



Newsletter 84

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30 years on from the child rights convention



Dear Readers,

The Consortium for street children (CSC) UK, is celebrating the recognition of that thirty years ago since they applied for a child right convention at the United Nations.

Consortium for Street Children (CSC) is a growing global network of 100+ organizations, researchers and practitioners across 135 countries. They unite to make the voices and views of **street children** heard on the issues that matter to them, and work tirelessly to protect their human rights.

The question is, should we be glad that we have to recognize street children as a group which needs protection, or should we be disappointed that this is indeed necessary?

My personal opinion is that we should never accept that children live in the streets. They do not belong there, and we should bundle all our efforts to prevent more children coming to the streets.

Let us look at the root causes: where do these children come from? Yes, indeed from families. So the root cause is the family. Here in Ghana, we know that the majority of the children who are in the street are from families who are broken down. I know that many people do not accept this statement and they argue that other causes such as poverty, truancy, lack of jobs, etc. Why is this done because it is difficult to admit that the street children problem is a social problem because social situation tells stories about our lives. It is definitely not an 100% economic problem. Although money is needed, money alone will never solve this problem.

We as care providers and society are failing to educate the youth about the benefits of having good and supportive families in our society.

Now, NGOs are trying to take the place of families (parents), which can never be good. Indeed, about forty years ago society did not have many NGOs and umbrellas such as the Consortium for street children.

It all has to do with recognizing the right values in life. I have my computer, I have my phone and I do not need my neighbor is often the attitude. Selfishness is the correct word.

Let us look at the group “street children”. After working for 28 years with and for street children we have learnt that the group street children **does not exist** as an entity but exist in various forms.

A migrant child who lives alone in the city cannot be compared with a urban poor child who has parents and goes home in the evening. A second or third generation child has a complete different background.

We have to study each group separately and for each group solutions have to found. Maybe, legislation could be helpful as part of the many answers to the problem.



Migrant child.

The Migrant child has left his/her family in the rural area and has travelled to the city alone or with some peers. Why did this child leave the home? In the social survey reports we have, we can read that there are many reasons. But often we read that the family can no longer cope with the circumstances they find themselves in and the family breaks apart. The child does not see much hope in a better future and decides to travel to the nearest city or even further. There they find protection and support from peers of the same tribe. They learn how to survive. At most, their educational background are not more than a few classes of primary school education.

Some indulge in a boy or a girl-friend relationship to assist each other in life. The result is, the second or third or fourth generation child is born.



Second generation group or those who have been born on the street.

These children have a very narrow opinion of life. They have a poor background and they only know the small space in the city where they live.

Working with them requires a lot of patience. These children have to be educated and reformed and often the basic 'life skills' are not known by them.

They are lucky when their mother sets aside some money for schooling.

The third group, **the Urban poor children** are children from poor families who live in the city. A good example are the families who live at the coast line of Ghana and are fishermen and women.

In other places such as Adjei Kojo and Ashaiman, for example, complete families have migrated from the rural areas and live now often in slums in the city. These children also roam the street and do not go to school. However, in the evening they go back to their homes.

Three different groups have different problems and are in need of different solutions and different legislation.

CAS never worked with children who still live with families and we do not have much experience working with parents. We never want to take the place of the parents.

Of late, we conducted extended fieldwork activities. More members of staff were asked to visit the streets to gather data. This became necessary because the situation in the streets had changed and we lost contact in several areas in the city. We conducted this mini data gathering for a period of one month. The outcome shows that only a few places by our findings were considered good working areas to do fieldwork activities.

Many places where Urban poor children are located were removed from our list. However, we maintained one located at one of the beaches in Accra.

The reason is, we do not know enough about this particular place and we do not know whether we can work for and with these children.

Alternatively: Instead of fighting for the right of street children, we should pay more attention to their families who cannot cope in this present time.

NGOs such as CAS are not formed for this family approach type of intervention. The only thing we can do is to encourage other groups, churches and societies to have an open eye for families in their neighborhood.



FAMILY LIFE.

The family of the migrant child is different from the family of the second generation child.

The migrant child has uncles and aunts as well as grant parents. This child also belongs to a particular tribe and most probably has learnt some cultural practices.

The second generation child knows her mother and some know his or her father as well. Most probably, this child has never met any uncles and aunties. The question is, to which group does this child belong? Is it the mother's culture or the father's culture which s(he) will accept?

Or does this child only know the sub-culture of the street?

Many studies have been made on family life in various countries. It is a fact that the value of marrying and having a family has changed, but solutions for handling the children who fall out of that family have not been found as yet.

In my opinion, it is completely wrong that some NGO's have to single handedly find solutions for the children who fall out as a result of broken homes.



Changes in the city and change in the type of children.

Although it happens often, it is still interesting to note that street children move frequently between places where they sleep and carry out activities. The reason is that, lorry parks and markets move to other locations because of road or building construction, but also because of other reasons such as:

- Authorities (there are many in Accra City) decide that the children are not allowed to stay at particular places.
- There is not sufficient “work” opportunity for the many children.
- Some of the areas become the support base of some political parties.
- And of course some of the places are no longer secure for them.

We also know that the type of children change constantly. This is as a result of the developments in society such as for instance the use of computer and cell phones. Street children use them as well for communication. The intolerance of some people to allow these children in their neighborhood. Children become more aggressive because they have to fight for their rights. We deal more with second or third generation children who are different from those who come from the rural areas. The first fifteen years CAS worked solely with migrant children and learned a lot.

Recently, the spouses of some of the Ambassadors in Ghana, paid us a visit and CAS wants to thank them.

The Demonstration department exhibited the items they made.

We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.



Bro. Jos van Dinther
(Director CAS)



