



# ACTING ON A DAILY BASIS TO PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF STREET CHILDREN IN THE FACE OF HIV/AIDS

Dedicated to protecting street children's rights in the face of HIV/AIDS, the international seminar organized by UNESCO in Bamako, Mali, from 3 to 5 December 2003 allowed the foundation to be laid for an original type of cooperation between Africa and Asia, on the one hand, and between associations and public authorities on the other.

The conclusions reached at the seminar indicated the need to develop action frameworks for associations and institutions confronted on a daily basis with the dual problem of street children and HIV/AIDS.

In order to stimulate reflection by the actors on site, UNESCO and P.A.U. Education led six work groups on the key issues of protecting street children's rights in the face of HIV/AIDS.

The objective of such reflection is not to reach irrefutable conclusions, but to create the conditions where everyone who is involved with street children on a daily basis through associations or on the institutional level can share their experiences.

## 1 CONTEXT AND JUSTIFICATION

According to the definition proposed by the UNESCO, "street children are boys and girls who spend most of their time in the street; the street is their source of livelihood, and they are there without protection. They are in temporary, partial or permanent rupture with their families and society."

There are two main categories of children in this situation:

- "Street children", who live in complete rupture with their families; and
- "Children in the street", who spend most of the day there before returning to their family home in the evening.

Children living in the street with their families are a third, emerging category.

The parent's low income, failure at school, family conflicts and parental negligence are some reasons that could lead a child to live in the street part of the time or permanently. More than living there, these children are simply surviving. Their everyday situation confronts them with drugs, violence, rivalries between gangs and especially the risk of contamination with HIV.

Their vulnerability to the virus is associated with:

- Precocious sexuality;
- Promiscuity and a high number of potential partners;
- Limited access to condoms and exposure to unprotected sexual relations, namely in exchange for food, shelter or money;
- High prevalence of untreated or poorly treated sexually transmissible disease;
- The consumption of drugs that decrease inhibitions and therefore increase risks;
- Low educational level;
- Lack of information on sexuality and false beliefs about HIV/AIDS;
- Low self-esteem with a strong devaluation of their bodies and lives;
- The impossibility of seeing themselves in the future: they are not worried about a hypothetical future illness because they are not even sure where they will be the next day.

HIV/AIDS represent a permanent threat to street children, who frequently catch sexually transmissible infections (STIs) - an indication of unprotected sexual activity. They often use objects that could be contaminated to perforate the skin, such as razors or needles, to carry out scarification or blood brotherhood rituals.

Several handicaps combine to make the struggle to help children with HIV/AIDS particularly difficult:

- Absence of qualitative and quantitative data;
- Target not very visible in national programmes;
- Inadequate training of educators on hand;
- Lack of pedagogical contents adapted to street children in the context of HIV/AIDS;
- Stigmatized and discriminated, these children have neither a future nor rights, namely the right of access to health care and services, in particular that of detection; and
- Difficulty or impossibility of considering returning to their families.

The problem should not only be considered from an institutional angle. The community aspect, with its cultural and religious components, should also be taken into consideration.

## 2 ACTING ON A DAILY BASIS

National and international associations and public institutions working on a daily, hands-on basis with street children adjust their actions to the conditions they encounter. Confronted with the prejudices surrounding street children and carriers of HIV/AIDS, they must develop complex strategies, most often simultaneously focussing on different factors.

Six work groups were thus created to work on the following items:

**1. Preliminary survey:** The preliminary survey is based on a simple methodology that each association can apply in its environment to better understand the street children whom it will be helping, and allows them to define the form of this assistance.

**2. Defence strategy:** Organising a defence campaign creates conditions for increased mobilization of human and financial resources to carry out a successful intervention with regard to street children confronted with HIV/AIDS.

**3. Listening and training those involved:** An adapted framework for training social educators and their peers will emphasize the need to listen to the children as well as group dynamic techniques in order to allow debate on the subjects of the body, sexuality, etc.

**4. Content:** The creation of tools and activities should facilitate prevention and learning of fundamental concepts in a context of child participation.

**5. Taking charge of street children after detection:** The definition of a framework for detection and assistance should be coherent with the children's living conditions and difficulties of following up.

**6. Return to families:** The additional difficulty represented by HIV/AIDS should not divert associations from the objective of favouring, insofar as possible, the children's return to their families, while at the same time providing family mediation and job placement services for the children.

### 3 GOING ONE STEP FURTHER

Getting to know street children, the reasons that led them to partially or completely leave their family environments and apprehending the specific risk factors to which they are exposed constitute the prerequisites to any educational and/or preventive measures. This preliminary knowledge will allow us to develop defence strategies and intervention frameworks to assist the children, the final aim being their leaving the streets and returning to their families and/or becoming employed.

The recommendations resulting from the reflection of the six work groups established can be considered six research paths to follow, illustrated by precise examples: a methodological basis upon which those working with street children can build a debate and define lines of action. The enterprise does not aim at being exhaustive in each of the items studied, but rather to furnish the foundations for reflection and action on issues as precise as the training of educators, the creation of adapted contents for educational measures for the children, awareness raising about detection and the taking in of children who may be infected.

The aim established is for Africa and Asia to share their practices and methods of intervention.

Each reader is invited to "go one step further" by joining the debate, either directly with members of work groups, or in a more general manner by communicating their contributions to the rest of the community.

UNESCO and P.A.U. Education are at your service to relay your thoughts.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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This working group was created following the international seminar organised by UNESCO and UNAIDS “Protecting the rights of street children: combating HIV/AIDS and discrimination” held in Bamako from 3 to 5 December 2003.

The ideas and opinions expressed in this publication are the result of this group’s work and, as such, reflect only the opinions of the participants.

**Six groups** were created during the international seminar “Protecting rights of street children: combating HIV/AIDS and discrimination” to debate and reflect upon the following items:

**1. Pre-intervention Study**

**2. Advocacy**

**3. Listening and Teaching Skills for the Facilitators**

**4. Contents**

**5. Provision of Care and Support for Street Children Infected with HIV/AIDS**

**6. Getting Children off the Street**

The six guidelines are available on the following website: [www.paueducation.com/aids](http://www.paueducation.com/aids)