have ever benefited from any assistance/programmes from humanitarian agencies in the municipality.

RECOMMENDATION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The main framework for improving the living conditions for children is set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), in four broad areas: survival, development, protection and participation. There are two possible levels of intervention by local authorities; first through working with the affected children directly (addressing the symptoms), and secondly, by providing preventative services and programmes to the community where the children come from, (addressing causal factors).

Both the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as the Habitat Agenda provides a mandate for local authorities to promote the rights of children. These can broadly be categorized either as active or passive rights. Active rights relate to provision of goods and services such as housing, schools and health care facilities. The latter include the right not to be imprisoned without trial, and freedom from discrimination based on sex, race, or religion. Local authorities need to secure these rights as part of their responsibilities in securing sustainable future cities.

Addressing the root causes of children streetism requires reconsideration of the fundamentals of governance and the rules humanity live by. One approach is the recognition and realization of the human rights. Most criminal laws deals with those who take actions that should not have been taken; it does not deal so effectively with failures to take action that should have been taken. This is true whether the failure to act is attributed to individual or governments.

Street children cannot make their own claims for recognition of their rights; they require surrogates to speak on their behalf. A number of organizations, private and public, national and international, have emerged to take up the advocacy of children. But much remains to be done. Millions upon millions of children still exodus to the street each year and at times die as a result.

The second approach is calls for assistance to the needy, and basing the assistance on the explicit legal recognition that the needy have specific rights to assistance. Empowering the powerless, and compensating them to at least some degree for their disadvantages to alleviate their suffering, on the grounds of charity, compassion and humanitarianism. There are some assistance programmes, both within countries and internationally, that are quite effective. But their coverage is uneven, largely a matter of charity and chance. Often they are targeted more on the basis of political considerations than on the basis of human need. They tend to reinforce rather than remedy the existing skew in structures of power.

NGOs have been at the forefront in initiating the most innovative approaches for addressing the street children problem. However, most NGO initiatives are only remedial, and provide short-term solutions. Community-based human settlement improvements in slums and squatter settlements have the greatest potential for preventing potential street children by re-integrating them into their neighbourhoods.

Awareness campaigns are a very important vehicle to help better understand children on the streets and local authorities to better respond to their needs. Awareness can be created through murals, animated cartoon vehicles, community forums and publications.

Most local authorities in Ghana tend to provide services along sectoral lines (i.e. committees or departments aim at providing a particular service) rather than adopting an integrated approach. However, the perceived needs of communities and children are often integrated, requiring a cross-sectoral approach. This also requires building partnerships with other actors in the city providing community services e.g. the central government, private sector and NGOs.

Government and other child support organizations should take advantage of new data on working children to implement more effectively the projects and programmes intended to enhance the welfare of children.

CONCLUSION

The street is a source of livelihood for many children. This study shows that street children in Ghana in general and Kumasi to be precise are important contributors to the sustenance of many poor urban households.

Remedies for streetism are not easy to design or implement, however, each case must provide a learning point for society and government agencies to see the pervasive and persistent impacts of streetism in the society. As should be clear from this research, there are massive and systematic patterns of disadvantage to particular categories of people that are neither natural nor necessary, and signify ongoing massive injustice. That injustice can be corrected overtime through clear recognition and progressive realisation of the right of the child as human rights.

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