

# The Effectiveness of Street Children Interventions in Eldoret, Kenya

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**Abstract:** *Street children constitute a marginalized population in most urban centres of the world. Their peer interactions, social networks, living arrangements and survival strategies are much the same all over the world. They have invariably been exploited and marginalized. As a marginalized group on the streets, street children fall into patterns of various undertakings, which ruin their lives. Despite government and NGO interventions towards alleviation of the problem of street children, there is a lack of comprehensive interventions that yield any significant impact in addressing specific challenges of street children. Therefore, this paper examines the various interventions available for street children and provided by service providers. The study utilized a descriptive survey research design which targeted street children, social workers from NGOs and officers as key informants from department of Children in Uasin Gishu County. Data was collected using questionnaires for street children, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with three groups of street children and one FGD with social workers and key informant interviews were conducted with children officers and municipal officers. The study found that there were several service providers identified by the street children who included NGOs, FBOs, Business Community and Good Samaritans. However, some of the services provided by the business community and Good Samaritans were identified by Social Workers, as a factor that led to more children coming to the streets of Eldoret town. Street children revealed that they needed to be more involved in informing service providers on what they would want to be assisted with. It was also clear that street children would want to participate in long-term initiatives which were sustainable and would assist them to be self-reliant in the long-run. The study recommends that a sector-wide training approach for service providers should be adopted in dealing with street children at all levels be developed, by the Government in collaboration with stakeholders to provide standard and holistic services to street children in the country.*

**Keywords:** Street Children, Interventions, Eldoret, Kenya

## 1. Introduction

Street children constitute a marginalized population in most urban centres of the world. Estimates indicate that there are millions of street children in most urban centres throughout the world (UNICEF, 2008). These urban centres have been theatres and battlegrounds for street children from poor resource settings (Benegal et al, 1998). Their peer interactions, social networks, living arrangements and survival strategies are much the same all over the world. They have invariably been exploited and marginalized. Various studies have estimated the number of street children in different countries in the world. For instance, in Ethiopia, Non Governmental Organisations estimated that there are nearly 600,000 street children and 100,000 of these in Addis Ababa (IRIN, 2004). Around 1,000,000 children are believed to be on the streets of Egypt (UNICEF, 2005).

In Kenya, the influx of street children in urban centres has been attributed to the disintegration of the family institution. As a marginalized group on the streets, street children fall into patterns of drug use in order to cope with their adverse circumstances and survive on the streets (Oino and Towett, 2014). Interventions targeting street children have been well documented in relevant literature in Africa and around the world. There is need therefore, for a study to evaluate the initiatives that discuss the effectiveness of such initiatives in addressing challenges facing street children. According to Njoroge (in Progress) several approaches have been adopted in addressing the plight of the street children all over the world including; charity, integration, rehabilitation and community based. Charity approach aims at giving gifts to the children, thus temporarily alleviating their basic needs. However, charity approach does not help the children to

become self-reliant, but instead makes the children more dependent upon the giver/well wishers. Thus, poverty remains rampant despite charitable support. This paper discusses these interventions from the perspective of both the government and non-governmental interventions with the aim of establishing the responsiveness of current approaches in their quest to address the issues of street children.

In 1991, by Presidential decree, the Government of Kenya established the District Children's Advisory Committees (AACs) in each district to enhance involvement of the community, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), private sector (business community), line ministries, Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) in the administration of matters relating to children. By then, only the Department of children's services under the Ministry of Home Affairs and National Heritage (MOHA&NH) was running public supportive and preventive programmes for the benefit of actual and potential street children. Although most of the country's local authorities (municipalities and county councils) were approved under the Children and Young Persons CAP 141 which was to manage both types of programmes, however, none mounted a supportive programme.

The CAP 141 Act was repealed in the 2001, and also paved way for interventions primarily, based on the rehabilitation and training of street children and were based on the delinquent nature of 6-18 year olds of whom street children were a majority. The programme was organized into two types of institutions namely, Approved Schools now known as Rehabilitation Schools and Juvenile Remand Homes now known as Children's Remand Homes, under the Children's

Act 2001. Approved Schools on the other hand were custodial schools for the rehabilitation and training of delinquent juveniles and youngsters. The Department of Children Services had 9 (nine) such schools in the country, with a capacity of 3,000 children (Ministry of Home Affairs and National Heritage, 1990). Kudrati et al., (2002) discourage these forms of interventions while acknowledging that in order to address the issue of street children effectively, both such long and short-term interventions are necessary. In addition, there should be a focus on preventive (rather than rehabilitative) solutions. For instance, ongoing provision of food, clothes, medicines, and shelter may even help to perpetuate the problem by making street life bearable and intensifying a child's dependence on programs (Volpi, 2002).

Despite government's good intentions on establishment of committees, research has suggested that the Committees established are failing to function in a satisfactory manner due to lack of good leadership by the District Commissioners, lack of funds to hold scheduled or necessary meetings, repetitive agendas and lack of clarity of purpose. Other main flaws in these committees were seen to be their quasi-legal status and the absence of a decentralized child care operational budgets at District level (CSC, 2004). In 1998, the Department of Children Services established the Volunteer Children Officers system. The concept was piloted 2004 in seven (7) Districts. The volunteers Children Officers (VCOs) complement the work of children officers by providing supervisory services to children in need of care and protection and those in conflict with the law at the location/village level. The VCOs work under close supervision of the District Children's Officers (DCOs). The VCO system however, has significantly been hampered by lack of funding, inadequate and systematic training to enhance their capacities in service delivery to children. Under the National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government (2003), the Office of the Vice President and Ministry of Home Affairs had the mandate to coordinate all children services as stipulated in the Children's Act of 2001. The Government also set up the National Council for Children Services to oversee proper planning, financing, coordination and supervision of child welfare activities. Representatives are drawn from relevant government ministries, civil societies, private sector and religious organisations. At the district level, these structures are called Area Advisory Councils (AACs). In 2008 the Government reorganized its ministries and the Department of Children Services was moved from Office of the Vice President and Ministry of Home Affairs to Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development (MoGC&SD) now under Ministry of Labour Social Security and Services. The Ministry through the Department of Children Services empowers the vulnerable groups and children in need of care and protection such as street children, orphans, marginalized children, internally displaced children among others.

The NARC Government through the Ministry of Local Government embarked on a rehabilitation program for street children in collaboration with the National Youth Services (NYS) to offer trainings, in an effort to provide them with rehabilitation services, non formal education, vocational skills, reintegration back to formal education and family

reintegration. In 2003, 6000 ex-street children were rehabilitated and enrolled in different primary schools countrywide while 800 other street children acquired vocational skills in various national youth service units countrywide (Awori, 2007). Under the Kibaki presidency, the Government made great strides in the provisions of supportive services to street children. Various bodies were created and mandated to work with street children in Kenya. In the same year, the Street Families Rehabilitation Trust Fund (SFRTF) was established under the Ministry of Local Government now under Ministry of Devolution and Planning through a Gazette Notice No. 1558 of 11th March 2003. The mandate of SFRTF was to coordinate rehabilitation activities for street families in Kenya in partnership with other service providers, educate the public, mobilize resources, manage a fund to support rehabilitation and reintegration activities, and encourage decentralization of activities to County governments to benefit those surviving on streets of Kenya's towns and cities among other functions. The Street Families Rehabilitation Trust Fund (STRF) rehabilitates and returns street children to their families and supports their re-integration into the community. The Trust has moved from emergency response and immediate basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, health and psychosocial support to long-term programs including support for their education, vocational skills and small scale business for self-reliant. The National Youth Service Act, Chapter 208 provides for the establishment of a National Youth Service (NYS). The functions of the NYS and related matters include training of young citizens to serve the nation and employment of its members in tasks of national importance. Eligibility to the service starts at the age of 16.

Muigai (2003) acknowledges that service opportunities are usually advertised in the daily newspapers where college and university students often apply, but since April 2003, approximately 800 street children from Nairobi and Mombasa had been actively recruited into the NYS to become "useful citizens, like other Kenyans". A joint study, Street Children and Juvenile Justice in Kenya (2004) by CRADLE, Undugu Society of Kenya and Consortium for Street Children (CSC) however, notes that there have been newspaper reports claiming that the first batch of street children graduates from the NYC have simply returned to the streets 'more ruthless and hardened'. If the 'recruitment' was in any way forced, this constitutes a gross violation of the rights of these children.

The NARC government also initiated the Street Children Capacity Building Project which aims at enhancing the capacity of organizations that are addressing the plight of both actual and potential street children in Kenya. The project has been based in Nairobi with a national outreach, and working in partnership with voluntary organizations and governmental institutions in key urban centres in different districts, including Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru, Kitale, Kisumu, Eldoret, Lodwar, Maralal and Marsabit. Based on the programs' objectives the project developed training modules which address three thematic areas namely: management of street children organizations, Participatory Action Research (PAR), and Paralegal and child Rights. The project has reached a total of eighty-two organizations with

various capacity-building activities. The project is based on a community and neighborhood based model to protect children against violence which signifies a paradigm shift from the rehabilitative programmes that characterised early governmental interventions.

Non-governmental organisations have been identified as the most active around the globe and in Kenya to alleviate the plight of street children. According to the Consortium for Street Children (CSC) it has been difficult to run effective intervention programmes for street children since street children are manifestations of profound social and economic situations that do not respond to quick and easy solutions. Failure has characterised many programmes that have not considered the children's rights, personal needs and freedom of choice in the provision of services and those that have addressed the symptoms rather than the causal factors. Part of the problem in designing effective interventions is the lack of adequate and reliable information. Current projections of the population of children living and working on the streets of Nairobi and other urban and rural areas are at best "guesstimates". There has hardly been any initiative geared towards collecting and consolidating data on these children. The recent survey, Dagoretti Street Children Programme (2001) Baseline Survey conducted by AMREF is an exception.

SNV/Kenya and the GTZ (2002) note the little data available tends not to be disaggregated, tending to categorise all poor urban children as "street children" and by clustering all poor urban children under the generic descriptor of "street children" distorts reality. In addition, such clustering cloaks the diversity of age, gender, ethnicity, religion and even sub-cultures that characterise children living and working on the streets. Consequently, the programme designer is unable to make any distinctions with regard to the peculiar characteristics and specific needs of the various groups of children thus, running the danger of developing inappropriate interventions. This situation also prevents the design and implementation of appropriate prevention programmes.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and some International Non-governmental organisations (INGOs) have attempted in their different ways to provide support for street children worldwide. Individual countries have themselves made attempts to tackle the problem locally. The Daily Nation, 15th January 2000, notes that the government has since 1994 participated in workshops to address the plight of street children known as the Forum. The paper further states that the forum was the initiative of the African Network for the Protection and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN). It also aimed at identifying the solutions that would help eradicate the problem of street children.

Although NGOs have been involved in programmes to address the plight of street children; Onyango et al., (1991) note management of most NGO programmes have enjoyed very limited internal public and government financial support, making them wholly dependent on external public financial support (donations) to finance their operations. This kind of financing is not dependable and complicates

planning and implementation. For instance, UNICEF currently provides financial and technical support to the Ex-street Children Community Organization (ECCO) to respond to the increasing number of street children in Eldoret town over the last few months as a result of the drought in Northern Kenya. The UNICEF supported program started in August 2011 with the identification and enrolment of street children resulting in 562 children being reached to date with a variety of interventions including psychosocial support, counselling, medical support, recreational activities and reintegration of children with their families (UNICEF, 2011). Cummings (2008) identifies Sierra Leone as one of the countries and other parts of Africa, where interventions stress both rehabilitation and prevention with a focus on Community-Based Organizations (CBOs); empowered with resources to provide money not directly to the child, but rather support for schooling, training for employment, and recreational activities such as sports, art, and music. The child is largely, nowadays understood as an active agent, one who must be motivated to participate willingly in his own rehabilitation. Attempts, for example, to forcibly relocate street children into "homes" have not worked. Instead, street children overall flee from such institutions, where disciplinary regimes and required labour are emphasized.

In Kenya, the Northern Rift Valley Protection Working Group found that at least one third of the children on the streets of Eldoret are coming from Turkana. With 800-1000 street children now on Eldoret streets and admissions in the Children's Remand Home based in Eldoret increasing significantly over the past three months, UNICEF has decided to prioritize child protection activities there. Initially, the Child Protection Centre (CPC) in Eldoret is provided with supplies, social workers and counselors, and support for logistics. UNICEF also seeks to expand its support to the local NGO, ECCO Street Children, so that they can scale-up services to street children and other vulnerable children. The District Children's Office is also to be supported to play its coordination role (UNICEF, 2011).

However, NGO programs alone are not enough to significantly reduce the number of children in the street, nor are they expected to do so. To accomplish this Volpi (2002) suggests that it would be far more effective for NGOs to network and cooperate among themselves and with local governments if they hope to increase the long-term impact and sustainability of interventions in this area. Schmidt (2003) indicates that policies that attempt to support street children must build on the experiences of the street children themselves and their voices must be listened to and taken into consideration. The aim of the programs is to soften punitive attitudes towards street children and to empower the neglected. However, without involving the street children, there is little likelihood to find lasting solutions. This paper therefore examines the effectiveness of street children interventions in Eldoret, Kenya.

## 2. Research Methodology

This paper is based on a study conducted between March and June 2013 in Eldoret town, Uasin Gishu County. The study utilized a descriptive survey research design which targeted; street children, social workers from NGOs and

officers and from department of Children and Eldoret municipality. The unit of analysis was a street child. The paper is an outcome of one of the objectives of the study which examined the socio-political factors affecting street children in Eldoret town. The criterion for selecting the area of study was based on the fact that the town was hard-hit by post-election violence of 2007/2008 in Kenya prompting international agencies such as Save the Children, World Vision, and USAID among others to launch various interventional programmes for street children.

### 3. Finding and Discussions

#### Source of Information for Street Children

The study sought to establish where street children got information on various interventions. This shown in table 1 below:

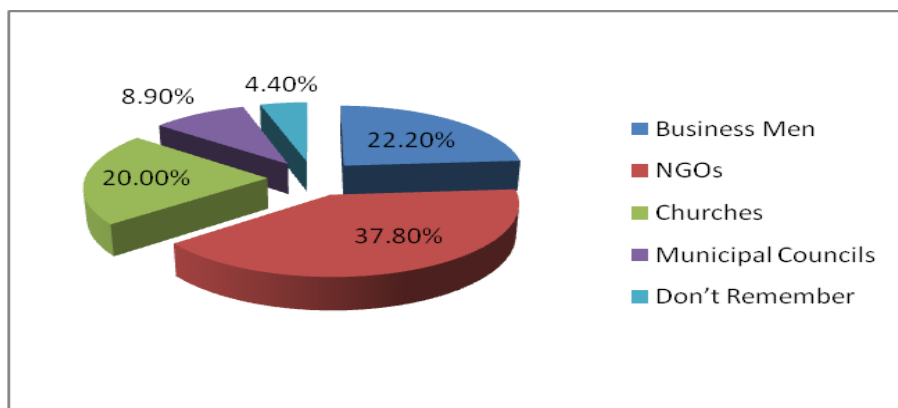
**Table 1:** Source of Information on Street Children Interventions

Source of Information	Frequency	%
Friends / Mother	2	4.4
Myself	1	2.2
Friends	32	64.5
Family	4	8.9
Social Workers	5	11.1
Missing Responses	4	8.9
Total	45	100.0

Table 1 above shows the sources of information on street children interventions. Knowledge of the services would

influence the decision of street children to seek or utilize such services. Majority of the children found out about the services from other street children (friends) and these accounted for 64.5% implying a strong network of communication among street children. It was evident that there were strong bonds between the street children which involved constantly "looking out" for each other. Street children refer to each other as shepha (comrade). This implies that if one of the children had knowledge of any assistance being offered to street children by the service providers they would refer this information to their comrades. Study participants also identified social workers as a source of information of these services where 11.1% indicated this. Social workers among the street children are mostly referred to as "teacher". There are street children who learned about the services themselves and this accounted for 2.2%.

As revealed in the findings of this study, street children's networks strengthen the ability to form bonds on the streets. Street children also extend their networks not only to other street children in different bases (barracks), but also to the business community, people and institutions they consider beneficial to their survival while on the streets. According to Aptekar (1988), friendships between street children permit the forging of affective relationships otherwise denied by abusive families. As shown in the previous discussion, street children rely on one another for money, food, security and protection, love, encouragement and emotional support. There are several service providers who are involved in providing street children interventions in Eldoret town as illustrated in Figure 1 below:



**Figure 1:** Service Providers for Street Children

From Figure 1 above, NGOs were identified as the most popular service providers by street children with 37.8 % indicating this. The Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) included Ex-Street Children Community Organization (ECCO), Tumaini Rescue Centre, OSCAR project, Berur organization, Child Welfare society and Morning star organization. These organisations provided a range of services which included rehabilitation, repatriation and child protection training. Businessmen were also identified as service providers by 22.2% of the study participants. Businessmen provided food and clothing and these were mostly of Asian community members who did this on every Friday. The children had nicknames for the Friday food giving activity which they referred to as

Kajumaa (Friday). FGDs with the street children revealed that street children are selective of the places that they go to seek for services. For instance, one of the children said, "organization X usually has a lot of documentation and paper work involved where they ask us a lot of questions and we have never seen the benefit from the exercise. They often promise us that they will take us to school but negate on their promises. *"They also tell us that we should go to school every day"* (Male street child, 13 years).

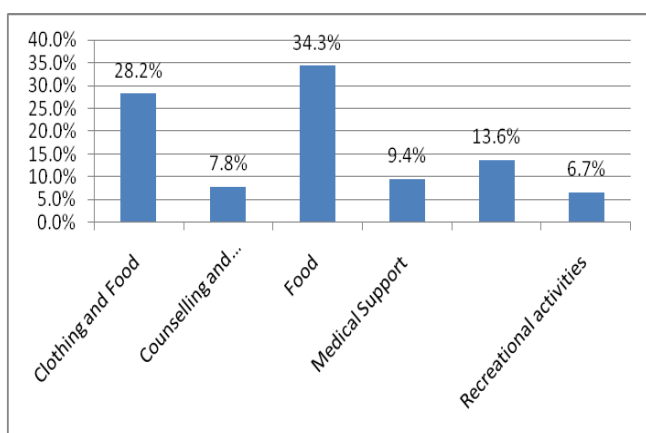
Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) were also involved in providing services to street children. Churches were identified by 20.0% of the study participants and were involved in providing clothing and spiritual guidance to

street children. The key informant interviews revealed that most of the service providers' intentions were selfish. For instance, the business community gave street children food that was about to expire or date had already expired such as bread, cakes and milk. Further, individual and groups also masquerade as street children service providers where they source funds from well wishers and other established NGOs and the community. This has led to children having a negative perception of any assistance that they would otherwise receive from genuine entities. In one of the FGDs with children a discussant said.

*"They (organisations or individuals) say they have come to help us where they give us papers (forms) to fill which are long and tedious but we never see the benefit of such efforts" (Male Street Child, 14 years).*

The Ushirika Church was identified by street children as the most active. The government has the mandate to regulate any activities undertaken by charitable children institutions (CCI) under the children (charitable children's institutions) regulations of 2005. For instance where the person or organization registered to run an institution for example, if a church is registered to run an institution, then the church is the Administering Authority. They are always required to register with the Area Advisory Councils who follow the due process as required.

There were several services that were identified by street children in Eldoret town which are shown in Figure 2 below.



**Figure 2:** Services Provided to Street Children in Eldoret Town

Figure 2 above indicates the services provided to street children. The study, having established that there were services for street children in Eldoret town further sought to find out how frequently street children accessed these services. Those who indicated once in a while accounted for 62.2%; regularly were 22.2%, rarely 2.2% and always 4.4% as illustrated in Table 4.10. Street children indicated that they used the services once in a while because they had to go to particular organizations which would interfere with their activities. They would only go if it was really necessary for them for instance, going to the OSCAR project office when they were feeling unwell. The study also sought to establish the services offered to street children in Eldoret town. The study classified services offered according to the non-governmental organisations which were represented by

social workers in the Focus group discussion. The researcher asked children how frequent they utilized those services. This shown in Table 3 below:

**Table 2:** Frequency of utilizing street children services

Frequency of service	Frequency	%
Once in a while	28	62.2
Regularly	10	22.2
Rarely	1	2.2
Always	2	4.4
Missing Responses	4	8.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100.0</b>

In order to improve the utilization of available services by street children the researcher asked them what improvements they would like to see in their provision. Majority of the study participants indicated that the services should target older children and street mothers and this represented 13.3%. This implies that older street children felt neglected by the service providers who gave more prominence to young street children. This is in contrast with the 2.2% who indicated that these services should target only young children. Among the responses 6.7% commented that employment opportunities should be factored in the services provided and that these services should be long-term. This shows that street children would want to be more independent and self-reliant in terms of economic empowerment. Further the study findings suggest that services provided for children are not sustainable and only increase their dependency. Street children's response is shown in Table 3 below:

**Table 3:** Respondents suggestions to improve children services

Suggestions for services provided	Frequency	%
Employment opportunities	3	6.7
They should be long term	3	6.7
Bring services to the streets	2	4.4
Should target older children and street mothers	6	13.3
have one centre for street children to access this services	2	4.4
Should continuously inform children on services offered	4	8.9
Involve us to tell them what we want	2	4.4
They should target only young children	1	2.2
They are accessible	2	4.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>55.6</b>

Table 3 above indicates the respondent's suggestions to improve children's services. Access to information was also another theme observed in the street children comments where 8.9% of respondents cited that service providers should continuously inform children on services offered. Further 4.4% indicated that service provider should consult and involve street children on what services they would want to be provided with. This implies that service providers in Eldoret town use a top-down approach to community development where they identify programs for street children which they deem fit and which may not be readily accepted and utilized by the street children.

#### 4. Challenges faced by Street Children Service Providers

The study further sought to identify challenges faced by service providers in their day to day operations to assist street children. One of the most challenges facing street children was communication barrier. Most street children are from different ethnic affiliations/communities and as such presented a challenge to service providers in communicating to them, especially illiterate ones. Moreover, there are also children with special needs who are on the street especially those who are deaf or dumb and as such need special communication which is a challenge to the social workers since they lack expertise in sign language. Children also ask for food in order to give any information during the interviews which social workers „teachers“ are not able to provide; Security was also a concern that affected social workers in their day to day work where they could not access all children especially within the barracks for fear of being attacked by hostile street children especially female Social Workers; Finances were also identified as a key constraint in service provision.

During the FGDs the researcher found that social workers occasionally had to go out of their way to use their own money in order to assist street children which affected their motivation towards their work. The social workers also indicated that they are poorly remunerated which leads to low motivation given that they handle very difficult children; lack of adequate facilities such as in the Children Remand Homes, Rescue Centres, and Charitable Children Institutions for safety and rehabilitation of street children; Shortage of social workers was also a constraint identified where an officer would have to do both the office tasks and also undertake fieldwork exercises such as reintegration activities which become tasking thus/affecting the morale and performance of their duties of assisting street children; lack of capacity and technical expertise to handle many street children who needed counseling and rehabilitation services. Some social workers dealing with street children did not have technical expertise/skills to handle street children issues (the social workers were either less qualified or had trained in a different discipline), thus, became a major impediment in assisting street children.

The study established that street children abuse several types of drugs which included glue, chang'aa, bhang, kuber, tobacco, D5 and Legatine and become addicted, hence complicating their rehabilitation process. For instance, key informants revealed that children in the Juvenile Remand Home (JRH) lack access to glue, which sometimes would lead to destruction of the mattresses they use and sniff the gum that is used for the manufacture of mattresses as a supplement for glue. For instance, during the FGDs one of the street children was high on "glue" and could not concentrate on during the discussion and would continuously need to be woken up by other children, and lack of Comprehensive laws, policies and strategies to address issues of street children. During the FGDs, the social workers, pointed that there are very weak policies and laws which are in place to deal with issues of street children and that there is no strategy in place for officers to refer to when handling street children. As a result every organization has

its own approach and as such this leads to duplication of services and waste of resources.

#### 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study found that there were several service providers identified by the street children who included NGOs, FBOs, Business Community and Good Samaritans. However, some of the services provided by the business community and Good Samaritans were identified, by Social Workers, as a factor that led to more children coming to the streets of Eldoret town. Street children revealed that they needed to be more involved in informing service providers on what they would want to be assisted with. It was also clear that street children would want to participate in long-term initiatives which were sustainable and would assist them to be self-reliant in the long-run. The study recommends that a sector-wide training approach for service providers should be adopted in dealing with street children at all levels be developed, by the Government in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders to provide standard and holistic services to street children in the country.

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