
Street Children and Street Life in Urban Tanzania: The Culture of Surviving and its Implications for Children's Health

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Introduction

During the past ten years, Tanzanian¹ cities have undergone rapid changes that have transformed the urban environment as well as the lives of millions of people who live in this setting. The impact of these changes is affecting almost everybody, particularly the urban poor. One of the growing social problems associated with these changes is the tremendous increase in unsupervised children either living alone or working on urban streets. The number of urban street children, *watoto wa mitaani*,² has increased rapidly during the last decade in Tanzania. This problem is especially acute in big cities like Dar-Es-Salaam, Arusha, Morogoro, Moshi, Tanga, Mbeya and Mwanza where the rates of urban population growth have been exploding amidst an intensifying and severe social and economic crisis. The rapid population growth has been associated with an increase in the number of children living alone on urban streets or spending most of their day on the streets in the quest for survival. The majority of these children have for various reasons either abandoned or have been abandoned by their families and have migrated to urban areas in order to earn a living. Their rapid increase in number at a time when Tanzania is experiencing great financial constraints raises concerns and calls for immediate attention.

Currently, urban street children are seen as a problem which further compounds the nature of the urban crisis. Politicians, policy-makers and urban planners seem to be helpless in their efforts to either resolve the problem or to assist street children and have so far failed to prescribe plausible solutions which are realistic, down-to-earth and concrete. In fact, the official government attitude towards street children has been very negative. Street children are considered to be hooligans, vagabonds and prone to commit crimes. As a result of this, they have been a target of harassment by law enforcement organizations; there are many cases of street children being beaten by police, detained and sometimes repatriated to their rural homes. Nevertheless, these draconian measures have not provided long-term solutions to this social problem. The number of urban street children has continued to escalate every year.

Why is this so? One reason for the failure of the government to provide viable solutions to this problem stems from the fact that the government is ignorant about urban street children in Tanzania. It has made no attempt to understand who these children are

1 Tanzania in this paper refers to mainland Tanzania only.

2 Kiswahili word for street children.

and where they come from, their reasons for leaving home, how they survive and meet their daily needs, what problems they experience and how they surmount these problems. Lack of this crucial information has led to adopting policy solutions that deal with the symptoms of this problem rather than the causes.

In order to address this information gap, the authors, who are Tanzanians, conducted an in-depth study of street children which was carried out in Dar-Es-Salaam in 1994–95. The main objectives were: first, to identify structures and processes that generate and perpetuate the increasing number of street children; second, to understand the historical background of these children, the socio-economic characteristics of their families, how they meet their basic daily needs, the problems they confront and how they surmount them; and third, to examine the implications of this culture of street life upon children's health.

Methodology and study area

The study was conducted in the city of Dar-Es-Salaam between October 1994 and August 1995. This city was chosen because Dar-Es-Salaam, with an approximate population of 3–4 million, is the largest city in Tanzania; since colonization it has taken the lead in terms of urban population growth and has accommodated over one-third of all urban dwellers in the country for the last three decades (Lugalla, 1995). Recent information from UNICEF (Dar-Es-Salaam office) shows that there are about 5000 street children in Tanzania, 40% of whom reside in Dar-Es-Salaam.

Dar-Es-Salaam city is divided into three administrative districts — Kinondoni, Ilala and Temeke. While Kinondoni and Temeke are predominantly residential areas, Ilala district contains most of the commercial and government administration activities. It is the business district of the city and accommodates more street children than the other two districts. It is for this reason that we chose Ilala district for our in-depth study.

The study was carried out in two phases: the pilot phase and the in-depth study. During the pilot phase, we visited all three districts in order to get an overview of the magnitude of the problem. This phase helped us to identify different types of street children. UNICEF and other agencies tend to define street children on the basis of the frequency with which they sleep on the street and the degree of contact they maintain with their families (Knaul, 1995a). Consequently, there are two main classifications: 'children of the street' and 'children on the street'. Children of the street include those who live and sleep alone on the streets and have almost no family contact; children on the street are those who spend most of the day on the streets but have homes, maintain family ties and normally return to their homes in the evening to sleep. Some operate in marginal jobs and others have flooded the informal sector.

The pilot study identified these two categories of street children in Dar-Es-Salaam and observed that the 'children of the street' were more vulnerable and at higher risk than 'children on the street'. We therefore decided to focus our in-depth study on the more vulnerable group. We began by identifying five street children (three boys and two girls) and establishing an informal, close and friendly relationship with them so that they became familiar with us. The children were informed of the purpose of the study and were asked to participate in it. Thereafter, these children introduced us to their friends, who in turn introduced us to other friends.

Information was gathered by means of informal and unstructured interviews with individual children and with ten focus groups. We also designed a questionnaire that included questions about their general demographics, their historical background and the socio-economic characteristics of their parents. Although it was in our interest to make sure that there was an equal representation of both boys and girls, we encountered a variety of difficulties in attaining this parity. First, cultural sanctions towards girls are

stronger and thus they are subject to more controlled supervision or monitoring by their families. The chances of being able to run away from their homes are slim. As a result, there are fewer girls living on the streets in Tanzania. Second, even if girls do manage to run away from their homes, most of them end up living with a family for whom they begin work as domestic servants. As they grow up and become independent, they often join the entertainment industry as barmaids, hotel attendants or prostitutes. Third, even if they do not work as domestic servants, those who are close to puberty are picked up by pimps or police. There is ample evidence in Tanzania that street girls are harassed and even detained by the police more than street boys. Fourth, street girls are always vulnerable to physical and sexual assault, making street life less attractive to girls than to boys.

All these factors contribute to the existence of a smaller number of girls living and surviving on the streets than boys, which is reflected by the number of girls we interviewed. However, one should not think that girls who work in marginal jobs as domestic servants or in the entertainment industry or as commercial sex workers are faring well. Evidence from India and South America of the magnitude of exploitation, oppression and child sexual abuse experienced by these girls is overwhelming (Patel, 1990; Knaul, 1995a).

Our research process included a participation dimension, the aim of which was to give the children a chance to make their own voices heard, or, as Blanc-Szanton (1994) has argued, to allow children to be participating subjects in, rather than the objects of research. They participated in all levels of the research by assisting in identifying areas where most children spend their day and night time. Some assisted in redesigning our questionnaire, and those who could read and write administered some of the questionnaires under the supervision of our research assistants, most of whom were social sciences students from the University of Dar-Es-Salaam. The children themselves mobilized other children, identified meeting locations and suggested meeting times.

The approach of involving street children in our research effort made our field work easier and led to valuable and immediate results. Through their assistance, we managed to establish three main meeting areas. One area was near a famous car parking lot situated between Sokoine Drive and Samora Avenue and between Avalon Cinema, United Nations Building and the City Council of Dar-Es-Salaam. Most street children prefer this area because some work there informally as 'parking boys', car washers or car security guards. The second area was the Mnazi Mmoja grounds where the up-country bus terminal is located. Street children like visiting this area because of the kind of activities which link Dar-Es-Salaam and its countryside. Some earn their living here by working as baggage on and off loaders. The third area was near Uhuru Co-Education Primary School playground. This area is quite close to the Kariakoo area, which accommodates the biggest market and low and middle-income shopping areas in Dar-Es-Salaam. It is also close to the city transport bus terminal. Street children flood this area during the day because of the economies of scale or comparative advantages offered by this area in so far as their survival strategies are concerned.

Who are the 'children of the street'?

Knowing who the 'children of the streets' are in terms of their age, gender, place of origin and social and economic characteristics is the first and most important step in designing policies which would have a positive impact on these children. Knowing about their historical backgrounds and the socio-economic characteristics of their families is crucial in that this information helps us to understand why these children are living on the streets. 'Children of the streets' are distinctly different from 'children on the streets' or children living in poor residential slum areas of Dar-Es-Salaam.

One main characteristic of the 'children of the street' is that they live alone on the streets, without proper or reliable shelter; they have lost contact with their parents and, as such, they do not enjoy parental protection, love and care. All 200 children involved in our study were of the street in these ways. The fact that these children are totally alone means that they are fully responsible for their own lives. They plan different survival strategies on their own. They develop themselves materially, culturally and morally. Also, as a majority of these children (80%) migrated to Dar-Es-Salaam when they were between eight and ten years old, they became uprooted from the traditional forms of cultural socialization and hence are completely divorced from their families' ways of life. Only 36 children (18%) stated that they knew their home language and could still communicate in it fluently. In general, these children are not only 'homeless' or 'roofless', but they are also culturally 'rootless'. This characteristic not only describes their state or situation but distinguishes them from other children of the urban poor who also flood the streets of Dar-Es-Salaam but who return home to their families at the end of the day. The fact that these children are unique in these respects demands that they require special attention which is necessarily different from that given to 'children on the streets'.

The ages of the 200 children we interviewed ranged from eight to sixteen years old. Only 4 of the children were aged eight and 12 were aged sixteen. The remaining 184 children (92%) were between the ages of ten and thirteen. All children said they had migrated to Dar-Es-Salaam from up-country regions. Eighty-seven children (43.5%) stated that they had migrated from the Dodoma region, followed by Tabora and Lindi both at 11%; 19 (9.5%) came from Mwanza and 14 (7%) came from Shinyanga. This means that 82% of the children came from these areas (see Table 1).

The vast majority — 188 — of the children (94%) had migrated from rural areas, while only 12 (6%) had come from other urban areas. A total of 105 children (52.5%) stated that they had been living on the streets for more than five years and only 30 (15%) had been living in Dar-Es-Salaam for less than a year. As many as 190 (95%) said that they had never been to school and did not know how to read and write while only 10 (5%) said that they had attended primary education. However, in-depth information revealed that only 4 of these children managed to complete the seven years of primary education. The remaining 6 dropped out of school when they were in the fourth grade. Of those who attended school, none of them were girls, an indication of how difficult it is for girls to get an education in rural Tanzania.

There are ecological and historical reasons for the majority of these children to come from the rural areas of the regions shown in Table 1. Of the 21 regions of Tanzania, these regions experience severe drought. They have arid and very infertile lands and agricultural production survives by sheer luck. Dodoma is more or less a semi-desert due to severe drought, and overgrazing has had disastrous environmental impacts in the Mwanza, Shinyanga, Mara and Tabora regions. Lindi, Mtwara and Ruvuma are regions which have been forgotten by official policy planners as far as development is concerned. They were considered labor reserves by the colonial government and it is doubtful that the post-colonial state has tried to reverse this situation. In general, these regions experience severe underdevelopment and chronic poverty seems to be the norm rather than a temporary phenomenon. Information derived from the Planning Commission of Tanzania shows that these regions account for a great number of migrants who become beggars in urban Tanzania.

In order to get a picture of the children's family household profiles and the social and economic background of their parents or families, we began by asking them to describe the dominant economic activities of their parents. Since all of them (including those from urban areas) indicated agriculture was the dominant economic activity, we asked them to estimate the size of land their parents or families owned. After describing to them what an acre looked like, only 18 children (9%) reported that their parents used to own land which exceeded two acres. The parents of the remaining 91% of the children owned less than

Table 1 Place of origin and educational status of our sample of street children, Dar-Es-Salaam

Region	No. of children	Origin		%	None	Education	
		No. from rural	No. from urban			Primary	Secondary
Dodoma	87	81	6	43.5	79	8	—
Tabora	22	22	—	11.0	22	—	—
Shinyanga	14	14	—	7.0	14	—	—
Mwanza	19	18	1	9.5	17	2	—
Lindi	22	22	—	11.0	22	—	—
Mtwara	12	12	—	6.0	12	—	—
Mara	10	10	—	5.0	10	—	—
Morogoro	5	3	2	2.5	5	—	—
Ruvuma	9	6	3	4.5	9	—	—
Total	200	188	12		190	10	0
%		94%	6%		95%	5%	0%

Source: Research findings.

two acres. All of the children reported production for subsistence as the main occupation of their parents. They also complained about poor productivity on these small pieces of land due to drought, poor soil and poor and archaic methods of social organization of production. This study data also confirms data in the UNICEF study which observed that 80% of households in Tanzania derived their economic livelihood from small-scale food crop production based on rain-fed land and hoe technology. The median size of holding was 0.7 hectares (UNICEF, 1990).

We also asked them about the size of their families and whether they had lived with both parents prior to being on the streets. While 29 children (14.5%) reported coming from monogamous marriages, 84 (42%) originated from polygamous marriages. Sixty-six children (33%) came from single (formerly married or unmarried) parents. Of these 66, 47 (71.2%) had been living with either their biological or step mothers only. Twenty-five out of the 30 girls belonged to this category. The main reason for this trend is that, in most cultures in Tanzania, girls prefer living with their mothers rather than with their fathers in the event of divorce or separation. Twenty-one children (10.5%) indicated they had been living with relatives or other guardians. Their response to the question of family size shows that more than two-thirds (78%) came from large families that had between six and fifteen children. All children stated that their mothers had never attended school and did not know how to read and write. Only 31 children (15.5%) reported that their fathers had received primary education.

It is very interesting, however, to note that although the fathers seemed to have access to education, 133 children (66.5%) identified their mothers or female guardians as the main economic providers. These findings point to an inversion of roles in the families of these children. The dominant patriarchal tradition of Tanzania requires that fathers be the head of the household and the main economic provider at the same time. Among the objective difficulties are workloads borne by the mother and how this, in turn, affects her relationship with her children. Rizzini rightly argues that a long and stressful workday has a negative effect, not only on the mother's relationship with her children, but also upon her ability to control them (Rizzini *et al.*, 1994). A more subjective consequence is the transmission of a weak image of the father, who has difficulty in performing the role that society expects of him. In a male dominated society like Tanzania, this image undoubtedly produces a lot of frustration, increases the father's level of stress, and leads to negative relationships within the family which contribute extensively to family

Table 2 Reasons for leaving home by percentage and rank of our sample of street children, Dar-Es-Salaam (population size = 200 children)

Rank	Reason	%
1	General situation of poverty	100.0
2	No food at home	90.0
3	Need to look for a job and earn money	85.0
4	Parent/matrimonial problems (parent death or separation)	69.0
5	Bad relationship with family (fights, abuse by parents or stepparents)	62.0
6	'Bright-light theory' (children attracted by city life)	12.5
7	No parents, therefore have no home	8.0

Source: Research findings.

instability. A recent study in Kenya has observed that street children in Nairobi tend to come from female-headed households in slum or squatter areas (Mutuku and Mutiso, 1994). As Rizzini has argued for Brazil, challenging such deeply rooted cultural attitudes causes both objective and subjective difficulties in the dynamics of the family (Rizzini *et al.*, 1994).

Having collected some information about children's family household profiles, we became interested in knowing their reasons for leaving their families and migrating to Dar-Es-Salaam. We asked each child to state as many reasons as possible. Table 2 presents a summary of these reasons by rank. It is clear that family poverty and poor economics are the main motives for leaving home. Confronted with rural poverty and hunger, the third most common reason for leaving home is the need to look for means of earning money outside the home village. Since our findings show that these children do not retain links with their families (that is, they do not have even their home addresses and have never revisited their homes), it is very unlikely that they migrate to urban areas in order to assist their families back home. Rather, they move to tend to their own personal needs for survival.

The other common reason which forces them to migrate is the nature of social life and social relationships in the family. Sixty-nine percent of the children stated a variety of matrimonial problems including parental separation due to either death or divorce. Sixty-two percent of the children mentioned fights between parents, the cruelty of some stepparents and abuse as conditions which forced them to run away from their homes.

Only 12.5% of the children mentioned the allure of city life or the need to see the city as an important factor in their decision to leave their homes and only 8% stated that they had decided to leave their homes because they had lost both parents and no-one in the village was willing to take care of them.

How street children meet their basic needs

Knowing how 'children of the street' meet their basic needs is critical. First, it helps us to understand how these children survive and, second, it enables us to map out the already existing urban resources which are being used by these children. This knowledge has considerable implications for policy planning: it can assist us in planning for future intervention policies and strategies. In order to know how these children manage their day-to-day basic needs, we asked them how they got their food, where they slept, where they bathed, what toilet facilities they used and how they protected themselves.

None of the children had fixed or permanent accommodation. More than half (60%) slept in the streets or on the pavement quite close to shops or other commercial buildings

such as cinema halls, discotheques and theaters. Fourteen percent spent their nights at bus and railway terminals (*Gerezani* and *Mnazi Mmoja* areas) and 11% slept in corridors near religious institutions. Ten girls spent their nights as partners of night security guards, while the remaining 20 spent their nights near hotels.

Most of these children (88.7%) reported that they worked informally during the day as car-parking boys, vehicle security guards, car washers or baggage loaders³ and used the money they got from these jobs to buy cheap food in shanty hotels, commonly known in Dar-Es-Salaam as '*Magenge*' or '*Mama Nitilie*'. Others (10.5%) got their daily food by begging in various restaurants and 6.5% indicated that they survived by eating leftovers collected from hotels (see Table 3). Information collected from focus group discussants confirmed that some older girls sell sex in order to survive.

Bathing or taking a shower is not considered to be very important. None of the children bathed more than twice a week. The majority (72.5%) used the waters of the Indian Ocean for bathing. Some (18.4%) used public bathrooms located at the central railway station. A few used water from leaking pipes and public kiosks (5% and 4.1%, respectively). They complained, however, about being harassed by both city residents and law enforcement officials when they used these water sources. More than two-thirds of these children used public toilet facilities available in the city, but they complained that most of the public toilets were not functioning. Some (14.6%) used hotel toilets and less than 10% used parks, pavements, roads and the seaside for their toilet needs. With these findings, the belief that street children primarily defecate or urinate in open streets must be seriously doubted.

In terms of security, four-fifths reported that they depend on their peer groups. The majority of them know each other and prefer living in smaller groups of between three and five children. This not only provides them with companionship, but also comfort and a framework for socialization. This grouping also serves as support and protection from certain kinds of violence. Street girls also have their own security groups. Their groups are often different from those that the street boys use. For instance, some of the older girls associate with older boys who provide them with security in exchange for sexual relationships. Other girls have managed to establish strong contacts with night security guards who are employed in the formal sector. Some of these guards provide the girls with security and shelter, in return for which they request sexual favors.

Street life as a social phenomenon affecting children's health

There is no doubt that the unhealthy urban environment in which these children live is a major cause of health problems among them. In order to know their health status and how they seek health care, we asked them to mention the kinds of illnesses they had suffered while living on the streets. All mentioned malaria (fever), diarrhoea and stomach-related illnesses, coughing and other respiratory diseases; 43 (21.5%) mentioned scabies and other skin-related diseases; 24 (12%) mentioned headaches; and 7 (3.5%) suffered from eye infections. Infectious diseases seem to be common among street children. Certainly this is a result of a variety of predisposing factors which include unsafe and unhygienic sleeping areas, the shortage or lack of safe drinking water, unsafe food leftovers and food collected from garbage bins. Street children also experience the physical problems associated with homelessness such as the lack of latrines. Some studies on urban crisis in Tanzania have noted recently that none of the public toilets in Dar-Es-Salaam city are functional (Lugalla, 1995).

3 Those who work as parking boys also provide security services and often wash the cars they are guarding as well.

Table 3 *How street children cope with urban life: where they work, sleep, eat, bathe and use toilet facilities*

Work*	%	Sleep	%	Eat	%	Bathe	%	Toilet	%
Parking boys	74.5	Street pavement	60.0	Hotels (buying)	82.0	In the ocean	72.5	Public toilets	54.5
Vehicle security guards	74.5	Railway/bus station	14.0	Hotels (begging)	10.5	Railway station	18.4	Railway station	23.7
Car washers	74.5	Religious buildings	11.0	Hotel leftovers	6.5	Leaking water pipes	5.0	Hotels	14.6
Baggage loaders	14.2	Near hotels	10.0	Miscellaneous	1.0	Public water kiosks	4.1	Parks/roadside	4.4
Beggars	11.3	With security guards	5.0					Seaside	2.8
	100.0		100.0		100.0		100.0		100.0

* Children were asked to indicate more than one type of job.

Source: Research findings.

How, then, do they solve their health problems? What is their health-seeking behavior? More than half claimed to get treatment from public hospitals located in Mnazi Mmoja and Ilala. Others said they had received medicinal assistance from friends, and others bought medicine from drug stores in town or from traditional herbalists in the city. Others, due to severe poverty, waited for their bodies to recover naturally. Information from focus groups revealed that these children have some degree of knowledge about medicines which cure their common diseases.

It is clear from the above findings that there are gross inadequacies in providing for the basic needs of street children. They have difficulty accessing sufficient fresh and nutritious food, clean water, reliable shelter, bathing and toilet facilities and health care. These children do not have contact with their families or relatives. With no family or formal structure for moral, emotional and psychological support and protection, they truly exist on their own. There is no doubt that such a situation has a serious impact on their psychological health and is not without consequences.

It was beyond the scope of this study to look at the psychological suffering that the 'children of the streets' are subject to. Street life is associated with psycho-social distress, as studies done elsewhere have confirmed. Especially instructive to the authors is the study done by Cohen *et al.* (1991) using the Home, Education, Activities, Drug use and abuse, Sexual behavior, Suicidality and depression (HEADSS) psycho-social profile data. The authors of this study found that more than 50% of homeless children in Los Angeles experience depression, over 30% had attempted suicide and 5% had had suicidal thoughts in the preceding month. Also they report that only 18% of homeless children claimed not to use drugs or any substance of abuse. The findings that homeless children have mental health problems are not unique to Los Angeles homeless children, as is evidenced by a previous study carried out by Bassuk and Rubin (1987) who report depression, anxiety and behavioral problems as common problems among homeless children in Massachusetts. Wagner and Menek (1990) found 50% of homeless children in New York needed mental health intervention. Furthermore, homeless female youth who had been sexually abused and are susceptible to binge drinking have been found to be more prone to suicide. As the problem of children of the street worsens, and more girls end up on the streets of Dar Es Salaam, it will be important for early interventions for this group in particular to prevent fatal outcomes.

Street life as a cause of sexual vulnerability

Living independently at this very tender age makes children more vulnerable to or places them at higher risk from both physical and sexual abuse. Cases of girls being raped and boys being sodomized by force are not hard to find. Although our study collected little information about street children's sexuality and the consequent health implications, discussions in focus groups confirmed that street children in Dar-Es-Salaam also lead active sex lives. Both anal and vaginal penetrative sex seem to be common among sexual relations involving both genders but penetrative anal sex is more common among boys.

None of those who reported having sex had used a condom and none of the sexually active children had only one sexual partner. This means that these children tend to practice risky sexual behavior. Since sex is offered as a transaction for money or emotional rewards like security, these children, particularly the girls, are forced to accept sexual behavior that is harmful to their health. Since they are already vulnerable, negotiating condom usage or practising safer sex becomes a virtual impossibility. Even if they are interested in using condoms, these are hardly available in Tanzania, and if they were to become available it is very unlikely that street children would be able to afford them.

Although our informants did not report having suffered from sexually transmitted diseases, studies elsewhere in Tanzania confirm the rampant spread of such diseases

among street children. In their study of the sexual experience of the street children of Mwanza in Tanzania, Rajani and Kudrati (1996) confirm that street children are particularly at risk from infection with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) for several reasons: the need to perform 'survival sex' or prostitution; greater freedom to experiment with sex; and lack of adult protection and socialization (Sibthorpe *et al.*, 1995). This study noted that sex plays a much larger and more central role in the lives of street girls than of boys, especially after puberty. Rajani and Kudrati also noted that the incidence and recurrence of STDs were also proportionately much higher in girls as compared to similarly physically mature boys. Eighty percent of the girls had STDs at least once, while 30% of boys were estimated to have experienced STDs during the same period (Rajani and Kudrati, 1996). Street girls are prone to prostitution because they have a much a narrower range of options for earning a living (Rajani and Kudrati, 1996). Narratives from street girls themselves reflect a situation of hopelessness and helplessness:

If I was a school girl, I could say don't bother me, I want my education. If I had a business, I could say I was a businesswoman. If I lived in a home then they would not think of me [sexually] because they would know I had parents (Rajani and Kudrati, 1996).

Under these circumstances the girls lack assistance and alternative ways of life and are forced to adopt survival behavior which is a risk to their health and which reduces their self-esteem. In addition, they risk being beaten and may experience rough sex, while others end up going unpaid for sexual services they have rendered. In general, their suffering is both physical and psychological. There is no doubt that in an era of rampant HIV/AIDS transmission, commercial sex as a survival strategy becomes a death strategy or a death ticket.

Street life as an urban subculture of surviving and suffering

Street children do not operate haphazardly in the urban environment. Different groups have different zones/areas in which they operate and any interference by another group can cause serious trouble between the groups. This informal way of zoning areas of operation within the city limits competition for resources among the children and assures their survival. This means that street children are highly organized.

These children tend to follow the normal rhythms of urban life. They usually wake up in the morning and flood the streets in pursuit of their means of survival. Learning from the children's experience, it is certain that their urban movements are highly strategic. They frequently visit religious buildings during worship hours. They know where the churches, mosques and other religious buildings are located and are familiar with the worshipping days and hours. They are well aware of important religious ceremonies like Easter, Christmas, Idd-el-Fitri, Maulid and the Islamic holy month of fasting (Ramadhan). According to them, these ceremonies are associated with great prosperity. One boy explained the fortunes associated with these days in the following way:

We get a lot of clothes as presents, also money and food during these religious ceremonies. Most people become very generous and sympathetic with our situation and give a lot. We really enjoy these days. I wish there were more of them.

This shows that street children's thinking is well organized, rational and calculating.

Another example of street children's strategic movements whilst on the streets is their involvement with the police and other authorities. Most of the street children know the names of people from the police force and the city council. When asked how they knew the names of these people, the response from most of them was, 'We deal with these people every day. They keep on chasing, harassing, beating and detaining us'. One girl

responded by saying: 'We know them, and they know us too. They are both our friends and enemies! Sometimes they help us, but sometimes they harass and coerce us. You have to know how to live with them'. Since 62% of the children stated that they had been involved in confrontations with the police more than twice, this is clear evidence that harassment by the police and civic authorities occurs.

Street children also know other areas which are important for their survival. Most of them consider streets which attract many tourists and areas near religious institutions as prosperous places. Some even know NGO offices that deal with street children. They are aware of the street children rehabilitation centers located in Dar-Es-Salaam, but they consider these centers to be kinds of prisons with tough and inhuman regulations. They stated emphatically that they would rather live on the streets than in such centers.

Street children are well aware of the risks and threats presented by the urban environment. Their perceptions of danger vary by age and gender. Some urban areas pose more danger to some social groups than others. Girls and young boys fear frequenting or spending their nights in areas where drunks are common. Most children also tend to avoid spending much time in areas which are frequently patrolled by police.

The plight of street children is hard to imagine. Since most of these children hover on the periphery of other people's lives, most people regard them as inconsequential. The urban authorities view them as a menace to the city. They are invariably seen as people who commit crime, thereby inflaming desires to see them eliminated from the urban environment. They are branded with names like '*wadokozi*' or '*wachomoaji*' (pick-pockets) or '*wahuni*' (hooligans) (Lugalla, 1995). According to section 176 of the Penal Code of Tanzania, street children are considered to be 'Idle and Disorderly Persons' and are therefore subject to criminalization (Lugalla, 1995).

However, in-depth studies on street children reveal a different picture. The study by Rajani and Kudrati (1996) and our own study show that street children are more down-to-earth in terms of their survival strategies and are capable of evaluating themselves. They normally describe themselves as '*watemi, magangwe*' or '*watoto wa maskani*', meaning tough, very strong, carefree people who hang out. Others call themselves 'Born-Town' or 'Born-Here-Here', indicating that they are a product of the social system itself and are therefore familiar with and used to this 'horrible' life.

The children's accounts reveal how they earn their living, their relations with each other, with police, with city or non-governmental organization officials and with passers-by. They also reveal the dangers they face, the problems they experience and what hopes they hold for their future. As with Rizzini *et al.*'s (1994) observation in Brazil, the Tanzanian children's stories show how mistaken some segments of society are in regarding the lives of these children as worthless. Street children try their best to earn income in socially acceptable ways. They work as car washers, car guards or as parking boys. Others have flooded the informal sector where they work as petty traders of a variety of items. Some work as shoe shiners, while others repair the pot-holes in the road in the hope of being rewarded by passing drivers. Those who fall victim to criminal adults become socialized to participate in activities which lack the approval of society, like peddling drugs, petty thievery, prostitution and other illicit ways of earning a living. In such cases, exploitation of child labor is clearly evident. It is very unfortunate that most research studies have difficulties obtaining in-depth information from these children.

Street children have their own ways of maintaining their identity and establishing their peer groups. They normally undergo intensive socialization and initiation processes in order to conform and adhere to specific forms of behavior and practices. Rajani and Kudrati (1996) have shown that '*kunyenga*' (a slang word meaning non-mutual anal penetrative sex) is practised by street children of Mwanza as a form of initiation rite (a transitional stage in identity formation) which allows one to become a member of a group and gives one access to 'group secrets'. Their study shows how power, authority, law and order is exercised and adhered to through these initiation rites. However strange this rite

may appear, it nevertheless shows us how organized these children are, and how they struggle in order to create their own identity and maintain social cohesion. Through this, they share not only information and survival strategies but also emotions. Their groups do not simply provide them with social cohesion, but act as forms of social networks through which information filters from one group of children to the other. These groups replace the family and provide the necessary social assistance which would otherwise have been provided by social networks within the family.

Street children use their groups in order to maintain love, affection and protection among themselves. Elsewhere, studies have found that because of the conditions of violence and insecurity the children face in their families, they tend to look out mainly for themselves as individuals (Rajani and Kudrati, 1996). These studies have also underscored the support and training functions of street groups, particularly during initiation into street life. Our study has noted that street children in Dar-Es-Salaam live and work in groups. This form of social organization makes life on the streets viable and manageable. Rajani and Kudrati (1996) have demonstrated how highly organized the street children of Mwanza town are. Their organization is modeled upon an idealized view of a family.

The groups of street children have leaders, and it seems that there are informal rules and regulations which require the members of a group to adhere to group leadership and ethics. Leaders are highly obeyed and respected. They play an essential role of protecting and guiding the group. It is the leaders who decide who should be recruited as a new member and who should not. They also perform the role of socializing new members. Via the influence of these leaders, newcomers undergo a variety of processes of social reorientation through which new norms and values which fit with urban street life are inculcated and the former rural-oriented family values are disdained. Rajani and Kudrati's study and our own study show that age, physical strength and length of time spent on the streets (briefly summarized as 'experience') tend to be the main determining factors of who becomes a leader. Street children seem to believe strongly in experience as a bank of wisdom.

Where does Tanzania go from here?

Findings from this study show that many of the pressures forcing children to leave their families are due to economic conditions and their family dynamics. This study and many others from all over the world confirm that street children come from desperate, chaotic and poor families. The long-term strategy of solving this problem requires addressing the root-causes of poverty. But it is very unlikely that poverty alleviation will take place soon enough in Tanzania, due to the ongoing severe social and economic crisis there. Abuse, domestic violence and family disintegration are also among the most commonly cited factors that push children onto the streets. Thus, any intervention must look for possibilities of maintaining harmony and stability within the family by encouraging processes which foster dialogue, love and affection rather than fights, conflicts, divorce and separation.

While reducing the increasing number of street children may be a long-term priority, in the meantime, strategies which help to meet the immediate needs and priorities of street children are necessary. The urgent basic needs for these children include proper and reliable accommodation (shelter), assurance of good food, security (protection) and provision of medical and health care, both physical and mental. All focus group discussions reveal that these needs are important and urgent.

The children also know that lack of education and specific productive skills puts them in a more hopeless situation. Most of the children we interviewed demanded education and training in productive skills. The statement below is typical of most street children:

Look here! My parents are very poor and that is why they did not send me to school. I am sure that if I was educated and had certain skills, I would not be living in this way. I am also sure that if I get some training now, I will be able to manage my own life more easily.

Such assertions confirm that street children know the means through which their life can be improved but they lack the ability to achieve those means.

It is important to understand that street children are not criminals, though some may participate in criminal acts as the only alternative for survival. They are the most needy persons in urban areas but the least assisted. In this case policies which criminalize them as 'idle and disorderly' are coercive policies which stem from the belief that street children are responsible for their situation. We need to be aware that children's remand homes are not a solution in that they do not rehabilitate the street children but simply deal with symptoms of the problem rather than the essential relations.

One way of establishing policies which would have a positive impact on the street children would be to involve the children themselves in developing the policies and strategies which are aimed at assisting them. Characterizing these children as passive actors is inaccurate. Communication between policy-makers, development and health planners, non-governmental and other grass-roots organizations and the street children themselves is not only important, but necessary if we want to make sure that policies are realistic, down-to-earth and can bring positive results to both the children and the urban environment as a whole.

As Rajani and Kudrati (1996: 315) have suggested, 'We must learn how to avoid paternalism, cultivate real dialogue and listen to the children with respect'. Respecting children means allowing them to participate in decision-making processes in matters which concern them and affect their daily life on the streets. These are indeed difficult processes taking into consideration the top-down approach in development planning which seems to be the norm in Tanzania. We need to be aware that street children, like other human beings have experience and are knowledgeable. They know their needs and the problems they experience. They are also capable of planning their own strategies in order to surmount these problems. Official policies and other efforts interested in assisting these children must begin by acknowledging the power and usefulness of this experience and knowledge.

Research experience gathered at 'Kuleana⁴ Center' in Mwanza, Tanzania, confirms that recognizing street children's sexual desires as normal and healthy is an essential starting point for effective HIV and STD prevention among street children (Rajani and Kudrati, 1996). This means that we must begin by accepting and acknowledging the problems which street children experience and what they do in order to solve these problems. In designing policies aimed at assisting these children, we must understand that street children's decisions to leave their homes and migrate to cities are probably based on rational economic calculations of the advantages and disadvantages of remaining within the family networks in their rural areas or migrating. The need to improve their life conditions, experience alternative ways of life and to escape from hostile family situations appear to be the predominating factors.

What seems to us to be the real challenge of policy planners is to work with these children in order to make their wishes a reality. They should be able to live well and in an urban environment which affirms their dignity, health and security. It must be clear among policy planners that if street children are helped to a clearer understanding of the potential risks of street life and are trained to protect themselves, they can be empowered to improve their own well-being. We also need to recognize that although these children live alone and do not have contact with their parents or relatives, possibilities of reunion are not out of the question. Policies which simply focus on gathering street children into

4 Meaning 'taking care of each other'.

rehabilitation centers encourage the separation of these children from their homes and from their communities. Intervention strategies should aim at reuniting the children with their families. This means that policies or programs must include their families. These policies must be broad enough so that they also address the situation of rural poverty which the majority of these children have run away from.

It is necessary to differentiate between street children as a 'problem' and the 'problems' of street children. As far as Tanzania is concerned, it is clear that it is the socio-economic and political environment which is a problem. The phenomenon of street children is a result of this social system. It is the situation of chronic poverty facing their rural areas in general, and families in particular, which produces a state of permanent tension in the lives of these children. A culture of consumerism, to which both the children and their parents, relatives and friends have been exposed, compounds these socio-economic problems. This culture of consumerism contrasts greatly with conditions of abject poverty and squalor, and it motivates some of the children to seek alternative ways of life.

When the family home environment is full of conflict, deprivation and loneliness, the companionship of peers or street gangs may indeed hold advantages, not the least of which is freedom from family demands and the larger effects of colonial history or social colonization. The picture that emerges from this is that family dynamics play an important role in expelling children from their homes. Studies from Brazil show that families with strained relationships, which no longer operate as a collaborative unit, families with a low degree of social cohesion and those which frequently resort to corporal punishment have a much higher tendency to produce street children (Rajani and Kudrati, 1996).

Long-term policies must therefore aim at fixing the system rather than fixing the children. As Knaul (1995a) has argued, normative categorizations of street children are useful in so far as they stress the need to develop tailored programs for particular groups of children at high risk. This study has noted the existence of many children on the streets of urban Tanzania. More work of this nature would provide better insights into the different kinds of street children in terms of where they come from, how they differ, the problems they experience and how they surmount them, and their survival strategies. Policies must distinguish between demeaning sources of income which jeopardize children's development, like pick-pocketing, peddling drugs, begging or prostitution, and those sources that are socially acceptable, like vending, hawking, scavenging and cleaning or minding cars. Long-term programs must be community based. Community-based approaches are bound to provide better alternatives to the present strategy of institutionalizing children in rehabilitation centers where they are given food, shelter and education. If community-based approaches incorporate the richness of the traditional African extended family, they can be of great help to children and their families because they can assist street children in getting access to basic subsistence and social services in their places of origin. There is a need for communities to become facilitators in the provision of children's priorities and needs. This is possible if the civil society is mobilized well. These approaches can also address the disadvantages parents and communities experience in a wider socio-economic framework.

Conclusion

Our study shows that the strategies used by street children are still inadequate in so far as meeting their basic needs are concerned. When one looks at their living conditions they remain 'horrible' and the government has been unable to address this situation. Street children use the existing public infrastructure in order to survive; they use street pavements for sleeping, for instance. But an on the spot observation of these pavements

reveals how unclean they are. Garbage and all types of litter is found in them. If the city authorities could make sure that these pavements stay clean, they would indirectly be assisting these children a great deal. The same applies to public toilets and bathrooms. The public toilet system in Dar-Es-Salaam has not functioned for the last ten years. Street children depend on these facilities in order to relieve themselves. Improving them would not only lead to a cleaner and more healthy urban environment, but in enabling the majority of the urban population to dispose of their human waste hygienically it would decrease health expenditure related to illnesses from poor waste disposal. The same should be done to improve the availability of clean and reliable drinking and washing water in urban public kiosks. Urban development policy planners must make sure that they understand this survival subculture and must aim at planning for people, rather than things, like public parks and other recreation centers which can only remain clean if facilities for sanitation and the disposal of garbage and other solid waste are placed in them. A city management which does not believe in this form of planning ideology should not accuse the urban population of being unclean.

As in other developing countries, it is indisputable that poor children in urban Tanzania confront complex problems, but street children confront far more problems. Chronic poverty within families tends to create a vicious circle of poverty. Children of poor families drop out of school or do not go to school at all like their parents. These children then run away from home and start working in the streets in demeaning jobs at a tender age, putting them at risk both physically and emotionally. As the socio-economic crisis continues, there is an urgent need to address the larger social and economic issues more aggressively.

Thorough studies of street children in Tanzania are just beginning. These studies are very important as far as policy formulation and intervention strategies are concerned. They help to identify children in distress, where they come from, how they survive and their sources of strength, all of which can assist social and economic planners to devise better support systems. More serious work is still needed. Future studies of Tanzania also need to look at gender differences among street children. Such studies are important and urgent. Children of all kinds constitute the nation of the future, and neglecting them amounts to abandoning the health and welfare of generations to come.

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