

A Situational Analysis of the Conditions of Street Children in Tamale Metropolis in Northern Region of Ghana

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Abstract

This paper examined the conditions and the reasons why children operate on the streets of Tamale Metropolis. It uses focus group discussion and observation to find out the problems facing the street children, the nature of their work and what they perceive to be the solution to their plight. Rooted in streetism is the problem of poverty as it was noted or expressed by respondents. Through literature review the paper discusses meaning, causes and effects of poverty and comes out with strategies for reducing poverty. The study noted that the children were on the street because the parents were poor and could not take care of them. The children also expressed readiness to leave the street if they could be assisted to learn a trade. It was noted that working on the street was risky, unpleasant and without hope of building one's career. The study recommends that students in basic schools should be well trained in both theoretical knowledge and practical skills and be well equipped with employable skills so as to make them useful outside the classroom. Again, instead of dropping students along the educational ladder for not meeting entry requirements to higher institutions and thereby regarding them as failures, they should rather be given apprenticeship training to prepare them for the job market especially in the informal sector.

Keywords: streetism, education, apprenticeship, poverty

Introduction

Poverty and streetism are seen to be interrelated because it is normally children from poor homes who resort to the street with the aim of getting their daily bread. It can be observed that the rich and responsible parents do not allow their children to be on the streets rather they put in much effort to train them to become responsible citizens in society. For some children, the desire to go to school to develop their future career is often thwarted by the problem of poverty.

The UN General Assembly has expressed concern about the survival and upkeep of children.

The UN Convention on the Right of the Child states that the State has an obligation to protect the child from engaging in work that constitutes a threat to health, education or development. Unfortunately some children are driven to the street to fend for themselves due to economic hardships. 'Rural poverty has become a great nemesis in the country as many people live in absolute low standard of living (Lamprey, 2010). This has resulted in child migration to urban centres, child labour and high school dropout rate. A survey conducted by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Right & Labour, indicated that three-quarters of street children surveyed reported that their parents were still living showing they were on the street due to poverty (www.gvnet.com). In an article published in the "Daily Graphic", Zakaria (2005) noted that most children operating on the street do so because their parents are just not responsible or do not have the money to care for their numerous children. Parents have primary responsibility to provide for their children

A street child is a person who is under the age of 18 years and who spends much of his or her time working on the street and often without access to good health, education, protection against economic and sexual exploitation. The Convention of the rights of the Child defines children as all human beings below the age 18. Streetism negatively affects the child's right to live in a family environment and to have access to education and protection from the state. Article 4 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that, the State has the obligation to do all it can to realize a child's economic, cultural and social rights. It is estimated that 218 million children aged 5 to 17 years are involved in child labour worldwide whilst these children are supposed to be in school. It is acknowledged that the situation of the girl child in Northern Ghana is worse with respect to school enrolment, furthermore the exploitation of the girl child for economic gain is widespread due to factors such as betrothal, foster parenting and religious beliefs that militate against girl-child education. Yet it can be noted that once an educated girl becomes an adult and mother her family and community tend to benefit (WUSC 2006). Even though the state makes every effort to ensure that all children of school going age are given free compulsory basic education, not all children are in school. Some children have completed basic school but could not continue further due to poverty, or could not pass examinations successfully to proceed to the next level of the academic ladder.

Ghana's Poverty Reduction Strategy focuses on the promotion of formal education, training and skills development as part of the effort to reduce poverty. This noble goal seems to elude the street child. If children were given the right kind of education they would grow to contribute their quota to national development. Those children who are regarded as having failed or not qualified to progress through the academic ladder should not

be left to roam about on the streets to look for menial jobs. They can be trained by artisans or through well-structured apprenticeship training. Apprenticeship refers to a period of long term training carried out within an establishment and regulated by a statutory law or custom according to oral or written contract which imposes mutual obligations on the two parties concerned, especially between apprentice and a trainer or employer (ILO, 1981).

An apprentice training can supplement formal education to build the capacity of the child and to prepare him/her for his or her future. An apprentice is a person who learns a trade by working under the guidance of a skilled master, whether or not the person has graduated from school (Encyclopedia, 2001). The government's white paper on 'the education reform review' states among others, that the government will assume full responsibility for junior high school leavers who are unable to enter senior high school programmes. The white paper noted that the State would be committed to partner the private sector in a more systematic way to promote apprenticeship programmes (Ministry of Education Youth & Sports, 2004).

This paper discusses the concept of poverty and the causes and strategies for tackling poverty in general. It then goes further to assess the plight of the street child and the conditions in which they live and work in the Tamale metropolis. Finally the paper makes a number of recommendations to eliminate or reduce the incidence of streetism especially in the study area.

Related literature

Children in many African countries are born to a future of poverty, diseases and premature death. Streetism emerges from communities under stress. Children from such poor communities live on the street to hustle, sleep, work and eat. They endure daily struggle for survival. The Zambia Times (2004) records that many street children are orphaned as a result of diseases and conflicts. They are separated from their families because of domestic violence and every kind of abuse. The street child is stigmatized; they live on the edge of society, uneducated and or no access to school and training, they are abused as they are seen as nuisance with no registration document, no health insurance or information card and no identity within their community. Opoku (2006) alludes that Accra alone has nearly 17,000 children on the street working as kayayos (porters). Such children are maltreated, imprisoned and in some cases die prematurely. Unfortunately few steps have been taken to address their plight. Young people who are supposed to be the future leaders and the intellectual force of the country are the most vulnerable. Streetism is seen, according to Hendriks (2006) as a by-product of poverty. Economic growth did not in all cases benefit the poor as the rich and the powerful turn to absorb more resources. They argue that the interests of government and of different classes and leadership in society do not necessarily coincide. The state is charged with the responsibility of seeing to the well-being and the welfare of its people. If majority or sections of the people in a particular country are found to be poor, then it is the responsibility of the state to ensure equitable distribution of the national cake.

Rural Savannah continued to be the poorest zone in the country with more than half of its population classified as poor and more than a third being very poor as at 1992. It is also acknowledged that the high incidence of poverty falls on food crop farmers, who are widespread throughout the country. Even though macroeconomic stabilization programs through IMF policies are helpful at addressing poverty they are not sufficient for poverty reduction (Sowah, 2002). Growth will only benefit the poor if it is sufficiently broad based. There is a crucial need for improvement in rural infrastructure, agriculture and extension services. Investing in human resources confers direct benefits to the poor in raising the quality of life and can lead to long run economic growth. It can be argued that the quality of educational provisions for the rural poor also leaves much to be desired. The persistent poverty in some parts of the country points to the need for targeted interventions to assist the poor to participate in the growth process. The implementation of right economic policies that ensure access to social services like education, health and provision of public goods and creating job opportunities, children can have a bright future and would grow to contribute to the growth of the economy (World Bank, 1995).

The concept of Poverty

Poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon with several characteristics such as lack of basic necessities of life, which include food, clothing, and shelter. Lack of access to quality education and inability to acquire marketable skills can also be regarded as symptoms of poverty. Wilson et.al (2001) allude that even though some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, through the intervention of the World Bank experienced economic growth, it did not automatically improve the well being of all sections of the population. Absolute poverty exists when 75 percent of a person's income is spent on food and this produces only 75 percent of the caloric requirement for a healthy living. Poverty is a worldwide problem. It is estimated that one billion people all over the world live in absolute poverty while 800 million people go to bed hungry every day. Furthermore about 30, 000 children die each day due to poverty while 1.3 billion live on less than the equivalent of a dollar a day in the world (Dryland, 2006). Poverty is pervasive in Ghana. The Ghana Living Standard Survey (GLSS4) reports that about 40 percent of

Ghanaians live below the poverty line with 26.8 percent considered as very poor (Ghana Statistical Service, 2000).

The Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy Documents regard all those who have less than 70 Ghana cedis a year as very poor. Those with less than 90 Ghana cedis to spend within a year were regarded as poor. The amount is based on Ghana Living Standard Survey of 1999, which calculated and estimated that one needed at least 70 cedis per annum to be able to buy food and other basic necessities of life (GPRS, 2003).

The Causes of Poverty

The causes of poverty are manifold and complex. Among them are the following, unequal distribution of wealth and lack of access to resources such as land, education and training, social services, money, employment and livelihood opportunities. Furthermore, natural disasters, rapacious exploitation of natural resources, poor climatic conditions, political instability, displacing people from productive activities and threatening their right of healthy and safe environment. Others include conflict and violence between and within communities due to inadequate commitment to basic human rights, social justice and democracy. “

“Economic crises, high inflation, unemployment ...an educational system that fails to respond to and meet the needs of the modern global economy are pitching millions into poverty.” (Ofosu- appiah, 2008)

Effects of Poverty

The effects of poverty include; hunger, starvation and deprivation of basic needs such as clothing and wholesome shelter, poor sanitation, diseases and low health care services, high crime rate, risk of suicide, drug abuse, depression, homelessness and slum, political and domestic violence, unemployment, emigration, brain drain, low literacy and lower life expectancy, inability to participate in social, political and economic life of the community and the nation, and the development of intergenerational poverty (Commonwealth, 1995).

Strategies for eradicating Poverty

The strategies for eradicating poverty among others include, provision of food, water, health care and housing, literacy, education, vocational skills, access to production resources such as land, natural resources and credit, opportunities for employment, income generation and livelihood, dealing with domestic violence and resolving conflict, social mobilization and empowerment of people to enable them fight against poverty and respect for traditional forms of organization and culture.

The Millennium Development Goals’ stress on the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. Among other things it suggests the eliminating school fees, providing soil nutrients to farmers, provision of free school meals for school children, transport services for school children, training programmes for community health in rural areas, ending user fees for basic health care, upgrading slums and providing land for public housing and timely access to justice for all as critical factors (NDPC, 2005).

One other area which needs consideration especially school dropouts is the need to equip the youth with employable skills. Bock and Bock (1989) argued that the high cost of education has resulted in far less access to schooling especially for the disadvantage. He noted that there is a discrepancy between labour force requirement for the economy and what the schools produce. The school system prepares students for the next academic ladder rather than the job market. According to Comb (1985) the formal school curriculum is becoming obsolete in relation to advancing state of knowledge and realistic learning needs of students for the job market. Barbara (1973) and Naik (1977) suggested that the youth should be equipped with skills required for employment. Apprenticeship training offers, more practical and quicker result for the youth who cannot afford formal education at a higher level. Ninsin (1991) also acknowledged that apprenticeship could prepare the youth for employment in the informal sector and relieve the state of enormous social responsibilities towards the unemployed. In the same way Illich (1971) and Yankson (1991) also hold the view that apprenticeship system is an effective mode of training for the job market. One can conclude that apprenticeship system can become an effective tool for stimulating social change and economic development and thus contribute to poverty reduction efforts in the country. It can prepare the youth who are no longer in school to acquire the necessary skills that they would require to make a living. If the child were kept in school or in a training workshop with future prospects the child would not make the street his or her home.

The Study Area

Tamale is the capital city of Northern Ghana. It has a population of 305,000. People with different ethnic origin live in Tamale as traders, students or workers in various Ministries Departments and agencies. It is traditionally occupied by Dagombas who speak Dagbani. The dominant religion of the people of Tamale is Islam. There are however Christian churches operating in Tamale. There is freedom of religion in Tamale as in any other part of Ghana.

The vegetation cover is savanna grassland. The metropolis is a commercial hub centre for the whole of

Northern Ghana. The city has supermarkets, wholesale and retail stores, two large markets, a number of lorry stations and a taxi rank. There are also restaurants, cooked food sellers and artisan shops. The commercial activities have made the city attractive to unemployed youth who travel from their villages to the city for greener pastures.

The city is connected to electricity from Akosombo dam, which is managed by Volta River Authority (VRA). The city also has local and international NGO's that provide humanitarian services to the poor, women and children within the region (Wikipedia, 2007)

The metropolis has 277 primary schools, 90 junior secondary schools. It also has 10 secondary schools, a polytechnic and a university. In addition, two teacher-training colleges are located in Tamale. Two vocational and privately owned Secretarial Schools can also be found. Tamale has a teaching hospital, a regional hospital and a district hospital. In addition are three clinics and other privately owned hospitals (Wikipedia, 2007).

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

In August 2005, street children participated in a workshop organized by the Tamale Metropolitan Assembly at Tamale Workers' College. Thirty-five (35) of the street children were identified and later selected at random and interviewed. The interview was conducted at the Tamale Workers' College. The investigator with the assistance of a Service Personnel who could speak the local Dagbani language conducted face-to-face interview after sampling 35 among other children who were drawn from the streets of Tamale. The interview was done in turns, that is, one after the other and at a convenient time and place within the College. This was followed by an observation of the work of the street children at the lorry station, market and taxi rank of Tamale Metropolis in December 2008. The study was updated in December 2011, The views of the children who were interviewed and those whose works were observed in the field have been put together as the views of street children in Tamale. The ages of the street children that were selected range from 11 to 17. Both males and females were interviewed but the females were in the majority constituting 71 percent, i.e. 25 out of 35 children that were sampled.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1. SLEEPING PLACE

Sleeping centre	No of respondents	Percentage
In front of stores	2	5.7
Friends room	1	2.8
Market	5	14
Relative	17	48
Station	9	25
Workshop	1	2.8
Total	35	100

Source: interview of street children in Tamale, 2008

Table 1 above shows where the children slept after close of work. It could be seen that whilst 48 percent stated they slept with their relatives, the rest constituting 52 percent did not have a proper sleeping place. It could be noted that though 48 percent had homes and relatives to go to, the children still enjoyed being on the street due to the income they derive from the street. It is also remarkable to note that not all street children were homeless; some as indicated above have places they go to after close from work. There is no doubt that they enjoy staying on the street because of hardship at home. It can be said that some parents also endorse the fact that their children live on the street, as they do not prevent them in any way from working on the street. It may well be that either the parents or guardians do not have the necessary resources to take care of them or they also have a stake in the little money the children bring to the house.

Reasons for Working on the Street

The children were also asked why they were living on the street, and for most of them the underlying cause was attributed to poverty. For example four of the respondents said they were there to work for their daily bread, while the majority of the respondents representing 54.3 percent said they had no money to live on, as the parents were poor. Three of them representing 8.6 percent said their parents were dead, two (2) just said they had no where to go apart from being on the street, because if they don't stay on the street and find some jobs to do they will go hungry, whilst six others (17 percent) claimed they had no relatives. One can conclude that the absence of parental control or motherly care compels young people who are supposed to be in school to be on the street in order to fend for themselves.

Risk Awareness

The majority of the children's were aware that it was risky to be on the. Whilst 21 responded in an affirmative, 14 representing 40 percent said no. This means that for some of the children they did not perceive any danger or

risk for working and sleeping on the street, such children felt comfortable being on the street that they did not foresee any danger to their lives or future prospects or career. The children would require counseling from mature people in society such as welfare officers or adult educators/ development workers to help them see the realities of life. It is significant to note that the majority of them however felt it was a risky business.

Attitude of children

On the attitude of the respondents towards streetism, it was noted that 20 of them were happy to be on the street, while 6 said they were not happy and that it was a bad situation whilst 9 were undecided. It can be said that since the respondents were young they could not perceive that they were jeopardizing their future. The few cedis that they were daily earning gave them false impression that life was okay. Such children require the support of the society to help them become conscious of their precarious conditions so they could opt and work for a better condition with better prospects for the future.

Years on the streets

Their responses as to the maximum period they hope to be on the streets were varied. For example, 22 respondents stated one year, six respondents stated two to four years, one person said five to seven years, whilst two said they would want to quit as soon as they gather enough money. It may be inferred that the children did not have any intention or plan to leave the street. It can be said that for some of them they did not have hope of securing a better job and they therefore find the street as a safe haven where they can make ends meet. Such children do not have plans to quit the street and unless government or civil society intervenes they would be on the street for a long time. Yet others do not intend to be on the street for long as they indicated, such people will be willing to leave the street if a capacity building training programme is instituted for them or they can have a better employment avenue.

Problems Facing Street Children

The investigation sought to find out the nature of problems the street children encounter as they operate on the street. Table 2 below gives an expression of what they considered to be their problems.

Table 2. Problems facing street children

Problem	Frequency	Percentage
Rape	6	17.1
Sickness	10	28.6
Fighting	3	8.6
Financial	3	8.6
Accommodation	8	22.9
No problem	5	14.3
Total	35	100

Source: interview of street children in Tamale, 2008

From Table 2 above, it can be seen that a major problem facing 22.9 percent of the children was where to sleep after a hard day's work. The issue of where to turn to when they were sick also constitutes a major problem for the children. For as many as 17.1 percent to regard rape as a threat to them for being on the street require further investigation as to the extent and nature of the rape threat. By and large, it could be seen that the major challenge facing the children were how to meet the basic body requirement of food, clothing and shelter. This gives credence to the point earlier on made that streetism and poverty are inter related and with proper parental care no child would want to be on the street.

Controls

On the question of who controls the street child as many as 48.6 percent of the respondents had no one to control, direct or supervise their activities, as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Controlling the street child

Control	Frequency	Percentage
No body	17	48.6
Guardian	5	14.3
Brother / Sister	2	5.7
Mother / step mother	2	5.7
Father / grand father	9	25.7
Total	35	100

Source; interview of street children in Tamale,2008

Related the above is also the question of who cares for the street child when they were sick or in trouble.

Table 4. Care for the street child

Responsibility	Frequency	Percentage
No body	10	28.6
Friends	1	2.9
Guardian	6	17.2
Brother / Sister	3	8.6
Mother	2	5.7
Father / Grandfather	13	37.2
Total	35	100

Source; interview of street children in Tamale, 2008

From table 4 it can be said that ten children had no one to care for them but the rest of the respondents who were in the majority i.e 72 percent, claimed their relatives cared for them. This confirms the fact that for some of the children they had homes they could go to daily but they were compelled to live on the streets because of poverty at home

EARNING PER DAY

Attempts were made to find out whether being on the street was lucrative or economically beneficial.

Table 5. Daily income

Income – GHC	Frequency	Percentage
Below - ¢1	2	5.7
1 - 2	14	40
3 - 4	17	48.5
5 - 6	1	2.85
7 and above	1	2.85
Total	35	100

Source; interview of street children in Tamale, 2008

It is interesting to note that majority of the respondents, constituting 93.5 percent earned between 1 to 4 cedis a day, which is similar to or more than the minimum wage of workers in the country. This might explain why the street continues to attract the child. Only 5 percent fell below 1 cedi as daily earning. As to how they spent the money they derive per day, sixteen (16) of them said they spent below 2 cedis a day while 17 spent above two cedis. When one compares what they earned with what they spent per day, one can conclude that they do not have enough after expenses for them to save. Their work can be described as from hand to mouth. This also confirms the fact that their desire to leave the street after accumulating some wealth could be a mirage and therefore they were likely to be on the street for a long time if external help was not forthcoming.

SAVINGS

Table 6 below gives an indication of where the children save their moneys after a hard day's work. It is interesting to note that six parents were keeping the money their children secured for them. This also shows that they lend support to their children to be on the street.

Table 6. Savings

Custodian	Frequency	Percentage
Kept with Parent (s) –	6	17.2
Susu collectors	10	28.6
Home	2	5.7
Sister	1	2.9
Kept in pocket --	11	31.4
Purchase goods / articles-	3	8.6
None to keep -	2	5.7
Total	35	100

Source; interview of street children in Tamale, 2008

Parental Concern

Respondents were asked whether their parents were aware that they were on the street and whether they have consented to their stay on the streets. Fourteen (14) representing 40 percent said yes whilst 20 representing 57.1 percent said no, one person could not determine whether the parents were in agreement or not. This confirms the view that some parents support their children to be on the street because they do not have what it takes to care for their children.

Health Problems

The investigation wanted to know whether the street children were encountering health problems and if they did the kind of health problems they encountered.

The study found out that 65.7% of the respondents encountered malaria while 11.4% stated that they had problems with general pains. As to who takes care of the health bills the respondents mentioned, guardian (11.4 percent), step father (28, 6 percent), self (54.3 percent) and sisters / brother (5.8 percent). The implications are that for a few of the street children they could rely on their relatives for support when they were sick but for the majority i.e.54.3 percent, they had no one to take care of them when they were sick. This also meant that they had to work hard to secure more than they could spend and save for eventualities.

Future Plans

Twenty-eight of the respondents representing 80 percent mention trading as their future career. Two respondents would want to be artisans in dressmaking and mechanics, while two others want to stay out of the street in the future. Some said they want to get money to establish their own business.

For one girl she needed money to buy a few cooking utensils and go into marriage. Significantly most of them were willing to learn a trade such as masonry, carpentry and dressmaking. Interestingly all of them said they would want to acquire skills and get out of the street. The need for apprenticeship training thus becomes relevant.

Future Career

The children were asked to indicate the actual skills they would want to be trained on or the skills they intend to acquire as their future career, Table 7 below gives a picture of what they wish to do.

Table 7. Desired occupation of the street child

Skills	Frequency	Percentage
Any	4	11.4
Radio / TV repair	2	5.7
Driving	1	2.9
Auto Mechanic	4	11.4
Soap making	2	5.7
Sewing	9	25.7
Carpentry	5	14.3
Hair dressing	1	2.9
School / Training	7	20.0
Total	35	100

Source; interview of street children in Tamale. 2008

It was noted that the majority of the street children would prefer a year's apprenticeship training in order to acquire the needed employable skills before they could leave the street. Interestingly all the children interviewed had in mind a trade they would want to learn as shown on Table 7, and given the opportunity they hope to acquire skills and leave the street. From discussions and as indicated in the table above 25.7 percent of the children expressed interest in learning to sew whilst for the males, carpentry and auto mechanic dominated their choice of interest. It is interesting to note that as much as 20 percent willing to continue their education if they could be assisted.

CONCLUSION

It is interesting to note that the children were aware of the state in which they found themselves and they also knew the way out of their predicament, the only problem was that they could not help themselves. They however, made useful suggestions as to the way forward, they were of the view that children could stay out of the street if the community could support parents who are poor to send their children to school, if the Metropolitan Assembly would support the children with tools for learning a trade and if the children could be given micro-credits to trade with. Again, the children were of the view that if jobs were created for them in their communities they would not want to be on the streets. The issues raised by the children corroborates with the point raised by Opoku (2006) that the children on streets are from poor homes and mostly from the rural areas of the country. In

spite of their background it can be said that the children are ‘ambitious, tough and resilient’ ([www. street child africa. org.](http://www.streetchildafrica.org))

Streetism is a matter of concern for well meaning Ghanaians. Again much has been spoken against child labour by civil society. Streetism is a reflection of children outside the classroom, whilst the virtues of girl child education and free compulsory universal basic education are being upheld and promoted in Ghana, it is a pity that some girls as well as some boys find themselves not in schools but on the street. Besides they are working when the whole world is against child labour. This has become a social problem and they are all manifestations of poverty. It is however suggested that serious effort should be made to make education relevant to the employment or survival needs of the students. A system of education that drops a number of students along the ladder on the pretext of failure or not having the high entry qualification to enter secondary or tertiary level does not help to reduce streetism. Perhaps adequate allocation of budgetary resources to basic and vocational education, including apprenticeship training will help equip students with skills and thus help stem the tide of streetism.

Recommendations

All children should be assisted to be in school, those who are unable to continue their education after completing the basic school should be given apprenticeship training or made to learn a trade of his or her choice under a master artisan. Similarly, children on the street should be given apprenticeship training with financial support from the government, district assemblies and non-governmental organisations. Parents, civil society and the government have a responsibility to ensure that all children are adequately fed and trained for their future career. Finally, it is recommended that formal education curricular should be restructured to take care of the employment needs of its graduates. The provision of social services such as fee free basic education and school-feeding programme, if vigorously pursued, can address low school enrolment and high drop out rates for girls. When measures are adopted to reduce poverty as outlined under the GPRS II, one would expect that streetism would also reduce.

Parents, society, and the State have equal responsibility to take care of children and to keep them off the streets.

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