

### **Background and Purpose of Study**

The eighties and nineties saw a growing global concern for the rights and welfare of children. This culminated in the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 November 1989. This was closely followed by the adoption of the Organisation of African Unity's Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government held in Addis Ababa in 1990.

In line with this general concern for the rights and welfare of children in especially difficult circumstances, is another growing international problem of the rising numbers of street children in urban areas, mostly within the developing world. This has translated into the increasing number of governmental and non-governmental organisations throughout the world whose main activity is to help alleviate the plight of street children.

Street children are seen to lack the primary socialisation and modelling framework of the family that is thought to foster healthy growth and development. As such, they are seen to be developmentally at risk.

### **Definition of Street Children**

The most common definition of a street child or youth is "any girl or boy who has not reached adulthood, for whom the street (in the broadest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc.) has become her or his habitual abode and/or sources of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults" (Inter-NGO, 1985). This definition was formulated by Inter-NGOs in Switzerland in 1983.

In this study the term "street children" is used to refer to children who work and/or sleep on the streets. Such children may or may not necessarily be adequately supervised or directed by responsible adults and include the two co-existing categories referred to by UNICEF as those "on the street" and those "of the street" (Agnelli, op. cit., p. 34). Other researchers identified these two categories amongst different street children populations (e.g. Dube et. al, 1996, Ennew, 1986; Scharf et al., 1986; Richter, 1988a). "Children of the street" are homeless children who live and sleep on the streets in urban areas. They are totally on their own, living with other street children or homeless adult street people. On the other hand, "children on the street" earn their living or beg for money on the street and return home at night. They maintain contact with their families. This distinction is important since "children on the street" have families and homes to go to at night, whereas "children of the street" live on the streets and probably lack parental, emotional and psychological support normally found in parenting situations.

### **Problems of Definition**

While the distinction between children "on the street" and "of the street" has been useful, some overlaps and grey areas still remain. Some children "of the street" may have been abandoned and rejected by their families while others may have left their families due to prevailing circumstances. Muchini (1994) noted that in a "sense they abandoned the family". Other children may stray and wander the streets, becoming involved in street activities with other children.

Muchini (1994) also notes that there are also "children of the street" who maintain links with family members while others have totally severed family connections. Some "children of the street" may visit their mothers staying with "step-fathers" once in a while or may visit other siblings and, return to their street "homes". Muchini (op. cit.) further observes that the degrees to which filial linkages are maintained also vary for different children. The quality of contacts also differs. The same can be said of "children on the street". Children classified as "on the street" include those in the grey area, who sometimes sleep on the streets and sometimes sleep at home. This category also includes those staying with distant relatives and those who stay with employers. Thus, categorising street children into only two categories may cloud the continuity of the children connecting with their families.

Muchini (1994) noted the problems associated with the last part of the widely accepted definition of street children: "... and who are inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults". He observed that this part fails to acknowledge the role played by children in shaping their own destiny. This part reflects society's

perception of a child as someone who must live within boundaries delineated by adults. Muchini (op. cit.) suggested that it might be possible that more and more parents are unable to adequately protect, supervise or direct and provide for their children. The result is that children assume some of the roles that were originally considered parental roles. Already findings from Home-Based Care (HBC) for people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWAs) programmes indicate that children and men are assuming care roles traditionally carried out by women.

The term “street children” and its various mutants such as “street kids”, “street boys”, “parking boys”, “car-washers”, “teenage beggars”, “street bums”, “children on their own”, and “*mutibumba*” refer to a complex phenomenon. The term stirs emotions and focuses on the “problem”. It is a problem whose manifestations are seated in several causal factors.

### **Historical Background of the Street Children Phenomenon**

Regardless of definition, the phenomenon of street children is not new and neither is it restricted to certain geographical areas (Connolly, 1990). The street urchin, the runaway, the street waifs and stray children were part of the “urban landscape” during the process of industrialisation and urbanisation in post-war Europe (Agnelli, op. cit.; Swart, 1986). This has also been the case in many populations that have undergone political, social or economic upheaval.

The problem of street children in Zimbabwe may not be new as related by Grier (1996). Grier’s paper looks at the street children in Zimbabwe from the 1920s to the fifties. This paper notes that native lads aged 10 to 14 were attracted to towns, mines and other centres. Colonial officials were concerned with the way children survived on the streets or made a living on the streets (Grier, 1996). Grier notes that many lads found wage employment in urban areas as domestic servants and gardeners in white and black homes. In mining towns, the boys were hired directly by mining companies to cook and clean for “senior” black workers in the company’s single sex compounds. Boys were also seen performing domestic services, including in some cases, sexual services, for “single” black mine workers who lived in the huts they built for themselves in native locations adjacent to the mines (Grier, op. cit.). However, the problem of children living and/or working on the streets of our urban areas appears to be a recent phenomenon in Zimbabwe. Prior to Independence (1980) it was almost impossible for children to work in the streets as vendors, car-washers, beggars, or parking boys as Municipal by-laws that restrict this, were brutally enforced. With Independence, such enforcement of the restrictions became slack and unpredictable.

### **Purpose of Study**

The objective of this study was to “compile, consolidate and validate available information” on street children “in order to facilitate the development of a long-term national strategy aimed at promoting, protecting and fulfilling their rights”. Thus, the report looks at the situation of street children in Zimbabwe and presents an assessment of the problem. The report presents the causal factors, the effects of the problem of street children, the interventions and responses currently being offered to street children, the emerging gaps and concludes with possible strategies for intervening in the short- and long-terms.

### **Assessment of the Street Children Problem**

#### **Study Methodology**

The study targeted street children in Harare, Bulawayo, Mutare, Gweru and Kadoma and involved interviewing a sample of 260 street children in the five urban areas. One hundred and thirty-five (135) street children were interviewed in Harare, 55 in Bulawayo, 27 in Mutare, 28 in Gweru and 12 in Kadoma. Their ages ranged from a few months to 18 years and averaged 13 years. There were 220 males and 40 females.

Twelve child care workers, 10 males and 2 females, were interviewed. Focused group discussions for street children involved 15 children in Bulawayo and 16 in Harare, while the adult focused group discussions consisted of groups of 12. One adult focused group discussion took place in Bulawayo with 9 males and 3 females and a second group in Harare with 7 males and 5 females.

The major tools used in the study were interview schedules designed to investigate the situation of street children in Zimbabwe. There was an interview schedule for street children, child-care workers, focused group discussion

guides for street adults and for street children.

All the research assistants were thoroughly trained in using the tools to interview in the mother tongue of the interviewee, using translated versions in ChiShona and SiNdebele.

### **Contact with Street Children and Adults**

The researcher was assisted by five research assistants (two were post-graduates, each with a Masters Degree in the Social Sciences and three were third year (1) and second year (2) undergraduate university students). Contact with the street children was made initially through staff and volunteers of organisations working with street children and then directly on the streets, in market places and at bus termini.

After the initial contacts facilitated by street child-care workers and volunteers, further contact was mainly through snowballing where street children interviewed, referred their friends and colleagues for interviewing. Through facilitation by child-care workers and volunteers, and some street children, the researchers had focused group discussions with street adults in the city centre and Mbare for Harare, and at the railways and Kilani for Bulawayo.

### **Collection of Information on Street Children**

The researcher or research assistant first informed the interviewee that they were commissioned by UNICEF to learn more about the child's life and why he/she was working on the street. The interviewer then asked for permission to interview the child. The child was assured that what they would say would remain confidential and no one, except the researcher and/or research assistants, would know who provided what information.

Most children agreed without further discussions but a significant number felt there had been too many studies done on them without their seeing any benefits accruing to them. A good number "demanded" payment in cash for spending time talking to the researchers. Children who consented were then interviewed and at the end they were given \$15.00 as a token of appreciation and compensation for time and earning opportunities lost while being interviewed.

### **Methodological Issues**

The street children and street child-worker interviews and focused group discussions with street children and street adults were the sources of information about street children. The street children interviews were the major sources of information that was triangulated with information from child-care workers, and focused group discussions with street children and street adults separately. It was through these interviews and focused group discussions, that biographical information, HIV/AIDS/STIs knowledge, attitudes and sexual behaviour, causal factors, perception of street children's situation and other relevant information about street children was obtained.

The study contacted 450 street children of which 260 provided complete data and became the sample upon which the study is based. These 260 children were aged 18 years and below and had managed to respond to all questions on the Child Interview. There was a huge reduction of the sample size from the large number of children contacted for reasons given below.

Street children would dash away to attend to "clients/customers" to receive payment for guarding cars or sell wares being vended. The researchers abandoned interviewing when children were high or drunk. The timeframe for the study did not allow for interviewing these children at a later stage when they were sober.

The study was conducted during a time of political tension in Zimbabwe. There was a one-day job-stay-away during the course of the fieldwork. All these affected the study as street children were found to be generally tense. Street children in Mutare and Harare had been interviewed a few months prior to this study by some other researchers and were wary that people were interviewing them again without their having seen any concrete results from these interviews. In Harare they reported to have received \$50.00 from the researchers for participating. All these factors could have affected the participation of the children in the research. More time would have been required to build trust and a relationship with the children. However, going through street child-care workers contributed to overcoming this hurdle.

## Data Analysis

Information obtained through the street child interviews was coded and analysed. The Statistical Package for Social Scientists 8.0 (SPSS 8.0) was used in generating frequency distributions, cross-tabulations and some factor analyses.

## Research Findings

### *Categories of Street Children*

The majority (56.9%) of the 260 street children interviewed were children “of the street”, who worked and slept on the streets. Thirty-one percent (31.4%) of the street children had homes to go to at night. Most were staying with at least one biological parent while others were staying with members of the extended family. The 31.4% of children “on the street” worked on the streets and slept at home. Nearly 12 percent (11.8%) were children who slept both on the streets and at their homes (Table 1).

The last group represents the grey area between the two categories of children “on and of” the street. This group represented children who were likely to become children “of the street” should home conditions deteriorate.

Table 1-: *Where Street Children Slept*

|                  | Female | Male | Total |
|------------------|--------|------|-------|
| Home             | 7.6    | 23.5 | 31.4  |
| Streets          | 5.4    | 51.5 | 56.9  |
| Home and Streets | 11.2   | 0.6  | 11.8  |

The results confirm that street children exist along a continuum of varying degrees of connection with their families. There are children in a grey stage or transitional stage other than the usual characterisation of children as “of” the street and children “on” the street. Focused group discussions with street children indicated that this was a stage most children “of” the street had gone through. Sleeping both at home and on the street, the child finally chose the street when home conditions were no longer supportive due to the death of a parent or guardian or due to increasing poverty or child abuse.

The majority of children “of the street” were interviewed in Harare (31.7%), while 12.2% were interviewed in Bulawayo, with almost similar percentages (4.6%) in Gweru and 3.4% in Kadoma (Table 2). This group appeared more unkempt and dirty, with poor access to shelter, water, sanitation and health facilities. They lived individually or mostly in groups on the street or rented shacks in high-density suburbs such as Mbare (Harare), Rimuka (Kadoma) or Sakubva (Mutare). Younger children (guarding cars and begging) in this category were mostly seen sniffing glue. The majority of children “on the street” were again from Harare (16.8%), while Bulawayo had 5.3%, Mutare and Gweru had each 3.1% and Kadoma had 3.8% (Table 2). Bulawayo had the majority of children who slept “both at home and on the streets” (3.4%), Gweru had 3.1%, Mutare 2.7%, Harare 2.3% and Kadoma had none (Table 2). This category of children “on the street” appeared to be smarter than children “of the street”, and mainly sold wares while a few guarded cars. This category had better access to shelter, water, sanitation and health facilities.

Table 2-: *Proportion of Street Children Categories by Age*

| Category of Street Child | URBAN      |              |           |            |            |
|--------------------------|------------|--------------|-----------|------------|------------|
|                          | Harare (%) | Bulawayo (%) | Gweru (%) | Mutare (%) | Kadoma (%) |
| Children of the street   | 31.7       | 12.2         | 4.6       | 4.6        | 3.4        |
| Children on the street   | 16.8       | 5.3          | 3.1       | 3.1        | 3.8        |
| Home and street          | 2.3        | 3.4          | 3.1       | 2.7        | 0          |
| Percentage of Total      | 50.8       | 21           | 10.7      | 10.3       | 7.3        |

### *Children’s Ages*

Two hundred and sixty street children, aged 3 months to 18 years, 220 males and 40 females, constituted the sample for this study. The sample’s average age was 13 years. Nearly eight percent (7.6%) of the sample were below the age of five, 24.3% were aged six to ten, 42.2% were aged eleven to fifteen, and 25.9% were 16 to 18 years of age (Table 3).

Table 3-: Proportion of Sample by Age

| Ages (years) | Percentage |
|--------------|------------|
| <5           | 7.6        |
| 6-10         | 24.3       |
| 11-15        | 42.2       |
| 16-18        | 25.9       |

The majority (47.1%) of children “of the street” and the majority of (50%) who slept “both at home and on the street” were aged 11 to 15 years. Similar proportions (43.9%) of children “on the street” were aged 12 to 15 and 16 to 18 years. Table 4 shows that children “of the street” tended to be older than children from the other categories, followed by those who slept “both at home and on the streets”. Children on the street were the youngest.

Table 4-: Proportion of Street Children Categories by Age

| Age (years) | Children on the Street (%) | Home and Streets (%) | Children of the Street (%) |
|-------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| <5          | 12.7                       | 3.3                  | 5                          |
| 6-10        | 25.3                       | 30                   | 22.1                       |
| 11-15       | 31.6                       | 50                   | 47.1                       |
| 16-18       | 30.4                       | 16.7                 | 25.8                       |

#### Children’s Economic Activities

Nearly forty-six percent (45.7%) of street children were beggars while 14.7% were vendors, 21.2% guarded cars, and 4.1% were escorting blind parents (Table 5).

The research confirms that the majority of vendors are children on the street (58.3%) followed by those who slept both at home and on the streets (22.3%). Ninety percent of those escorting blind parents were children on the street. The majority of beggars were children of the street (66.4%) followed by children on the street (27.3%). Those guarding cars were mainly children of the street (67.3%). Car washers were also mainly children of the street (56.3%). Those who worked as taxi touts (66.7%) were mostly children who slept both at home and on the streets (Table 5).

Table 5: Street Children’s Economic Activities

| Economic Activity      | All Street Children (%) | Children of the street (%) | Home and Streets (%) | Children on the Street (%) |
|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Begging                | 45.7                    | 66.4                       | 6.3                  | 27.3                       |
| Guarding Cars          | 21.2                    | 67.3                       | 13.5                 | 19.2                       |
| Taxi Tout              | 1.2                     | 0                          | 66.7                 | 33.3                       |
| Washing Cars           | 13.1                    | 56.3                       | 18.7                 | 25                         |
| Escorting Blind Adults | 4.1                     | 10                         | 0                    | 90                         |
| Selling Wares          | 14.7                    | 19.4                       | 22.3                 | 58.3                       |

A number of very young children and babies were “used” by adults to elicit sympathy and obtain money by begging at major street intersections and in busy shopping areas. Babies were “hired” out to child street beggars while the mothers remained somewhere in the vicinity and would earn money for this “hiring out” of babies. Very young children between the ages of 2 and 6 years, were sent out onto the streets by their mothers. She would in turn watch over them from a distance. These children would give to their mothers the money “donated” by the public.

#### How Street Children Obtain Food

Most of the street children (62.3%) reported that they bought their own food using their income (Table 6). Slightly over eighteen percent (18.2%) ate leftovers from restaurants and bins, while 8.2% ate from a drop-in centre and 9.1% ate from home.

Table 6-: How Children Obtain Food

| How They Get Food              | Percentage |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| Buying                         | 62.3       |
| Eat leftovers from restaurants | 18.2       |
| Eat from drop-in centre        | 8.2        |
| Eat from home                  | 9.1        |
| Other                          | 2.2        |

The majority of children “of the street” (62.6%) bought the food they ate, 22.9% ate leftovers from restaurants while 13.7% ate from drop-in-centres. Many of children “on” the street and those who slept both at home and on the streets also bought their own food. Thus, street children are mainly meeting their own food requirements through purchase from their own earnings or through scavenging.

#### How Street Children Spend their Income

The vast majority of street children (60.9%) reported that they spend their money on food (Table 7). A little over fourteen percent (14.2%) reported they bought their own clothes while 22.7% spend it on meeting family expenses.

Children of the street (88.4%) mainly spent their earnings on themselves while the majority (37.1%) of the children on the street and those (34.5%) who slept both at home and on the streets, mainly reported that they spend their money on meeting family expenses. Seventy-five percent of children of the street reported using their income mainly for purchasing food while 13.5% used their earnings on buying their own clothes.

#### Duration on the Streets

The majority (39.5%) of the street children had spent one to three years on the street. Twenty-four percent (23.9%) had spent one-half to one year, 18.5% had spent under half a year, 11.9% had spent four to six years, 4.1% had spent seven to ten years and 2.1% had spent over eleven years (Table 7).

Table 7-: Length of Time Children out on the Streets

| Duration (years) | Percentage |
|------------------|------------|
| < 0.5            | 18.5       |
| 0.5-1            | 23.9       |
| 1-3              | 39.5       |
| 4-6              | 11.9       |
| 7-10             | 4.1        |
| >11              | 2.1        |

Children “of the street” tended to have stayed longer on the streets than children falling in the other categories, i.e., children “on the street” and children who slept “both at home and on the streets”. Fifty-three percent (53.3%) of children “of the street” had spent more than one year on the street, 62.1% of those who slept “both at home and on the street” and 64.5% of children “on the streets” had spent over a year on the streets (Table 8).

Table 8-: Time Children had been Street Children

| Duration (years) | All Street Children (%) | Children of the Street (%) | Home and Streets (%) | Children on the Street (%) |
|------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| < 0.5            | 45.7                    | 66.4                       | 6.3                  | 27.3                       |
| 0.5-1            | 21.2                    | 67.3                       | 13.5                 | 19.2                       |
| 1-3              | 1.2                     | 0                          | 66.7                 | 33.3                       |
| 4-6              | 13.1                    | 56.3                       | 18.7                 | 25                         |
| 7-10             | 4.1                     | 10                         | 0                    | 90                         |
| >11              | 14.7                    | 19.4                       | 22.3                 | 58.3                       |

#### Work Done by Children’s Guardians/Parents

The vast majority of the street children came from very poor family backgrounds (Table 10). The work done by the children’s guardians or parents were domestic workers (13%), vendors (18.5%), peasant farmers (19.6%), self-employed (21.2%), and industrial workers (12%).

Focused group discussions with street adults confirmed the finding that street children were primarily from poor family backgrounds and came onto the streets due to lack of support and care by parents and members of the extended family.

#### *Street Children's Original Homes*

The majority (55.9%) of street children came from communal areas while 38.3% came from urban areas, 1.8% from resettlement areas, 2.3% from mining and 1.8% from commercial farming areas (Table 11). These findings confirm what other studies and organisations such as Thuthuka have discovered, that most street children originate from rural areas. In the Thuthuka case, they point out that a substantial number (27%) of street children on their register in Bulawayo are from the Masvingo and Manicaland provinces.

*Table 9-: Street Children's Original Homes*

| <b>Original Home</b>    | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Communal area           | 55.9              |
| Resettlement area       | 1.8               |
| Urban area              | 38.3              |
| Mining area             | 2.3               |
| Commercial farming area | 1.8               |

The fact that many street children came originally from rural areas was confirmed in focused group discussions with street adults and interviews with street child-care workers. Increasing poverty levels in rural areas, the impact of HIV/AIDS on rural people and other socio-economic factors impacting negatively on rural folk, has had the effect of decreasing rural families (households) and communities' ability to provide adequately for their children. Rural folk are adversely affected when their members, who used to work in towns and used to remit funds, fall ill and have to in turn be cared for by rural people with little resources. When many adult members die due to HIV/AIDS, children often head households and seek employment in urban areas to help them fulfil their new responsibilities.

It might not be surprising that only a small proportion of street children have come from resettlement, commercial farming and mining areas since such areas have small population proportions. This pattern may also reflect the differences in poverty levels in the various areas. These differences could also reflect differences in children's perception of livelihood options available to children in difficult circumstances. However, the livelihood (food, shelter, health, etc.) and security of farm workers is being threatened by the current farm occupations by land-hungry people. If such occupations continue and land redistribution programmes do not meet the employment and livelihood needs of farm workers, then their children may be forced to work, this time away from home and on the streets, to supplement family income.

#### *Children's Schooling*

Over twenty-five percent (25.5%) of the street children had never been to school. Slightly over twenty percent (21.9%) had some lower primary education (Grades 1 to 3) whilst 38.2% had some higher primary education (Grades 4 to 7). Around nine percent (8.8%) had had one to two years of secondary education while only 4.8 % had three to four years of secondary education (see Table 10).

Children of the street were the least educated, followed by those who slept at home and then those who slept both in the streets and at home. Thirty-nine percent (39.1%) of children on the street had never been to school while 53.1% of children of the street and 7.8% of those who slept both at home and on the streets had no school experience. Twenty-six percent (26%) of children on the street had some primary education while 14.7% of children who slept both at home and on the streets, and 59.3% of children of the street had some primary education (Table 10). The majority of the children in all categories had little or no education at all. This contrasts sharply with earlier research showing a marked decline in reported levels of schooling.

Table 10-: Street Children's Educational Levels

| Schooling Level | All Street Children (%) | Children of the Street (%) | Home and Streets (%) | Children on the Street (%) |
|-----------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Never           | 25.5                    | 39.1                       | 7.8                  | 53.1                       |
| Grade 1-3       | 21.9                    | 23.6                       | 20                   | 56.4                       |
| Grade 4-7       | 38.2                    | 27.3                       | 11.6                 | 61.1                       |
| Form 1-2        | 8.8                     | 40.9                       | 9.1                  | 50                         |
| Form 3-4        | 4.8                     | 50                         | 8.3                  | 41.7                       |
| Higher          | 0.8                     | 0                          | 0                    | 100                        |

### Use of Intoxicants

The majority of street children who took intoxicants were children “of the street”. Nearly sixty percent (59.1%) of street children reported that they did not take any intoxicants while 40.9% did. Almost twenty-two percent (21.5%) of children “on the street” reported that they took intoxicants while 48.6% of children “of” the street took intoxicants. Approximately seventy-seven percent (77.3%) of the children who slept “both at home and on the streets” took intoxicants (Table 11).

Children who slept both at home and on the street were more likely to use intoxicants than any other category. This group appeared more vulnerable to a number of risks due to their apparent lack of experience and street wisdom. The use of intoxicants by street children can be viewed as a risk factor in a number of areas including sexual abuse and infection with HIV.

### HIV/AIDS/STIs Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices

Slightly over a quarter (26.2%) of the street children reported they had had sex within the previous six months while the majority (73.8%) had not had sex within the past six months. Of those who reported having had sex within the past six months, 43.8% reported they had one sex partner while the rest had two or more partners. The majority of those who were sexually active (50.8%) were in the 11 to 15 years age group, while 38.5% were in the 16 to 18 years age group and 10.8% were in the 6 to 10 years age group. From this study it was found that street children are engaged in sex at a very young age. Again children who slept both at home and on the street were likely to have had sex than children in other categories. Nearly twenty-seven percent (26.7%) of children of the street had had sex within the previous six months, while 22% of children on the street and 32.1% of children who slept both at home and on the street reported having had sex within the previous six months. The majority of street children (85.7%) reported that they had never had an STI while 14.3% had had an STI. The majority (50%) of street children who had had STIs had them once, 38.9% had had STIs twice and the rest had had STIs more than two times. Again children who slept both at home and on the street were more likely to have had an STI than children in the other two categories. A little over twenty-two percent (22.2%) of the children who slept both at home and on the street reported having had an STI while it was 16.5% for children of the street and 5.2% for children on the street.

Over thirty-eight percent (38.5%) of the children could identify at least three symptoms of STIs (STDs) while 61.5% could not mention three symptoms of STIs. Forty-six percent (46%) of the children said they could tell one has HIV just by looking at them while 54% said they could not tell by looking.

Half (50%) of the children interviewed could identify at least three ways one can become infected with HIV, while the rest (50%) could not. The majority of the street children (39.5%) said everyone is at risk for getting HIV, while 10.1% felt it was only commercial sex workers, 18.1% felt it was promiscuous persons, 9.7% felt men and 6.5% felt women were at risk of getting HIV. Thirty-two percent (32.4%) identified commercial sex work as a practice that accelerates the spread of STIs, 14.5% mentioned casual sex, 10% mentioned sharing the same women, 24.5% mentioned that they did not know. Forty-two percent (42.6%) identified at least three ways of preventing AIDS, while the majority 57.4% could not identify three ways of preventing HIV/AIDS.

The majority (33.1%) of the street children identified use of condoms as a measure to reduce the spread of HIV, 26.1% mentioned that behaviour change can reduce spread of HIV, 22.4% mentioned that they did not know what could be done to reduce the spread of AIDS. The majority of street children 39.6% mentioned government clinics as the places where they would get treatment, 30.9% mentioned municipal clinics and 16.6% mentioned traditional healers as places where they would get treatment. Close to forty-seven percent (46.7%) stated easy access as the



reason why they would seek treatment where they said they would, 19.3% mentioned privacy and 28.4% mentioned the low or absence of cost of treatment as the reason why they would seek treatment from a particular health provider.

#### *Child Abuse*

Over one half (56.6%) of the street children were concerned with child sexual abuse. Forty percent (40%) of street children mentioned sexual abuse while 39.5% mentioned physical abuse as their concept of child abuse. Very few (12.6%) mentioned emotional abuse, while only 7.9% identified other forms of abuse.

A similar pattern was seen in the children's identification of the most prevalent forms of child abuse. Nearly forty-three percent (42.6%) of the children identified sexual abuse as the most prevalent form of child abuse, 36.6% identified physical abuse, 16.2% emotional abuse and 4.6% other.

The majority (30.1%) of the street children felt that child sexual abuse was caused by poverty, 23.3% mentioned psychological problems, 21.8% attributed it to power imbalances while 18.4% felt it was caused by dysfunctional families. The vast majority (72.5%) of the street children said that child sexual abuse can be stopped if offenders were jailed or punished severely, 14.7% said children should be educated about it while 10.9% said adults should.

Focused group discussions with street children and street adults and findings from interviews with child-care workers confirmed that street children were engaged in risky sexual behaviour. This study shows street children in Zimbabwe experience casual sex, rape, prostitution, and sex for goods and other services. It was reported in the focused group discussions that younger boys were engaged in sex for protection, while other boys were raped by older male youth or adult street people. Some had "girlfriends" or "boyfriends", others bought or sold sex while some had sex with friends.

#### *Public's Perception of Street Children*

Street children were questioned as to what they felt were the general public's opinions about them as "street children".

More than a third (35.1%) felt that the general public disliked them, 28% mentioned they were seen as hooligans and that they should be forcefully removed from streets, while 24.9% reported that the general public was very supportive.

Research has demonstrated that no amount of intervention programming designed for street children can be successful unless the community is prepared to respect, protect and provide opportunities to street children (Tacon, cited in Schurink & Rip, 1993). This study shows that only less than a quarter of the community is supportive of street children. In focused group discussions, street children said they were treated violently, scorned and subjected to hostility by police and security guards. Most were highly fearful of police in Harare. They spoke with fear of a particular police officer. He would physically attack and transport children to remote places far from town, and drop them off.

Programmes for street children are best directed at the general public and those charged to enforce the law to address negative attitudes and violent practices against street children.

#### *Street Children's Perception about Street Life*

Asked about how they perceived their lives on the street, 28.5% of the street children felt hopeless and helpless; they mentioned that they had no other option concerning what do about their lives except live on the street. Nearly twenty-six percent (25.8%) mentioned that their lives on the streets were tough, 20.8% felt fatalistic and mentioned that their lives were bleak and without a future, 11.3% said that their lives on the streets are temporary and 10.3% mentioned that they enjoyed living on the streets. The majority of children in all three categories felt that their lives were tough and that they had no future.

#### *Responsibility for Children*

Nearly thirty-four percent (33.7%) felt that parents, fathers and mothers, should be responsible for their children's food, clothing, shelter and education. About twenty-nine percent (28.6%) said that government should be responsible for street children's food, shelter, clothing and education while 13.3% said NGOs should be responsible for food, clothing, shelter and education for street children.

Street adults felt that both parents had primary responsibility over their children. However, most street adults felt parents had relinquished their responsibility due to lack of financial means to care for and support their children. Street adults further felt that extended families had become over-extended and that the current socio-economic environment was not supportive to communal life. They felt the capitalist and economic environment had led many people to pursue mainly economic interests at the expense of social benefits. These were viewed as being mainly pursued in communal settings.

## Analysis of Causal Factors

A careful analysis of the street children phenomenon reflects a number of immediate, underlying and basic causes. Available literature on street children in Zimbabwe from academic presentations, journal articles, books by researchers and situational analysis and survey reports, show a plethora of causal factors and effects to the street children problem.

The phenomenon of street children in all countries seems to be a social institution with basic social, economic and environmental causes (Auret, 1995; Bourdillon, 1991; Dube, 1999; Muchini, op. cit., Muchini and Nyandiya-Bundy, op. cit.). It appears to have basic causes in the polity, the economy and other basic social factors such as public social policies about employment, housing and land ownership.

The colonial authorities are said to have seen the boys and girls who “flocked” to urban areas as coming into town to seek the “glitter” and “excitement” of urban life (Grier, op. cit.). Grier further noted that during the years after World War I, there was a tendency for children to “flock” to industrial centres due to increased immigration of white settlers, additional land confiscation, overcrowding and growing landlessness on the reserves, rural poverty and periodic droughts. Grier also notes that during this colonial period, children left for urban areas due to boredom in herding animals (boys) and due to the drudgery of domestic chores (girls).

Following Independence, more children came onto the streets due to the inability of the Zimbabwean economy to create sufficient formal employment since 1975, recurrent drought periods and the war that was in Mozambique. The Mozambican war displaced many people, mainly children and women. Muchini and Nyandiya-Bundy (1991) found a substantial number of street children in Zimbabwe who were displaced Mozambicans. This finding was also verified in the study that found that almost all vendors at Mbare Musika in Harare were of Mozambican origin (Dube, et. al. 1996).

Thus, for the larger number of street children, the underlying and basic causes for pushing children onto the streets lie in the increasing number of families surviving under extreme poverty, unemployment, lack of opportunity for social mobility and strained family relationships (Bourdillon, op. cit.; Grier, op. cit.; Muchini, op. cit.).

## Reasons for Being Street Children

Street children cited a number of reasons for being on the streets. These include earning income, being orphaned, abuse by stepfathers/stepmothers/some relatives, inadequate care and support by parents or guardians and peer pressure.

The study revealed that the majority (35.3%) of the street children gave earning income for their families as their main reason for being on the streets (Table 16). Just over thirty percent (30.7%) said they were orphans and did not have care-givers while 18.3% said they were abused by parent(s), 7.3% were employed to work on the streets and 6.4% had committed a misdemeanour and had run away from home.

Table 11-: Reasons for Being Street Children

| Reasons                                     | Percentage |
|---|------------|
| Orphanhood                                  | 30.7       |
| Abused by parent(s)/guardians/care-givers   | 18.3       |
| Committed an offence and ran away from home | 6.4        |
| Employment                                  | 7.3        |
| Earning income for family                   | 35.3       |

The reasons given in the interviews with children for becoming street children were confirmed in the focused group discussions with street children and street adults. Both groups identified poverty, seeking food and employ-

ment and being orphaned as the reasons why children moved onto the streets. Social and economic factors appeared to be primary in pushing children onto the streets. Poverty, disability (mostly blindness) and death of parent(s) appeared to be the key factors resulting in families' inability to look after their children properly. Children of blind parents, primarily girls, assist their mothers in begging and moving around town. Focused group discussions with street adults showed that most of these blind beggars were single parents. Death of parents resulting in orphanhood, and poverty, have created a vacuum in child-care responsibilities by removing and/or incapacitating those with duties to provide for children's basic needs.

Focused group discussions suggested that many of the street children had lost, either through death or divorce, their biological parent(s). Such children elected to move onto the street, rather than away from staying within step-parent settings – with either a male or female step-parent, and/or from staying in extended family settings. This was especially true for children of the street. In the focused group discussion, step-parents or extended family members reportedly physically and sexually abused such children. Poverty alone was not seen as a sufficient factor in pushing children onto the streets. Street adults and child-care workers mainly saw the antecedent factors as family dysfunction and/or disruption. Such factors, as already noted above, included abusive families, child-headed households, death of a primary care-giver, inadequate care and support, and over-extended families.

### **The Effects of the Street Children Phenomenon**

Researchers in psychology, sociology and related disciplines have shown that the environment, both animate and inanimate, influences and affects children's development (e.g. Tudor, 1981; Ennew, 1986). Thus, a psychologically impoverished environment may lead to physical and social problems in children who grow under such conditions. Street children live under squalid conditions and others lack parental care, affection, education and opportunities for healthy growth and development (Auret, 1995; Bourdillon, 1991; Dube et al, op. cit.;).

In Zimbabwe there is a growing disquiet over the numbers of children working and living on the streets. These children have been portrayed, especially in the electronic and print media, as being little thieves or criminals in the making. Their moral values and behaviour are seen as different from that of other children who are not street children. This is so as they are seen to lack parental guidance and protection. The family is regarded as the main source of material and emotional support of the child's growth and development. Both the African traditional and Christian beliefs reinforce the values attached to loving bonds between parents and children, filial duty, responsibility and respect, parental obligations and responsibilities of mutual support, within a closely-knit family network. Muchini (1994) notes that family unity is upheld as the ideal even when it is almost impossible to achieve.

Many studies cite the deleterious effects resulting from child work on the psychological and physical development of children (e.g. Agnelli, op. cit.; Ennew, op. cit.). The literature for street children in Zimbabwe does not report much on the effects of the street children phenomenon. However, as the Muchini (1994) study suggests, the work some children do, for example, loading and unloading trucks and buses, exerts a great deal of demand on their meagre calorific reserves. This, together with excessive alcohol use and poor nutrition, may weaken their resistance to diseases.

However, it is important to acknowledge that some types of work performed by children may actually improve their health and psychological status. Families with children who guard cars, sell goods on the streets (vendors) and those who clean cars earn more than the minimum wages and are able to meet their basic needs (e.g. food) by pooling together their labour (Bourdillon, 1991; Muchini & Nyandiy-Bundy, op. cit.). Furthermore, some forms of child work may increase their physical fitness thereby strengthening their resistance to certain diseases.

Children's work is generally assumed to impair their educational and intellectual development as work leaves them with little time and energy for school. Indeed studies by Bourdillon, Muchini and Nyandiy-Bundy, show that the majority of street children have little or no education at all. However, their work may be an important component of their socialisation process as they gain the skills necessary for future employment. This may be true for children of vendors who assume vending roles by the side of the roads at a young age, begun by accompanying their vendor parents as infants. Schooling, it may be argued, limits children's choices for many forms of employment in the informal sector. Unprecedented high unemployment rates for the educated groups and high informal employment rates for the less educated, may render support to this assertion.

Children's work may lead to high levels of unemployment for adults. Child labour is cheap and children are more

efficient than adults at many tasks (see Loewenson, Gutto and Makamure, 1985). Children's inability to organise themselves or to form unions and their lack of awareness of their rights, lead to their exploitation. They are made to work long hours under detrimental conditions and for low financial returns (Agnelli, op. cit.).

Street children are seen to be at risk for HIV-infection given their sexual behaviour however there is limited information on the HIV-infection rates amongst street children in Zimbabwe. Emerging data from research and from organisations working with street children does indicate however that they are at higher risk for HIV infection (Bourdillon, 1994; Dube, 1997). Dube (1997) found out that both street girls and boys have risky sexual activities that make them vulnerable to HIV infection. Dube (op. cit.) noted that street boys were engaged in commercial sex with adult males (*mangochani*), exchange of sex for security, comfort sex based on mutual consent, sex with female sex workers, and having their "wives" sell sex as an income-generating activity for the "couple".

While this study has not explored the effects of street living on children, it is an important area which should serve to inform programming and policy makers. In this country and elsewhere, there has been a tendency by some researchers and programmers to romanticise street children and street life. This study found that street children do not enjoy being on the streets. They see this option as bleak and without a future and asked for help in improving their situation. They specifically asked for government's intervention as they "are citizens of this nation".

## **Intervention for Street Children in Zimbabwe**

### **Institutional Responses**

Interviews with street child-care workers revealed that all programmes for street children, be they government run or supported by NGOs, lack adequate funding and skilled personnel and suffer problems with co-ordination between similar organisations.

There are a number of organisations in Zimbabwe that work with street children. In Harare organisations who are working with or have helped street children include the Department of Social Welfare, Harare Shelter for the Destitute, Streets Ahead, Harare City Council/Harare Street Children's Organisation, Street Kids In Action, Shungu Dzevana, Jesuits' Project, City Presbyterian Church, and Compassion Ministries.

The Harare Shelter for the Destitute is the first organisation to run intervention programmes for street children. Other organisations are Streets Ahead and Street Kids In Action (SKIA). Some organisations provide solutions such as giving the children food, clothing and blankets periodically, while others are still trying to work out ways in which they may help the children.

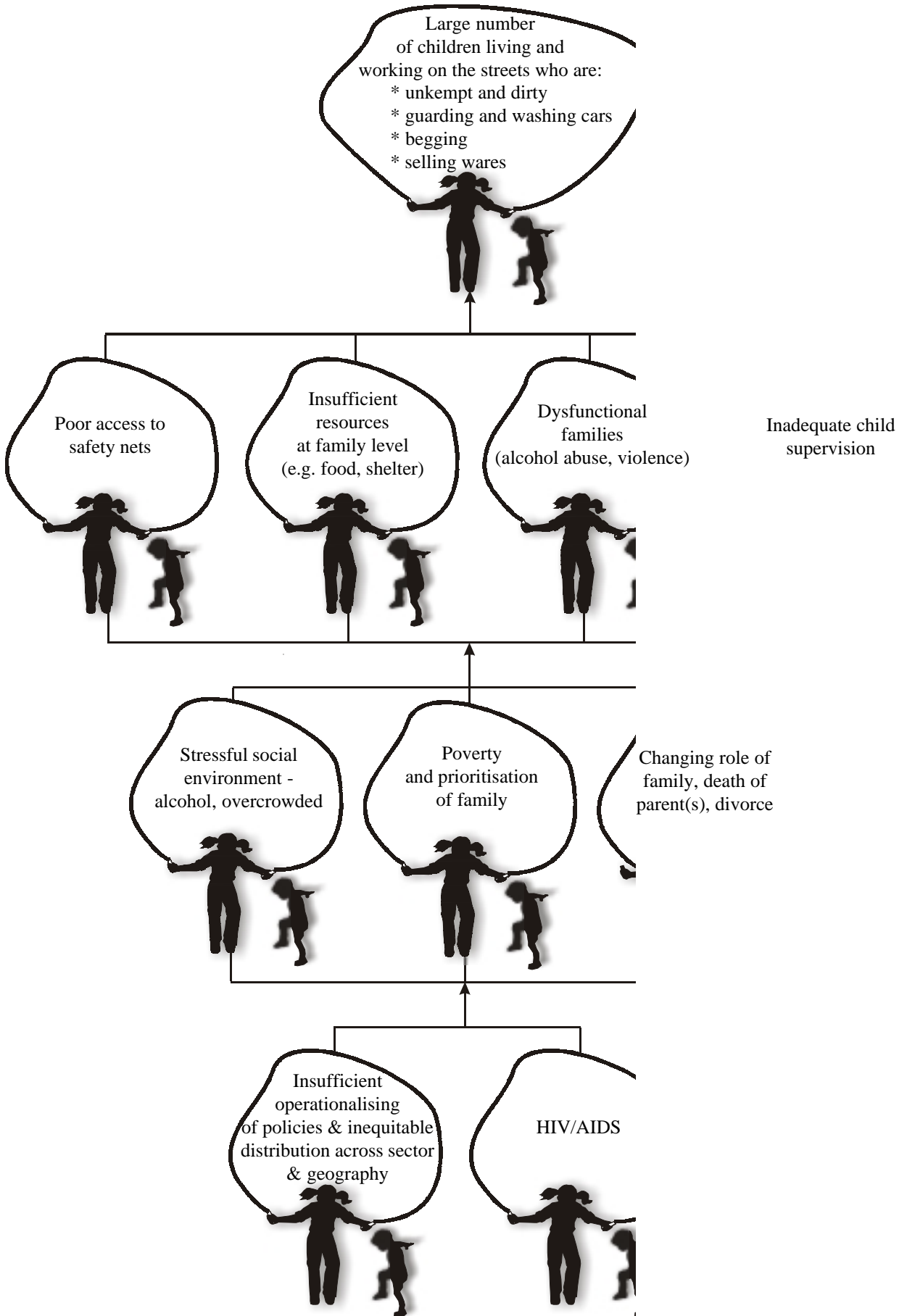
The Harare Shelter for the Destitute is a welfare organisation comprised of various religious denominations in Harare. It is based at the Anglican Cathedral of Saint Mary and All Saints and provides meals to the destitute once every day except Saturdays and Sundays. The organisation runs a skills training programme and a literacy and numeracy programme for street children. At one point it had children enrolled for skills training attend literacy and numeracy classes on occasion.

Streets Ahead is another welfare organisation devoted to assisting street children in Harare. The organisation's original objectives included providing food, clothing, care, education and usable skills to street children. Where possible it intended to integrate the children into their families and/or formal education system. It also provided counselling services, awareness drives for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), drug and alcohol abuse and legal rights, and assistance for formal and informal employment. Streets Ahead helped in establishing a community-based informal school initially for about 150 children at the resettlement scheme in Dzivaresekwa 5. In Mbare the organisation provided children with instruction in drama, arts and crafts. In the city centre it provided skills training to a group of children.

Street Kids In Action (SKIA) is another Harare-based welfare organisation whose objectives included providing street children with a halfway home. It intends to establish new homes for street children in Bulawayo, Gweru, Mutare and Masvingo. The organisation plans to run a pilot project in Harare with 100 children. They bought a two-acre plot in Ardbennie, Mbare, where they intend to construct a halfway home. The home would house 25 street children and together with 75 non-residential children, the street children will be provided with vocational

**Causal Analysis Framework**

Figure 1-: Causes of Street Children Phenomenon



skills and literacy and numeracy skills. After 12 months at the home the children are hoped to be placed with large companies. For example, BP Shell was said to have agreed to absorb SKIA young adults in their auto mechanics garages as trainees.

In Bulawayo there are a number of organisations working with street children. These include the Department of Social Welfare, the Bulawayo Task Force on Street Children, Scripture Union Thuthuka Street Children's Project, Emthunzini Wethemba, and Khayelihle Children's Village.

The Scripture Union Thuthuka Street Children's Project focuses on reuniting street children with their parents or extended family. They have grown over the years to become a national organisation, having already established an office in Mutare. They have plans to establish an office in Masvingo by mid-2000. In Bulawayo, they have a day contact centre where children can come in and take a bath, wash their clothes, receive meals and counselling. They have a training centre outside Bulawayo with 11 boys in residence. Once they link children with their families, they provide school assistance to the reunited child and their siblings if there is need. If the child's guardian is unemployed they assist with finding employment or with an income-generating project. They have made arrangements with Zambuko Trust for the micro-finance institution to provide loans to children and or families working with Thuthuka.

Emthunzini Wethemba is an organisation running a home for orphans including street children. Khayelihle Children's Village takes a maximum of 12 street children.

### **Community Responses**

Street children are seen as "vagrants", "illegal vendors" or "truants" by both the law and the general public. Focused group discussions with street adults confirmed what many street children felt that many people view street children as irresponsible young persons who were "criminals in the making". Reactions to such children thus tend to be punitive and anti-social and delinquent behaviour stemming from poverty, is not considered in its proper social and psychological context. Such has been the attitude adopted by the police and the Department of Social Welfare whose alternatives have not been many.

Some communities of street adults have responded to the needs of street children by offering shelter, and security for personal property for a small fee (Bourdillon, op cit). The general public at times support street children by offering them money for washing or guarding their cars or just cash donations to beggars.

### **Government Responses**

The Government of Zimbabwe's policy guarding the interest of each and every needy child under the age of 16 years, is the Children's Protection and Adoption Act (1972), Chapter 33. Other pieces of legislation, which protect children, are included in the Labour Act. The Children's Protection and Adoption Act contradicts some of the fundamental provisions for children which are enshrined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. For example, sub-sections 20(2), (a) and (b) of the Act contravene the Convention and need to be deleted.

Government's traditional practice has been to round up the street children and confine them along with non-street abandoned children, delinquents, stray children and other children in need of care, in government residential facilities of remand, training centres, probation and children's homes. In some cases street children become children in need of care in these institutions. Child-care workers and street children spoke of the harsh conditions at some of the government training and remand centres. While a number of government training centres have tried to be responsive to the rights of street children, most have cited financial and human resources as inadequate to fully meet the challenge of providing for these children.

Table 12-: Summary of Institutional Responses

| Responses   | Who  |  | Where    | When           | How  | For Whom   | How Many            | Perceived  |
|---|--|--|----------|----------------|--|--|---------------------|--|
|   | Name   | Grouping                                       |          |                |  |  |                     |  |
| Bathing, Washing Clothes, Counselling, Schooling, Skills Training, Family reunification, Family Support | Thuthuka Street Children's Project             | Scripture Union                                | Bulawayo | Formed in 1995 | Rely on donor support and have local fund-raising projects | Street Children, Parents or Guardians of Street children | 176                 | Would like to start similar activities in Mutare & Masvingo. |
| Shelter, Schooling, Skills Training   | Khayelihle Children's Village                  | Church of Christ                               | Bulawayo |                |  | Street Children  | 12                  |  |
| Shelter, Schooling  | Emthunzini Wethemba                            | Various Churches, Social Welfare & Individuals | Bulawayo |                |  | Street Children  | 67 boys<br>17 girls |  |
| Bathing, Washing Clothes, Counselling, Schooling, Skills Training, Family reunification, Family Support | Simukai  | Scripture Union, FACT-Mutare                   | Mutare   |                |  | Street Children and Parents or Guardians of the children |                     |  |
|   | Streets Ahead                                  |  | Harare   |                |  | Street Children  |                     |  |
| Shelter, Bathing, Washing Clothes, Family Reunification   | Harare Street Children's Organisation          |  | Harare   |                |  | Street Children  |                     |  |
| Bathing, Washing Clothes, Schooling, Feeding & Material Assistance                                      | St. Joseph's Community Home Care               | Catholic Health Services Mutare Diocese        | Mutare   |                |  | Street Children  | 7                   |  |
| Schooling, Shelter, Skills Training, Counselling  | Northcot Children's Remand and Training Centre | Department of Social Welfare                   | Harare   |                |  | Street Children  |                     |  |
| Schooling, Shelter, Skills Training, Counselling  | Kadoma Children's Remand and Training Centre   | Department of Social Welfare                   | Kadoma   |                |  | Street Children  |                     |  |

## Emerging Gaps

### Policy Level

A number of ministries are responsible for safe-guarding the rights of children which often lead to gaps where departments or ministries may not have enough funding to fulfil their obligations to children. As already indicated above, the existing legislation needs to be reviewed and amended so that it is in line with international conventions to which Zimbabwe is a party.

### Programme Level

It is difficult to run effective intervention programmes for street children since street children are manifestations of profound social and economic situations that do not respond to quick and easy solutions. Failure has characterised many programmes that have not considered the children's rights, personal needs and freedom of choice in the provision of services and those that have addressed the symptoms rather than the causal factors. Failure has also characterised programmes that address street children singularly without looking at the wider contents of family and community.

In Zimbabwe there is a general feeling amongst street child-care workers interviewed that poor funding for programmes and lack of coordination has worked against successful programmatic intervention.

Programmes need to focus on family tracing and re-unification since this is a best practice. Street children, as with all other children in especially difficult circumstances, need to be cared for within the context of their families and culture. Strategies for intervention need to consider ways of strengthening families' responsibility for their children. Children should only be placed in homes or foster placements as a last resort.

## **Recommendations**

From this research a number of short-term recommendations emerge:

- There is need for co-ordination of responses to street children's rights.
- There is need to conduct a best practices survey or study of responses to street children and to share this with all stakeholders.
- A process could be initiated through child-welfare fora to review existing legislation on children and how these could be strengthened.
- There is need for research to be conducted to fill the information gap on the effects of street environments on child development.
- The Government of Zimbabwe needs to seriously consider re-deploying its welfare departments into development departments. This would mean that the Departments of Child Welfare and Social Welfare would focus more on child and social development. The fact that it is much more expensive to "cure" than to "prevent" cannot be overstated.
- Many of the organisations working in the area of street children have been in existence for a couple of years. In the long-term it could be beneficial for these to have a capacity assessment in order for intervening around NGO, CBO or organisational capacity-building.
- Community mobilisation should be a priority in ensuring duty-bearers are "keeping their promise" to children of Zimbabwe, including street children.