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Many children have no trustworthy adult in their lives. These are the children on the streets, living invisible lives on the edges of their communities, having to be self-sufficient and resilient in order merely to survive. These street children deserve chances like any other child. StreetInvest supports investments in children so that their rights, needs and potential can be fulfilled. We do this through the training of professional and committed street workers who serve as trustworthy adults in the lives of street children and by contributing to the investments the workers and the children need to secure a real future.

“Take Your Shoes Off” – A Street Worker Training Experience” lies at the heart of StreetInvest’s training. Unlike traditional training courses, ‘Take Your Shoes Off’ combines training for street work-related skills with personal development of the street worker, focussing on talents, interests, motivation, confidence and commitment. The programme content is related to the knowledge, attitudes and skills required to work with street children. The ‘experience’ is relevant to all those who are already doing street work as well as anyone else involved in the lives of street children. The opportunity to establish networks and benefit from shared experiences is at the centre of our approach.

Originally designed for a street child project in Eastern Europe in the 1990’s, the training was brought to Africa where it was delivered in eight countries of sub-Saharan Africa before StreetInvest was founded in 2008. Since then, further programmes have been pursued in Ghana, DR Congo, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nigeria and Sierra Leone while new programmes are being considered in Asia, Latin America and United Kingdom.

It is StreetInvest’s aim to reach as many street children as efficiently as possible and with limited resources. StreetInvest believes that the street worker role and model of care, as well as our “cascade” training approach is consistent with this objective. Future growth will therefore be heavily weighted towards the countries in which we operate rather than in the StreetInvest “Head Office”. This will also serve to minimise our costs of delivery.

Estimating the reach of our work is extremely difficult as this will vary from city to city. However, StreetInvest’s experience informs us that, conservatively, each street worker in an African city may be in regular contact with at least ten street children at any one time. Furthermore, each of these children will have a social network of a further ten children.

The “multiplier” effect can, with all due qualifications, be illustrated as follows:

- Each training trains 20 participants and 4 trainers which in turn train a further 20 participants
- These 40 street workers will have direct reach to some 400 street children and a possible indirect reach to 4,000 children

Since StreetInvest’s inception in 2008, we have trained 190 street workers (of which one third have been trained by local trainers). The multiplier effect would therefore suggest that in the first two years of our operation, we have been able to improved the life chances of some 2,000 children directly and 20,000 indirectly. Ultimately, however, StreetInvest’s work is judged by the relationships that Street Workers form, not numbers. From these relationships, positive choices grow. This is the “reach” to which we aspire.

Challenges

- Shortage of children’s agencies doing street work/ outreach work.
- Achieving recognition that all interventions aimed at street children start with street work, and the need for more outreach workers on the streets.
- Lack of adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (“UNCRC”) in real terms.

Lessons

- The need for awareness raising of the role and effectiveness of street workers and supporting local communities and agencies in the same, and need for raising funds to support the continued, long-term employment of street workers where resources are not available locally and assisting local agencies and communities to raise funds on their own behalf.
- Support Street Workers in gaining proper recognition and respect for their work both within their organisations and the communities by gaining UK academic accreditation for StreetInvest's training and offering this as a basis for a fully recognised local Street Work Diploma.
- Devolve leadership and development of Street Worker Training and related investments to the local communities, agencies and children we support by training trainers who are empowered and equipped to roll out the training locally and establishing a network for these trained trainers and street workers
- The need for being informed in all we do through needs assessments, baseline research, local research including Head Counting, during and after projects and monitoring & evaluation.
- Ensuring that both StreetInvest, and those we work with have sufficient influence to effect change to policy and practice that ensures better chances for street children in the long term.

Good practices

- Working with and using local agencies and local staff whenever possible and practical.
- Training of trainers to ensure a sustainable model where local workers are trained to conduct further trainings in their regions.
- Following a rights based approach with a commitment to children's rights according to UNCRC and child protection policies.
- Ensuring replicability by establishing the "*Take Your Shoes Off*" training model.
- Enhancing community participation and advocacy by including different stakeholders in the training programme, such as police and local government.

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