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## NON -GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS' RESPONSE TO SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS OF ADOLESCENT STREET CHILDREN OF HARARE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper argues that non-governmental organisations have important roles in the fight against substance abuse and sexuality issues among adolescent street children of Harare Central Business District. However, there is also evidence pointing towards the fact that some of the non-governmental organisations faced numerous constraints. The constraints had compromised the delivery of services by non-governmental organisations to the adolescent street children. Findings suggest that some of the duty bearers in the name of non-governmental organisations were perpetuating child rights violations on the adolescent street children. The paper adopted qualitative research methodology and street ethnography approach. In analysing the various roles of these organisations, the study adopted the child rights perspective.*

**KEY TERMS:** civil society organisations, street children, nongovernmental organisations

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## INTRODUCTION

The paper examines the role of non-governmental organisations in fighting substance abuse and sexuality issues among adolescent street children of Harare Central Business District. Hahn and Holzscheiter (2013) observed that non-governmental organisations are often seen as working for the disenfranchised, marginalised section of the population. A number of non-governmental organisations were active in providing services to street children in Harare Central Business District and these included Zambuko Trust, CESVI, OASIS, Amai Caro Orphanage, Mabhawu, Street Exit Strategy, Anglican Church, Roman Catholic Church and United Methodist church among others. However, the majority of these organisations faced numerous challenges that militated against their services to street children. These challenges related to registration status, capacity related and resources. Previous studies by Bourdillon (1991, 1994a, 1994b, 2000), Mella (2012), Mhizha (2010), Rugaranganda (2008), Wakatama (2007), Chirwa (2007), Chirwa and Wakatama (2000) among others have failed to interrogate the role of non-governmental organisations in fighting substance abuse and sexuality issues. In other words, there is paucity of in-depth academic studies on the role of civil society organisations in fighting the complex phenomena of substance abuse and sexuality issues among adolescent street children of Harare Central Business District. Hence this article attempts to cover this gap.

This research was undergirded by the human rights approach. According to Save the Children (2002), rights based approach is defined as a social contract between rights holders and duty bearers. In addition, Save the Children also observed that rights based approach has key principles that include universal, inalienable, indivisible, participation and accountability. Save the Children noted that the human rights approach to development is supported by international law. Some of the international laws include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, and the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women of 1978 among others. However, one could argue that rights based approaches could be seen as part of pushing Western world agenda of development at the expense of tackling structural issues such as resource sovereignty (Abebe and Tefera (2014). The authors noted that the rights discourse normally disappears when some of the non-governmental organisations leave the area. Furthermore, Abebe and Tefera also noted that child rights based approach is problematic as it fails to acknowledge the meaningful role and contributions children they to their families and communities. One could argue that the child rights based approach views children as victims and vulnerable not as social actors.

## METHODOLOGY

A sample of 10 participants participated in this study. These consisted of four street girls and six street boys drawn from the streets of Harare Central Business District. Convenience sampling was used to select participants for in depth interviews, life histories, informal conversations and observation. Neuman (2011) observes that convenience sampling is ideal when working with difficult populations such as street children as it becomes easy to identify and recruit them. Similarly, Idemudia, Kgokong and Kolobe (2013) used convenience sampling when researching on the social experiences of street children in Mafikeng, North-West province, South Africa. De Melo Resend (2012) observed that street ethnography studies were advantageous as they provide opportunities for evaluation of experiences among the researcher. Through the street ethnographic approach the researcher spent more than thirteen months interacting with children on the streets of Harare Central Business District. In

addition the researcher through street ethnography extensively interacted with key informants some of them working for nongovernmental organisations working with street children.

Data were analysed through thematic content analysis, a convenient method used by other previous researchers on street children (Nueman, 2012; Mhizha, 2010; Garland et al, 2010; Rugaranganda, 2008). Participants were given false names to protect their identity.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The non-governmental organisations have been instrumental in the provision of specialist services to adolescent street children who have been victims of substance abuse and sexual behaviours. However, during the time of the study, some of the organisations such as Streets Ahead and Just Children Foundation had closed shop besides having good programmes for the children. For example, participants indicated that Streets Ahead had a project for young mothers. During the in-depth interviews Tadiwa one of the street girls had this to say:

*Elder [interviewer], people from Streets Ahead, used to assist us through the young mothers programme. The programme was good because they used to give us money to start income generating projects. As for me, they gave me money for starting vending. Through vending, I used to get money for rentals in Epworth. I used to do vending of airtime such as Buddie etc. As a result of that, substance abuse and prostitution had gone down, when we started the project. We were later on told that the project will no longer proceed after Streets Ahead closed shop in 2013. So we do not have anything to do and we have resorted to selling substances and trading sex on the streets. Some of the NGOs have no interests with us, they are useless. They are not interested with us, they enjoy to see us struggling on the streets, when they are moving on their immaculate vehicles. Even United Nations, we see them in their vehicles, they do not come to us to help us. As of you elder, UNICEF what is their core business? They see us and pass through us on road robots [traffic lights], when we are begging with their cars written UN (Tadiwa)*

The above narrative suggests some of the organisations were active in providing income earning opportunities to street children who have been victims of substance abuse and sexual behaviours. For example, Zambuko Trust was offering vocational life skills training to the adolescent street children. Some of the vocational life skills included training in tailoring and leadership.

Conversely, during the informal conversations, Pamela one of the street girls revealed that some of the nongovernmental organisations were not concerned with the plight of street children. She had this to say:

*Some [NGOs] always come saying they will come back to assist us, the majority do not come back, they are liars, they do not say the truth. They are more interested in lying to their donors, when they are not doing anything meaningful. If they were assisting us, would there been children on the streets? These people are thieves as they are just looking for money through us. Some of them came and wrote down our names, and they came with a white person last year, we did not see anything out of that. We are now struggling too much these days on the streets (Pamela).*

The study also noted that, some of the organisations such as Amai Passmore Orphanage which was founded by one of the former longest servicing members of Streets Ahead had a

number of challenges including those related to registration. For example, AmaiPassmore Orphanage was not yet registered under the Private Voluntary Organisation Act (17:05). In terms of the Private Voluntary Organisation Act (17:05) all non-governmental organisations including orphanages or children's home should provide annual audited financial reports and programme reports to Department of Social Services. In the case of the orphanage, it has not been able to meet these legislative requirements may be because of lack of technical capacity among others. However, when the researcher visited the orphanage, he noted that despite having registration related challenges the orphanage was providing shelter to a sizeable number of twenty-two of street girls. One of the street girls revealed that, sometimes they had food related challenges.

In addition, during the time of the study, Mabhawu Drop-In Centre that was providing educational and food assistance to street children had closed at the behest of the officials of Department of Child Welfare and Probation Services. The Drop-In Centre was closed as it had not complied with the Government of Zimbabwe's registration requirements.

Some of the organisations were not adequately defending the rights of street children. As discussed above some of the street children queried the role of United Nations as they continued staying on the streets. .

In addition, one could also add that the narratives about Amai Passmore Orphanage illustrate, that some organisations that provided support to street children act outside the legislative framework meant to government their operations. For example, the orphanage did not meet the minimum standards for residential care for children and also the Private Voluntary Organisation Act (17:05) of Zimbabwe.

Paradoxically, the move to close these organisation has the likely effect of leaving needy children such as those on the streets more deprived. Additionally, the Government of Zimbabwe as the primary duty bearer seems to be struggling in terms of providing services to these children.

The study also unravels that some of the organisations were struggling to mobilise sufficient resources so as to effectively assist street children. For example, Amai Passmore Orphanage had challenges to attract donors because of its registration status. Additionally, some of these organisations were manned by unqualified and inexperienced people who could also compromise the quality of the delivery of services.

Therefore, given the myriad of challenges facing some of the agencies were working with street children, one becomes worried about the effectiveness of some of the interventions offered by these organisations. In addition, most programmes offered by these organisations were residual thus not comprehensive enough in terms of addressing some of the structural issues affecting street children who engage in substance abuse and sexual behaviours. .

### **Churches and other faith based organisations**

There is evidence that churches were providing services to adolescent street children who were victims of substance abuse and sexual behaviours. Some of the churches included Presbyterian Church, Anglican Church, Roman Catholic Church and a number of Pentecostal churches. These churches offered a wide range of services that included spiritual counselling, provision of food, family tracing and reunification.

During the in depth interviews, Talent one of the street girls revealed that, she was receiving counselling from one of the Catholic Church nannies. Apart from offering counselling to the street children, the Catholic Church was also providing accommodation for a number of adolescent street girls who were involved in sexual behaviours on the streets such as commercial sex work. She had this to say:

*For us as girls who used to engage in commercial sex work, we get support from Catholic sisters, they give us counselling. They also pay for our rentals in Jacha area in Epworth. They realised that if we continue to stay on the streets, we might end up doing bad things such as prostitution and substance abuse. The problem which is there is that, they pay for our rentals and groceries, but the groceries are not enough. As for me I have a child, who is very young, who requires food. So if the food is not enough, I end up selling sex at Second Street (Talent).*

By the time of this study, churches such as Anglican Cathedral were offering a hot meal to street children every day of the week. However, the provision of the hot meal was restricted to weekdays at the expense of weekends and public holidays. Jah Bulo of the street boys revealed the following:

*Like some of us drug addicts, we wake up morning with hang over. We only get food around 1200 hours at Anglican Cathedral. They give us food from Monday to Friday but there is no food on weekends and holidays.*

During the field visits, the researcher noted that, every week days, street children and other homeless people were queuing for food rations at the Anglican Cathedral. However, the researchers observed that a few street girls were receiving food from the church. The majority of the recipients of the food were males. One of the officials at the church revealed that street girls were shy to come to the centre for food. He also confirmed that the church was only providing a hot meal during the week and not on weekends and public holidays.

The street children have nowhere to go for food during weekends and public holidays as the Anglican Church is closed. This probably confirms what some of the street girls were saying that they would engage in prostitution so as to raise income for survival. Some of the girls also abuse substances as a coping mechanism in a context of constraining environment (Giddens, 1984). Therefore, some of the churches were promoting child rights violations as their programmes were piecemeal thus not comprehensive enough.

There is need that more drop-in centres should be functional so as to provide services to these children. The drop-in centres could provide services such as substance abuse rehabilitation, food during week days, weekends and public holidays so as to ensure that the right to food for street children is met.

Additionally, churches such as Presbyterian Church were providing some of the street children with money for school fees. The church was also running educational programmes for the street children. However, during the in depth interviews, Cosmas one of the street boys revealed that, the church had a number of challenges that were affecting some of the educational programmes that were offered to street children. For example, the boy highlighted that, some of the teachers were not well qualified to offer education services. There were also shortages of text books and other reading materials. Also, their education programmes were more aligned to religious teaching among other issues. Cosmas had this to say:

*The Presbyterian Church used to assist us with money for school fees but at the present moment, they are saying donors are no longer having the money. Plus, the school education that we get is more inclined to church education. Elder, there are also no books for us as well (Cosmas).*

The above narratives demonstrate that, some of the organisations were perpetuating child rights violations. For example, the shortage of text books and reading materials for these children demonstrates that their right to education as defined by the Education Act (25:04) is severely affected. Drawing from a child rights perspective their efforts were pockets of

programmes that were not comprehensive enough to tackle the structural issues related to substance abuse and sexual behaviours.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As discussed above, the non-governmental organisations had numerous challenges that compromised the delivery of their services in fighting substance abuse and sexuality issues among adolescent street children of Harare Central Business District. Some of the challenges included limited human capacity, limited resources and failing to comply with legislation governing non-governmental organisations. In order for non-governmental organisations to be effective in delivering their mandates there is need to build their own technical capacities and comply with the Private Voluntary Organisation Act (17:05).

The paper made a number of recommendations that included that nongovernmental organisations should employ qualified and experienced social workers so as to significantly address substance abuse and sexuality issues among street children. In addition, civil society organisations should be more aggressive in raising resources locally and abroad. The non-governmental organisation should also adopt a more transformative approach in programming rather than using the residual approach. The transformative approach would include a host of strategies geared towards promoting the empowerment of street children who have been victims of substance abuse and sexuality.

Churches should closely work with Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education so as to effectively deliver relevant and quality education to street children.

Furthermore, there is also need to seriously consider the strengthening of internal control systems in some of the organisations so as to nip in the bud some of the reported cases of corruption. Therefore, non-governmental organisations should come up with comprehensive programmes which embrace the social development so as to effectively assist street children.

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