

Background Paper: Street Children

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Street Children Accessing Education in Dar es Salaam: Report on Preliminary Research¹

Introduction:

Street children are amongst the most vulnerable and marginalized members of society, often lacking access to food, shelter, health care, security and education. This study is preliminary research to identify the issues faced by street children in accessing quality education in Dar es Salaam and the potential for further research in the area.

Background:

The phenomenon of street children in Dar es Salaam has not been the subject of research in the same way as in other areas of Tanzania, particularly Mwanza and the Kilimanjaro Region. Consequently, there is little information about the numbers of children involved, and little networking between the agencies supporting them. Whatever the actual numbers of street children, there is a perception that the numbers of street children in Dar es Salaam is increasing more rapidly than elsewhere in the country, and that this is a particular cause for concern².

The significance of street children as an issue to the Tanzanian Government was shown by the organization of a high profile 'Street Children Planning Conference' held in Dar es Salaam in January 2009 which was attended by the Prime Minister and Minister of Community Development, Gender and Children as well as approximately 80 stakeholders, including street children, representatives of local government agencies, street children NGOs, international organizations and various government ministries. One aim of this conference was to contribute to the development of a strategic plan for street children by the Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children.

Street Children's Access to Education in Dar es Salaam, the Current Situation:

At a policy level Tanzania's Education Training Policy (1995) provides for equal access for all children to basic education, and the Child Development Policy (1996) emphasizes the need for co-ordination and collaboration between ministries to ensure that all school-going age children are enrolled in primary schools and that alternative programmes are set up for the older children.

¹ This research was carried out by Alan Jury for VSO Tanzania.

² Consortium for Street Children, 2009

The policies also emphasize the need to introduce programmes which will enable children from poor families to have access to education; so that those who have dropped out of school can re-enter schooling, and to ensure a conducive teaching/learning environment for children.

A system of Complementary Basic Education (COBET) or MEMKWA (the corresponding Kiswahili acronym) is in place to provide flexible educational opportunities to children out of school, and includes the possibility of transfer into mainstream schooling following success in Standard IV or Primary School Leaving Examinations. MEMKWA centres are attached to some primary schools, and some NGOs are also registered as MEMKWA providers. Initial research suggests that when MEMKWA is provided by NGOs, it is more effective in facilitating children's entry or re-entry to the formal education sector than when it is provided in primary schools. However, even where children are successful in Standard IV examinations at the end of a MEMKWA course, they often face continuing difficulties when they transfer to mainstream education.

Although the Tanzania Government has made good progress towards achieving universal primary education, with net enrolment in primary schools rising from a ratio of 59 percent in 2000³ to a rate of 97.3 percent in 2007⁴ street children's access to education remains very low. A 2008 census of street children in Mwanza indicated that 26% of participants had never attended school, and a further 45% had dropped out of school. When asked what form of intervention would be most useful to them, just over 50% wanted support for an education. Over 60% of the participants were of primary school age. Street children cited various factors that contribute to their migration to the streets. The most frequently cited reason for being on the streets was "economic hardship" followed by "domestic violence."⁵

Constraints on accessing education:

Primary education is NOT free

In principle, primary education in Tanzania is free. The policy enshrined in the Primary Education Development Plan is that a child should not be excluded from school for lack of means to pay fees. However, in a national survey⁶ children reported a different picture with the majority of children saying that their school expected contributions of up to 5000/- (Tanzanian Shilling) for a range of things, from health services to watchmen and school buildings. Many reported that children were excluded from school for non-payment, and in one school, more than half the older children had been excluded for non-payment at some point. Such demands for payments from pupils will inevitably be very problematic for children living on the streets with little or no family support or income.

³ Poverty and Human Development Report 2005, page 11, REPOA on behalf of the Research and Analysis Working Group, GoT

⁴ Poverty and Human Development Report 2007, page 25, REPOA on behalf of the Research and Analysis Working Group, GoT

⁵ Railway Children, 2008, Children on the Streets in Mwanza – Summary of Survey Findings, Downloaded from www.railwaychildren.org.uk/wcore/showdoc.asp?id=962 on 24 February 2009

⁶ Research and Analysis Working Group, United Republic of Tanzania, 2008

Attitude towards street children

Parents' attitudes are not always supportive of children attending school. Teachers' attitudes to the position of street children in school are often far from positive. The research suggests that where MEMKWA is provided within mainstream primary schools it is of poor quality, underfunded and understaffed. This is at least partly the result of attitudes towards street children, but is also likely to be related to a skills gap in teachers' ability to develop more inclusive teaching methods.

Gender issues

There is no consistency regarding the proportion of female street children. Studies on street children in Tanzania suggest that girls only represent an estimated 20–30 per cent of the total numbers of 'street youth' due to the fact that traditional cultural values restrict girls' freedom of movement compared to boys⁷. Many girls are thus in domestic employment, and not working openly on the streets. The majority of the twenty or so street children projects in Tanzania (most of which are located in Dar es Salaam) cater almost exclusively for boys⁸. The exploitation of girls as domestic workers is linked to the smaller proportion of girls living independently in the street environment.

Limited capacity of NGO and the local Government and skills gap in teachers:

Non-Governmental Organisations working with street children in Dar es Salaam have limited capacity to support the effective inclusion of these children once they enter primary school, and report that although they have provided training for Local Government Officers, Head Teachers and teachers in local schools, there are continuing capacity and attitudinal gaps which form barriers to the children accessing a quality education.

Opportunities for further research:

This issue of continuing capacity and attitudinal gaps needs further exploration. There are indications of substantial successes in the inclusion of children from 'street backgrounds' in formal primary education following a period of NGO provided 'complementary basic education'. This prepares children for the teaching and learning approaches of mainstream schools, and supports schools to developing more inclusive practices. "Views of the Children", a major research report in 2007, gave a voice to children on issues related to their education and their role in society, but was unable to include the views of working children.

VSO intends to undertake further child-focused action research to identify the views of working children, the factors which lead to successful inclusion and to develop these factors as a model of good practice for dissemination. Planning for this research is now at an advanced stage and it is hoped to carry this out beginning towards the end of 2009.

⁷ Evans, Ruth. 2008

⁸ Evans, Ruth. 2002