



TOYBOX

Changing the world
for street children



WAYS OF COPING:

Children growing
up on the streets
of Nairobi

JUNE 2017
REPORT



Contents

Written by Hannah Stevenson Doornbos with Emily Malcolm (Toybox) and Okari B. Magati (Pendekezo Letu). This report is based on research conducted by Samuel Munyuwiny and George Khisa at the African Institute for Children's Studies (AICS). We are grateful to all the organisations who took part in the 'Change on the Streets' Theory of Change workshop in Nairobi in February 2017. These organisations are Nairobi City County Government, Street Families Rehabilitation Trust Fund (SFRTF), UNHCR, AMREF Health African in Kenya, Undugu Society of Kenya, Medecins d'Afrique (MDA) Kenya, Koinonia Community Rehabilitation, MCFpanairobi, Joy Divine Children's Organisation, Rescue Dada Centre, Refugee Affairs Secretariat (RAS), Probation and Aftercare Service, Metro Kenya Youth Children Operation, Action for Children in Conflict, The CRADLE, Officer of the Director of Public Prosecution, National Government Administration, RAHA KIDS Education and Rehabilitation Centre, African Institute of Children Studies (AICS), and Pendekezo Letu (PKL). Our recommendations for change were informed by their breadth of experience.

We particularly thank the children and families who shared their stories with us.

Cover image: A rubbish dump in Nairobi with children looking for scraps to sell.
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Foreword



At Toybox we have one core value: to be courageous. We strive to have the courage to do the right thing, to speak the truth against injustice and to be unafraid to try new ideas.

This report tells the stories of children who face the streets of Nairobi with courage every day. Children like Freddie and Eric who are forced to adapt to life on the streets through ways of coping that most of us couldn't even imagine. The reality of their daily experiences is so far removed from the challenges and threats that most of us face across a lifetime, and yet the strength many children show in surviving life on the streets is remarkable.

Toybox was established nearly 25 years ago because individuals were outraged at the violence perpetrated on street children. We are still outraged by the violence and exploitation of children today. When children feel they have no other choice than to steal money or sell themselves in order to buy food, action must be taken. I have met children across the countries we work in who feel they have no choice. Children who dream of becoming teachers and doctors and pilots and presidents, but who are let down by the systems around them that should be protecting them.

In this report, we have captured some of the challenges children like Freddie and Eric face every day; their fears and worries, their dreams and wishes and hopes for their future. We have also sought to evidence how strengthening systems can provide real protection for the possibly millions more children with stories like Freddie and Eric's.

Our hope is that this report contributes to a new recognition of the children being exploited on the streets of Kenya, inspiring a response to this exploitation that protects children on the streets today and prevents more children being exploited tomorrow.

Lynne Morris
Chief Executive Officer
Toybox

Executive Summary

An estimated 3,000 boys and girls spend their nights sleeping on the streets of Nairobi. As many as 60,000 further children live and work on Nairobi's streets during the day, exposed to violence, exploitation and abuse¹. Nationwide, this figure is estimated to be anywhere between 250,000 and 300,000 children². However, the uncertainty over numbers is just one indication of how street connected children are ignored – national data collection does not include them and therefore the number of children in street situations in Nairobi county and nationwide is still only an estimate³. An absence of accurate data on street connected children enables a policy environment in which the rights of children in street situations continue to be overlooked. The absence of research, data and documented experience is a critical gap in addressing the needs of street connected children on a global scale. This report seeks to address this gap in mapping existing data available and in contributing to this with our own research in Nairobi.

In Kenya, street connected children are still considered to be illegal, discriminated against in their attempts to access services and treated with violence and contempt by state authorities and members of the public. This legal status results in children in street situations being systematically discriminated against as though they are breaking the law. Sexual exploitation is a common experience amongst street

children, as is physical violence from security authorities, engagement in some of the worst forms of child labour, and petty crime for the purposes of gaining income for food and shelter.

Our research identified both push and pull factors that result in children becoming street connected in Nairobi, and the innovative, brave yet often destructive means with which they are forced to protect themselves while living and working on the streets. From focus groups, interviews and workshops with children, families, and organisations working with street connected children and with government, this report tells the stories of children living and working on the streets of Nairobi. It also seeks to map specific threats that these boys and girls face, and the adaptive capacities they are forced to deploy in order to protect themselves. This report highlights the gaps in the child protection system at a national and global level, making key recommendations to those working with street connected children as well as policy makers and donors.

This report also seeks to reframe the debate, challenging the inherent stigmatisation afforded to street children by demonstrating their capacity for resilience, their determination to survive horrific violence and abuse, and their unrelenting ability to hope for a better future.

“Normally street children are shown in terms of the tragedy of their lives – which is true – but there is also another dimension: their wisdom, dignity and enormous capacity for survival.”

Henning Mankell

Methodology

This report is based on a context analysis undertaken in 2014 and updated in 2016. It also draws on the stories of street connected children living in Nairobi county between October and December 2016. We used qualitative methods to try to best capture the truth of their experience. The children and youth participated in focus group discussions (FGDs) based on their age, sex and geographical location. A total of 11 FGDs were conducted with 76 (63 male, 13 female⁴) children and youth at street bases. These children and youth identified as street connected because they were living on the streets, and/or spending significant proportions of their time on the streets, and therefore at risk of living on the streets⁵.

We also carried out 24 interviews with key informants, including officials from the Department of Children Services and Street Families Rehabilitation Trust Fund (SFRTF); local government officials including Children's Officers and Area Chiefs, head teachers, social workers and staff from civil society who work with street connected children and their families. Also interviewed were four caregivers and two leaders of bases from which the street connected children and youth operate.

Findings from this primary research was verified with a group of 20 children (5 boys and 15 girls) connected to the street and already taking part in reintegration and rehabilitation programmes with our Kenyan partner Pendekezo Letu. The responses of the children were then analysed alongside our initial findings. We also presented our research to a broad group of civil society and government officials in a separate verification workshop held in Nairobi in February 2017. Our recommendations for change emerged from this collaboration.

Our study had its limitations: there are very few recent or verified sources that provide an estimate of the number of street children in Nairobi, and we struggled to find enough girls in the street bases who were willing to participate in the research. Girls are not often seen living or working on the streets of Nairobi, in part because many carry out domestic work and so spend the daytime indoors, or because many work at night. Additionally, with the exception of stakeholders who worked directly in programs focusing on street connected children, the level of awareness of issues around street connected children was very low among other stakeholders in the children's sector. An additional consideration was in verifying our findings. We chose not to return to the same children we had spoken to initially as we decided it was not ethical do so without offering an intervention.

Introduction

There are as many as 60,000 girls and boys living and working on the streets in Nairobi. These children spend long days in street situations and are either forced to sleep on the streets, or must return home late at night after long hours spent working. 'Home' is often a household strained by poverty or made dangerous by violence, abuse and neglect. Many of the children who live and work on the streets of Nairobi are doing so to escape this abuse and neglect, and yet the streets themselves foster further discriminatory, violent and abusive behaviour and attitudes towards them.

Our research explored the causes and effects of children in street situations in Nairobi. Dysfunctional and abusive families play a critical role in pushing high numbers of children to seek refuge and protection on the streets. Children told us that they felt they had no other option than to risk their life on the street in order to get away from abuse and neglect at home. Studies have shown that this is a significant push factor in Kenya⁶, and a common cause of street connectedness on a global scale⁷. The absence of effective social support for vulnerable families or alternative care arrangements for children who are at risk, creates a gap in which children must find their own means of protection. The street is often the only choice.

The children we spoke to told us their stories, not just of living and working on the street as a means of escaping abuse at home, but of the activities they are forced to engage in to survive street living. When children steal or sell sex in order to buy food, it is clear the system of child protection is not working.

This year presents several key opportunities for achieving better protection for street children at a policy level. The General Comment on Children in Street Situations was adopted by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

in February 2017 and is expected to be published by June 2017. As a state signatory to the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child, Kenya will need to use the General Comment as guidance for fulfilling its legal obligations to implement street children's rights effectively. This will require a shift towards governance that is fit for children and inclusive of street connected children. With as many as 300,000 children estimated as street connected across the whole of Kenya, failure to include them in national initiatives to achieve these goals will critically undermine their success. No child should be left behind.

The Sustainable Development Goals also require an international focus on achieving children's rights if the commitment to leave no one behind is to be realised. The UK Government's commitment to prioritise child exploitation within its strategy for international development is welcomed⁸. Without addressing the rights abuses faced by children, and specifically the most vulnerable children such as those living and working on the world's streets, the SDGs will not be met.

On a national level, the ongoing redrafting of the Children's Act 2001 in Kenya provides a critical opportunity to include provisions for meeting the specific protection needs of street connected children in national child policy frameworks. A comprehensive policy framework which directly addresses issues facing street connected children is a critical foundation for a child protection system that street children can access and attain services designed to meet their specific needs. It is also a vital component in breaking down discrimination and stigmatisation amongst service providers. The momentum to develop a new street connected children protection network (Nairobi Street Children and Youth Consortium) emerging from the process of this context analysis is critical to maintaining a voice for street children at the national policy level in Kenya.

The Street as Protection?

FREDDIE'S STORY

Ten year old Freddie is from Thika, a small town 40 miles east of Nairobi, although his family home is in Muthurwa base in the city. He was forced to seek protection on the streets after his mother became a drug addict. Freddie could not endure the harsh environment that became his homelife as his mother became very violent and abusive. He was beaten and neglected, deprived of food and water and verbally abused. He had no way of providing food or clothing for himself. Freddie realised that his mum had lost control, and that his life was in danger. He knew that he could not survive living at home for much longer without his most basic of needs being met. So he decided to run for his life and joined other street boys. While talking with him, he shared a deep desire to go back to a safe and loving home, to start school and to have a better future.

Abusive and dysfunctional families as a push factor

The factors that cause children to become street connected are varied and complex, and yet we know that there are common issues identified across contexts. Abusive and dysfunctional families are a critical push factor in forcing children to seek protection on the streets⁹. Children who experience neglect, abuse, violence and exploitation at home are forced to find their own protection. Improving access to social services, including positive parenting skills, psychosocial support and livelihood opportunities for vulnerable families, including single parents and caregivers, is critical to preventing children from seeking safety on the street.

“When my parents died, I was mistreated by my relatives. Life was unbearable, I just had to leave.”

10 year old girl, Mwiki

Many of the children we spoke to told us of severed relationships with their original families, of the death or divorce of parents, conflict with parents or step-parents, parents going to jail or abusing drugs and alcohol, or of the inability of the most vulnerable parents to provide for and protect all of their children.

“My relatives forced me to repeat class so that they would not have to pay for my secondary school fees. I dropped out of school and left home.”

16 year old boy, Kasarani

Children who do not feel safe at home told us that they perceive the streets as offering them choice. It can seem as though there are opportunities for generating an income to access food, clothing and other basic essentials. Living on the streets

also enables easier access to drugs and other addictive substances, which can dull the ache of hunger and provide comfort for children who have experienced trauma and pain. Escape from abusive or disempowering authority figures also contributes to the lure of the streets, where the absence of adult care is attractive to children who have experienced adult care as a threat.

“It starts like this: a child fears parents because of mistreatment, abuse and brutality. The child engages in drugs to cope and becomes addicted. The child is then lured to have money like the rest of the street children. Eventually the child feels that they have been freed from the parents.”

Male Base Leader, 18 years old

In Nairobi, children often talk of abusive teachers, as well as parents and relatives¹⁰. Corporal punishment was cited in our research as a key contributor to truancy in the short-term and street living in the long-term. Whilst all corporal

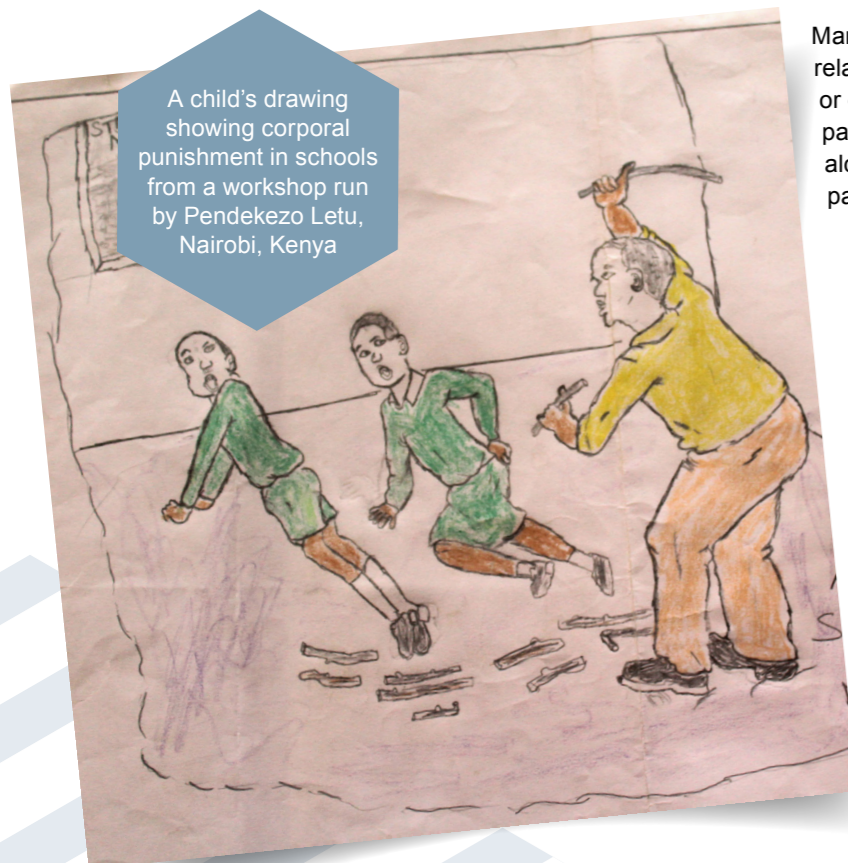
punishment (including in the home as well as school) was outlawed in the 2010 Constitution (Article 29), it continues to be an issue¹¹. Toybox's partner Pendekezo Letu teach alternative discipline methods in schools and hold regular forums between teachers, parents and students to tackle attitudes and hold teachers accountable. Efforts to tackle corporal punishment in schools are ongoing at a national level as well. A Positive Discipline Handbook for Teachers is planned for launch by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in 2017 and the aim is to include positive discipline in the teacher training curriculum¹². Initiatives that seek to tackle violence in schools must include addressing physical discipline, as well as sexual harassment and assault. Strengthening community-wide knowledge and understanding of child protection is also essential to tackling abuse.



Toybox works with local partner Pendekezo Letu to provide access to financial and livelihood support for vulnerable families living in Nairobi. Through the creation of Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILCs), parents living in informal settlements will be supported to start small businesses, thereby reducing the need to send their children out onto the streets to work

and enabling them to provide basic needs to their children. Vocational training provides adolescent mothers and youth at-risk with the skills needed to make key changes to their lives. The SILCs programme is supporting single parents like Angela, who is living with HIV/AIDS and struggling to earn enough to feed and clothe her two young daughters. Angela was orphaned at a young age and did not go to school herself, and so her ability to earn an income is limited. Since joining her local SILC, Angela has used some capital to set up and run a small grocery. Through the grocery, she is able to meet her family's daily needs. Angela is also training in tailoring and dress-making to gain skills to improve her livelihood opportunities. Toybox are currently supporting 16 young people at risk with vocational training.

A child's drawing showing corporal punishment in schools from a workshop run by Pendekezo Letu, Nairobi, Kenya



Angela learning to sew in Nairobi



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The Absence of State Protection

Street connected children in Nairobi fall through the gaps in the child protection system. Despite existing laws that provide a policy framework relating to children's rights broadly¹³, there is no policy at national or county level directly addressing street connected children. This year is a key opportunity to include street connected children in the redrafting of the Children's Act 2001 and to ensure that government budgets and newly devolved structures align with this policy so that implementation of child protection services is effective.

Many street children experience discrimination and stigmatisation at the point of access including, as we were told, from healthcare providers. Government department mandates are unclear as to who has responsibility for street children and so coordination of services is patchy¹⁴. There are also a shrinking number of international civil society organisations providing services and support to street children, and therefore less funding. Informal, community level actors are also critical to improving the protection system. Local Area Advisory Councils play a vital role in protecting street children across Kenya's counties and must be resourced, funded and collaborated with effectively. See opposite page.

Street connected children are targeted for verbal and physical abuse by police, business owners and members of the public. The widely held discriminatory attitudes and behavior of a broad section of society creates a hostile environment in place of a circle of care. The failure to understand the scale of the issue through a more accurate

measure of the numbers of children living and working on the streets of Nairobi prevents their participation, even in analysing the problem and identifying solutions.

This is a critical issue on a global scale. A 1989 estimate of 100 million street connected children worldwide is still widely used almost thirty years on¹⁵. Without a clear idea of the number of children involved, it is a huge challenge to target appropriate policies and programmes that provide effective protection to scale¹⁶. In response to inadequate systems of protection, children are forced to devise coping strategies which provide their own basic protection.

WHAT WE DO...

Toybox works to strengthen informal mechanisms for protection within communities at risk as part of our protection and prevention work with our partner in Kenya Pendekezo Letu. We do this through

providing guidance and counselling to children, as well as sensitisation to parents on child rights and protection, including positive parenting practices. In Nairobi and Kiambu counties, we are also working with Local Area Advisory Councils (LAACs) to better protect children in six slum settlements. We train council members on child rights, child protection and referral mechanisms. We have seen the positive impact that empowering the communities has had on the protection children experience in the community – the absence of which is a key factor in becoming street connected. For example in Njiru, three children were abandoned by their parents and left alone in their rented house. Neighbours soon realized that there was a problem in the house and reported the case to the local village elder, who was a member of the LAAC. The elder brought the case to the attention of the LAAC, and the referral process was triggered. The children were provided with emergency shelter and care, including access to education, and initiatives are underway to trace the parents.



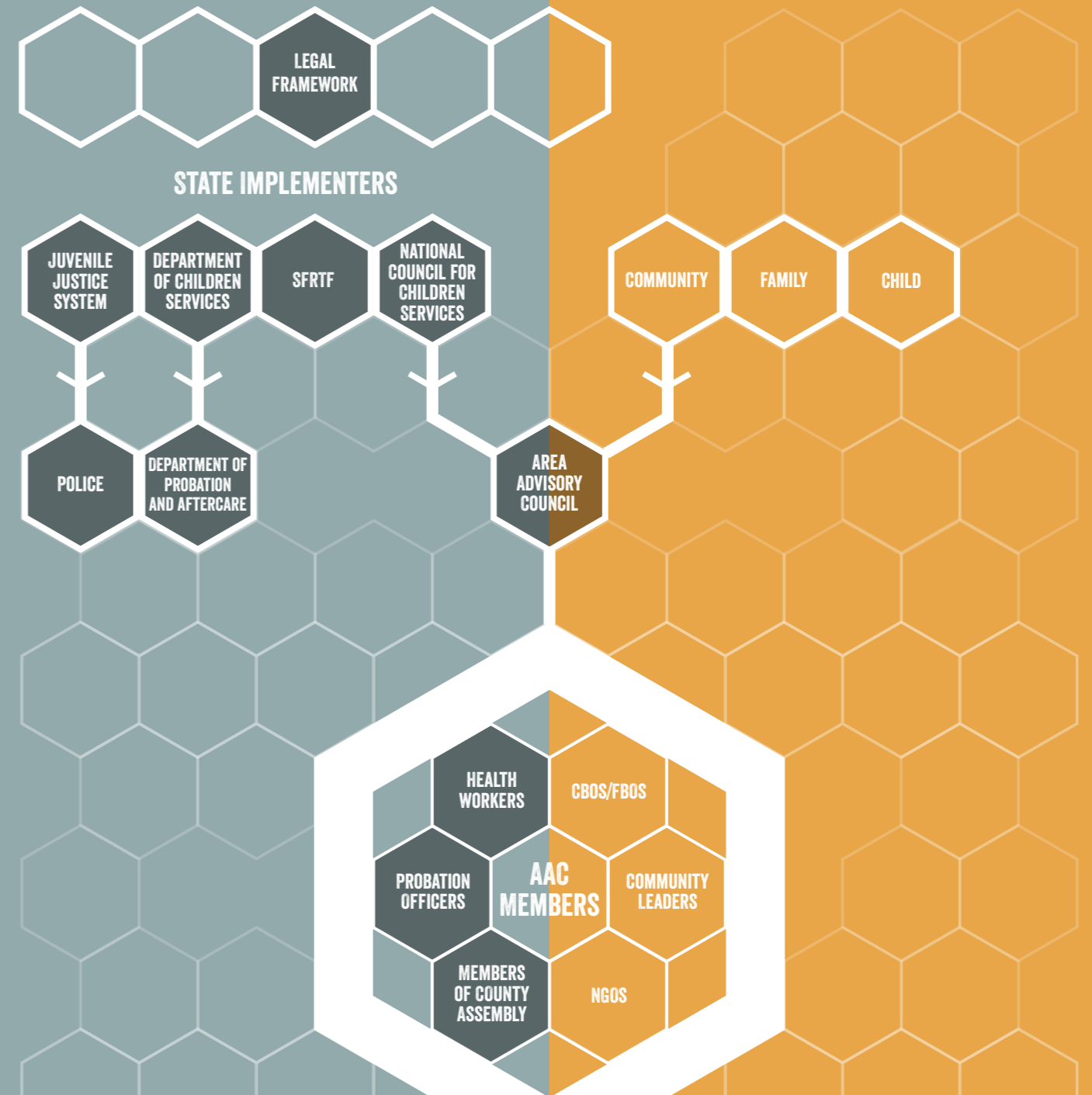
One of the children attending a Toybox child rights club which provides guidance and counselling on child rights and protection

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A SYSTEMS MAP OF THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM IN KENYA AND NAIROBI

FORMAL ELEMENTS

INFORMAL ELEMENTS



ERIC'S STORY

Eric lives with other street connected children in a base near Gatwekera, an informal settlement in Nairobi. He keeps track of where he would have reached in his schooling. "Next year (2017), I would have been in class 8", he told us. He is 15 years old but has already endured many tough life experiences. Eric is most afraid of the nights. Tonight, like many other nights, when he goes to sleep he is anxious and scared of the authorities – particularly the city inspectors who work on the streets, or the Kanjo. He has good reason to fear them - he and his friends have had many ambushes at night from Kanjo. The last one was a close shave, "We were asleep when the inspectorate officials struck. I ran into the tunnels the Chinese contractors, working on this road, have made." The reason he really fears Kanjo is the way he has seen them handle other children. Some of his friends were taken and he has not seen them since. Kanjo are not the only thing Eric fears about nights. Nights are usually very cold and he has no blanket or mattress. He said, "Most nights we light fires to keep warm but this only helps for a while. Eventually the fire dies out in the deep of the night and then the cold really bites. I fall sick often and I know it is because of the cold". Eric really misses his life before the streets, when he slept on a mattress and had a blanket. The room was warm and he was able to wash every day. Now, he can't even remember the last time he was able to wash.



Children supported by Pendekezo Letu and Toybox in Nairobi act out a play in a Child Rights Club.



Toybox supports a Paralegal Social Worker and a Legal Officer through our local partner Pendekezo Letu to work in Nairobi's children's court, providing legal guidance and advice to

children in conflict with the law. Supporting vulnerable children through the legal system and ensuring they are reintegrated back into supportive communities is critical to keeping children safe and off the streets.

The Paralegal Social Worker undertakes the legal submissions and reports for each case, championing the best interests of the child and ensuring the child is protected in court. He also supports the child's reintegration back into the community by working with the social worker to better support the family and community to encourage and support the child coming back. The Legal Officer represents children in court and trains actors within the juvenile justice system on the best interests of the child. PKL have been involved in facilitating the first Child Court Users Committee in Milimani Court to solely discuss child cases.

Between July and December 2016, Toybox supported 27 children in conflict with the law in Nairobi. Of the 14 children – all boys – who received free legal representation, 8 were acquitted. The remaining cases are ongoing.

Protection or Abuse?

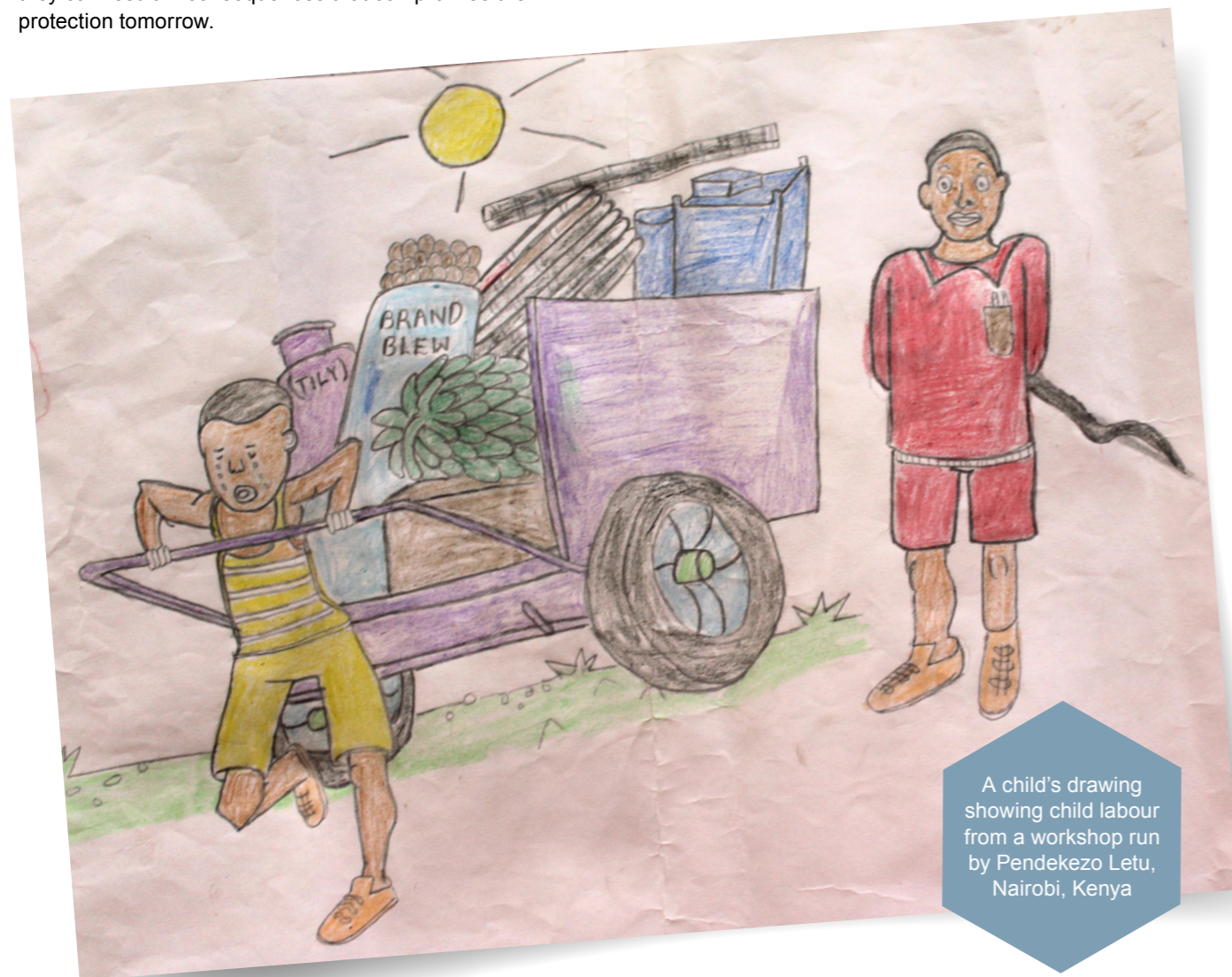
The Coping Mechanisms of Street Connected Children

In the absence of protective families and systems, children are left to fend for themselves, forced to find ways of protecting themselves and each other. It is clear from our research that children living and working on the streets have an incredible capacity for resilience, and their ability to find innovative and effective means of survival is remarkable. However, their coping mechanisms are deployed at the expense of their wellbeing. Some methods of perceived protection are actually means of further abuse and, where they may enable limited protection today, they can result in consequences that compromise their protection tomorrow.

“On the street, life is survival of the strongest. No one cares for you.”

18 year old male youth, Kasarani

The children we spoke to identified four main threats that they face on the streets as 1) a lack of access to basic needs including food 2) the frequency of ill health and recurring sickness 3) sexual violence including rape¹⁷ and 4) physical violence from the police.



A child's drawing showing child labour from a workshop run by Pendekezo Letu, Nairobi, Kenya

Coping With Hunger

Our research found that many vulnerable families in Nairobi rely on the income their children make to meet their family's basic needs. Many street children are exposed to some of the worst forms of child labour as a result. Sources of income were mostly cited as begging, searching for valuable items amongst the rubbish, or street hawking. Other, specific examples given were carrying luggage and helping people take care of livestock. We heard from one NGO working with street connected children that the type of work that street connected children in Nairobi engage in often changes as they grow, becoming more physically demanding as they get older.

Children told us that they are often forced to resort to other, more dangerous means of earning money for food. Children in all the focus groups said they are forced to steal from people, either to get money to buy food or to protect themselves by bribing police and other officials who threaten them with violence or arrest. Some children have formed groups or gangs that serve as protection in case one of them gets into trouble while trying to steal.

Commercial sexual exploitation of children in Kenya was noted as a concern by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2016¹⁸. One woman in the 18-24 year old female group (Nairobi West) interviewed told us that 'girls sell their bodies to get money to survive'. Transactional sex was mentioned by others and is a common source of bargaining power for children who have no other means of accessing food, clothing or safety. Prostitution to raise money for food was also reported across the research.

When there is a gap in protection created by a weak and ineffective system, children are forced to find any possible means of protecting themselves. When desperate measures are deployed for survival such as sex for money or protection, substance abuse is often used as a coping mechanism¹⁹. 'Most of us abuse drugs and other substances to forget the main issues we face in life,' a boy in the 10-14 years group (Kawangware) told us. We see that both transactional sex and substance abuse are both protection issues for street connected children, as well as desperate means deployed by children to secure their own protection. The consequences of these can be life-long.

Coping with Sickness

Children living and working on the streets of Nairobi are at risk of some of the most easily communicable diseases, as well as those transferred through poor hygiene. Cases of water borne diseases such as cholera, typhoid and diarrhea were commonly reported to us, as well as pneumonia, tuberculosis and constant skin infections. One respondent from a boy's focus group aged 15-17 in Kawangware linked skin infections with being forced to sleep on the ground, in dirty conditions, without protection from insects and parasites and lacking any water or other resources to wash.

“One of our challenges is frequently falling sick with no medical care.”

Boy in the 15-17 year old group, Kawangware

Complications from injuries are also common where children undertake physical work such as searching for rubbish, often climbing precarious piles of refuse and working amongst broken glass, metal and other hazardous objects. Several children also disclosed that they were living with HIV/AIDS and suffer from regular respiratory diseases. Nairobi has a high altitude and temperatures can be as low as 12°C in the winter months. When combined with rainy nights and sleeping directly on the ground, children with an already weakened immune system are at risk of serious illnesses.

One boy told us that when they are sick, they have no money to pay for hospital care and so they look for other ways to treat themselves. Children in Githurai reported that they had been denied access to healthcare by health providers because of their status as street connected children, despite the provision of free healthcare on paper²⁰.

Coping with Sexual Violence

Sexual exploitation of women and girls in Kenya has been repeatedly noted by the UNCRC Committee as a child protection issue of significant concern. As well as being a cause of children becoming street connected, sexual abuse and violence is a frequent experience for children living and working on the streets, primarily for girls. To protect themselves from rape and assault, some of the girls told us that they avoid sleeping in dark alleys or street corners that lack lighting or have fewer people passing.

“We sleep in a safe, open place where no one can be harmed..”

Girl aged 10 years or below, Mwiki

Others befriended law enforcers in the hope of avoiding harassment from them. Other coping strategies include moving regularly to avoid becoming a target for abuse, sleeping in large groups, as well as sleeping during the day in order to stay awake and alert when it gets dark. Younger children told us that they look for older children to sleep beside to protect them.

Girls reported experiencing harassment and abuse from other street children and youth. Some NGOs working with street connected children noted harmful rituals and practices required of children before they can access the protection of the group. These included sexual assaults, physical beating and rape, including gang rape. An effective referral system that is accessible for street connected children is a critical step in prevention and protection from sexual violence on the streets.



A child's drawing showing sexual violence from a workshop run by Pendekezo Letu, Nairobi, Kenya



A child's drawing showing physical violence from a workshop run by Pendekezo Letu, Nairobi, Kenya. The caption reads 'This child, I'm warning you, I'm going to kill him/her.'

Coping with Physical Violence

In Kenya, the state of living and working on the streets as a child is illegal²¹. The illegal status of street connected children is often used as justification for mistreatment of children by police and other security officials, including city council *askaris*.

“The older street kids protect the younger ones. We keep each other on high alert to avoid arrest by city police..”

Boy aged 15-17 years

Physical and emotional abuse is therefore a common, sometimes daily experience for street connected children. Children reported frequent beatings and verbal abuse, particularly boys, and largely from members of the public as well as older street connected children and youth. A 2010 joint report by UNICEF found that violence against children is a serious problem in Kenya, with two-thirds of females (66%) and three quarters of males (73%) reported having

experienced physical violence as children²². Children we spoke to said they were often harassed, beaten, and arrested by police. Rather than providing protection, our research identified police and other security officials as one of the biggest sources of abuse and violence for children living and working on Nairobi's streets. A change in the law is critical to tackling this abuse. Street living for children and youth must be legalised as a critical step to protecting them.

Alleged incidences of violence against children, including extrajudicial killings, have also been reported in Kenya. Activists say as many as 14 street connected children were killed by city police in Eldoret in 2016 alone²³.

Despite the prohibition of degrading treatment by the police in the National Police Service Act (2011), repeated reports of police violence against children in Kenya is a recognized issue²⁴. We know from our work in Nairobi that most street connected children and youth who are arrested lack legal representation and advice, and are left to navigate the justice system without guidance or support. Children in conflict with the law are awarded the right to free legal representation at a policy level²⁵, and yet the state budget only allows for funding for the prosecution. Changing the law to legalise street living for children and youth is a critical first step towards protecting these children. Without access to justice, there is no protection.

Recommendations

Recognising that children live and work on the streets in search of protection is a critical step in affording them the agency, protection and dignity they deserve. Toybox takes a systems approach to child protection and development, working across the four levels of the ecology of the child which include the child, family, community and society level. We believe that children are on the streets as a result of issues and failures at each of these levels. Toybox do not believe that living or working on the street is the best way for a child to experience life. We work to empower children to have greater agency within their own lives and to achieve their most basic rights, such as health and protection and the right to a home and family. We take a 'harm minimisation' approach to our work with street children, working to protect children from abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation today as well as the consequences of these on their future.

Our research identified several critical changes required before street connected children can experience an improved change in protection in their daily lives. Our recommendations are in no way exhaustive, but the priorities identified through our research.

The Government of Kenya, donor governments such as the UK, international NGOs and local civil society organisations working with street connected children, as well as communities and families, all have a role to play. A childhood lasts a lifetime. Kenya's street children are Kenya's next generation, and the parents of future generations. They must not be left behind.

What the UK Government can do

- UK Government initiatives to tackle child exploitation must take a systemic approach, building capacity across the child protection system and prioritising the inclusion of the most vulnerable children, such as street connected.
- The UK Government's commitment to put children at the centre of their development efforts is to be commended but needs to be reflected in practice through coherence across DFIDs programmes. Addressing the drivers of violence against children must be a multi-sectoral approach, addressed in all programmes including health, education and economic development.

What the Government of Kenya can do

- Street living for children and youth must be legalised. This is critical to removing the opportunity and justification used by police and other security officials to beat and arrest street connected children.
- Children in conflict with the law must have access to free and fair legal representation. Such legal representation must be provided by the state and supported with appropriate training to work with vulnerable children and youth. This policy commitment must be implemented at all levels to enable individual children in conflict with the law to have access to justice.
- To better target interventions and scale them appropriately, the number of street connected children in Nairobi county, and Kenya more widely, needs to be known.

What NGOs and communities can do

- Collaboration between actors working to strengthen the child protection system is essential for the inclusion of street connected children, who have the same rights and heightened protection needs as other vulnerable children, but often operate outside formal and informal protection structures. The Nairobi Street Children and Youth Consortium²⁶ is an exciting development and should be adequately resourced, funded and collaborated with to advocate for street children's rights. The Consortium should also look to incorporate their work into the larger Nairobi Child Protection Network, and not to duplicate or divide the fundamental focus of building a child protection system that protects all children.
- Effective referral systems must be in place within communities and strengthened by those working to build informal protection mechanisms. Community members, including those involved in the referral system, must have access to training on child rights and child protection. Community-based referral mechanisms must be responsive to all issues of child protection and intentionally accessible to at-risk groups such as street connected children.
- Equipping children at risk with age-appropriate life skills including knowledge of consent, decision-making, communication and relationship-building skills are critical to improving their wellbeing. Activities that foster confidence and empowerment can provide essential support and protection to children in street situations today. It is also crucial to equip children with knowledge of their wider rights, access to flexible education that can be undertaken alongside working, and access to child-friendly spaces.
- Addressing the factors that enable violence against children is key. Parents and caregivers must be supported to exercise positive parenting skills through training, mentoring and counselling, as well as to access effective and supportive social services. Parents and caregivers must have opportunities for improved livelihoods, through access to financial institutions, markets and training. Viable, alternative care arrangements must exist for children who cannot remain safe within their home environment.
- Strengthening community safety nets is essential for providing protection to children and families at risk. Child protection advocacy campaigns, child rights clubs for children and child protection capacity building for community leaders are all vital contributions to changing attitudes and behaviours towards protecting children and realising their right to care and protection.

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Endnotes

- 1 Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) unpublished report; Cottrell-Boyce, Joseph 'The role of solvents in the lives of Kenyan street children: an ethnographic perspective.' *African Journal of Drug and Alcohol Studies* 9, 2 (2010): 93–102; UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), *UN Committee on the Rights of the Child: Concluding observations, Kenya*, 19 June 2007, CRC/C/KEN/CO/2
- 2 Also reported in GoK and UNICEF, 2014. *Our Children, our Future: Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in Kenya*, Government of Kenya (GoK) and UNICEF; NCCS, 2015. *National Plan of Action for Children in Kenya 2015-2022*, Nairobi: National Council for Children Services (NCCS);
- 3 Also reported in Johnson, V., Johnson, L., Okari, B., & Walker, D (2016) *Breaking intergenerational transmissions of poverty: Perspectives of street-connected girls in Nairobi* in Murray, L. and Roberson, S., eds. *Intergenerational mobilities: relationality, age and lifecourse*. Routledge, UK
- 4 We sought to redress the gender imbalance in the focus groups in the representation of girls in our verification workshop with street connected children.
- 5 There are several other definitions of a street connected child, but we used this definition in our context analysis, our primary research and the workshop we conducted in Nairobi in January 2017.
- 6 Kipyegon, K., 2015 *Factors Influencing Rising Number of Street Children in Urban Centers in Kenya: A Survey of Eldoret Municipality, Kenya*. *European Open Urban Studies & Development Journal*, 1(1), pp. 1-14; and Sorre, B. and Oino, P. *Family based Factors Leading to Street Children Phenomenon in Kenya*, *IJSR Volume 2 Issue 3, March 2013*
- 7 See Benitez, S. T., 2011. *State of the World's Street Children: Research*, London: Consortium for Street Children, pages 22-23; and Adikina, K., 2016. *Factors Associated with Increasing Number of Street Children in Kampala*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.statistics.gov.hk/wsc/CPS202-P15-S.pdf>
- 8 DFID's *Economic Development Strategy: prosperity, poverty and meeting global challenges* (January 2017) commits to pressing for international action to end all forms of abuse and exploitation of children.
- 9 Research cited in Sorre, Bernard (2009) reflects our findings that children move to the streets in response to home or family life becoming hostile. Reasons for this hostility may be drug and alcohol abuse, sexual abuse, little or no motivation to go to school, etc which are often intensified by poverty.
- 10 Also seen in Johnson, Vicky et al., *Case Study: The Role of Girls' Education in Pendekezo Letu's Interventions in Nairobi*
- 11 Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in March 2016 include repeated concerns by the Committee at the persistent practice of corporal punishment at home and schools (21 March 2016 CRC/C/KEN/CO/3-5).
- 12 Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children October 2016, *Corporal punishment of children in Kenya* <http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/assets/pdfs/states-reports/Kenya.pdf>
- 13 The Constitution of Kenya, Children's Act 2001, Persons with Disabilities Act, Criminal Law Amendment Act, Sexual Offences Act 2006, and Employment Act 2007
- 14 For example, the Department for Children Services focuses on all children, and the SFRTF focus on 'street families' but no one has 'street children' specifically and the overlap between the two is unclear. UNICEF is involved in supporting the GoK to develop a cohesive coordination strategy.
- 15 UNICEF 1989, UNICEF 2002 and UNICEF 2004 *State of the World's Children*
- 16 The Consortium for Street Children provide a further critique of the lack of data relating to the number of street children in Briefing Paper 2015 – Do I Count if You Count Me?
- 17 In Kenya, the legal term used is 'defilement'. This includes both sexual assault and rape.
- 18 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) *Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Kenya* (21 March 2016) CRC/C/KEN/CO/3-5
- 19 Sorre, Bernard 2009 also documented street children rationalising substance abuse as a coping mechanism with which to deal with the prolonged trauma associated with living on the streets.
- 20 The Kenyatta National Hospital provides free access to healthcare which is intended to be inclusive of street connected children.
- 21 "Vagrancy" (being without a fixed abode) is a criminal offence under Kenyan law (Vagrancy Act, Chapter 58 of the Laws of Kenya)
- 22 These findings were among 18-24 year olds who were asked if they had been slapped, pushed, punched, kicked, whipped, beaten with an object, or threatened or attacked with a weapon, such as a knife by perpetrators such as authority figures, parents and adult relatives, and romantic partners. UNICEF et al 2012 *Violence Against Children in Kenya: Findings from a 2010 National Survey*. UNICEF
- 23 IB Times Nov 17 2016 *Petition for UN probe into alleged murder of street children by Kenyan police is close to target*. Available online.
- 24 Human Rights Watch, 2008 *A Question of Life and Death: Treatment Access for Children Living with HIV in Kenya*
- 25 Children's Act 2001 Section 77: Legal aid
- 26 For further information, contact *Pendekezo Letu* in Nairobi. This Consortium emerged from a recognition within the 'Change on the Streets' Theory of Change Workshop of the need for greater collaboration between agencies working with street connected children in Nairobi. This workshop was funded and facilitated by Toybox together with PKL, in collaboration with the Street Families Rehabilitation Trust Fund.

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