

The Durban Declaration: a call to action from the Deloitte Street Child World Cup

In March 2010 street children aged 14-16 from South Africa, Brazil, India, Nicaragua, Ukraine, the Philippines, Tanzania and a team from the UK took part in the inaugural **Street Child World Cup**. This included a youth participation conference at which they discussed their experiences and rights. The Durban Declaration distills their discussions and the key points they raised.

Listen to us: we have the right to be heard

“The government don't do anything for children on the street, they don't even think about them. When they see those children they do not even make a case for them. They should take them by the hand and say: I am going to support you, I am going to help you, you are not alone. But no – they look at them as they would anything else, like any other rubbish.”

Governments and civil society need to listen to street children to understand

- why they are on the streets and what their right to a home means to them
- how to end the abuse they experience and realise their right to protection from violence
- how to develop services and realise their right to education and health care.

These children believe their voices need to be heard so that negative perceptions of them change. They want it to be understood that *“we are people like them”*.

Listen to us: home means family

“A house doesn't give me advice, food, love or care – the family offers you this.”

Governments and civil society need to understand - *“we do not want to stay on the streets. It is not a good thing for children to live on the street”*. These children spoke of leaving homes due to:

- neglect, sexual abuse and violence at home (often connected with alcohol and substance misuse);
- family breakdown and conflict, often involving “step-parents”;
- economic pressures, leading some children to seek to earn money on the streets.

Most of these children wanted to return home, and felt that if families could be given more support children would not have to run away.

Listen to us when we say we are abused: we have the right to be protected.

“When a child is beaten, nothing happens to the perpetrator.”

The children described incidents of violence and sexual abuse at home, on the streets (from gangs or members of the public), within institutions (including schools and orphanages), and from police and security guards. The children did not see the perpetrators of this abuse brought to justice.

Governments and civil society need to ensure that children can have confidence that they can report violence and abuse, and that steps will be taken to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable.

Listen to us so that we can have a future.

“Police and legal systems do not work. [These street child] projects work well.”

The children spoke of how projects in which they were involved had enabled them to leave the streets, access education and healthcare, and stop substance misuse. These projects took the time to understand why they were on the streets and the barriers and prejudice which prevented them from accessing services. They heard that the children wanted to return home and understood the difficulties involved in this process. These projects also understood the importance of sports and arts programmes to the children. *“When I'm playing football, I don't think of those bad things that happened to me”*

Governments and civil society need to work together to understand why children do not access services, to ensure that investment is targeted toward those services that work, and to safeguard children's rights.

Implications of the Durban Declaration

Listen to us: we have the right to be heard

Listen to us: home means family

Listen to us when we say we are abused: we have the right to be protected.

Listen to us so that we can have a future

The issues brought up by the children at the Street Child World Cup conference represent layers of interconnected and interdependent issues – poverty, violence, family, substance abuse, perception, impunity, corruption. For effective change to take place, there must be commitment at every level – family, community, civil society, and government. The children's recommendations concentrate on the steps government and NGOs can take, and to a lesser extent the wider general public. The experience of the Street Child World Cup is that involvement of the private sector can play a significant role in strengthening the effectiveness of positive responses.

The children at the Street Child World Cup showed that they can and wish to be part of solutions to the issues they raise: the Indian team, for example, suggested that they could form groups of children to talk to village elders to address issues of substance abuse. The children demonstrated their resilience and how they already work within the situations they find themselves in to develop solutions for themselves and their peers - street children are perhaps the most effective referral and advice network for other street children, advising on issues around police, food and NGOs. Such capacity should be recognised and harnessed for wider community benefit.

Implications for government

Listen: Work with street child NGOs to hear the opinions of street children.

Local and national government should develop mechanisms to seek the views of street children over decisions affecting their lives. This may include policing, accessing health and education, and social work. Without listening to these voices, services are less likely to meet the particular needs of street children.

Prevent: Support families stressed by poverty, substance abuse or changing relationships

These children identified ways in which the government could support families to prevent issues developing which could lead children to leave for the streets. These children speak from the experience of having made that choice themselves, and speak with particular authority about the interventions which might have enabled them to stay at home. Within the context of poverty, their ideas included practical support with, for example, growing food (Philippines), better quality housing (India) and social security (Ukraine). The Nicaraguan team wanted the government to address drug abuse by securing borders. The Ukraine team wanted to see more social workers working with families.

Protect:

- **Zero-tolerance when police abuse street children**

Police were identified as perpetrators of abuse in every country participating in the Street Child World Cup. Governments must take a stand against police round-ups, working with NGOs to create effective referral mechanisms for children on the streets. Internal police disciplinary procedures should be strengthened to promote transparency, accountability and child rights, with a zero tolerance approach to abuse. Where appropriate, legal support should be provided to take perpetrators to court.

- **Challenge causes of abuse at home**

Recognising the link that the children at DSCWC identified between substance abuse and violence, the government should tackle substance abuse through awareness and rehabilitation programmes. The children highlighted the vulnerability of children in times of family transition and the significance of step-parent relationships, suggesting government should do more to protect children abused within families.

- **Ensure children can report abuse**

Many children had experienced violence in homes, and some in schools or other institutions. Finding nowhere to report this abuse, they have instead left these situations for the streets. Governments should work with NGOs in a social work framework to set up child-friendly reporting mechanisms.

Invest: In services which work

These children were all involved with specialist street child NGOs, responsive to the opinions and particular needs of children who have lived on the streets. The children were able, as a result of this listening attitude and carefully designed interventions based on their experiences, to foresee a positive future for themselves, to engage in education and to return to homes. Governments should engage with NGOs working effectively with street children in order to learn what works, and help make such work sustainable.

Implications for NGOs and civil society groups

Listen: Involve children in designing and delivering services, especially with regard to home reintegration

Civil society institutions such as NGOs and churches should actively seek and respect children's views, and be prepared to involve children in making decisions at levels appropriate to children's age and capacity. This should be done through formal (children's committees) and informal processes in order to involve a range of children. This will ensure that services continue to meet the needs of street children. Needs may change as cities continue to develop in the future.

These children had individual stories about how they were on the streets, involving family dynamics and poverty. Likewise, their reintegration into homes and communities involves individualised interventions and choices. NGOs working with street children should prioritise listening to the reasons why children have left homes, and tackling with them the barriers to them returning. NGOs should work with families and children to facilitate reintegration, including supporting them to meet basic needs, enabling families to find non-violent ways of communicating, finding support to overcome substance abuse and supporting children through family transitions including new step-parents.

These children were clear about how they supported one another. NGOs should recognise acknowledge children's self-help networks (eg, among other street children, market stall holders, communities and friendly security guards) and support them where they are positive and healthy, and where they promote reintegration.

Partner: Work with governments in order that street children's priorities are recognised in policy and practice

Effective interventions can be made when NGOs and local government are able to work strategically together to listen to street children, design programmes which work for them, and engage communities in changing perceptions of children. Where NGOs are able to work with local governments in order to address issues of police violence, they should develop referral systems which result in street children being first referred to social workers or NGOs rather than treated as law-breakers by the police.

Amplify: engage in advocacy to ensure that children's rights are recognised and respected

NGOs should be prepared to challenge governments and institutions where abuses occur, withdrawing from partnerships if these compromise the central responsibility to amplify the voices of street children at policy levels. This can involve a strategic use of media, international partners and local supportive private sector. This involves making difficult decisions about funding and influence.

Lead in rigorous child protection practices

NGOs and churches should establish effective and rigorous child protection procedures, including child-friendly reporting and referral mechanisms.

Perception change

Provide opportunities for children to demonstrate their gifts and potential, and to interact with wider communities

Communities can foster cultures of transparency so vulnerable children are recognised and supported. The wider community, including religious communities, can promote children's rights within groups and families, and direct families in difficulty to social safety nets.

The ways in which street children are perceived can contribute to abuse. Communities should facilitate changes in perception and attitude towards street children in order that violence against children is not tolerated and perpetrators are confronted. The children at the Deloitte Street Child World Cup demonstrated their potential through football and artwork. Many of the NGOs working with them use these interventions in their home countries. For these to be fully effective, they need engaged members of the public to support them.

"We want to change the mindset and attitude of people with regard to the treatment of street children. We can change our own personal prejudices and campaign against disrespect nationally and globally."

Implications for the Street Child World Cup

"For me, the highlight was the conference. It was good to have the opportunity to be heard, and to hear other street children's experiences. Maybe together we can make a difference."

The inaugural Street Child World Cup achieved significant success in:

- changing perceptions of street children,
- raising awareness of the reasons why children are on the streets,
- raising awareness about the experiences of children on the streets, and the abuses they are subjected to.
- raising awareness of positive steps which can be taken in response to street children,
- galvanising a wide cross-section of society to ensure that change happens on the ground.

These successes mean that, in accordance with the wishes of participants, the Street Child World Cup will move forward to Brazil in 2014. The participation of street children will be central to this project, both in the build-up to, and at the Brazil event. The Durban Declaration will form the basis for the project's ongoing advocacy work.

The Street Child World Cup recognises that "street child" is often used to describe a spectrum of experiences and that many children see it as pejorative label. In choosing to use the term 'street child' we are following the conscientization approach of SCWC hosts, Umthombo Street Children. Umthombo argue for the importance of reimagining the term "street child" so that it can be used to assert children's rights.

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