



**Submission to U.N. Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights ahead of country visit to Ghana**

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Submitted by:

**Consortium for Street Children**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

While great strides have been made against poverty in Ghana, one group remains outside much of this success: street-connected children. A census conducted by the government's Department of Social Welfare and Ricerca e Cooperazione in 2011, counted 61,492 street-connected children in the Greater Accra Region alone, and found that search for money was the leading cause (87%) for street-connectedness.<sup>1</sup> Poverty has been identified as one of the structural causes of children moving onto the streets, and marginalising children who are already living and/or working on the street.<sup>2</sup>

Street-connected children and youth in Ghana lead extremely difficult lives with limited access to their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Research and consultations with street-connected children and youth conducted by the authors in Accra, Ghana revealed that children and youth face daily challenges in obtaining the basic necessities to live (e.g. food, water, clothing and shelter) and in accessing services that enable them to be healthy and develop (e.g. medical treatment and education or skills training).

The Consortium for Street Children (CSC),<sup>3</sup> Growing Up on The Streets (GUOTS)<sup>4</sup> and StreetInvest<sup>5</sup> submit this joint statement that is based on detailed participatory ethnographic research and engagement with street-connected children in Ghana since 2011:

1. Research carried out by Growing Up on the Streets, results of which can be access on: <http://www.streetinvest.org/guots-briefing-papers>.
2. A Consultation conducted by CSC and GUOTS between 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> March 2016 to include the voices of street-connected children in the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 21 on Children in Street Situations. The full report of the consultations held in Accra, Bukavu and Harare can be accessed on: <https://docs.google.com/viewerng/viewer?url=http://www.streetchildrenresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Report-on-Ghana-Zimbabwe-DRC-consultations-April-2016.pdf>
3. The work CSC, GUOTS and StreetInvest have been doing in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to strengthen the government's strategy concerning persons living and/or working on the streets.

Our submission will:

- Highlight the major challenges and human rights violations faced by street-connected children and youth living in poverty in Ghana;
- Discuss the government strategy concerning street-connected children, highlighting both the positive aspects and the concerns we have; and
- Identify regions to visit and individuals to meet during the country visit to get a better understanding of the correlation between poverty and street-connectedness.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Social Welfare & Ricerca e Cooperazione, Census on street children in the Greater Accra Region, Ghana, 2011, pp 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> UN General Comment No. 21 on Children in Street Situations, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2017, preface and par. 8.

<sup>3</sup> The Consortium for Street Children (CSC) is a global network of over 100 NGOs, researchers and practitioners who make real, long-term, positive change for street-connected children.

<sup>4</sup> Growing up on the Streets is an award winning, international research project working with 198 children and young people (aged 14 – 20) in three African cities – Accra, Ghana; Bukavu, DRC; and Harare, Zimbabwe.

<sup>5</sup> StreetInvest is a global NGO which exists to create positive sustainable change for street children. StreetInvest's vision is for every street child to have access to a trustworthy adult, so that they are safer, better supported and valued by their communities.

## 2. MAJOR CHALLENGES AND HUMAN RIGHTS-RELATED PROBLEMS FACED BY STREET-CONNECTED CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN GHANA

From our research and consultations, the following key challenges and human rights-related problems have emerged:

### **Inadequate access to shelter / housing**

GUOTS research has clearly shown that children and youth in Accra sleep in public spaces, such as doorways and railway platforms, the market areas of the city and informal settlements. The lack of shelter has major consequences for health and well-being and causes young people to be vulnerable to violence and sexual assault.

In Accra, the government's forced evictions and demolitions of informal settlements where many street children and youth sleep has forced them to sleep on the streets, increasing their vulnerability:

*"Some of [the city authorities] used force to sack us...they came to demolish the whole place, they didn't relocate us or give us any place to go"<sup>6</sup>*

*"We lost a lot of our belongings because of that I had to come and sleep in the open and so I lost my money and phone"<sup>7</sup>*

*"[Sacking] will increase street life. I will be tempted to join girls in sex work. When I should go to sleep in front of shops I may be raped; so the best option for me would be to join my friends in sex work"<sup>8</sup>*

Forced evictions and demolition of homes without any alternate provisions is a clear violation of several socio-economic rights. As such, the lack of redress for these children, in addition to the increased vulnerabilities to further human rights violations, discrimination, violence and abuse remains an outstanding concern.

Street-connected children and youth who participated in the General Comment consultations requested that the government provide them with shelter, rather than children's homes, as the conditions in these facilities are often poor and children lose important social networks and the ability to earn money:

*"The government should provide us with a sleeping place so that when we wake up in the morning we can go and sell...to feed ourselves so that in the evening we know that this is my sleeping place where you go and rest"<sup>9</sup>*

*"Renting is difficult, especially in Accra; when you don't have 500 Ghanaian Cedis [c.£100] or more you will not be able to rent a room; and getting that amount of money is not easy. The government must think of us and build for us"<sup>10</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> Quote from a street child/youth participating in the consultation held in Accra, Ghana between 4th and 6<sup>th</sup> March 2016 by Consortium for Street Children and Growing Up on the Streets (identities withheld to safeguard the children who participated).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

### **Inadequate access to food and water**

For street children and youth in Accra, accessing food is a daily challenge. Inadequate shelter and few opportunities to earn money affect their ability to buy, store and prepare food. As a result, they rely on begging, stealing and scavenging waste food to survive.<sup>11</sup> Even in instances where children do earn some money, this may be insufficient to buy a nutritious meal:

*“You don’t have enough money, you are having GHc2 [40 pence]. You go to buy banku 1 cedis and fish 1 cedis; in that case what will you eat in the evening? You won’t have it. So you instead buy rice 50 pesewas [10 pence] for morning, afternoon, evening.”<sup>12</sup>*

Eating poor quality food, and the social condemnation associated with it, contribute to ill-health, feelings of diminished self-esteem and negative behaviour, including use of alcohol and drugs.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, street children in Accra are unable to access clean water for drinking and hygiene. Drinking water is purchased in sachets costing the equivalent of between 2 and 4 pence (GBP), otherwise they use contaminated water that invariably leads to illness. Similarly, water for cooking and washing is accessed at public bathhouses, where it is open to contamination and host to mosquito larvae.<sup>14</sup>

### **Inadequate access to basic services such as health care and education**

Due to the inadequate access to shelter, food and drinking water, street children and youth struggle to invest in strategies to pursue physical and mental health and well-being. Some street children and youth are able to access health care through Ghana’s health insurance system, but most treatments and medicines attract a fee. As a result, many end up in a negative cycle of ill-health and impoverishment making it even more difficult to afford health care:<sup>15</sup>

*“The government has introduced health insurance it is good, but if it can’t be used to access service and I fall sick as a street [child], what will I do? Water is now going to be increased to 30 pesewas [c.5 pence]...government should let these things be cheap so that we can access them”<sup>16</sup>*

In addition to difficulties accessing health care, street youth often engage in risky behaviour, including unprotected sex and the use of alcohol and drugs. Girls often have limited choices, and due

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<sup>11</sup> Growing Up On The Streets & StreetInvest, ACCESSING FOOD ON THE STREETS, Briefing Paper 4, March 2015, p. 1, accessible on:

[http://www.streetinvest.org/control/uploads/files/1484218084~\\_~Briefing\\_Paper\\_4\\_-\\_Accessing\\_Food.pdf](http://www.streetinvest.org/control/uploads/files/1484218084~_~Briefing_Paper_4_-_Accessing_Food.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Focus group discussion with street children in Accra, Ghana, as part of the research published in: Growing Up On The Streets & StreetInvest, ACCESSING FOOD ON THE STREETS, Briefing Paper 4, March 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Growing Up On The Streets & StreetInvest, ACCESSING FOOD ON THE STREETS, Briefing Paper 4, March 2015, p. 4

<sup>14</sup> Growing Up On The Streets & StreetInvest, HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF STREET CHILDREN AND YOUTH, Briefing Paper 8, October 2016, p. 1, accessible on:

[http://www.streetinvest.org/control/uploads/files/1476374229~\\_~Briefing\\_Paper\\_8\\_-\\_Health\\_&\\_Wellbeing.pdf](http://www.streetinvest.org/control/uploads/files/1476374229~_~Briefing_Paper_8_-_Health_&_Wellbeing.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 2

<sup>16</sup> Quote from a street child/youth participating in the consultation held in Accra, Ghana between 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> March 2016 by Consortium for Street Children and Growing Up on the Streets (identities withheld to safeguard the children who participated).

to lack of money and hunger may enter into a sexual relationship in exchange for money to buy food.<sup>17</sup>

Due to the poverty faced by street-connected children and youth in Ghana, accessing education also becomes difficult:

*“My schooling ended when I didn’t have money to feed myself and others though the organization who sponsored me paid for all my schooling expenses. ... I didn’t perform well at SHS [Senior High School] because I had to come back home on vacations to work to make money to feed myself”<sup>18</sup>*

Through the General Comment consultations children made recommendations to the government to improve access to informal education and skills training to allow them create their own businesses and be self-sufficient, noting the importance of trainings being linked to job opportunities:

*“If the person completes the apprenticeship and doesn’t have anywhere to start work, the person can’t begin anything until all the things are in place. So in that case the person will perhaps decide to go and sell pure water or something”<sup>19</sup>*

### **Discrimination, violence and harassment**

One of the biggest obstacles the children and youth encounter is the daily experience with discrimination, violence and harassment from police and city authorities, and criminalisation of survival behaviour.

Children are discriminated against for being street-connected, physically beaten on the street and forcibly removed from the street:<sup>20</sup>

*“These days, even when you go to sleep the task force will be chasing you”<sup>21</sup>*

*“Sometimes they will beat you and you can’t do anything”<sup>22</sup>*

The criminalisation of survival behaviour can be seen in actions by Accra Metropolitan Authority task force that confiscates the stock of street vendors without a licence. These licences, however, are beyond the means of children and youth to afford.

*“The task force who take licence...asked me to pay for licence...The goods I was selling was not even enough so I had to beg him...When you go to their office you will have to pay 60 Ghanaian Cedis [c.£12]1; I don’t have that amount of money, if I do I would have bought more soap to sell”<sup>23</sup>*

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<sup>17</sup> Growing Up On The Streets & StreetInvest, HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF STREET CHILDREN AND YOUTH, Briefing Paper 8, October 2016, p. 3

<sup>18</sup> Quote from a street child/youth participating in the consultation held in Accra, Ghana between 4th and 6<sup>th</sup> March 2016 by Consortium for Street Children and Growing Up on the Streets (identities withheld to safeguard the children who participated).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Moreover, the Beggars and Destitute Act, 1969 criminalises begging, and though exempting juveniles from this provision, juveniles are defined in this law as persons under the age of seventeen years. As a result, every individual 17 years or older can be arrested for the act of begging, establishing a vicious cycle of poverty for individuals having to pay fines or bribes, undermining anti-poverty strategies.

### **3. GOVERNMENT OF GHANA'S STRATEGY CONCERNING STREET-CONNECTED CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection in Ghana has recognised that persons living and/or working on the streets in Ghana need special attention and protection. As a result, the Ministry launched a strategy in 2017, called: "Operation get off the street for a better life".<sup>24</sup> The title and certain aspects of the strategy imply a focus on removing children and adults from the streets. However positive the intention may be, as we have seen from the documentation of forced evictions (including reports from the Special Rapporteur on Housing, Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) and Amnesty), forcibly removing people from what they know as their home can lead to further human rights violations.

In General Comment No. 21 on Children in Street Situations, the UN CRC has explicitly called on Governments to ensure that positive alternatives must be offered to children, and not to forcibly remove children. Decisions on where children live should always be taken in the best interest of the child, and with the involvement of the child.<sup>25</sup> Our view on this aspect of their policy has been shared with government representatives on several occasions to which they have responded positively.

Moreover, there are many commendable aspects to the strategy, including a data collection exercise and provision of support packages to persons living and/or working on the streets. This offers the potential to gain a better understanding of the lives of individuals living and/or working on the streets in Ghana, develop better policy and improve the lives of street-connected children.

The adoption of the UN General Comment No. 21 and launch of a national strategy provides an opportunity for the Government of Ghana to establish itself as a leader among nations to commit to implementing step by step UN GC 21 and effectively work together with and involve street-connected children and non-governmental actors directly working with street-connected children to fully reach its laudable goals of reducing poverty and improving the lives of the most vulnerable.

### **4. AREAS TO VISIT AND INDIVIDUALS TO MEET DURING THE COUNTRY VISIT**

The key locations for street children are the large urban areas of Ghana – including Accra, Kumasi and Tamale. Support can be provided to the Special Rapporteur to access expert local practitioner organisations working with street children in these cities. Additionally, in Accra there is an established network of street youth that have been involved in GUOTS since 2012 that could be brought together to meet with the Special Rapporteur to share their experiences of life on the

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<sup>24</sup> This strategy does not focus only on street children but focusses on different population groups with connections to the street, including children, elderly, commercial sex workers, persons with disabilities, families, mentally ill and Kayayei (head porters) on the streets.

<sup>25</sup> UN General Comment No. 21 on Children in Street Situations, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2017, par. 5, 28, 40, 44 and 45.

streets. Local contacts are: Selassy Gbeglo for GUOTS ([sir\\_selassy@yahoo.com](mailto:sir_selassy@yahoo.com)) and Tijani Mahmoud for StreetInvest ([tijani.mahmoud@gmail.com](mailto:tijani.mahmoud@gmail.com)).

We also recommend a meeting with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and in particular the Department of Social Welfare, who are in charge of implementing the recently launched strategy concerning persons living and/or working on the streets in Ghana.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Poverty is both a factor in forcing children onto the streets, and is a result of growing up on the streets. No analysis of the full extent of poverty, nor strategies to defeat it, can be complete without including the situation and views of street connected children. The devastating human rights implication of growing up on the streets, in poverty and without access to human rights protection, cannot be overstated – and indeed as these children mature into adults form Ghana’s future.

We urge the Special Rapporteur to:

1. Make particular effort to investigate the unique challenges faced by children living and/or working on the streets as part of the wider analysis of poverty on the country visit to Ghana
2. Speak directly to as many children, boys and girls, as possible in order to hear their views and experiences directly.
3. Urge the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to ensure that the strategy concerning persons on the streets in Ghana integrates a rights-based approach, addresses structural causes of street-connectedness, and is based on Ghana’s obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in particular General Comment No. 21 on Children in Street Situations.
4. Urge the Government of Ghana to include street children and practitioners working directly with street-connected children in the development and implementation of all strategies and actions concerning street-connected children.
5. Urge the Government of Ghana to include analysis of the needs of street connected children into their health, education and justice plans, in order to ensure access to all Ghanaians.