WORKING WITH STREET CHILDREN

Exploring Ways for ADB Assistance

Asian Development Bank
Regional and Sustainable Development Department
“There is no issue more unifying, more urgent or more universal than the welfare of our children. There is no issue more important.”

Kofi Annan, Secretary-General, United Nations
If he had the chance, fourteen-year-old Mohammad Yusuf of Dhaka, Bangladesh, would become a teacher and an advocate for children. He says he is one of the children kicked around and abused in the vegetable market where he works. When asked about his dream to become a children’s advocate, Mohammad Yusuf says that the adult “mafia” demand money from children. He also talks about the police who ask for a share, threatening to arrest children for stealing, or chasing them away if they hang around. Mohammad Yusuf works from midnight to 5:00, loading and unloading vegetables and selling scraps that have fallen from trucks. And like other boys working in the market, he goes to the nongovernment organization (NGO) drop-in center each morning.

ADB. 2003. *If I Had the Chance ... Artwork from the Streets of Asia and the Pacific*. Manila.
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Why work with street children?

Children represent hope and the future in every society. Yet, in many parts of Asia and the Pacific, children and their futures are at risk.

In the Asian Development Bank’s (ADB) developing member countries, children under 14 years old make up 30% of the population. Without proper protection this vulnerable group can suffer undernourishment, poor health, and intellectual underdevelopment, which can have lasting impacts on young peoples’ ability to participate fully in their communities and the broader economy. Investing in their protection has profound implications for the development of the region.¹

ADB is committed to assisting its member countries implement social development programs that put people first and empower the weaker groups in society to gain access to assets and opportunities.² While all children deserve this access, one group requires special attention—the growing number of young people living or working on the streets of Asian towns and cities.

Children can end up on the street for a wide range of reasons, from the necessity to help feed their families to the need to escape a hostile home life. Whatever propels them onto the street, their presence is a stark, worrying sign of deeper social problems.

In 2001, ADB organized a roundtable with nongovernment organizations (NGOs) working with street children to highlight the issue and to improve understanding and definition of the close connection between street children’s

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needs and ADB’s primary objective of reducing poverty. The discussions, under the theme “A Streets Eye View of Poverty Reduction,” painted a troubling picture of societies unable or unwilling to care for their poorest members, and a future of greater violence and hopelessness for children of the streets unless prompt action is taken.

A second roundtable followed the ADB-sponsored 2002 Street Children’s Art Competition, which gave street children in seven developing member countries an opportunity to depict through art what they would do to improve their world if given the chance. During this roundtable, NGO representatives and ADB staff looked at ways to provide that opportunity.

The roundtable’s report noted that “this is a rare moment of convergence in the history of children’s concerns within ADB.” A Social Protection Strategy is in place and being implemented; ADB’s relationships with NGOs and civil society organizations are verging on a new, more significant level of collaboration; the President of ADB and senior staff have expressed their interest and commitment to strengthening ADB’s role in reducing child poverty; there is a community of qualified NGOs with successful partnership relationships with ADB that are willing to explore deeper, long-term collaboration; and the Children’s Art Competitions have provided a direct voice from children.3

It is now time to marshal these elements and initiate the actions required to provide the street children of Asia and the Pacific with the support they need to ensure their safety, their ability to provide for themselves, and their right to contribute to society.

Who are street children?

Street children are a diverse group. Indeed, the meaning of the term “street children” is widely debated. But at the center of each definition are children who are “out of place.” If they are sleeping, on the streets, they have lost or left their families and homes. If they are working on the streets they have abandoned, or been abandoned by, the system of education. If they are playing in the streets, this is most likely because they lack other options.

3 ADB. 2003. If I Had the Chance ... Artwork from the Streets of Asia and the Pacific. Manila.
Children end up on the street for countless reasons, including parental landlessness, domestic violence, rural-urban migration, family homelessness, unemployment, natural disasters, civil unrest, and family disintegration—which is increasingly the result of parental illness or death from HIV/AIDS. In the varied and rapidly changing Asian context, the root causes range from the misery and social exclusion of extreme poverty, to the consumer desires and substance abuse that cause relatively wealthy children to run away from home in newly industrializing countries.

The increasing interconnectedness of these various problems across the region is having a deep impact on the lives and futures of this vulnerable and rapidly changing group.

Without an accepted definition of the term “street children” it is not possible to determine their number accurately. Estimates by governments, NGOs, and other groups vary widely. Nevertheless, it is believed the number of children living on the streets worldwide runs to tens of millions.

Whatever the exact figure for Asia and the Pacific, one thing is clear—even a single child without adequate food, shelter, and safety is one too many.

Approaches for working with street children

ADB has expertise and experience in many areas that have a profound impact on the lives of street children. For interventions to be effective they must be framed within local ideas about the roles of children and the nature of family relationships, as well as being sufficiently flexible to meet the varied and changing needs of individual children.

Rights and standards

The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified by almost every state in the world, including all ADB developing member countries. The Convention provides a rights-based framework for intervention in the lives of children, including street children. It establishes universal standards for children’s rights to dignity, freedom from discrimination, survival, development, protection, and participation, with overall consideration given to the best interests of the child.5

Protection and participation are the two key principles for implementation of the Convention with respect to street children.

Protection is the main reason for intervening in the lives of street children. It includes immediate protection from danger, abuse, and exploitation, but also covers more long-term, proactive approaches designed to promote

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development of children’s skills and knowledge, build support structures for children, and lessen their vulnerability.

Participation is a human right with particular significance for street children, who care for themselves, alone or more usually in groups, and are thus the key source of information on their situations and needs. They are most knowledgeable about the factors that send children to the street as well as about the difficulties of and strategies for survival on the street. This makes it essential to listen to children and encourage their participation during intervention design, implementation, and evaluation. When considering how to include their needs in ADB projects and programs it is important to be aware of the challenges presented by the diverse backgrounds and circumstances of individual children.

Once on their own, street children engage in a variety of work to meet their basic needs. Much of the work is dangerous and leaves children open to exploitation by adults. Among the work street children depend on for survival are collecting rubbish for recycling; running errands; shining shoes; washing cars; selling flowers, newspapers or magazines; prostitution; petty theft; and begging. Many children have several jobs to meet their needs.

Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is intended to protect children from economic exploitation, including the requirement for states to establish a minimum age for entry to employment. According to International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 138 (1973), this should be no lower than 15 years (in some developing countries the age limit is 14 years). This is one of the core labor standards of ILO, which combines with Convention 182 (1999) on the worst forms of child labor, to establish the “effective abolition” of child labor as one of the four fundamental principles and rights at work of the 1998 ILO Declaration. ADB is committed to upholding the core labor standards. With respect to street children, this indicates the importance of partnership with the ILO International
Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) as well as with United Nations International Children’s Fund (UNICEF), which has worked with street children for over 20 years.

Human development and service provision

Within this rights-based framework, there are two basic approaches to working with street children—human development and service provision. The human development approach takes a long-term perspective and concentrates on equipping street children with the skills and confidence required to reintegrate to society, fulfilling their human rights to self-realization and independence. Examples include nonformal education and vocational training projects; programs aimed at helping children return to their families if they wish; and efforts to build communities’ capacity to manage and maintain long-term projects aimed at improving the lives of children, thus preventing them from abandoning their families in favor of street life.

In many cases, long-term programs need to be combined with short-term service projects to fulfill the provision and protection rights of children living on the streets; meeting their immediate needs and protecting them from danger, abuse, and exploitation. This may include providing food, shelter, health services, and shorter-term training and counseling opportunities in drop-in centers. However, service provision should be regarded as a short-term response rather than a long-term solution. Provision of immediate needs through continuous charitable handouts simply makes street life more bearable, which creates dependency in the children and is essentially nonsustainable.
Striking a balance between human development activities and service provision is important when considering interventions for street children. In one sense, street children are in a permanent emergency situation. Children in danger, frightened, hungry, or ill cannot be ignored because development theory demands long-term solutions. They need immediate help, but this will be of greatest use if it is planned as part of a long-term development solution. Depending on the way interventions are implemented, both human development and service provision can be rights-based.

Mainstreaming street children into ADB operations

Projects or project components designed to help street children can fit with ADB grants and loans in a number of areas. The most obvious area may be urban development activities. But projects involving health, education, capacity building, and other areas also provide fertile ground for including street children components; rural development can stem the flow of potential street children as migrants to urban areas; and early childhood development programs can be an important preventive strategy.

Street children and the human development approach

Children who are visibly living or working on urban streets are the tip of an iceberg of unknown proportions. Poor children are vulnerable to family, social, and economic crises that may propel them into street life. Protection against these shocks is a vital prevention strategy, especially through strengthening family and community resources to

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meet such shocks, but also through crisis preparedness that is sensitive to the special rights and needs of children.

**Economic support**
Rather than focusing on rescuing children from the street, it may be important to acknowledge their need for income and to respect their economic independence.
- Program responses for street children include formal and nonformal education, life skills, and vocational training.
- Microfinance and other support to parents can prevent children from leaving home.

**Need for trained professionals**
Goodwill is not enough to ensure a positive, long-term impact on children.
- Successful programs include continuous training for and supervision of volunteers and staff.
- Experience in working with street children has developed professional skills in this area, which can be shared through training, capacity building, and study visits.

**Focus on reintegration**
Street children are on the street as a result of the vulnerability of their social environment in families, schools, the labor market, and their communities.
- In principle, reuniting a child with his or her family is the most desirable outcome of a program, assuming the child wishes to return and the family is capable and willing to receive him or her (with or without program support).
- When a return to the natural family is inadvisable, alternatives such as foster home, adoption, or community home should be identified.
- Reintegration into formal education systems may not be immediately feasible and children may prefer nonformal education with a timetable and curriculum relevant to
their work and life experiences. In some cases, vocational training combined with literacy, numeracy, and life skills may be the best option.

- Community-level programs may focus on local governance, basic services, job creation, education, advocacy among relevant stakeholders, improving schools and other basic services, as well as strengthening social capital.
- Awareness raising in communities can help sensitize community members to the special requirements of vulnerable children and avoid stigmatizing former street children.

**Policy making and advocacy**
No matter how technically sound they may be, stand-alone programs provide only partial solutions. Opportunities for street children are directly affected by national laws and policies on education, social protection, health, child labor, juvenile crime, social work, adoption, and other factors. At local, national, regional, and international levels children are increasingly involved in decision making and policy formation, particularly in areas that have direct impact on their lives.7

- Advocacy and campaigning—based on the perceptions of children, their families, and communities—confront the root causes of problems experienced by street children.
- Strong NGO networks can raise public awareness of the need for change.
- Effective solutions require integrated policy making that cuts across sectoral boundaries.

**Networking and institutional cooperation**
NGOs have played a significant role in street children’s programs, in many cases providing services that local and national governments cannot afford. Yet NGO programs alone are not enough to reduce significantly the number of children in the street.

- Networking with local government, as well as with other civil society service providers at the local level, can help NGOs overcome their isolation, avoid duplication and competition, and increase their impact.

**Examples of developmental approaches**

- Protected work opportunities for street youth
- Strengthening communities
- Family reunification
- Children’s organizations in community governance and among street children

**Street children and the service provision approach**
Children who are already living or working on the street have immediate needs that cannot be ignored.

**Reaching children on the street**
Children cannot be forced to leave the street. Programs need to respect their right to stay there if they wish, although adults must recognize their own duty to provide for children’s rights and welfare.

- Street educators, or street-based social workers, have proved to be one of the best ways of making contact with street children and assessing their needs.
- Drop-in centers and temporary shelters can provide a first step to leaving the street, without compromising children’s independence.
Health care
Programs should pay special attention to physical and mental health, either through their own specialists or by referring children to community services.
- On first contact with a program, street children may require immediate health care, often for injuries from accidents or abuse, or to combat malnutrition, respiratory and intestinal infections, skin diseases, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, or substance abuse.
- Many street children require professional counseling and emotional support.
- Even while still living or working on the streets, children can be offered health education for improving hygiene and nutrition and for protection from accidents, illnesses, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, and substance abuse.

Children’s participation
To ensure positive and lasting outcomes, as well as fulfill their right to participation, children should participate in designing, implementing, and evaluating of projects aimed at helping them.
- Organizations of street and working children provide a strong and relevant means for children to express their problems and suggest solutions.
- Children can be involved in outreach activities, as well as be peer counselors, advocates, health educators, and facilitators.

Individualized attention
Every street child has his or her own needs, medical and family history, skills, and aspirations. Each child is in the street as a result of a complex and unique combination of factors; the situation he or she would face upon returning home is similarly unique.
- Street children should be offered flexible alternatives that combine their own perceptions with professional assessment of their needs.
- The aim should be to develop an integrated service package for each child.
- Flexible provision of a various services requires cooperation between stakeholder agencies—one solution does not fit all children, and no agency can provide all services.

Coordination and integration of services
Many successful programs for street children are multi-sectoral, because the health, education, survival, and emotional needs of street children are often impossible to address separately.
- Networking, capacity building, and joint funding between service providers need to be systematically promoted.

Involving family, community, and society
Street life may have given children a fresh sense of belonging and of emotional and material satisfaction, which their communities and families were unable to provide. Their street-based support networks can provide more satisfaction than shelters, foster homes, or their own families—which

Examples of service provision approaches
- Meals
- Washing and laundry facilities
- Health—first-aid services, developmental health care
- Health education, perhaps focusing on sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, or substance abuse
- Temporary shelters and drop-in centers offering counseling, shelter, formal and non-formal teaching, life skills training
- Vocational training
- Recreational and relaxation opportunities
means that many return to the streets after a short period of reintegration.

- Capacity-building efforts help families and communities, including schools, improve their ability to receive and care for returning children.

The costs of inaction

Street children often lack control over their situation and the power to change it. On the street they are vulnerable to considerable dangers and problems. They are more likely than other children to contract HIV/AIDS; may be more likely to engage in lifelong criminal behavior and substance abuse; more likely to be forced into child prostitution or be victimized by human traffickers; more likely to be without hope and therefore engage in self-destructive and desperate behavior. In addition, they are more likely to be engaged in hazardous work.

Although that list is harrowing, street children face an even graver, long-term threat to their rights and their future: the likelihood of never having the opportunity to fulfill their potential.

ADB is committed to helping improve the lives of the citizens of its developing member countries. ADB believes everyone should have access to basic education and primary health services, and that people over the age of 15 years have

Nobody, it seems, has greater motivation to help the poor than a poor child.
the right to work to support themselves and to receive fair reward for their labor. It also believes people have the right to a degree of protection from external shocks.⁸

For many street children, this access and these rights are too often distant dreams. In his foreword to If I Had the Chance..., a book highlighting the art and words of street children who participated in the second ADB-sponsored children’s art competition, ADB President Tadao Chino noted the children’s own desire to contribute to poverty reduction.

“One striking message, common to every country, was the children’s own commitment to helping the poor,” President Chino wrote. “Time and again, they told us that given the chance they would become teachers, doctors, nurses, or social workers. Nobody, it seems, has greater motivation to help the poor than a poor child... Their art also reminds us again just how many poor children there are in our region, and how important it is that their lives and their creative talents be nurtured—not wasted.”⁹

Asia is characterized by rapid transitions from command to liberalized economies, between peace and conflict, and into relative prosperity. Each kind of transition is associated with childhood vulnerabilities. Economic liberalization has seen the emergence of a street child problem in countries where it was unknown when social protection was universal. Armed conflict, like natural disasters, can displace entire populations, often separating children from their families. Increased economic and educational opportunities can disrupt traditional family values. These factors combine with rising labor migration within the region, and the demographic impacts of HIV/AIDS to produce new populations of street children in rapidly growing metropolitan areas throughout the region. Yet relatively little is known about vulnerable children, let alone the positive and negative impacts of policies and programs on their lives.

Time for action

ADB policies on poverty reduction, labor markets, health, education, and social protection all highlight the unique vulnerabilities faced by children, including street children, as well as the important role of young people in the future development of the Asia and Pacific region.

Similarly, by ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ADB’s developing member countries have recognized their responsibilities to respond to the needs and develop the potential of children.

A solid and experienced body of NGOs is working in many parts of Asia to help street children meet and overcome the challenges of life on the street.

ADB has worked with NGOs since the mid-1980s and recently adopted a framework for action on ADB-Government-NGO cooperation that details how these actors can pool expertise and resources to improve development efforts in ADB member countries.¹⁰ It is now time to bring these three actors together in a concerted effort to provide Asia’s street children with the education, health, safety, and opportunities they deserve. The following appendixes provide further technical advice and guidelines about how this vital task can be achieved.

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⁹ ADB. 2003. If I Had the Chance ... Artwork From the Streets of Asia and the Pacific. Manila.
The guiding principles of working with street children

**Prevention is better than cure**
Integration of the street children issue into ADB work should not concentrate on stand-alone projects to meet the immediate needs of children already on the street, but focus within communities on preventing children at risk from becoming street children.

**Working with street children is not confined to rescue and rehabilitation**
It is not possible to force children to leave the street—except as a temporary measure. The most successful approach is through phased-in transitional programs, which work first with children on the street, provide drop-in service centers and temporary shelters, and finally facilitate the decision to leave street life to take up an alternative package of positive opportunities.

**Children’s rights are adult duties**
Children’s involvement in decision making is a right that must be tempered by adult awareness of their duties, not only to listen to children but also to protect them and to provide for their needs.
The following appendixes are intended both as a “how to” guide for strategic planning and action, and as a resource for finding tools for both planning and implementation. Appendix 1 shows how children-focused, rights-based perspectives can be productively integrated into the ADB operational cycle, indicating potential entry points within existing activities. This is followed by a section outlining ways of cooperating with stakeholders at country level (Appendix 2). Appendix 3 provides lists of resources, most of which are easily obtained through the Internet, including organizational links and publications.
Mainstreaming street children: The ADB operational cycle

Street children are the most excluded sector of the 40% of the population in Asian countries that is under 18 years of age. Although each child follows a unique path to street life, impoverishment is an element in every story, relating this group directly to the overall ADB aim of poverty reduction. ADB has established five areas of intervention within social protection: labor market, social insurance, social assistance and welfare, micro- and area-based schemes to address vulnerability at the community level, and “child protection to ensure the healthy and productive development of the future Asian workforce”. As a social group that is only loosely related to the labor market, children are particularly vulnerable to development shocks and other crises, because they have no direct access to social protection. ADB’s social assistance aim is “to create comprehensive social assistance and welfare services for the most vulnerable groups with no other means of adequate support.”

Street children initiatives are specifically mentioned under child protection in the Social Protection Strategy. Indeed the presence of street children is the surest (and most visible) sign that social protection and child protection are not working.

There is considerable overlap between human development as a long-term response to street child prevention, and mainstreaming street children components in activities

A stand alone street children project in Indonesia

Because of concern about street children in the region, ADB funded street children activities in Indonesia as part of a loan. The Social Protection Sector Development Program focused on fact finding about street children and also evaluated existing street children programs. Later, under two technical assistance projects, twelve ‘open house’ drop in centers were assisted. Finally, the first JFFR grant of 1 million USD was approved to assist street children in the city of Yogyakarta, particularly focusing on girl street children.

This was a stand-alone activity, not linked to concurrent projects such as the Indonesia urban poverty reduction project (in other parts of Java) or a slum upgrading and shelter program for the urban poor. Mainstreaming through integrating the street children project might have maximized on opportunities for both child protection and service provision.

### Matrix of Street Children Interventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Intervention</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rescue: Institutional care</td>
<td>Human development: No</td>
<td>Appeals to donors and governments and keeps the streets “clean”; highly protective (especially for girls)</td>
<td>Not sustainable or cost-effective; children may escape or become “institutionalized”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street-based services: Health, Food, Advocacy</td>
<td>Service provision: Yes</td>
<td>Cost-effective; outreach to hard-to-reach children</td>
<td>Professional standards hard to maintain; may not protect the most vulnerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phased in: Drop-in center (with services)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gives children time to decide to leave street life; respect their rights; allow children to choose services</td>
<td>Difficult to manage; may not be successful with all children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonformal education</td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide second-chance education for drop-outs and those who have never attended school; easier to access, flexible, and relevant</td>
<td>Often rigid; may only provide minimal skills and not be connected to formal education system, so that children cannot progress back into formal schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational training</td>
<td></td>
<td>Provides livelihood skills and independence</td>
<td>Tends to offer a limited range of poor quality skills not linked to labor market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protected work</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fosters independence and livelihood skills</td>
<td>May violate core labor standards if children are less than 15 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family reintegration</td>
<td></td>
<td>The ideal solution if children and parents wish to be reunited, and parents can be located; may be linked with microfinance and other means of supporting parental income</td>
<td>Often limited to biological parents rather than extended family; can fail if parents are unable to support or care for the child, or are abusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-based prevention</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prevention-oriented option, linked to community services and (urban) upgrading</td>
<td>May not target the children most at risk of becoming street children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s organizations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Provides a platform for understanding, advocacies and program strategy, as well as child-to-child service provision</td>
<td>Children may be manipulated or exploited by adults; unrealistic expectations not fulfilled</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
under both grant and loan schemes. Meanwhile loans and grants for specific, “stand-alone” activities for street children correspond more or less to relatively short-term service provision.

Street children interventions vary widely. Traditionally they concentrated on rescue from the street and placement in orphanages or other institutions.

In the 1980s, realization that this solution was not cost-effective and tended to fail to develop children’s capacities, led to the development of street-based intervention methods, which aim to encourage children to leave street life in phases, focusing on drop-in centers, with the end result of reintegration with families, schools, and communities.

Street children service delivery programs are increasingly linked to prevention activities through development of children-focused programming in poor urban communities.

For over 20 years, NGO programs for street children have often been based on promoting and supporting organizations of street and working children, which promote their interests locally, nationally, and sometimes internationally, involving them in program planning, implementation, and evaluation.13

Many programs for street children integrate several of these options. Mith Samlanh, a Cambodian NGO, founded 1997, reaches 1,500 children each day with program elements such as vocational training, employment, education, and family reintegration, using 12 interlinked programs: outreach, transitional home, boarding house, training, education, family reintegration, youth reproductive health, HIV/AIDS awareness, substance abuse prevention and harm reduction, incarcerated children, child rights, and staff development.14

Pre-Country Strategy and Program Assessments

The poverty partnership agreements (PPAs) for individual countries are guided by the diagnostic tools of the country poverty analysis. The PPAs establish the mutually agreed goals of ADB assistance with a partner developing member country. The thematic and sector analyses for a national poverty analysis are a fact-finding exercise. Information about street children can be incorporated into the analyses in two main areas—labor market assessment and identification of risks and vulnerable groups.

The inclusion of street children in labor market analysis is necessary because ADB interventions must be designed in accordance with ILO Declaration (1998) on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (“core labor standards”),15 which include, among three other areas, the effective abolition of child labor.16

The two ILO conventions regarded as fundamental to the abolition of child labor are Convention 138 (1973) on the minimum age for admission to employment and 182 (1999) on the worst forms of child labor. National plans in Asian countries, such as Nepal, made with the ILO International Program for the Elimination of Child Labor (ILO-IPEC), often identify street children as one of the worst forms of child labor.17

14 West, A. 2003. At the Margins: Street Children in Asia and the Pacific. Manila. Box VII.7
15 All Asia and Pacific developing member countries, by virtue of being members of ILO, are held to respect and realize the Core Labor Standards, with the exception of countries that are not ILO members: Bhutan, Cook Islands, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.
16 The remaining core labor standards are freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, abolition of forced and compulsory labor, and elimination of discrimination with respect to employment and occupation.
The final stage of the pre-CSP assessment identifies risks and vulnerable groups and elaborates the requirements for social protection interventions for any of the social protection issues that have been identified as “significant,” meaning that the issue should be elaborated further during the project design stage.

To what extent are street children a “significant” social protection issue in Asia and the Pacific? Despite the uncertainty about the exact numbers of street children, some large figures are often cited as justification for setting up street children programs. This leads some to observe that the “street children problem” has hijacked the urban agenda by drawing attention (and funding) away from the larger numbers of impoverished children in slums and informal settlements. Yet the existence of visible street children is a proxy indicator of the hidden extent of child poverty and draws attention to the need to investigate this important issue.

The analysis of other forms of risk and vulnerability may also have implications for street children, or those in danger of becoming street children. Thus, any population of displaced people is likely to contain unaccompanied children who may be particularly likely to drift into street life, and whose needs should thus be considered through their participation in finalizing CSP concept papers like, for example, in projects such as the “New settlements basic infrastructure” development in Azerbaijan. Similarly a family protection project against gender-based violence in Pakistan could also include analysis of the extent to which this might prevent children leaving a violent family and making the street their home.

### Street children risk categories: Children and youth (aged 5–18 years)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of risk</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Still linked to families, school, and society, but vulnerable to development shocks</td>
<td>Preventive (human development)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Weaker social ties, especially vulnerable families, exposed to specific risks such as school dropout, child labor, domestic violence</td>
<td>Preventive, but focusing on a vulnerable target group (targeted human development with support services)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>Seriously weakened or severed social ties, spending the majority of their time on the streets</td>
<td>Rescue and rehabilitation (service based, but with attention to human development of individuals)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


How to include street children in vulnerable groups assessment

UNICEF situation analyses and ILO-IPEC reports on child labor are good points of departure for investigating child poverty, as well as to the extent to which this is manifested in the existence of large numbers of street children. Nevertheless, in household and other surveys, children may be subsumed as members of vulnerable families—those with an unemployed household head, female-headed, and grandparent headed. Children tend to be discriminated against in the statistical record because the unit of observation tends to be adult-focused (such as households) or service-focused (such as clinics and schools). Yet children-centered statistics can usually be easily calculated and are more useful for targeting programs at child protection and child poverty alleviation.21

Similarly, “street children” is a group that, like orphans, tends not to appear in census and household data, which explains their lack of protection in national policies. Children in general may be discriminated against in statistics, but street children are excluded.

Two additional approaches focusing specifically on childhood poverty are increasingly being used as policy analysis tools. Children focused budgets began as a way of linking macroeconomic development and children’s rights. They analyze the impact of government spending (central and local) on the realization of children’s rights and become an aspect of both policy and budget frameworks. In addition to information about children in general, such analyses can show the extent to which budget provision targets, or fails to target, specific groups such as street children or children at the risk of ending up on streets.22

22 The original children’s budget analysis was Robinson, S., and L. Biersteker, (eds.) 1997, First Call: The South African Children’s Budget, Cape Town, IDASA.
Projects with potential to contribute directly or indirectly to addressing the problem of street children

- Urban infrastructure including secondary towns, especially components providing temporary shelters
- Rural infrastructure
- Early childhood development
- Education—especially teacher training, nonformal education and vocational training
- Social protection for vulnerable groups
- Governance, especially municipal
- Partnerships with NGOs
- Social mobilization—especially for children

Child impact assessments are linked to this approach, but should be made with respect to any program planning, particularly those that do not target children. An assessment of how programs and projects might negatively, or positively, impact the rights of children, particularly vulnerable groups, should be part of any programming strategy.23

Community-level studies are usually the most effective way to put street children onto the statistical record and policy-making map. These include household surveys carried out by communities at local level, setting up schools as sentinel sites for identifying children at risk in areas known to be the place of origin for street children, and establishing “childwatch” committees within communities to keep an eye out for danger signals.

Project preparation

The predesign stage of the ADB program cycle explores the problems identified during the country poverty analysis and CSP, starting with a brief project concept paper and concluding with either a technical assistance paper or a project preparatory note. This sets the stage for subsequent detailed project design. Issues of concern for street children, or those at risk of becoming street children, can be incorporated into many different plans and projects for poverty reduction. Principal areas where synergies should be sought are urban poverty, rural poverty, early childhood development (ECD), education, governance and partnerships.

Urban poverty and services

The streets associated with street children are principally those of metropolitan city centers. Strictly speaking, they may not be streets at all. Street children gather in public spaces such as malls, railway and bus stations, tourist areas, markets, parks and squares—places where unaccompanied working children are visibly “out of place.” Children playing on slum or suburban streets are not publicly “visible” in this way. In secondary cities street children may not be visible in such large numbers because income-generating opportunities for children are reduced, compared with those available in a metropolis. In contrast, children in rural settlements whose family ties are stretched to breaking point are not visible at all, except to their neighbors.

Urban infrastructure and services projects are clearly important for street children, not only for prevention but also for reintegration. In the Philippines, development of poor urban communities, with the provision of low-cost shelter as a means of poverty reduction, is central to the Government’s development agenda, which includes decentralized planning and decision making.24 This implies that local shelter strategies could include some temporary provision for street children, and also include children in the planning process. Likewise a basic urban services project in Pakistan

23 A child impact assessment is similar to a gender impact assessment: see www.unicef.org/crc/bg027.htm
addresses “the basic urban infrastructure deficiencies within selected katchi abadis (informal settlements) … to develop a city-level, sustainable, and participatory approach to responding to the problems faced by the urban poor communities.” 25 A policy analysis of key issues of urbanization and urban poverty in secondary towns of Bangladesh, could almost certainly include street children as a key issue within child poverty analysis.26

The same considerations apply to plans for secondary towns improvement in Azerbaijan and Bangladesh, including training and capacity building at municipal level for better governance and human development.27 Although Vietnamese plans for central region urban development28 to “enhance human capital in some of the poorest provinces of the country” leading to increased productivity and reduced migration to larger urban areas focus to a large extent on water and sanitation, this too has potential for child budget and impact analysis and possible subsequent project components.

A concept worth bearing in mind is the Child-Friendly Cities Initiative, active since Habitat II (1996) including India and the Philippines, which advocates the adoption of locally designed urban management approaches that aim to ensure the fulfillment of children’s rights through new programs for children, increased social sector investment, children-focused management and children-centered


Destination “street”

Although photographs usually show street children stationary on urban pavements, asleep, or begging, in fact they tend to be very mobile, both within and between urban areas. In the People’s Republic of China and Viet Nam, they are often referred to as “vagrant” or “wandering” children and associated with both rural and urban areas. In South Asia, they journey widely, using trains both for transport and as opportunities for income generation through vending and begging. In Indonesia, street children travel from city to city, island to island, using goods trains and boats, to avoid “street cleaning” operations and other dangers, as well to seek seasonal earning opportunities.

A group of “traveling children” is now observable in the Kyrgytz Republic, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, providing sexual and other services (for example as lookouts, guards, or porters) for male traders and travelers on trains. The children cross borders, becoming street children at their destination until they find another customer to take them on another journey.

Thailand is now a magnet for migrant workers because it is wealthy compared with surrounding countries, thus street children in Thai cities are more often than not from Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar, and Viet Nam.

municipal plans. The objective is to improve the quality of life for children, and the initiative is also linked to many experiences of involving children in environmental planning.29

The road to the city—more than a trafficking issue
Not all street children are city-born. The route by which children come to live and work on the streets often begins in the countryside and follows the sequence of disrupted rural home to rural vagrancy to secondary city to metropolis.

When the Indian NGO The Concerned for Working Children (CWC) began to work with child rag pickers in Bangalore, staff quickly discovered that many were migrants fleeing rural poverty. Instead of being content with providing services for street children in the city, CWC began poverty assessments with children in their home villages, to better understand the roots of village-level impoverishment, meet the challenges, and make it worthwhile for children to remain at home. Solutions have included developing markets for declining rural industries, promoting children’s inclusion in local governance, and expanding rural school provision.30

There is a link between improved rural roads and the street children phenomenon, similar that noted for trafficking.31 Roads and rural development to go hand in hand; roads bring services in but, if economic development does not follow fast enough, they also take people out in search of new and better opportunities. Children are not just lured to towns by “bright city lights” but also seek schools and jobs that are not available in rural areas. No matter how unpleasant and dangerous life may be on the streets, it may still offer greater opportunities than subsistence in a rural hamlet with no amenities. Comparative research in Nepal and elsewhere has shown greater levels of stunting and other evidence of malnutrition among village children than street children.32

Child impact assessment included in road improvement schemes might help stem the flow of children into towns by discovering what related project components might be added to encourage them to remain in rural areas. For example, a socioeconomic assessment of a transport project in the People’s Republic of China aims to produce better understanding of its contribution to poverty reduction, and “how to identify and design such projects with a greater poverty


30 The Concerned for Working Children web site is http://www.workingchild.org


focus.” 33 An additional objective might be to examine the effects on child migration patterns in order to understand why so many Chinese children take up a vagrant way of life and are drawn towards urban streets.34

**Improved rural infrastructure and livelihood**

Although it may not be the most obvious option for preventing children from living on urban streets, rural development can effectively address some of the root causes. Typical packages of rural development, for example in the Philippines and the Kyrgyz Republic, encompass roads, electrification and other infrastructure as well as livelihood opportunities and microfinance.35 In such cases, microfinance for parents could be tied to school enrolment and attendance, as in successful child labor prevention schemes in South America and Sub-Saharan Africa.36

In a rural income generation program in Kazakhstan “integrated assistance to develop rural finance institutions and improve the access of the farms, rural enterprises, and the rural poor to financial services” includes addressing social issues by targeting assistance to the poor and allocating rural financial services to women. This program also includes “establishing a participatory mechanism for project design, implementation, and monitoring.” 37 There is thus considerable potential for targeting assistance to households where there is a specific risk of children leaving to seek a better life in the towns, such as the increasing number of grandparent-headed and children-headed households that are the result of parental deaths from HIV/AIDS. If children participate alongside adults in the program cycle, it is more likely that their needs will be identified and solutions found to their problems.

**Early childhood development**

Early prevention of all forms of child labor is possible through early childhood development programs, as acknowledged by the selection criteria for districts involved in programs. In Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyz Republic, for

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33 ADB. 2002. *Technical Assistance to the PRC on Socioeconomic Assessment of Road Projects (TA 3900).* Manila.


36 One of the most popular current interventions for preventing child labor is financial support to children tied with school attendance. This can take the form of bursaries, micro-credit/finance, help with purchasing children’s school supplies or with school registration. One of the best-known of these schemes is the Bolsa Escola (School Grants) system in Brazil, which provides a small stipend to families (§ 5 a month) for each child up to a total of three in a family. The grant is linked to monitored school attendance by school-aged children (6–15 years) targeted at low-income families. This is now state policy and is the basis of the WB/UNDP/ILO initiative in low-income countries in Africa.

example, criteria include declining attendance in schools, one of the objectives being to reverse this trend by convincing parents of the importance of enrolling in and attending primary school.38 Although early childhood development programs are usually limited to health, and cognitive and basic psychosocial skills, an additional component aimed at preventing children from leaving home would be parenting skills in nonviolent means of conflict resolution. Domestic violence is often the trigger for adolescents to leave home.

**Education programs**

Education is relevant to street children programming with respect to both prevention and reintegration. Prevention refers to access to and retention in schools, while reintegration strategies provide a second chance to children who have dropped out or never been to school at all. Education programs, in Indonesia and Kazakhstan for example, tend to focus on improving formal education systems, thus preventing children from dropping out of school and onto the streets.39 Within formal education, particularly through teacher training, additional elements could be added to sensitize teachers in identifying pupils “at risk” of becoming street children. Prevention is also implied in curriculum developments targeted specifically at meeting the needs of “the poorest” sections of society, “making education more relevant to the needs of labor markets” and including “beneficiary participation”—presumably including


children—the objective of the Kyrgyz Republic Third Education Development Project.\textsuperscript{40}

Giving street children a second chance at education requires greater integration between nonformal and formal systems, if children are not to be trapped in nonformal provision with low achievements and expectations. Children may require a prior spell in nonformal education, perhaps with an accelerated curriculum as in Nepal and other countries in the region, to bring them up to the standard normal for their age, so that they can reenter schooling with their peers instead of being humiliated (and bored) by being placed with younger children. Children who have spent several years on the street may also need to remain in nonformal education until they have acquired the habits of learning and school discipline.

**Local governance**

Despite the high numbers sometimes quoted for national street children problems, it is at the local level that they are a visible problem—often causing fear and irritation to residents, shoppers, and tourists. Because of this, and because of the unique dynamics of each street child’s problems, solutions are best provided by local government, with small-scale, but integrated components—several appropriately located drop-in centers, rather than one large central facility, for example. Strengthening local governance, as well as improving collaboration between local government and NGOs can thus be important contributions to the success of street children programming.

A case in point is the People’s Republic of China, where the Ministry of Civil Affairs began to create street children protection centers in response to the reappearance of street children as a result of economic reform. Operated by municipal-level (and sometimes provincial) authorities to gather up street children, assess them, and return them to their families, the number of children passing through these centers increased. In contrast, community-level activities—sponsored through collaboration between government, mass organizations, and NGOs to raise awareness about the difficulties of urban life, parenting, and children’s rights, have reduced the number of street children traveling out of the provinces where it has been carried out.\textsuperscript{41}

Where street children have been identified as a significant problem by the national poverty analysis, specific capacity for carrying out street children projects can be built into projects that aim to build local government capacity, or poverty reduction programming in general. In Kazakhstan the local government capacity building program will

1. help selected local (provincial and subdistrict) governments develop and implement poverty reduction strategies and time-bound action plans;
2. help selected local governments develop institutional mechanisms for antipoverty planning, budgeting, monitoring, and evaluation; and
3. train local government officials in managing poverty interventions.\textsuperscript{42}

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\textsuperscript{41} West, A. 2003. At the Margins: Street Children in Asia and the Pacific. Manila. para. 94 and Box VIII.5.

Each component could be amplified by specific street children objectives:

1. develop a time-bound program for addressing the problems of street children;
2. develop antipoverty and other mechanisms for preventing children from adopting the street as their homes, including monitoring and evaluation; and
3. train local government officials in planning and managing street children interventions with nongovernment partners.

Maximizing on opportunities

Opportunities can be identified for inserting street children components in various country programs and projects, with benefits not only for this vulnerable group but also for at-risk populations. For instance, interventions that target the socio-economic conditions of rural areas can indirectly benefit street children by improving their living conditions and reducing their motivation to become street dwellers. These might include projects aimed at developing smallholder farms, promoting rural finance, strengthening education management, and improving power sector development. By aligning these interventions with the needs of street children, the ADB can provide a holistic approach to addressing the issues faced by this population.
children in general, as well as for longer-term poverty reduction. Lao PDR, for example, provides openings within existing ADB planning, for preventing children from migrating to a life on the streets, both in urban Lao and Thailand.

With different country dynamics and conditions, one model or approach to street children programming will not fit all situations and mainstreaming street children issues into existing plans and approaches is likely to be the most profitable path to take. Although some service provision is always necessary for children in crisis, the main concern should be to shift thinking about street children programming from the service area to human development. One useful tool for this purpose would be to design and use a child impact analysis framework to match that used for gender.
Appendix 2

Stakeholder involvement

The main stakeholders in street children programming are either those directly affected—especially street children themselves—or indirectly affected, including NGOs, local businesses, respectable people, teachers and other child professionals, local and central government, the police, and some international organizations, principally ILO-IPEC and UNICEF.

There are both old and new partnerships for ADB to consider when seeking to strengthen its work for street children. In the first place existing partnerships with ILO-IPEC, UNICEF, and other international organizations could have greater focus. As noted during the 2002 roundtable and the 2003 framework for action for cooperation between ADB, Governments, and NGOs, the current “rare convergence” of factors that can maximize impact on street children problems includes a new level of collaboration with NGOs and other civil society organizations. Finally, collaborations with children’s organizations and community-based organizations offer fresh opportunities for incorporating participation into the planning process.

Nongovernment organizations

Civil society is not limited to the not-for-profit organizations concentrating on various welfare issues usually referred to as nongovernment organizations (NGOs), it also includes such varied nonstate agents as mass organizations, religious groups, commerce, media, interest groups, community organizations, and individuals. Yet the existence of NGOs is

sometimes taken as an indication of development of “civil society” as well as of democratic forms of governance.

In some countries, NGOs are numerous, may or may not be state licensed, and can be one of the main (if not the main) providers of welfare for the poor—a charitable orientation with an ingrained historical tradition in some societies. Few NGOs focus specifically on children. Even if they do, they may not have shifted their perspective from charitable handouts for beneficiaries to rights-based work with participants. Nevertheless, NGOs have a long track record of working with street children, particularly since the Inter-NGO Programme for Street Children and Street Youth was set up to investigate and ameliorate the street children problem shortly after the 1979 UN Year of the Child.44

As the majority of provision for street children is organized through NGOs, a key issue in the response to their problems and preventing their numbers from increasing is the relationship between NGOs and government organizations.

NGOs are still responsible not only for the bulk of work with street children but also for developing dominant policy perspectives, including the necessity for children’s participation. Yet a common problem is a lack of coordination and failure of either government or NGOs to set standards for provision, or regulations for supervision.

Local government, like NGOs, is close to communities and has a tangible responsibility for vulnerable groups. Municipal governments are directly answerable to citizens for children living and working on the street. Unlike NGOs, they have city-wide infrastructure for program delivery and regulation, yet they lack trained and experienced staff. All too often their regulatory role puts them in conflict with NGOs because of the need to police street behavior and activities.

The ideal solution is for a local government strategy on street children to be developed in collaboration with NGOs, who are the implementers, with the support of municipal infrastructure and regulatory mechanisms. This is the case with the Philippines Department of the Interior and Local Government Street and Urban Working Children Project, which is implemented nationwide by local NGOs.

In the context of the new collaboration between ADB, NGOs, and local government, ADB’s role is to provide training and technical assistance, assist in program evaluation processes, and disseminate information and research, especially on lessons learned in the region.

Existing partnerships show the potential for this kind of collaboration. In the People’s Republic of China, for example, capacity and procedures of local government will be strengthened in partnership with local NGOs to deliver poverty reduction activities “consistent with international

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NGO practices,” in collaboration with training of trainers in-country training by international NGOs.

**Community-based organizations and children**

Most children seen on the streets return to their families at night or have some other community linkages. Thus the participation and social mobilization of communities are vital components for planning, implementing, and evaluating street children programs. Not least in importance is awareness raising to sensitize communities to the existence and needs of vulnerable groups and fragile families. Developing ‘childwatch’ community mechanisms to identify and support vulnerable children is one step in building community social capital.

ADB is committed to community participation in the form of sharing information, consultation, and collaborative decision-making. Although participation takes time and effort, the benefits outweigh the costs.

The benefits are principally in the form of speedier project implementation and more effective use of resources or services provided through the project. There is also evidence that adopting participatory approaches also has costs. These costs include a lack of ownership and support, which can impede the use of project services, reduce the sustainability of intended benefits, and limit the recovery of project costs; indifference and dependency on the state by citizens who see that they have little or no say in development; and resentment and willful obstruction when policies and programs are imposed.

**Children’s participation**

In common with most other organizations, ADB is less familiar with children’s participation. Yet this is not only a right; like community participation, it also improves project planning, delivery, and evaluation.

Street children the world over have been known to manipulate their identities to obtain benefits from different projects, to shop around projects, and have even been known to refer to NGOs as their “clients.” Only participation will reach objectives.

Over the past two decades Asian NGOs have developed considerable experience in children’s participation. For example, the NGO Butterflies has been active in street children work in New Delhi since 1988. The program provides rights training for children on the street at 80 “contact points” spread throughout the metropolis. Each contact point sends a representative to meetings of Bal Sabha, the children’s council, which identifies needs to which Butterflies responds through program provision: non-formal education, life skills education, health, vocational training, counseling, savings schemes, identity cards, and recreation. Other special interest groups formed by children (for example street theatre) are embedded within the Bal Sabha structure.

Because such NGOs have the skills to facilitating children’s participation, ADB does not have to develop a children’s panel or board. But, just as programs have gender checklists and gender plans, so they should have childhood checklists and children plans.

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45 ADB. *Framework for Mainstreaming Participatory Development Processes into Bank Operations*, no date.


48 Members of Child Workers in Asia, for example; see also Driskill, D., 2002, *Creating better cities with children and youth*, UNESCO and Earthscan; Hart, R. 1997, *Children’s participation*, Earthscan and UNICEF.

Appendix 3

Resources

This resource list has been developed with the requirements of nonspecialists in mind and concentrates on easily accessed information, most of which can be downloaded directly from the Internet. The first part is a list of key organizations that provide information and other resources. This is followed by a list of documents and other published materials that cover the main areas discussed in this Guide, most of which contain considerable reference material for further reading and research.

Organizations

Global

- Children’s Rights Information Network (CRIN) has up-to-date news of child rights issues worldwide, with useful links to other organizations and web sites: www.crin.org
- Global March www.globalmarch.org (Global March Against Child labour 1998–1999 started in the Philippines and with headquarters in India; currently working on education; has always included street children)
Asia

- Childhope Asia Philippines, established in 1986, with a regional scope and tailor-made study tours: www.childhope.org.ph
- Child Workers in Asia (CWA) (was established in 1985 as a support group for child workers and the NGOs working with them. Wide membership and a web site: www.cwa.tnet.co.th Because of CWA's wide membership, the web page is one of the best sources of information about local NGOs working with street and working children in Asia—particularly useful for contacting NGOs that do not have their own web sites (such as Butterflies in India and Child Brigade in Bangladesh)
- The Concerned for Working Children (CWC), based in Bangalore, the support group for the child workers’ organization Bhima Sangha; children’s participation—including study tours and courses; web site: www.workingchild.org
- CWIN, Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre, established in 1987, with considerable knowledge of street children and a more-than-national scope; advocacy, research, training and publications: www.cwin-nepal.org
- Asian Development Bank has documents on its social protection web site: www.adb.org/socialprotection/child.asp
- ILO-IPEC offices in Asia can be accessed through links from the main ILO web site: www.ilo.org
- International Save the Children Alliance: Probably the best source of information and links about the publications and activities of Alliance members in this and other Asian regions, as well as worldwide, is the South-East Asia Pacific Regional web site: www.seapa.net
- UNICEF: For information it is most useful to contact country offices directly as regional offices in Asia do not have web sites, see www.unicef.org
Documents and publications

Human rights and labor standards
The following can all be downloaded from the UN Human Rights web site: www.unhchr.ch, street children are often mentioned in government reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child:

• UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, full text;
• Status of reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child for individual countries; and
• Government reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and Committee comments and recommendations.

The full texts of ILO Conventions 138 and 182, together with the current ratification position country by country, and the most recent report on child labor from the Director General (A Future Without Child Labor, 2002) can be downloaded from the ILO web site www.ilo.org


Street children worldwide
For unemotional overviews and references to the growing body of responsible research on street children, the following special issues of academic journals are both readable and useful:

• Special issue on “Children Out of Place” Childhood 3(2), 1996, Sage publications, general editor KarinEkberg@svt.ntnu.no
• Special focus: Street Children, Children, Youth, Environment, 13 (1) electronic journal, download from http://eye.colorado.edu

Street children in Asia
The most up-to-date review of current literature on street children in Asia, together with references to published materials on most countries in the region, is


Program planning

A particularly useful example of child poverty assessment

Strategy planning for advocacy about street and working children
Rights-based programming


Children’s participation (1): “How to”

- Save the Children Sweden Toolkit on Children’s Participation: www.rb.se

Children’s participation (2): Experiences