

## **Mitaani hadi shuleni: from street into school**

### **Child centred research to understand the lives of street-connected girls in Nairobi**

This paper addresses question 4: *developing rights based holistic strategies for street-connected children*.

#### **The research and evidence**

This submission is based on detailed qualitative research with over 200 street-connected girls including 48 in-depth case studies of girls and their families living in informal settlements across Nairobi in Kenya. The girls who participated in the research were selected so that one-third were living and working on the -s without intervention, one-third had completed a rehabilitation programme with Pendekezo Letu, a local organisation based in Kenya working to improve the lives of street-connected girls in Nairobi, and the remaining one-third of girls had dropped out of Pendekezo Letu's programme and returned to the street.

The research was co-constructed between the University of Brighton, ChildHope UK, Pendekezo Letu, and the Overseas Development Institute. A team of 10 young Kenyan researchers and 6 social workers were trained to carry out participatory and qualitative research to gain a deeper understanding of the complex everyday lives of street-connected girls, their peers and families, and of how interventions had worked (or had not worked) to improve their educational opportunities and wellbeing. Methods such as roads and rivers of life, life histories, safety mapping, individual network diagrams, happy/sad matrices, photo narratives and interviews were used with focus groups and individuals in case studies. Key representatives from government departments and national and international non-governmental organisations participated in a reference group that analysed key aspects of policy and legislation that needed to be addressed to support local interventions.

#### **Examples of case studies and context:**

##### ***Story from street-connected girl: Diamond aged 15, from Dandora***

Diamond's mother suffered from mental health problems and couldn't look after her eight children. Diamond was bullied on the streets, sexually harassed by older street-connected boys,

***Story from street-connected girl: Angel aged 17, from Thika***

Angel ran away from home as her mother used to beat her. Although she attended the rehabilitation centre and, following this, entered formal education, she got raped on her way home from school one day and didn't know who to tell. She became pregnant and was diagnosed with HIV. The person responsible walked away from her, she also lost the baby and was totally devastated by this series of events. Angel had been abused and lacked any family support and so was introduced to prostitution by a friend. With this complex set of risk factors facing Angel, there would need to be additional intervention to engage further with her and she may need to be signposted to other services.

peer support.

**Increasing vulnerability**

*Definition: street-connected children may live with some family support, facing some risks such as children caring for parents (often mothers) with HIV and AIDS, or having moved often due to abuse.*

*Intervention: In these situations more vulnerable children can benefit from having a **safe and separate space for rehabilitation** in parallel to **family members being assisted** to improve their health and wellbeing so that they can better support their children. Findings showed that one-to-one psychosocial support, counselling and life skills training can significantly improve*

effectively realise their rights.

- Rights-based strategies that are holistic include consideration of the right to special care and protection for the most vulnerable (article 20), and the right to assistance to children and their street-connected families to adequate standard of living (article 27). Partnership is also important, for example involving community representatives (CPC members, local elders, chiefs etc), district authorities, schools and other child focused organisations working in the area.