

# Appropriateness of Skills Imparted to Street Children by Non-Governmental Organisations in Harare, Zimbabwe

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**Abstract-** This is part of a broad study that sought to investigate the appropriateness of counselling being given to street children by non-governmental organisations in Harare, Zimbabwe. This paper looks at the appropriateness of skills imparted to street children in transition to independent living as adults. A qualitative descriptive survey was used to guide the methodology. A purposive sample of organizations that work with street children based on visibility in dealing with street children participated in the study. Officials of non-governmental organisations who have direct contact with street children and street children who received some assistance from the non-governmental organisations were randomly selected to participate in the research. A pilot study was carried out on officials of non-governmental organizations and street children that did not participate in the study. Forty street children and twenty officials of non-governmental organisations participated in the research. The study found out that 60% of the street children felt that the skills that were being imparted were appropriate while 15% felt they were inappropriate and 25% were undecided. The study found that 100% of the non-governmental staff felt that the skills they imparted were appropriate for the future of the street children. The study found out that 65% of the street felt they were not consulted on the skills they were being given and felt there was need for more consultation before the skills were imparted. The study found out that non-governmental organisations imparted skills like soccer, carpentry, tailoring, beads work, candle making, art and craft and knitting. The street children were not given many choices on the type of skills that they wanted to pursue. The study recommends that there be more dialogue between the street children and the non-governmental organisations. The wishes and circumstances of the street children need to be given consideration when deciding on the type of skills they should be given.

**Index Terms-** street children, skills, non-governmental organisations, counselling, independent living.

## I. INTRODUCTION

When children leave homes to stay in the streets they usually carry with them life aspirations they had when they were at their natural homes. However life in the streets make very difficult for them to fulfill their aspirations because of the limitations that life in the streets has. Their education is cut as they no longer have time to attend school as they have to spend most of their time looking for food. They do not have guidance as most of the time they will be with their peer street children who have no idea on how to prepare for the future. They lack

role models to emulate while in most instances the society generally denigrates them. In a study in London, Boyden and Holden, (1991) found out that the community saw the street children as being ill-mannered, directionless and being a sore in the city. Kariuki (1999) in a study in Kenya found out that people turned their heads the other way as a sign of disapproval when they met street children. In most countries society generally has negative feelings towards street children. Even though the society has negative feelings towards street children there is need for these children to be prepared for productive life in future. Though society has these feelings some non-governmental organisations that work with street children have found it worthy to rekindle the aspirations of the street children and provide them with skills that they will use in life to make a living. This study wishes to find out if these non-governmental organisations are imparting appropriate skills that are beneficial to the street children.

## 1.2 The Research Question

Are the skills imparted to street children by non-governmental organisations appropriate for their transition to independent living?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. DETAILED DEFINITION OF STREET CHILDREN

Research distinguishes between two different groups of street children. The classification is basically based on the degree of contact between the child and his or her family. The first category of street children comprises children 'of' the streets. These are children who have completely lost contact with their families and relatives. These street children sleep and depend entirely on the streets. The second category of street children comprises children 'on' the streets. These are children who are still maintaining contact with their families and relatives. Children 'on' the streets can be further divided into those who come to the streets daily to beg and do odd jobs and go back to their families at the end of the day and those who work and live on the streets and periodically visit their families (Rurevo and Bourdillon, 2003).

Muchini (1994) notes that there are 'children of the street' who maintain links with their family members though there are others who have totally severed family connections. The degrees to which the filial linkages are maintained differ for different children. Some of the children know where to find their relatives and family members but deliberately avoid or distance themselves from them. The quality of the contacts also differs.

Some of the children visit their relatives during important holidays like Christmas and Easter.

It is at times hard to make a clear distinction between children 'on' the street and children 'of' the street as Muchini (1994) found that at times children 'on' the street included those who sometimes slept on the streets when things are not fine at home or when the conditions are 'too good' in the streets. In his study, Muchini (1994) discovered that children 'on' the street gradually became children 'of' the street and are thus on an initiation phase. UNICEF (2001) found that the majority of Zimbabwe's street children are 'of' the street and not 'on' the street. The study found out that the majority (56.9%) of the 260 street children interviewed were children 'of the street' who worked and slept on the street. The study found out that (31.4%) were children 'on' the street who performed various types of work in the street during the day and went to their homes at night. The study found that (11.8%) who slept both on the streets and their homes were showing that they were on the transition stage to becoming children 'of' the street.

Zindi and Nherera (1999) define street children as youngsters (often aged between three and eighteen years) who hang out and sleep on the streets mainly due to poverty. Konane (1989) notes that street children are those for whom the street, more than their family, has become their real home, a situation in which there is no protection, supervision or direction from responsible adults. Swart (1998) claims that street children referred to children who have made the city streets their place of abode and source of livelihood. She further puts the street children into two categories which are 'push outs' or 'throwaways' and 'runaways'.

Swart (1998) cites the distinction made by the United States Senate subcommittee on juvenile justice which claimed that 'push-outs' or 'throw-aways' are children who have been abandoned or orphaned and for whom their relatives and the local community do not wish to take responsibility. With the AIDS pandemic still raging on there are numerous such children in Zimbabwe as the few remaining adult population becomes overburdened by the orphans that are being left behind. Push-outs or 'throw-aways' are children who may also come from intact homes of origin but who have been rejected or forced to leave, frequently by step-parents. Children who come under the category of 'run-aways' are those children who are seeking an escape from poverty, brutality, neglect or being laden with responsibilities beyond their coping capabilities and their families appear to be glad to have gotten rid of them. Run-aways do not always depict delinquency or emotional disorder. It could be a cry that something painful is happening or a sign of health seeking surface. In this study the distinction between 'run-aways' or 'throw-aways' is not taken seriously as the emphasis is on the appropriateness of counselling given to the street children by non-governmental organizations in Harare in Zimbabwe.

The Child Protection and Adoption Act (1996) of Zimbabwe considers children less than eighteen years in two categories of a child and a young person. A child is considered to be any person under the age of sixteen years and includes an infant. A young person is considered to be any person who has attained the age of sixteen but has not yet attained the age of eighteen years. In this study the term child is going to be considered as any person who

has not yet attained the age of eighteen. This will include a young person.

The concept 'street child' according to Michaleon (2006) encompasses any child or adolescent under the age of eighteen who works and or lives in the street alone or with his or her family or asylum seekers who are technically homeless and without support. In Zimbabwe the phenomenon of asylum seekers who came in large numbers was last experienced during the times when there was instability in Mozambique. These days a few asylum seekers who are usually in transit to look for better opportunities in South Africa from The Horn of Africa may be seen. This group of children is not included in the present study. In the present study the concepts of 'street children' or 'street kids' are used to mean the same as was adopted by Rialp (1991) at The Inter-Non Governmental Organisation Conference in Switzerland which regarded them as boys and girls who have not yet reached adulthood for whom the street has become their habitual abode and or source of livelihood and who are inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults. The concept and definition will apply to both categories of children discussed above. In the context of this study, boys and girls who have not yet reached adulthood, mean those children who have not yet attained the age of eighteen, which is the legal age of majority in Zimbabwe. Those under the age of eighteen are legally considered to be minors and should be dependent on adults for most of their needs. These adults could be parents, relatives or other people who can be legally responsible for the needs of such children.

## 2.2. INVOLVING THE RECEIPIENTS OF COUNSELLING

In most cases solutions to the problems of street children are drawn without the involvement of the street children. Chirwa and Wakatama (2000) note that the intervention programmes are less effective because they have been designed by adults, based on research and perceptions of adults. The street children are not involved in the dialogue which involves solving their problems. This results in suspicion on intentions between the street children and the civil society as no information is communicated to the children, yet, they are the ones experiencing the problem directly. Although Article 12 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child states that children should have a say in decisions that affect their lives, society still fails to take the opinions of the children seriously. The case becomes worse if the opinions happen to contradict with those of adults, worse still if the children concerned are street children who are seen as unworthy of making any valuable contributions. The street children are already viewed as deviants who are not capable of making any constructive contributions.

Bourdillon (2000), is of the opinion that if researchers are to devise strategies to improve the situation of the street children, they need first to listen to them and acquire some of the children's knowledge. There is need to allow the children themselves to have a voice for they know the reason why they are living and working in the street. In most instances the children are not consulted and solutions are just imposed on the children without giving the children a chance to say their side of the story.

McCartney (2008) says counselling work is usually ineffective because the targeted beneficiaries rarely come alive as participants in the stages where decisions are made. They are regarded as individuals who have no emotions, wishes, opinions and ability to participate in solving their own problems, hence, they are made passive recipients of handouts. This eventually results in the process of assisting the people and failing to empower the beneficiaries due to non-involvement in the project planning. McCartney (2008) attributes this failure by the responsible authorities to listen and to know the recipients of their services as underrating the strengths of the street children in knowing things that are important to them.

The need to listen to the opinions of street children is of particular importance so as to avoid working with assumptions and opinions made by adults. It is usually assumed that the projects or solutions that work for adults automatically work for younger people. Yet the process of assisting is incomplete if the people do not listen and seek to understand those they intend to help. Street children usually respond to this by resisting attempts by government to help them because the policies are just planned and imposed on them without being consulted. Chirwa and Wakatama (2000) note that the intervention programmes are less effective because they are designed by adults, based on research and perceptions of adults.

### **2.3. SKILLS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING**

The children come to live in the streets mostly due to poverty. It is imperative that the children be equipped with the relevant skills that make independent life possible. In a study of children living in the streets in Kenya, Gichuru (1993) concluded that the children in the streets of Nairobi and any other city in Kenya had their origin basically from poverty. Michaleon (2006) in a study on street children in Greece, Germany and the United Kingdom found that children in the streets were mostly those who were from socially deprived and disadvantaged families, neighbourhoods and societies marked by unemployment, poverty, crime and violence. It was when parents and or guardians failed to provide for the children under their charge that forced the children to go and work in the streets. If the parents had the means to provide for their children there would be very few reasons that led children to live in the streets. Gichuru (1993) further said that some children came to the city as refugees to escape from poverty in rural areas and in search of means to supplement family incomes with but often without the consent of their parents. When they came into the city usually these children expected to find work easily but the situation in most times did not turn up to be like that as they failed to find the work.

Kanjii (1996) studied children living in the streets and found out that children in the South and Eastern African region engaged in economic activities and faced the consequence disadvantage in terms of school attendance and performance. The children engaged in diverse activities like petty commerce (often working long hours for adults), begging, washing cars, scavenging and shoe-shinning. Kanjii (1996) went on to say that these were the children who were visible in the streets and that there was another group of children who were invisible but who were in the same category. These were children who worked as domestic servants in the case of girls and boys who worked in garages as car washers and in sweatshops.

In many countries especially in developing countries it is difficult to get employment when one has limited skills which are characteristic of street children. Black (1993) agreed that the recent history of recession and structural adjustment in many countries was making a combination of economic and social forces which has recently tended to precipitate and drive children out of school and into the world of work. These structural adjustment programmes have had a tendency in most instances of reducing the labour force in organisations thereby making many people redundant. When people are made redundant the ones who suffer most are children. In order to supplement the family income Myers and Boyden (1998) found out that in Ethiopia, almost without exception, the children were on the streets to make money for their own and for the family. The study by Myers and Boyden (1998) in Ethiopia reported that 67% of the street kids reported that they had both parents who were alive and were living with them. This was what this study considered as children on the streets. The study also found out that 76% reported that they were in the streets to make money.

In an effort to remove the children from the street some non-governmental organizations like Oasis Zimbabwe have embarked on programmes that equip the street children with skills for income generating activities. The Herald of 17 April 2008 quoted Miss Tinashe Sande, programme officer for Oasis Zimbabwe as saying that they had embarked on programmes for empowering street children by imparting skills of tailoring, carpentry, computer skills and agriculture. In addition Oasis Zimbabwe also runs the Tanaka project for street girls that aimed at equipping them with self-help skills (Dhemba, 2008)

The Standard of 18 December 2007 had a story of how the street children were being equipped with skills of acting on the stage by Amakhosi Cultural group. The street children were organised into a culture group that was called The Young Blood. In addition to acting the street children were taught to play music instruments. When street children are engaged in activities that interest them they are likely to remain in the programme for a long time unlike when they are forced into a programme that they do not like or were never consulted on.

Research done by UNESCO in Harare (2000) revealed that when the street children are not involved in the crafting of a solution to their problems, the solution was unlikely to work. This was partly because the solutions would not be feasible and partly because the street children themselves resist attempts to be imposed assistance. For example, the Government of Zimbabwe has tried to send street children to designated places like farms and protection homes without much success (Rurevo and Bourdillon, 2003). There they were given work to do, food, clothes and shelter. The children still escaped and returned to the streets. At the farms and protected homes they complained of being subjected to harsh conditions and stringent rules that were strictly applied. Some who were interviewed prefer life on the streets to that at the 'homes' because in the streets they were free from control and routine work.

This research mainly focused on the appropriateness of the assistance that is given to the street children by non-governmental organisations in solving the problem. Where the non-governmental organisations offer skills, there is need for the street children to accept the skills as relevant to their needs.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design. This method was used as the researcher felt it was the most ideal for the study. The descriptive survey research designs are defined by their methodical collection of standardised information from any representative sample of the population (Christensen, 1994). In addition, this research design suits the context under which the present study was taken as the descriptive survey represents a probe into a given state of affairs that exists at a given time. It therefore means that direct contact was made with the individuals whose characteristics, behaviours and issues were relevant to the investigation under study. It allowed the researcher to choose a wide variety of instruments. The study was qualitative in nature and the data to be sourced had to be descriptive rather than quantitative.

This research design has the advantage of the researcher being in direct contact with the research participants. The direct contact affords the researcher to be able to observe other information like non verbal cues in the form of voice tone and facial expressions that quantitative designs cannot capture. Data collected using the descriptive survey method can be easily summarized and analysed.

This research design has the disadvantage of the researcher becoming carried away when carrying interviews. This problem was overcome by formulating questions in the interview schedule that were clear to the respondents so that answers were required needed no much explanation.

The sample comprised of ten randomly selected children from each of the four purposively selected organisations that work with street children. The organisations were selected due to their visibility in dealing with street children. The children were selected by dividing the children who were present on the day the researcher visited into two groups of boys and girls and then randomly picking five children from each group who would participate in the research. There were twenty male street children and twenty female street children who participated in the research. The sample of those who work with children was purposively selected so that at each of the four organisations one participant came from the administration and the other four came from field workers. These dealt directly with the street children. There were twenty officials of non-governmental organisations who participated in the research. Qualitative data analysis with descriptive statistics was used to present and analyse the data.

### IV. RESULTS

**Table 1: Composition of Research Participants N= 60**

Category of Participants	Male Street Children	Female Street Children	Organisation Officials	Total
Number	20	20	20	60

In the study there were 20 male street children, 20 female street children and 20 officials from non-governmental organisations.

**Table 2. Skills Given To Street Children by non-governmental organisations according to the officials (n=16)**

Type of Skill	Number	Percentage
Literacy	15	93.75
Agriculture	6	37.5
Knitting	4	25
Art and Craft	8	50
Tailoring	8	50
Beads Work	6	37.5
Carpentry	8	50
Computer skills	8	50
Candle making	4	25
Sporting Activities	16	100
Entrepreneurial Skills	4	25

The table shows that 100% of the officials of non-governmental organisations involved the children in some sporting activities. 93.75% regarded literacy to be an important skill to be given to the street children. 50% gave the street children skills in computer skills, tailoring and carpentry. Least of importance were skills in agriculture, art and craft, beads work, candle making and entrepreneurial skills.

The results show that the non-governmental organisations were utilizing the children's interests in finding the skills to impart to the children. There is also a realisation that without literacy the future of the children would be very gleam. There is a trend to also monopolise on the direction that technology development is going as the children are also being given computer skills. Most of the children are on the street due to economic hardships so there was need to put strong emphasis on activities like entrepreneurial skills so that at least the children will be able to make money on their own.

On the question on whether there had been any children who had passed through their hands who had been successful in life there were a number of them. Non-governmental organization officials reported that some of the children whom they had counselled had succeeded in the following endeavors:

- Drivers
- Market stall holders
- Independently selling juice cards
- Rank marshals
- Easy-Park officials
- Combi assistants
- Employed

**Table 3. Professions preferred by street children (n=40)**

Profession	Number	Percentage
Teacher	4	10
Driver	11	27.5
Doctor	3	7.5
Pastor	2	5
Nurse	3	7.5
Soccer Player	6	15
Musician	3	7.5
Office Worker	2	5
Pilot	2	5

Radio D.J.	4	10
Total	40	100

The table shows that the highest number of street children (27.5%) (11) preferred to be drivers in their future. The next preferred profession was that of being a soccer player which had 15% (6). The next preferred professions were being a radio DJ and teacher which had 10% (4). The next preferred professions were being a doctor, nurse and musician which was preferred by 7.5% (3). The least preferred professions by street children which had 5% (2) were being a Pastor, pilot and office worker.

**Table 4. APPROPRIATENESS OF THE SKILLS ACCORDING TO OFFICIALS OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (n=16)**

Appropriateness of skills	Number	Percentage
Yes	16	100
No	0	0
Total	16	16

The table shows that 100% of the officials of non-governmental organisations thought that the skills that they gave to street children were appropriate in meeting the challenges they were to face in the future.

**Table 5. Appropriateness of skills being given by non-governmental organisations according to street children (n=40)**

Appropriateness of skills given by NGOS	Number	Percentage
Yes	24	60
No	6	15
Undecided	10	25
Total	40	100

The table shows that 60% (24) of the street children thought that the assistance they were getting from the non-governmental organisations would assist them in entering the professions that they wanted to do in the future. 15% (6) thought the assistance they were getting was not enough to assist them get into the professions that they preferred. 25% (10) were not sure whether the assistance they were getting would assist them in getting into the professions that they preferred.

**Table 6. Whether street children were being consulted on the type of skills that were imparted to them (n=40)**

Were you consulted on the type of skill to be taught?	Number	Percentage
Yes	14	35
No	26	65
Total	40	100

The table shows that 35% (14) of the street children reported that they had been consulted on the type of skill they wanted to be trained in. 65% (26) of the street children reported that they

were not consulted on the type of skill they wanted to be trained in.

## V. DISCUSSION

All the organisations involve the street children in some sporting activities and 15% the children look forward to careers in the sporting field. They involve them in sporting as a way of trying to entice them and keep them in their programmes. However officials of non-governmental organisations did not have any success story of a former street child in the sporting sector. There is need for the non-governmental organisations to involve some sports academy to train the street children who will have been identified to assist in training to become professional sports people.

The street children have not lost hope as they still think they can still enter professions that other children in normal school aim to become. Some of the children among the challenges they are likely to meet included finishing school. The non-governmental organisations are addressing this need as 93.75% of the officials reported that they were imparting literacy skills to the street children.

The street children among the professions they prefer included being a teacher, pilot, doctor, nurse, radio disc jockey and driver. Among the professions that the street children preferred only that of a driver was reported among the success stories by officials of non-governmental organisations. Others had chosen other endeavours like being market stall holders, airtime vendors, rank marshals, combi assistants or domestic employment. This means there could be a mismatch between what the street children prefer and what is actually available for them in the job market. Some of the professions that they preferred are simply beyond their reach thereby doubting whether the street children were actually realistic and knew what was expected from the professions like being doctors, nurses or pilot.

The non-governmental organisations are imparting skills that the street children can immediately put to use with very minimal capital injection and are relatively easy to market. These are skills in tailoring, knitting, beads work, candle making, art and craft and carpentry. They are trying to address the need for them to be able to create income as soon as possible as most of them came to the street due to poverty. Studies by Gichuru (1993), Michaeleon,(2006) and Kanji, (1996) all point to poverty and limited home income being the main reasons that drive children to leave their homes to come to the streets.

All officials of the non-governmental organisations were satisfied with the appropriateness of the skills they were offering to the street children. However 60% of the street children were satisfied with the appropriateness of the skills that they were being offered and 15% thought the skills were not appropriate. There was difference in opinion between the non-governmental officials and the street children. The non-governmental thought they were giving the street children the right skills yet the street children were not satisfied. This calls for dialogue. What the officials think is good for the street children, the street children think otherwise.

On further probing they had indicated that they preferred skills that were not being offered by the non-governmental

organisations. 65% of the children reported that they were not consulted on the type of skills they preferred to be imparted on them. According to UNESCO (2000) there will be problems if the street children are not consulted in issues that have to do with their welfare. This could be the possible reason why they were not satisfied because the non-governmental organisation made them take what was there.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) There is need for non-governmental organizations to involve other stakeholders like sports academies to equip street children with sporting skills so that they can also enter the sporting industry. They can appeal to them to consider having social responsibility and assist in equipping the street children with sporting skills or get involved in collaborative training.
- (ii) The productive skills given to street children by non-governmental organisations should match the interest of each of the street children.
- (iii) The non-governmental organisations should increase the skills on offer so as to include those that are marketable. There is need to watch the current employment trends so that they include skills that are marketable at the present time and appeal to young people.
- (iv) The non-governmental organisations should involve the street children in entrepreneurial skills so that they are able sustain themselves in case they do not find employment.
- (v) There is need to consult the street children in the selection of the skills they prefer to be equipped with.

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