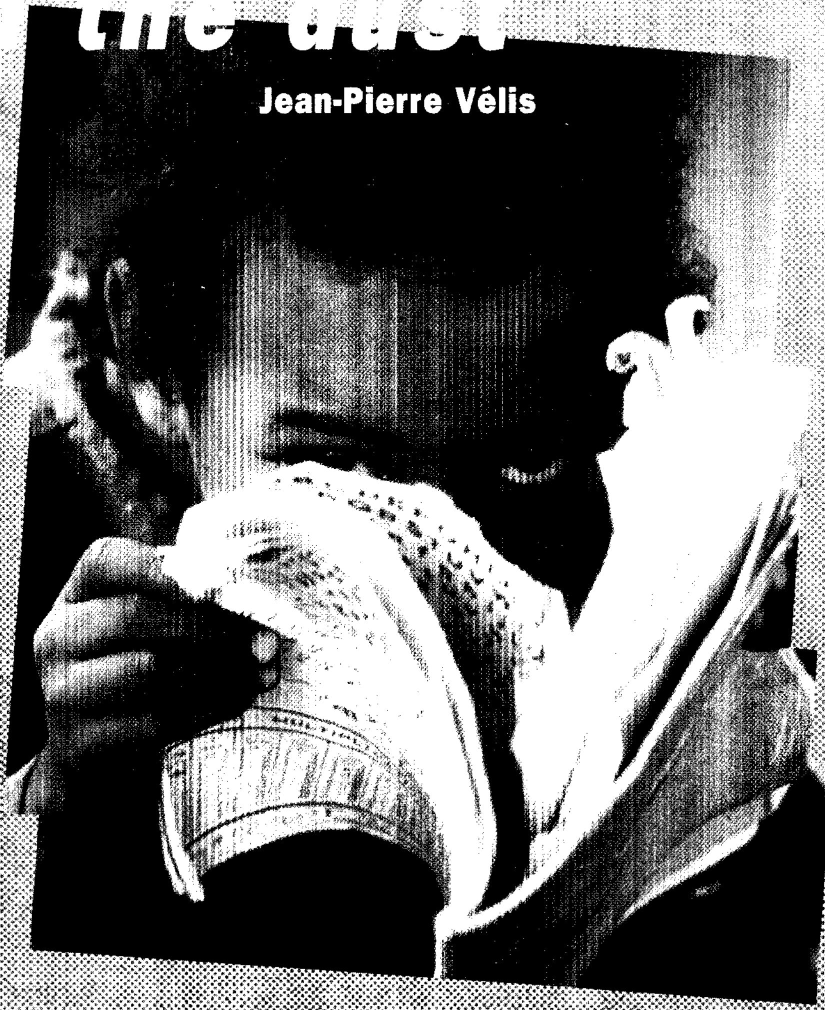
Blossoms in the dust

Street children in Africa

Jean-Pierre Vélis



YOUTH PLUS

UNESCO Publishing

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Blossoms in the Dust: Street Children in Africa

Preface

Today, as in the past, the existence of street children is something that cannot be tolerated or justified, in any part of the world or under any circumstances. The phenomenon has developed as a result of poverty and need, and as it has done so we have become accustomed to the suffering of these children without shelter, without family, without rights.

This is unacceptable.

It is estimated that there are more than 100 million street children worldwide, including some 5 million in Africa, where it had always been thought that the strength of tradition and family solidarity would prevent such a situation from ever coming about. This is a scandal from which no continent and no country is spared.

And yet the international community has considerable intellectual and material resources with which to cope with the problem, if only universal and sustained political determination could be mobilized to do so.

In co-operation with its Member States and with the specialized non-governmental organizations concerned, UNESCO has therefore launched a special programme on the education of street children and working children which takes as its starting-point the recommendations of the World Conference on Education for All, held at Jomtien (Thailand) in March 1990.

This book, which focuses particularly on African cities, has been written to increase public awareness of the activities of our special programme. I hope with all my heart that it will achieve its purpose and that together we shall be able to act to restore to these children the childhood which is their right.

FEDERICO MAYOR
Director-General of UNESCO

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the child . . .

should grow up . . .

in an atmosphere

of happiness,

love

and

understanding

(Extract from the Preamble of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 November 1989.)

Acknowledgements

UNESCO wishes to thank the UNICEF offices in Africa, the International Catholic Child Bureau (ICCB), the non-governmental organizations working with children in difficult circumstances and the UNESCO National Commissions which actively co-operated in collecting information essential for the preparation of this book. We are also grateful to the Governments of the Republic of Benin and the Republic of Kenya, which kindly hosted, in 1990, the international meetings that laid the foundations of UNESCO's special programme for the education of street and working children in Africa. Thanks, finally, to all those, near and far, who helped to make this book possible.

Introduction

As we approach the year 2000, our world – North and South, industrialized and developing countries alike – is experiencing great changes. In fact change is too mild a word to describe the upheavals that have taken place in the last few years, leaving us to face a future heavy with uncertainty.

In Africa, many countries achieved independence in the 1960s; in the 1990s the hour of democracy seems to have come. In some countries dictatorships have been forced into retreat and authoritarian regimes based on military force have been replaced by multiparty systems or other forms of more equitable representation; apartheid has tumbled from its pedestal. However, the final victory has not yet been won. Far from it.

Victory is impossible as long as other struggles still remain to be waged against problems that do not respect state boundaries. Only when these battles have been won will justice and respect for human rights prevail. In spite of great efforts, much of Africa is still staggering beneath the burden of poverty, malnutrition, endemic disease, high rates of infantile mortality, millions of children out of school and high rates of adult illiteracy. The backcloth to all these problems is explosive population growth.

How democratic is a country that allows a mass of needy people, including large numbers of children, to remain on the sidelines of

society? What future and what hopes of development can a country have if many of its young people are left to fend for themselves on the streets, a prey to poverty and exploitation?

The countries of Africa are young. In the year 2000 – tomorrow, in other words – more than half the population of many of them will be under 20. In some countries this is already the case. Millions of children and young people will be living – or rather, as is only too often the case today, struggling to survive – in an environment their elders never knew, in the sprawling, insalubrious slums of huge cities in the throes of tentacular growth.

Why must children bear the brunt of this situation which, we are told, is inevitable? Their schooling non-existent or virtually so, ill-trained or untrained to do a job, often without any support from their families, which are themselves disintegrating under the pressure of an urban environment for which nothing has prepared them, the children are thrown back on their own resources, suspended in a social and emotional vacuum, and plunged without any protection into the world of the streetwise. Odd jobs, various kinds of trafficking, begging, prostitution, drugs – these are some of the realities of everyday life for hundreds of thousands of African children. Not to mention hunger, low resistance to disease, the rags they wear and the lack of a roof to shelter them when they sleep.

It is clear that no miracle cure exists. It will be impossible to change this situation overnight. Nevertheless many private individuals and voluntary bodies, in most cases charitable non-governmental organizations, have taken action to help street children and this has borne fruit, albeit on a modest scale. Their tenacious, unsung efforts in the face of many difficulties deserve to be recognized and compared.

This was the purpose of two meetings jointly organized by UNESCO and UNICEF, one held in Cotonou (Benin) in November

1990, the other in Nairobi (Kenya) in December of the same year. A third meeting in October 1991 at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris provided men and women street educators, and officials of African non-governmental organizations, with an opportunity to meet some of those who are doing similar work in Latin America and Asia. This book owes much to these meetings and draws extensively on their proceedings.

This 'second-hand' documentary information has been supplemented by several field study trips. Street children are a worldwide phenomenon, and visits to Bombay, Madras and Bangalore (India) and Manila (Philippines) completed observations made in Bamako (Mali), Bujumbura (Burundi) and Nairobi.

In view of the relatively narrow experience on which it is based, this modest study clearly does not claim to be exhaustive nor to lay down the law on a problem whose geographical dimensions are so vast. It is merely an attempt to suggest some ideas and possible forms of action.

There is, as we have already remarked, no miracle cure. There are, however, a number of ongoing projects and programmes which are strongly committed to helping street children and the communities to which they belong. These efforts must be followed up and extended so as to benefit the largest possible number. We can learn from their experience, their trials and errors, their setbacks and achievements.

Street children, by definition, live in the streets. Where are these streets? Are there 'street children' in the villages? Perhaps the problem we should be looking at is that of the city, the outsize city.

'When I was born there was no one at home.

My father had left

two years before and my mother was playing cards

at the neighbour's.'

These remarks by a street child are quoted by Jacques Meunier in *Les gamins de Bogota* (A. M. Métaillé, Paris), 1989.

'What's wrong, kids?'

'We've got nowhere to sleep,' the eldest replied.

'So that's it?' said Gavroche. 'That's terrible.

And that's why you are crying?

You're real ninnies!'

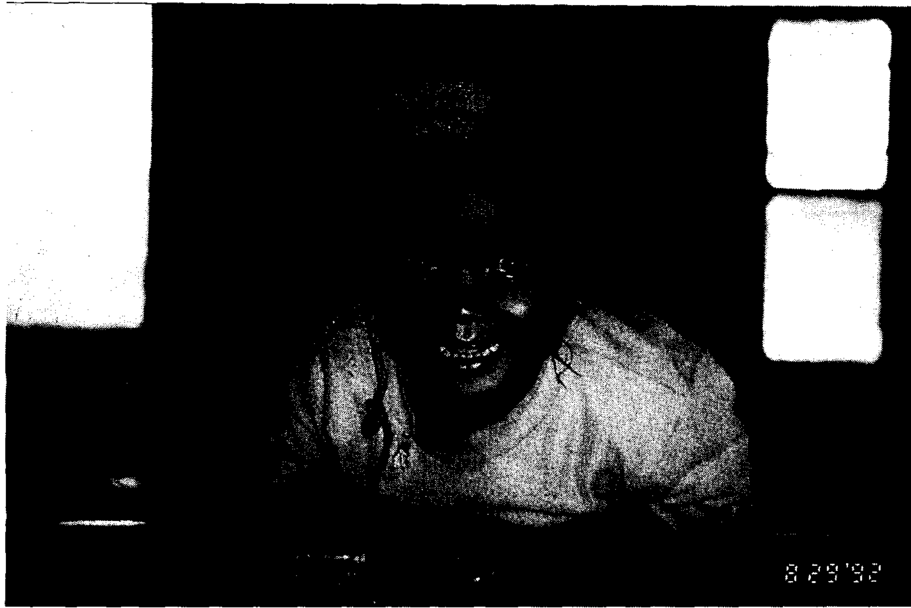
Through his somewhat mocking superiority

his voice took on a tone of tender authority and

gentle protectiveness.

'Come with me, kids.'

Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*.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Different continents, the same story

Bujumbura, April 1991

The window looks out over a street and the back garden of a hotel. Between the two is a brick wall about two metres high topped with broken bottles. At one end of it is a big wire-covered gate. Here the street forms a long straight corridor between the walls that protect from intruders and prying eyes the gardens, tennis courts and swimming pools of the two smartest hotels in the capital of Burundi.

This remote piece of garden, which is normally inaccessible from the street, is where the hotel's garbage is tipped. A container has been installed here, an enormous rusty metal bin standing in the middle of a neglected lawn strewn with all kinds of detritus. From time to time a kitchen porter or some other member of the hotel staff throws in the bin some refuse that has been judged unfit for consumption.

A gang of four or five children comes here every day. They take up their quarters on the pavement on the other side of the street and spend the day playing and talking. Why do they hang around so often in this grim-looking street? The answer is, of course, the garbage bin. That is the magnet that attracts them to this place.

All day long they keep a close eye on the comings and goings in the back garden where no hotel guest ever sets foot. They are biding

their time. When a hotel worker throws something into the container they pretend not to notice him, though their eyes carefully follow his every movement. But as soon as he leaves and is far enough away, they race across the street to the gate. They look around quickly and then one of them lifts the wire netting while another crawls underneath. Now comes the dangerous part. There are still a few yards of open ground to be crossed. Crouching down to avoid attracting attention, the child runs towards the container, pulls himself up and peers inside. Half of his body disappears into the bin as he leans down to grab something before racing off to rejoin his pals in the street, where he has all the time in the world to examine his ill-gotten gains. The fact that the children haunt the area day in, day out proves that the garbage bin must contain plenty of booty.

Today, like every other day, they are playing the same game. One of them is perched high up on the giant bin, picking his way through its contents, putting something aside, rejecting something else, rummaging through plastic bags, litter, fruit skins and vegetable peelings. Absorbed in his search, the child does not see a hotel worker running across the grass towards him. Bare-chested, dressed only in a pair of shorts, the man rushes towards the little thief who jumps down in the nick of time and bolts for it as fast as his legs can carry him. But not quite fast enough. Although his friends in the street lift up the wire and shout and wave at him to hurry, he is too slow to slip under the gate. He is trapped against the wall and the gate like a bird beating its wings against a window pane. The man easily catches up with him and grabs him. He drags the child towards the hotel, as if taking a criminal to the police station. Perhaps alerted by the noise, another hotel employee comes out. This man is wearing a suit and tie, and is probably higher in the hotel's hierarchy than the man in shorts. The child is handed over to him and the first man leaves. The second man pushes the child towards a corner of

the garden where some trees hide them from view. He gestures to the child to lie down on the ground and breaks a small branch from a nearby hedge. Returning to where the child is lying on the ground face down, he whips him with his switch. The blows rain down on his back and bare legs. Once, twice, several times. When it is over the child gets up. He is free again. Without saying a word he goes back to the gate and slips underneath. His friends welcome him back to the street.

Bujumbura, December 1992

The Planning Ministry is located in the centre of town. Around mid-morning several people emerge from the building and stand on the pavement outside talking about the meeting they have just attended. A cyclist arrives, a boy aged about 15. Everything about him is conspicuously smart. He is riding a magnificent black bicycle and is wearing a pair of bright red trousers and an immaculate white T-shirt. He cuts a fine figure. He rides past the little knot of people who stare at him in surprise. He stops in front of the ministry building, carefully props up his bike and enters the reception area. From a small bag he has been carrying on his back he takes out an envelope and gives it to the receptionist. Then he returns to his bike, still with the serious demeanour of someone who has done an important job. Now the front of his T-shirt is visible: the design printed on it shows a house and a straw hut enclosed in a green square. Above in yellow letters are the initials OPDE[1] and lower down in large red letters are the words *Facteur urbain* (city postman).

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1. Logo of l'Œuvre Humanitaire pour la Protection et le Développement de l'Enfant en Difficulté, a humanitarian organization.

Some eighteen months separate the two scenes described above. Both took place in the streets of an African capital and feature children and adolescents, all of whom – dustbin scavengers and city postman – have one thing in common: they are, or have been, what are widely known as street children. In the case of the postman, that life is in the past, but quite a recent past. What a difference there is between them! As far as their appearance, behaviour, activities and the opinion others have of them are concerned, they have nothing in common. Many things divide them. The street children are dirty and destitute. In order to survive they scavenge the refuse of a society that marginalizes and excludes them – and they are punished for doing so. The postman is clean, well-dressed and self-confident. In the eyes of society he is doing a useful job from which he earns a living and the evident approval of the people around him. Exposing themselves to all kinds of danger, the street children break into private property in order to pilfer . . . garbage. The postman walks boldly into a government building as part of his job. But only a short time before he too was a member of a similar gang to that which hangs around the hotel. The town is the same; only a few short months have gone by. What has happened?

Before answering this question, let us look further afield. Let us listen to a few more street children. Vijayakumar, for example, who lives in Madras (India):

' "My name is Vijayakumar," said the 16-year-old rag-picker. "I have never been to school," he sadly added. Vijayakumar has a brother and a sister but he does not know what they are doing now as it has been a very long time since he visited his family in Tondaiyarpet, Madras.

'His father deserted the family on the pavements and married another woman. The poor mother found it extremely difficult to feed her three children, so she chose another man as her life partner. Con-

ditions at home deteriorated still further. "We were compelled to work even on rainy days," said Vijayakumar bitterly. He was working in a small steel-plate-making unit at the time but as the family situation became intolerable he decided to quit and strike out on his own. He started an independent life as an unauthorized porter at Madras Central Station. But Vijayakumar had to face new problems there; the police often harassed him. He grimly recalls that he was arrested nine times and was remanded to Otteri Boys' Home for a month each time.

'Seeing his sorry plight, Vijayakumar's friends took him along to collect papers, plastics and rags to earn a living. [. . .] He earns 50 rupees[2] per day but has no savings as he spends lavishly. He is the master of his own destiny. He knows the art of tying flowers and making garlands and wistfully remarks that he would like to become a flower-seller. To the question "What do you say about today's society?" Vijayakumar emphatically replies: "Unless there is a revolution there is no future!" '[3]

'El Muñeco', an 11-year-old boy from Bogotá (Colombia), gave the following account of himself:

'In fact we went onto the street when my father left home. . . . As long as he was there he only allowed us to play on the doorstep or on the pavement opposite. No further than that. Of course, he beat us and we were afraid of him, but I think that if my father had stayed we would never have gone onto the streets. Never. [. . .] Look what happened to me. My brother Silvino had run away from home. . . . He went begging in the street as little Miguel had taught him to.

2. In 1990 the monthly per capita gross national product was 555 rupees.

3. Joe Arimpoor, *Street Children of Madras: A Situational Analysis*, Noida, Uttar Pradesh (India), National Labour Institute, 1992.

One day when I was going to school he came to me and said, "When you come out of school we'll go down into town and beg. Afterwards we'll go to the movies. . . . You'll see, kid, we'll have a great time!" I said to him, "All right, but have you got any money?" He said to me, "No I haven't, it's the owners of a bakery who give me money." I thought he must know them. . . . Then he said to me, "Go and ask that man over there. . . . I know him, he'll give you something." So I went and sometimes the man gave me something. Afterwards I went to the movies. . . .

'That's how I began and I liked the life. I used to go begging every day.

'You see how it is, it's your brother or a friend who persuades you to go. . . . Your friend invites you. . . . Off you go with him and that's that, you're finished. The kid's hooked, as we say. That is how Miguel took my brother along and Silvino took me. . . .

'I only stayed on the street for a year without going home. Life in the street is very hard, believe me. . . . Why do I say that? Because you have to go into restaurants to beg and if they don't give you anything you have to steal. At the beginning I was ashamed but not later on.

'I think kids run away from home because their father hits them and tells them off. With some of them it's because they have no money and nothing to wear.

'Among those who run away there are poor kids and rich kids. . . . The poorest ones have no clothes to wear. . . . Nobody helps them. . . . They live in the mud. . . . They get to the city and they see that it's all asphalted over. They see kids enjoying themselves and so they stay. They like the life. Another problem for the poor kids comes when their parents realize they are old enough to work. . . . Then they throw them out.

'Rich kids run away as well. Because one day they are given

everything they want and another day they get beaten. They can't stand it. As for me, believe me, I'd love someone to buy me a few clothes. . . . I wouldn't refuse. I wouldn't run away. But that sort of thing isn't likely to happen to me!'[4]

Now let us listen to 16-year-old Mohamed from Freetown (Sierra Leone):

'Well, the first day I ran away from home to go and live on the street was a Tuesday. At first I did not know how to hustle at the Government Wharf. I did not know how to do anything. I would just sit down at the Wharf. I was nearly always hungry. I really suffered from hunger. Then I became very thin. I was so thin that even a broomstick was fatter than I was. So one day I met a woman. I sat by her until she cooked some rice and gave me a share. I ate it and left.

'Then I joined the other boys at Government Wharf. We started hustling together. Whenever boats or canoes came with fish at the Wharf we would pinch some and jump into the water with the fish and go away. Whenever people brought fish to the Wharf that is what we used to do. Sometimes if there were a lot of fish we would steal them by the carton and jump into the sea with the carton and go with it. [. . .]

' "While you were on the street, did you sleep at one particular place or had you several places to sleep?"

'Well, I did not sleep at one place. At first when I ran away from home I used to sleep at Dove Cot on the market tables. When I left Dove Cot I moved down to Government Wharf and from there I went to sleep at other places, like on the market tables in town.

'There was a place at Government Wharf called "Rice Mill". It was a small place, but they have now converted it into a shop. This

4. Jacques Meunier, *Les gamins de Bogota*, Paris, A. M. Métailié, 1989.

"Rice Mill" place had a few watchmen who would allow us to sleep in there if we each gave them two or four leones. So we used to sleep there as well.

'Jim and some other boys used to sleep at a petrol filling station at Saint John. Early in the morning they would wake up and do odd jobs like car-washing before they would move out.

' "Were Jim and Abubakar your 'Bras'?"[5]

'Yes. Both of them were my Bras. Jim would not let anybody beat me. But Abubakar would often let me be beaten up. He seemed to like it. So really it was Jim who used to fight for me. [. . .]

' "Did you or did you not really enjoy your life while you were on the street?"

'I didn't really enjoy my life while I was on the street. I did not really enjoy it because I worked too hard on this fishing business. I would go out to sea in the evening; come back on shore the next morning then go out again that evening, and so on, and on. So I never really had much time to sit down and enjoy myself.'[6]

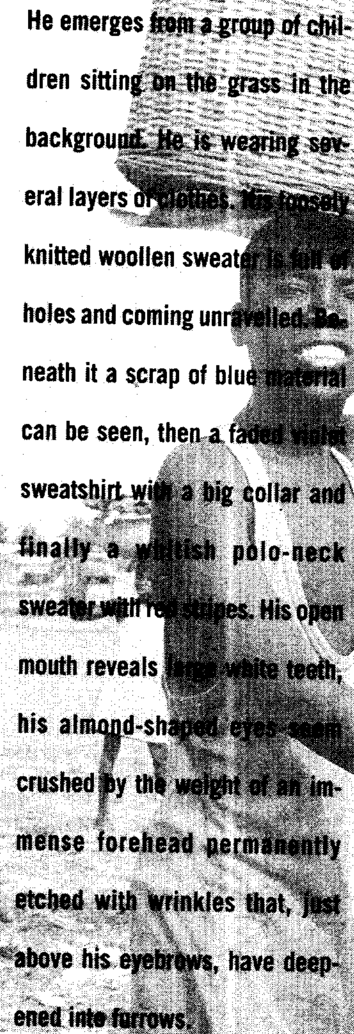
Three children in three different continents. Three children who live thousands of kilometres apart, who know nothing of each other's existence and yet have many things in common, probably

5. 'Bra' is one of the names the street children of Freetown like to call themselves. The 'Bra' is normally the strongest and oldest boy in a group. The town has no secrets for him. He knows ways and means of getting money, where to hide and sleep for the night. He protects the younger, inexperienced and newly arrived children called 'Greens' and 'Ballheads'. He fights for them and looks after them when they are ill. The younger boys are supposed to do as he tells them. In return he provides food, protection, drinks, tobacco and other essential items.

6. *Bras, Greens and Ballheads, Interviews with Freetown 'Street Boys'*, Freetown, People's Educational Association of Sierra Leone, 1989.

because, wherever they may be, they are all struggling to survive in similar conditions. Three children who have no idea that millions like them are living in the same way on city streets. '[. . .] children who have run away or been abandoned or orphaned. Most of those children are deprived of health care and education and almost all are faced with the difficult choice of either resisting or falling in with the violence, crime, prostitution and drug abuse which are facts of street life from Lima and Rio to Bombay, Lagos and New York.'[7]

7. *The State of the World's Children 1991*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press for UNICEF, 1991.



He emerges from a group of children sitting on the grass in the background. He is wearing several layers of clothes. His loosely knitted woollen sweater is full of holes and coming unravelled. Beneath it a scrap of blue material can be seen, then a faded violet sweatshirt with a big collar and finally a whitish polo-neck sweater with red stripes. His open mouth reveals large white teeth, his almond-shaped eyes seem crushed by the weight of an immense forehead permanently etched with wrinkles that, just above his eyebrows, have deepened into furrows.

Nairobi, September 1992.

Childhood in Africa, then and now

'It is estimated that almost 15 per cent of the world's children are living in particularly difficult circumstances. There are more than 100 million working children, 50 million street children, more than 100 million ill-treated or neglected children and more than 20 million refugee or displaced children, not to mention the children who have been physically or psychologically traumatized by conflict, and the victims of natural calamities. It is well known that there are street children in some Latin American countries, notably Brazil and Colombia, and child prostitution is an equally well-known phenomenon in some Asian countries, such as the Philippines and Thailand. It would be wrong to believe, however, that Africa has been spared.' These words were spoken in November 1990 by Stanislas S. Adotevi, UNICEF's Regional Director for West and Central Africa, at a workshop entitled 'Children in Difficult Situations'.[1]

He went on: 'In addition to the visible cases of children living in

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1. The workshop was organized jointly by UNICEF and UNESCO, and held in Cotonou (Benin) from 19 to 23 November 1990. It was attended by ninety participants from the following twenty African countries: Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Togo and Zaire.

countries embroiled in war, the phenomenon of street children, working children, children clustered around traffic lights, children who are ill-treated or even sold is becoming a problem we can no longer ignore. But in Africa we have to admit that our knowledge of the problem is limited.'

It is true that over the last few years the media have often alerted public opinion to the tragic plight of millions of children, although in some cases they have tended to highlight the sensational aspects of the problem. Television has brought the street children of Rio, the *gamins* of Bogotá, the child prostitutes of Manila and child victims of war and labour into many Western homes among the quiz programmes, advertising spots and American soap operas. But very few television documentaries or articles intended for the general public have specifically focused on African countries.

Does this mean that Africa is not affected? 'Rapid growth of cities that are turning into megacities surrounded by shantytowns, the amazing progress being made in communication technologies that know no frontiers, the intermingling of cultures and civilizations – these developments are turning the world upside down. Traditional structures are bursting apart and industrialization is encouraging ill-controlled urban growth and giving rise to phenomena such as working children and street children who, together with abandoned children, child victims of war and catastrophes and children in moral danger, constitute the category of "children in difficult circumstances". In Cotonou, the economic capital of Benin, and in a number of other administrative centres, the number of working children has gradually risen in the last thirty years or so. They are different from the children who in the past were placed with someone outside their families so that they could benefit from that person's knowledge, better living conditions and education. The continually growing numbers of street children and the tragic spectacle they

offer are a source of anxiety for ordinary people, who prefer to steer clear of them while surreptitiously tossing them a few coins. . . .'[2]

So Africa too contains its 'children in difficult circumstances' as they are euphemistically called. One of the major causes of the problem has been clearly identified by well-informed observers, notably Mary Racelis, UNICEF Regional Director. 'In many African countries, such as Zambia,' she has said, 'where the total population is over 50 per cent urbanized, poverty and overcrowding have resulted, creating a growing number of urban disadvantaged communities.

'The trends seen today in some African cities were evident many years ago, when people began to arrive from rural areas in search of a higher standard of living. People coming to the urban areas were not the most prosperous members of the society. They were generally the rural poor, displaced for many reasons, such as poverty or conflict in the rural areas where they were born. Generally, those migrating to the urban areas were comprised of two groups: single men and women, or family units.

'Many left in search of a better way of life, but instead found unemployment and greater poverty than they had left behind. They also faced a great degree of rejection and lack of support from other members of the urban society, the rich. While the rich are generally viewed as the backbone of any society, the poor have found themselves marginalized, viewed negatively, or even seen as criminals.

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2. 'Évaluation des besoins fondamentaux relatifs à l'éducation de base pour les projets consacrés aux enfants de la rue et aux enfants travailleurs', a contribution by Jean-Baptiste Babo of the archbishopric of Cotonou, at an international meeting on the evaluation of the educational needs of street children and working children held at UNESCO Headquarters from 30 September to 4 October 1991.

'The governments of countries where rapid migration of the poor to urban areas has been the pattern have also shown little interest in the poor, who they have categorized as illegal squatters in terms of housing and land arrangements.'[3]

The poor and their children, need we add?

It appears, and this is in no way surprising, that the conditions in which hundreds of thousands of children in the African countries are today living – or trying to survive – are directly linked to economic, political, demographic, social, cultural, educational and other changes in their countries. The word 'crisis' is today frequently used to describe this process. Yves Yehouessi, Benin's Minister of Justice and Legislation, has said: 'This phenomenon (street children and working children) is worrying because in Benin it is growing at the same speed as economic crisis and rampant population growth. As everyone knows, for almost a year our country has been searching for ways and means to escape from a serious economic crisis accompanied by a political crisis that has paralysed it for several months. Moreover our towns and villages have been transformed by the effects of rampant demographic growth and the move from the land. The villages are emptying whilst the cities are crammed with a strong, youthful labour force which is, alas, all too often jobless. The traditional system of solidarity that characterized our societies has broken down and for many children the family circle is the place where they imbibe only violence, injustice and hatred.'

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3. A contribution to a workshop entitled 'The Urban Child in Especially Difficult Circumstances' organized jointly by UNESCO and UNICEF, Nairobi, 3 to 8 December 1990. It was attended by seventy-seven participants from the following countries: Ethiopia, Gambia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The final report of the meeting was prepared by Kathleen Webb Ngwiri.

Stanislas S. Adotevi would certainly not disagree with this pessimistic analysis. He notes: 'Over the last few decades the terrible phenomenon of children in difficult circumstances has spread and seems to have taken root. This tragedy has many different causes: the break-up of our communities which in the past were so balanced and supportive, the abdication of responsibility by parents and the community, the widespread economic recession, constantly falling raw materials prices upon which the majority of our population depends, while at the same time there are steep rises in the price of the manufactured products which, at this stage of our development, we are obliged to import from the industrialized world. Not to mention high interest rates, the crushing foreign debt whose interest alone absorbs more than a third of our export revenues, the diminishing flow of foreign investment into our countries. [. . .] In other words, accelerated impoverishment, reduced income and means of livelihood – all reflecting an economy in total collapse. This is the place to echo what others have said before me, namely that if Third World children are in the street, it is partly due to the difficulties that both families and the state have in keeping them at home. [. . .] In any case, children are clearly the first to suffer from this crisis. Not only are they dying of diseases that can easily be treated, but they are also dying of malnutrition. And increasingly they find themselves in the street where they beg, survive by doing menial jobs, and live on their wits, becoming delinquents, children who are in the street. And then street children.'

'Family' is a word that crops up again and again. For some time people hoped and believed that Africa would be spared this problem, doubtless because they thought or wanted to believe that the African concept of the family – the extended family – would always provide a place of refuge for even the most destitute children, that some family member – however distantly related – would

always be there to provide a minimum of refuge and protection for each child.

For a child to be brought up away from its parents is not necessarily shocking in Africa. On the contrary, in some places and in some societies this practice forms part of the cultural tradition. This is the case, for example of 'entrusted' children among the Wolof of Senegal: 'Sometimes a child will not grow up in the house of its father and mother but, some time after weaning, will be "given" to a paternal or maternal relative. [N.B.: In the two villages studied the proportion of children "entrusted" was relatively small. Out of a total of 202 children aged from 2 to 5, fifteen – that is, 7.5 per cent – were "entrusted".] The child was entrusted to a childless woman or, as a way of showing honour or respect, to a usually older female relative considered the most suitable person to bring up the child because of her qualities, her social status or her wealth. Parents do not usually entrust the eldest child but one or several of the younger ones, a girl more often than a boy, since a girl will be able to work in her foster mother's house. [N.B.: A boy may be entrusted at around age 7 or 8 to a relative who will send him to school, sometimes a Koranic school, or into an apprenticeship.] Women with many living children will entrust several of them, because a large number of children should be "shared out" to avoid threats from the evil tongue and the evil eye that take them away. The child may be given to a female relative on the mother's side, the maternal grandmother, a sister classified as a "milk sister" or even to a maternal uncle. A woman with several children will give one of her daughters to her mother or to the woman who brought her up to "thank" her. A child entrusted to its father's family, and this is often the case of a boy child entrusted when he is weaned, will be given to one of his father's sisters or brothers. The sister or brother in question will make a good job of educating the boy "of their own blood" whereas the maternal uncle or grand-

mother would spoil him. The gift of a child may be decided by the father ("I catch God", *"Ma jàpp ci Yalla"*, the mother replies) on the advice of the grandmother or offered by the mother to her female relative. The saying that sets the seal on the gift is "all we claim from you are the bones". This indicates the sense of detachment required. Visiting an entrusted child too often would betray a lack of confidence in the relative looking after him or her. Nevertheless it is recognized that the separation may be painful for the child or the mother [N.B.: One mother said: "When my child was taken away he was as old as Mbaye (age 3) and I cried until I was exhausted." Speaking of a 4-year-old girl entrusted to her aunt and happily integrated into the family, she said: "Sometimes she cries to come home."] The child will only rarely be taken back unless a disagreement arises between the father and the relative to whom it has been entrusted.'[4] Nevertheless, it is clear that there is an enormous gulf between a child who is deliberately 'entrusted' to a third person and a child who is thrown onto the street, whatever the reason. A whole cultural tradition has disappeared into this gulf.

For the family has not been spared – far from it, since the 'crisis of the family' is cited as one of the major factors which explains the situation of thousands of children today. The Cotonou workshop report makes the following comments: 'Increasingly frequent family break-ups, growing numbers of divorces and single-parent families, the breakdown of family structures – these factors recur again and again in situation analyses and in field reports. Also mentioned are the increasing number of children being abandoned. The absence of relatives in the widest sense has led some observers to speak of

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4. Jacqueline Rabain, *L'enfant du lignage. Du sevrage à la classe d'âge chez les Wolof du Sénégal*, Paris, Payot, 1979.

"orphan children with living relatives", "children in distress" and "children with family and means" and to stress the lack of affection from which some of these children suffer. Others believe that "the family cannot help the child to adapt to a society into which it has not managed to integrate itself". In these conditions communication within the family is bound to be difficult. Some children and young people who are at odds with their family decide that it is preferable to run away and go into the streets where people live on their wits.'

Another writer describes how 'all accounts by street children and young people mention a conflict with their parents at the period when they ran away into the street, either that or their parents threw them out [. . .] all of them without exception. [. . .] Here we must make an important distinction between child prostitutes who are in the street to earn a bit of money for the family and street children. [. . .] At first sight one feels the same compassion for all these children as members of a single group, but in fact they do not belong to the same phenomenon, although there is some overlap. The prostitutes still feel they have a place in the family, however precarious it may be. The street children do not feel this, even though they may still have a bed beneath the roof of what they no longer feel is "home". In this way they lose their roots, their roots in humanity. Without this past they no longer have a future, no plans they can call their own. This is their tragedy. This is why they have become "nobodies".'[5]

Alphonse Tay, the specialist in charge of UNESCO's street children programme, believes that this approach is too simplistic and that the complexity of the problem calls for a more subtle analysis.

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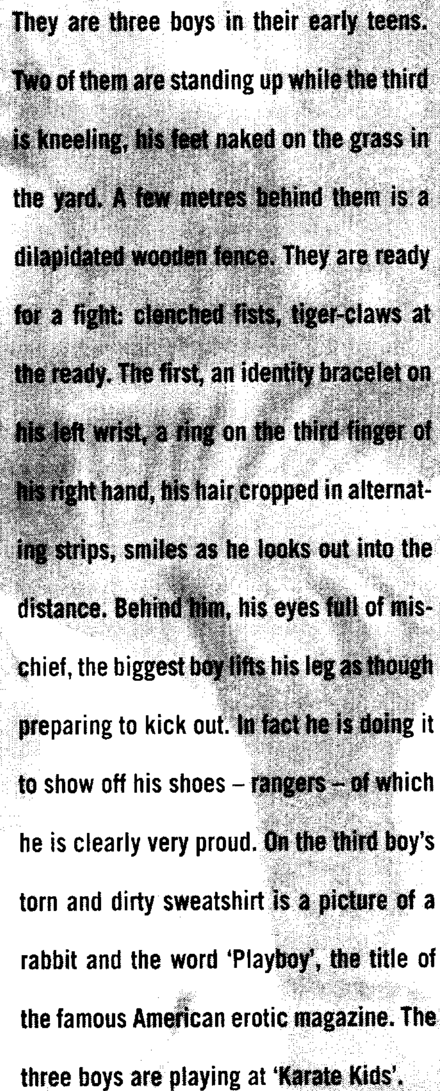
5. In *Sans toit, ni frontière. Les enfants de la rue*, report presented by Marie-Jeanne Coloni, Paris, Fayard/Bureau International Catholique de l'Enfance, 1987.



They are three boys in their early teens. Two of them are standing up while the third is kneeling, his feet naked on the grass in the yard. A few metres behind them is a dilapidated wooden fence. They are ready for a fight: clenched fists, tiger-claws at the ready. The first, an identity bracelet on his left wrist, a ring on the third finger of his right hand, his hair cropped in alternating strips, smiles as he looks out into the distance. Behind him, his eyes full of mischief, the biggest boy lifts his leg as though preparing to kick out. In fact he is doing it to show off his shoes – rangers – of which he is clearly very proud. On the third boy's torn and dirty sweatshirt is a picture of a rabbit and the word 'Playboy', the title of the famous American erotic magazine. The three boys are playing at 'Karate Kids'.

Nairobi, September 1992.

'To say that the African family of today has broken down, that it has gone to pieces is really going too far. A kind of diabolical mechanism is at work. It consists of many interdependent factors against which the family must struggle for survival. For example, in rural areas where most of the population lives there are many single-parent families or, to be more precise, families headed by women who are alone and responsible for their children. These are not necessarily families that are dislocated, still less have they broken up. The main objective of the absentee father, who works elsewhere, further and further away in another country, is to provide cohesion, stability and a living for his family. The mother is left alone at home and there is indeed a risk that she will lose control of the situation. The children may go astray. But so long as the father can return home periodically with money, his imaginary presence may compensate for his physical absence and give the mother the strength for her struggle and make the children obey her. An absentee father can sometimes, paradoxically, have a stronger influence than a father who is always there but who is weak. And the mother can use an absentee father as a threat, saying he will soon be back, in order to strengthen her own authority. Thus the actual basis of the family is not necessarily in question. On the contrary, it will dominate an apparently paradoxical situation. Let us not minimize the problems of the family in Africa. But it is not the end of the world either.'

This point of view – that the full complexity of the problem should be taken into account – is supported by the conclusions of a survey carried out in Namibia[6] which drew up a composite portrait

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6. *Survey on Street Children in Three Urban Centres of Namibia*, Windhoek, Republic of Namibia, Ministry of Local Government and Housing, 1991. (Text and recommendations by Peter Taçon. A study carried out with UNICEF support.)

of a typical Namibian street child. Though the difficulties should not be underestimated, the picture that emerges is nevertheless less tragic; there is still room for dignity, self-confidence and hope for the future. The Namibian street child would most likely:

- be male, black, poor and between 11 and 14 years of age;
- come from and have a family which is also poor and to which he goes home regularly, if not nightly;
- have a mother who heads his family and who is very possibly unemployed;
- have four to seven siblings making a total family group of six to nine members who live together with from four to six others in the same house (ten to fifteen people in all);
- work on the street to earn food and/or money to support his family;
- experience alcohol and/or substance abuse within the family and home, perhaps even affecting himself;
- attend school in or have dropped out of Standards 1 or 2;
- be physically and/or psychologically abused at home;
- still have self-esteem and the desire to be esteemed and respected by others; and
- be full of spirit, eager to learn and anxious to improve his lot in life.

Many other surveys have filled out and confirmed this general picture. For example, research carried out in 1990 in Côte d'Ivoire by the Institute of Ethno-sociology and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection with funding from UNICEF revealed that 'street children are mostly from large, poor families with a low level of education. Some 40 per cent of fathers and 71 per cent of mothers are illiterate, whatever their country, ethnic group and birthplace; 49 per cent were born in Abidjan, 16 per cent outside the country and 35 per cent elsewhere in the country; 33 per cent of children did not

benefit from the presence of both parents during their earliest years, 10 per cent were brought up by their mothers, 10 per cent by their fathers and 13 per cent by substitute parents. Most of them are not in school or did not go beyond the primary level; 21 per cent are illiterate. 14.2 per cent attended a Koranic school and 15.4 per cent a normal secondary school (third year); 17 per cent said they failed at school because they lacked support. Some 88 per cent are boys and 12 per cent girls; 62 per cent do a variety of menial jobs (shoe-shining, looking after cars, vending) and 19 per cent say they "get by". *It must be said that the weakening of family ties and the children's identity problems make it difficult for the extended family to take over* [my italics]. The conclusion is that these children are doing all they can to work in order to survive.'[7]

In Dakar a team from Environmental Development in the Third World (ENDA) Youth-Action is working with 204 girls and young women aged from 12 to 22 and 223 boys aged from 7 to 20. This group of young people has exactly the same characteristics as those described above. It is also worth noting that 68 of them are out-of-school children who have been 'thrown out' of the education system, most of them at elementary-class level and that 359 are completely illiterate.

In 1987 a small ENDA Third World team conducted a survey lasting several weeks among young people living in the streets of Bamako, the capital of Mali.[8] The members of the team subsequently

7. *Plan d'opération du programme enfants en circonstances exceptionnellement difficiles*, Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, UNICEF/Côte d'Ivoire Co-operation Programme, 1992–96.

8. See Moussa Abdoulaye Sissoko, *Enquête sur les jeunes et enfants de la rue dans le district de Bamako (Mali)*, Dakar, ENDA Third World, 1987.

identified the main reasons why the young people they interviewed had gone to live together in groups apparently without occupation (though they sometimes shine shoes, look after vehicles, beg or steal, their main activity seems to be table football) in the area around the station, the main market and the supermarkets, and in the slums.

Some of them had previously been held in the youth section of the central prison. Here too the most important reasons cited are the rural exodus and urbanization: 'The urbanization of Bamako [. . .] has resulted in styles of housing development which are rarely or never what our people want. This housing policy obliges the population to change its patterns of behaviour, whence the appearance of nuclear families or large families living in overcrowded conditions without any privacy. This goes against our customs and habits, in short against our specific identity. [. . .] Modern life creates new models of society involving new styles of behaviour which conflict with the sociocultural realities of our country. The children born out of this geophysical confusion seem to be in disarray. [. . .] In addition to the young country children who are flooding into Bamako, there are also city youths, most of whom have been thrown out of school and come from needy families. [. . .] Drought with its concomitant misfortunes has ruled out all opportunity for success in many villages. Elsewhere young people have been obliged to leave to earn a living when there is nothing to do in the village. Others want to go to the big city to sleep like the city-people they worked for in the village. Living with their parents they do not have the freedom to do what they want. They need to spread their wings and assert their personalities. And to do this they turn their eyes towards the city. So they go to the city where they swell the ranks of the unemployed. They live without jobs, in a state of idleness, the mother of all vices. We can readily imagine what will become of these young

people as they search for work, food and accommodation. It is in the street that they try to provide for these basic needs.' But problems connected with their families are also constantly referred to. 'Among the street children there are some whose parents have completely given up on their education. The child has been left to his own devices. He has been unable to resist the growing temptation of his environment, which is often an unhealthy one. He will go elsewhere to look for what his parents have not been able to provide, and hopes to find it in the street. The children we met often came from large families where education became a problem; their parents were often divorced and the child went backwards and forwards from father to mother, belonging nowhere, without father, without mother or without both.' After describing the situation, the researchers went on to analyse its consequences, particularly the emotional ones. 'Because the mother is absent from the child's world, a vacuum is created. He has no area in which to express his emotions and his virility. Something is missing in his personality. So he goes onto the street in order to fill his emotional vacuum and to restructure his personality. This new personality then becomes psychopathological because what he is looking for is not in the street. What can he do? In the child's eyes the father is the representative of the laws and standards of society. His absence results in anti-social behaviour. The child thinks he can do anything since his mother cocoons him. A child of this kind will also go onto the street to look for his father. . . . The father must provide an image with which his child can identify. An alcoholic father can never offer his children such an image. When the father is authoritarian and unpleasant with his wife and children, tension is created within the family which again pushes the child onto the street in search of a substitute parent. His meetings with a chosen group of young people will replace his family circle.'

At the Cotonou workshop, Stanislas S. Adotevi reported an 8-year-old child as saying: 'Last week I saw my father on his bike. I waved to him. He looked at me but he rode on.'

In view of the important role the family has always played in traditional African values, it is easy to see why observers so often use the word 'crisis' to describe what is happening. One participant at the Cotonou workshop even went so far as to say that 'the cultural war has been lost'. Moreover, the report on the meeting notes: 'The perception of the child has totally changed and so has his situation. He was the supreme value of traditional society. Now, for a large number of families, he has become a stepping-stone to survival. They send him out to work, they "place" him, they exploit him.' 'Once he was the "child-king", now he is the "child-servant",' says the document prepared for Cotonou by the Congo. During the meeting Charles Samake, UNICEF representative for Benin and Togo, drew attention to the case of maids and domestic servants, which sometimes constitutes an invisible form of slavery, as in the case of the child servants in Benin who are known as *vidomégons*. 'The children are placed so as to reduce family expenses or to pay off a debt. In some cases there is a kind of sale, usually of girls (30,000 to 200,000 CFA francs),[9] who represent a good bargain for women shopkeepers or for doing household work.'[10]

In fact there is nothing new about this type of arrangement in Africa. Children were sold in the past but only as a last resort because the family was hard-pressed and had some outside obligation to meet. Let us listen to Amadou Hampâté Bâ's eye-witness account of a phenomenon that appeared in Mali in the 1900s. 'Each year the provin-

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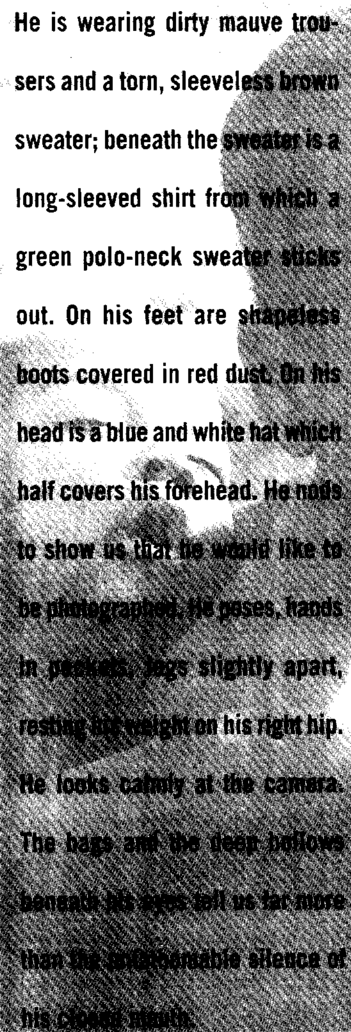
9. In 1990 the monthly per capita gross national product was 8,167 CFA francs.

10. 'Évaluation des besoins fondamentaux . . .', op. cit.



He is wearing dirty mauve trousers and a torn, sleeveless brown sweater; beneath the sweater is a long-sleeved shirt from which a green polo-neck sweater sticks out. On his feet are shapeless boots covered in red dust. On his head is a blue and white hat which half covers his forehead. He nods to show us that he would like to be photographed. He poses, hands in pockets, legs slightly apart, resting his weight on his right hip. He looks calmly at the camera. The bags and the deep hollows beneath his eyes tell us far more than the unfathomable silence of his closed mouth.

Nairobi, September 1992.

cial chiefs (who were called cantonal chiefs after the administrative reform and the deposition of the king) had to collect the tax levied on the population on behalf of the colonial administration. They were obliged to do this to keep their position. This "poll tax" was calculated on the basis of the number of "heads" in each family. It was very unfair; each family, rich or poor, was taxed solely according to the number of its members. The tax was sometimes called the "soul price". If you were unable to pay it you had no peace. Either you were sent to prison or you had to sell or pawn your belongings, if you had any. Failing that you sold your children, a custom which – alas – became widespread at that time.'[11] What African families had to do in the past in order to do what was required of them by the colonial administration, they are forced to do today because of dire poverty.

This practice shows how extreme pressure has perverted African traditions, or at least diverted them from their original objective, and finally called them into question. In Africa work is often a normal part of a child's education. The aim is not ruthlessly and shamelessly to exploit the children's capacity to provide services or their productive energy but to educate them in a pragmatic way by preparing them, within the limits of their capabilities, for social and working life. 'The child works as part of his initiation into life or his education, helping out with domestic chores or agro-pastoral activities alongside his parents or someone stricter (an instructor) or better off from whose knowledge or superior standard of living he can benefit. Or the child may work for his parents, taking part in productive activity and helping to improve output.'[12]

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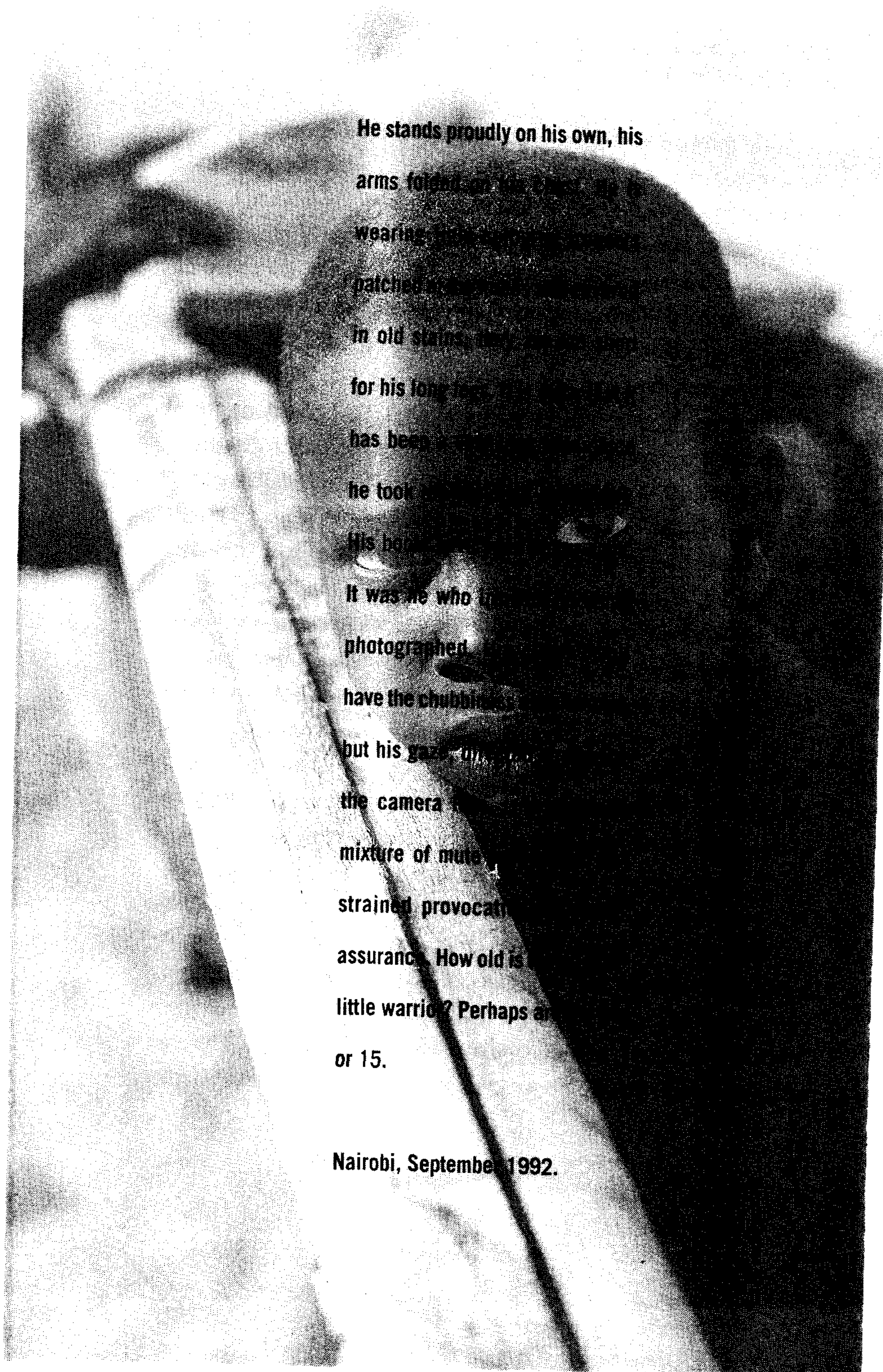
11. Amadou Hampâté Bâ, *Amkoullel, l'enfant peul*, Arles (France), Actes Sud, 1991.

12. 'Évaluation des besoins fondamentaux . . .', op. cit.

This raises a sensitive matter that should be approached with the greatest circumspection, neither regarded with starry eyes nor systematically dramatized. Amadou Hampâté Bâ's memoirs of his childhood contain a portrait of one of the author's playfellows, Bamoussa, the son of a village chief, who was a year older than the author. 'He went about quite naked except for a bag made from strips of cotton which he wore slung across his shoulder and in which he kept everything he came across: field mice he had caught in a trap, grasshoppers, lizards, wild fruit, and so on. [. . .] I found my friend Bamoussa's occupations extremely amusing but rather disgusting all the same. So I ate the fruit and left him his mice, lizards and grasshoppers. He grilled them over a fire made of twigs and straw that I helped him to collect. He possessed a tiny hoe which he used for digging, a small knife and a hatchet and, to light the fire, an African lighter consisting of two pieces, a small firestone and a striking iron. Using his stock of tinder (fluff from a kapok tree) he could light a fire whenever he wanted. The bush was his favourite restaurant; he often lunched there. Some people may be surprised that such a young child (he must have been around 6) knew how to do so many things. The reason is that African children were very precocious. Their games usually consisted of imitating the occupations of adults, whom they began to help in their work early on. Bamoussa was no exception.'[13] This was around the beginning of the century.

'The concept of a childhood whereby children should be exempt from work so that they can devote themselves exclusively to school and recreation reflects an essentially American or European attitude which has gradually appeared in this country. [. . .] The idea of a childhood separate from working life and adult responsibility is

13. Hampâté Bâ, op. cit.


He stands proudly on his own, his
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little warrior? Perhaps
or 15.
Nairobi, September 1992.

quite alien to Africa. On the contrary, the education systems that the African peoples have evolved regard productive work, apprenticeship and culture as indissociable. This can be seen at different stages of childhood and adolescence. The little boy with his miniature tools and the little girl with child-sized cooking utensils begin to work alongside their parents and other young people early on. As part of the same process the child learns about the history, moral code and religion of the group to which he or she belongs. This type of education eschews the separation of intellectual work (which some people think is the only work that children should be required to do) from working with tools, which is essential for the future development of Africa. In changing societies most of the jobs children are expected to do remain at their level, with two notable exceptions: first, certain semi-industrial concerns such as weaving workshops, and second, the condition of children placed with people who no longer have any family or clan links with the villages from which their servants or apprentices come.'[14]

It is hard to draw the line between education and exploitation, whatever the reasons may be for the latter. Let us not forget that 'poverty forces some parents to leave their child as security or in bondage or to hand over the child definitively in exchange for a sum of money, which is almost tantamount to child-selling'.[15]

For many children today the grim realities of everyday life are very far from perpetuating educational concepts based on the wisdom of tradition. 'Children work to earn their living, offering themselves as servants or maids-of-all-work, as itinerant or sedentary

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14. Text presented by the Executive Secretary of ENDA Third World to the meeting on the Human Rights Convention held in Dakar in December 1988.

15. 'Évaluation des besoins fondamentaux . . .', op. cit.

vendors, or by performing such menial jobs or services as shining shoes, washing cars or dragging trolleys. Sometimes they move on to illicit activities such as selling drugs or prostitution. They all work illegally because of the constraints of their social situation. They are physically and morally at risk and are exploited beyond their capacities. During this time they are deprived of education and training, far from their parents and without recreations. Some are in the street all the time and can be categorized as street children.'[16]

16. 'Évaluation des besoins fondamentaux . . .', op. cit.

The street child: a composite profile

'Deprived of education and training, far from their parents and without recreations' – how do these children spend their days? The conditions in which they live have been described at a number of meetings by those who are trying to help them. These descriptions are based on the observations of the field-workers in question and on what they have learned during interviews with many of the children. In Kinshasa (Zaire) for example, 'The children get up at daybreak. Around 6 a.m. they have breakfast if they have any money and then go to their workplace (the post office, the central market, the Memling Hotel, the main station or the ONATRA port). They stop work between midday and 2 p.m. and get together to play or rest on the pavement. Those who do washing up or work as porters or shoeshiners can hardly even take a midday break. When the shops and markets close the children go off to the Victoire roundabout or stay near the Zoo or go to a piece of ground to play. In the evening they hang around the cinemas. They wait until the cinemas, bars and clubs close and then go off in twos and threes to sleep in secluded places where they can keep out of the way of the police. Once a week they go to the Kalamu river to wash themselves and their clothes.' 'So long as we have nowhere to keep our things there's no point in buying smart clothes. They'll only disappear or be swiped by the gang leaders, the police or someone else.' The children earn between 20

and 500 zaires[1] a day depending on the kind of work they do. They are kept in hand by the older ones, to whom they hand over some of their earnings – or else risk a beating.[2]

Thousands of kilometres away in Bamako (Mali), survey workers noted that many children 'hang around the cinemas, especially the Rex, the Vox, the ABC and the Lux. They can always be seen in front of the railway station where some of them play table football while others tell their pals what they got up to the previous day. Their other haunts include the central market and the Danaya and Mali-Mag supermarkets, where they sell plastic bags, shine shoes and look after cars in exchange for a coin or two. They swarm around Bagadadji Square, a spacious area behind the National Assembly. Most of them work occasionally as apprentices, otherwise they shine shoes or just play table football. The slums close to the town centre – Banconi, "mafia"-plagued Sokoniko and Djikoroni – overflow with children of this type. There are fewer of them in working-class neighbourhoods such as Bamako-Coura, Medina-Coura, Bozola and Bagadadji. In these districts there are many out-of-school children left to their own devices. They come and go while their parents look on, unable to do anything for them. They have nothing to do and form gangs that haunt these working-class neighbourhoods.'[3]

In Kenya too, many street children live in gangs. 'Mwangi is a boy living in Ngomongo with his gang of five. They sleep together in a room of 3 by 2 metres. It is made of cardboard and covered with

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1. In 1990 the monthly per capita gross national product was 13,772 zaires.

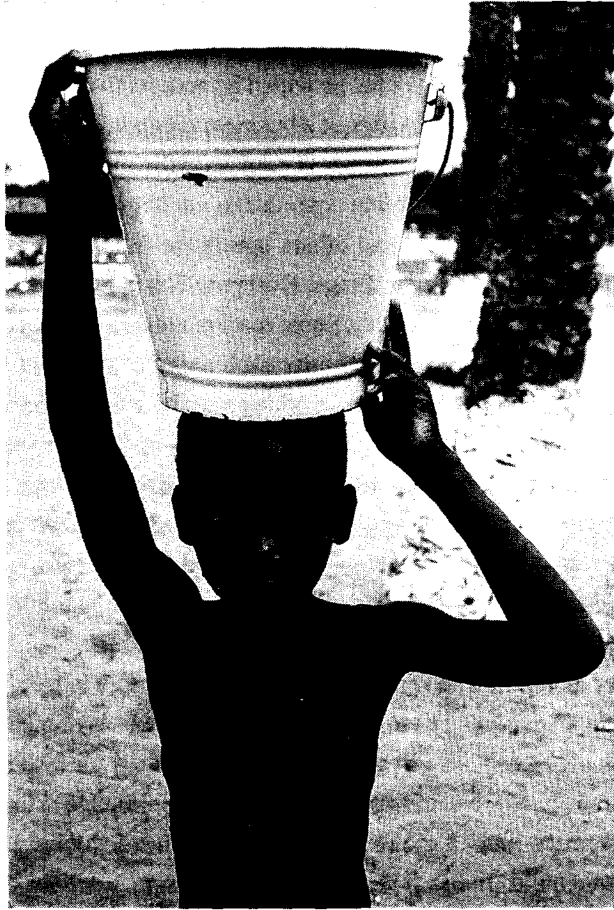
2. *Sans toit, ni frontière. Les enfants de la rue,* report presented by Marie-Jeanne Coloni, Paris, Fayard/Bureau International Catholique de l'Enfance, 1987.

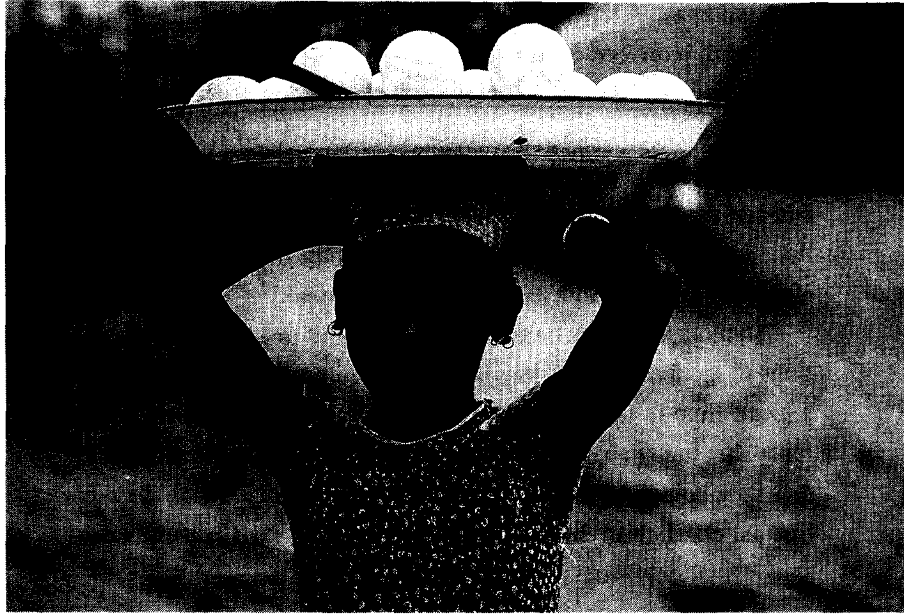
3. Moussa Abdoulaye Sissoko, *Enquête sur les jeunes et enfants de la rue dans le district de Bamako (Mali),* Dakar, ENDA Third World, 1987.

sheets of plastic; the walls are decorated with pictures cut from old calendars and magazines. They all work during the day. If one is sick, he will rest at home or be taken to the nearest dispensary. Mwangi's gang, as all other gangs, has the characteristics of a family: the members care for one another and are just to one another. The weaker one is protected by the stronger one, provided he accepts the authority. A gang also has the characteristics of a business company with its own rules and discipline. Each member is used according to his talents in order to make money; some specialize in begging, some in pickpocketing or stealing, and others specialize in guiding and/or helping people to carry their things. Everyone has to be productive, like a worker in a normal factory. Some receive more than others; this is accepted according to the authority each member is vested with. The gang members are capable of working very hard and under difficult circumstances. They are capable of enjoying themselves too after a good day. If the day was really good, they will share their earnings with friends, aged beggars and others of their society. Gangs might be related to an environment, like a slum in big cities, where the members may have their families and relatives. They might also be on their own, especially if they come from rural areas.'[4]

Other children, who are less conspicuous and more lonely, have to put up with everyday living conditions that are just as unpleasant. 'Judith is a 10-year-old girl working as a housemaid for a wealthy Kenyan family. She has to wake up at 6 a.m. to prepare breakfast for a family of four. After 8 she remains alone in the house looking after a 1-year-old child. Judith is responsible for cleaning, washing, feeding the baby and cooking for the family. She eats alone in the kitchen

4. Fabio Dallape, *An Experience with Street Children*, Nairobi, Undugu Society of Kenya, 1988.





after the family members finish their meals and the table in the dining-room has been cleaned. She then goes to sleep before 10 p.m. Her day off is Sunday from 10 a.m. till 6 p.m. She is allowed to visit her parents once a month for a weekend. She is paid 200 Kenyan shillings a month.[5] From the salary is deducted whatever she breaks during the month. Judith is one of the luckiest housemaids, since she is not beaten when she makes a mistake and is respected by the husband in the family.'[6]

Judith is indeed lucky. According to another source, 'whereas the children of the household have a bed in a separate bedroom, the children who have been placed have to make do with a mat which they unroll in the drawing-room. This means that they are the last to bed and the first up, and of course they have to wake up to open the door for members of the household returning home late. Girls are easy prey and are often assaulted or even raped.'[7]

To those who may be surprised to find lumped together descriptions of the living conditions of street children, children who spend a lot of time in the streets and children in employment, we would reply that today most people working with these children consider that they belong to a single all-embracing category which they define as 'children in difficult circumstances'. At the Cotonou work-

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5. In 1990, the monthly per capita gross national product was 700 Kenyan shillings.

6. Dallape, op. cit.

7. 'Évaluation des besoins fondamentaux relatifs à l'éducation de base pour les projets consacrés aux enfants de la rue et enfants travailleurs', a contribution by Jean-Baptiste Babo of the archbishopric of Cotonou, at an international meeting on the evaluation of the educational needs of street children and working children held at UNESCO Headquarters from 30 September to 4 Octobre 1991.

shop, as a preliminary to further in-depth studies, a number of subcategories were distinguished:

- Working children and youths, including those in the street environment, doing 'menial jobs' or working as small-scale vendors, children employed as domestic servants and children working in small businesses.
- Street children and youth who have partially or totally broken off relations with their families and who constitute 'the tip of the iceberg, the visible part of a more widespread and growing phenomenon'.
- Beggars (children and youths). *Talibés* (children in Koranic schools) constitute one of the largest subgroups in this category, which also includes handicapped children, children from needy families and children who guide the blind.
- Abandoned children, a phenomenon hitherto virtually unknown in Africa, but one which is rapidly growing in some countries; children who are displaced or refugees because of war (in Angola or Chad for example); orphaned children who have not been taken in by their extended family or a foster family and whose parents have died of AIDS. In the coming years more and more children will be orphaned by AIDS, particularly in the cities where around 20 to 30 per cent of the population are HIV positive.
- Children and youth without occupations in districts where economic and/or affective problems are widespread. A source of recruitment into other categories.

Whatever category these children belong to, they share many common features, notably where diet and health are concerned. They are malnourished and many of them have difficulty in getting their hands on one meal a day. The Cotonou workshop noted that in most countries there are children who live on scraps from restaurants, dustbins or garbage heaps. Some benefit from food distributed by

non-governmental organizations or charitable bodies or from other facilities such as food salvage depots or military camps.

Many children use drugs to stave off hunger. The Bamako situation analysis contained the following account: 'When we first visited the station we picked out a few faces. During this first observation period which lasted around thirty minutes, the children were passing round a piece of rag soaked in a cellulose dilution which they each inhaled in turn. These station youths indulge in a form of drug addiction which the Senegalese call "guinzomania" and which is extremely widespread in our African capitals.' On the basis of his long experience in Kenya, Fabio Dallape says: 'The most common forms of drug-addiction among street children are smoking marijuana, sniffing petrol, sniffing rubber solution and drinking locally made alcohol. Drugs affect their brain, weaken their willpower, reduce their resistance to sickness and make them vulnerable to common diseases like flu, malaria, etc.[8] While they are under the influence of drugs, they may be violent and can commit any sort of felony.' The Namibia survey mentioned above provides some detailed information about this. The children interviewed were first asked if their friends smoked, drank alcohol or used other drugs. Just over half of them said yes. When the same question was asked of them personally, only 37.3 per cent said they themselves did. Out of a sample of 515 children, 35 said their friends sniffed glue or petrol

8. Among street children in some countries of Latin America, there has been a tremendous growth in the consumption of cigarettes laced with *basuco*, a by-product from the extraction of cocaine from the coca leaf which is especially toxic because it contains kerosene, sulphuric acid and other poisonous chemicals. According to a study cited in *Fact Sheet on Street Children and Drug Abuse* (New York, CHILDHOPE, January 1990), regular *basuco* users suffered a 2.5 per cent loss of brain matter after only four months' use.

but only 19 replied that they did so themselves. The author of the study remarks: 'Considering the ages of the boys and girls in general,[9] the very high incidence of alcohol use is particularly alarming, although perhaps less so if related to the society's overall use and abuse of alcohol. As no distinction between cigarette and marijuana (*dagga*) smoking appears on the questionnaire, it is difficult to determine the extent of the latter amongst the children, but it appears notable.' The reasons usually given by the children to explain why they smoke and drink are not surprising. They say they need to calm their nerves, to get a 'high', to respond to pressure from their peers or to identify with the group. Some reported that smoking, sniffing and drinking set you free, get rid of tension, tranquillize the stomach and stave off hunger.

The children's health is not good. Hygiene is poor and the many injuries caused by physical violence or accidents during their dangerous lives on the street often become infected. As a rule it is very difficult for them to make use of the health services because of the cost of health care, because they feel ashamed to apply to these services and because of the reception they often get. They are at high risk from sexually transmitted diseases, notably Aids, about which they are ill-informed.

All these children spend their day trying to obtain a little money as best they can. The lawful and unlawful methods they use and the menial jobs they do have been identified. A working group at the Cotonou workshop drew up the following list:

- selling goods they have been given or have procured in some unlawful way

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9. The age-range of the whole sample was between 5 and 17 years, with an average of 14 for the boys and 15–16 for the girls.

- selling petroleum products
- salvaging (metal, old sandals)
- carrying baggage
- pushing trolleys
- selling water
- shoe-shining
- looking after cars
- begging
- cleaning cars
- prostitution
- small-scale pimping
- finding customers for hauliers or taxi-drivers
- cleaning markets
- washing dishes
- reselling plastic bags and other small objects
- washing windscreens
- killing animals
- taking animals to the slaughterhouse
- giving change
- guiding tourists
- guiding the blind
- smuggling
- playing cards for money, etc.

Participants at the second Inter-African Meeting of Street Educators and Youth Leaders (Bamako, 12–17 December 1988) drew up the following list of money-earning occupations:

- baggage-carrying
- rickshaw-driving
- shoe-shining
- mobile vending
- looking after cars

- car-washing
- giving change
- manufacturing number plates
- organizing games of chance
- working as apprentice drivers
- selling water
- pounding grain
- washing
- fish-scaling
- knife-sharpening
- market cleaning
- caretaking (market and elsewhere)
- selling cheap snacks
- washing feet
- collecting garbage
- working as butcher boys
- plaiting
- mending
- disinfecting houses
- giving addresses
- guiding tourists
- cleaning offices

All the same, the children do not earn enough money from these occupations to satisfy their basic needs. Although they do not get enough to eat, they nevertheless sometimes choose to spend the pittance they earn on leisure activities, especially on going to the cinema, when they do not give it to their gang-leader or to their family.

Philista Onyango, president of the African Network for Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN), believes that all children who work do so for the same reason, to survive and/or support their families. There seem to be three types

of children working in the street: those who work within their family, the self-employed and the employed.

'Traditionally, children are expected to assist in families,' she says. 'It is through this process that they learn their roles and the process of socialization.' A second group of children, most of them young boys, are self-employed, working as hawkers or vendors in the street. The third group consists largely of girls working as domestic servants. Philista Onyango reports: 'The working conditions of street children expose them to a great degree of harassment by adults and the police. They are also prone to various social problems. . . . Employed children work long hours with poor pay and have signs of malnutrition. It is difficult to determine what benefits children achieve from working. For example, although they survive, they lack both the incentive and opportunity for education, and suffer deficiencies in growth and development. From studies conducted in Africa on child domestic workers results show that working children bedwet up to 14 years of age due to the high degree of exploitation and stress in their lives.'

Much remains to be done before a complete typological description of street children can be made. (The Nairobi workshop in 1990 considered that a clear definition of the target community had still to be given according to age, sex, living conditions and other socio-economic criteria.) However, other information does exist to flesh out this modest attempt at a composite profile. For example, although it seems there are far more boys than girls, this definitely does not mean there are no marginalized girls – it is just that their situation is different. Some turn to prostitution at a very early age (12-year-olds in the Central African Republic), others become single mothers very young and then come up against all kinds of economic, emotional and social problems. Other girls, as we have said, are placed as domestic servants, or are ill-treated and in some cases become the vic-

tims of trafficking, though not much is known about this aspect of the problem. To sum up, 'the girls in difficult circumstances are much less visible but their problems are just as serious'.

It is striking to note that girls are very often absent from projects organized for street children and that projects specifically targeted at them are even rarer. An exception that proves the rule is the Ons Plek Shelter for Girls in Cape Town, which was created in 1988 and each year takes in around 120 female street children aged from 6 to 18. In 1992, the project-leaders remarked that theirs was the only project for female street children in South Africa although girls comprised around 12 per cent of street children. In Cape Town, theirs was the only girls' shelter though there were eight others for boys only. They concluded: 'However, there is a problem among street projects that girls are unimportant because they are the minority.'[10]

It also appears that street children's origins vary from country to country and according to their category – working children, street children, children without occupation in urban neighbourhoods. In Burkina Faso, for example, more than two-thirds of street children are of rural origin; in Togo and Zaire they are mainly from the cities. Mention must also be made of the *talibés*, child beggars, who, as in Dakar, mainly originate from rural areas and, according to surveys quoted at the Cotonou workshop, 'complain that they have "no family". Most of them go for an average of five to ten years without managing to return to their villages.'

Finding out how old the children are is difficult. The ages they give must be taken as approximations because they have no identity

10. Information provided by Child Welfare Society (Cape Town, South Africa) on the Ons Plek Shelter for Girls project in response to a questionnaire sent by UNESCO as part of its project identification programme.

papers or family ties or because they are illiterate. One boy will say that he left his family 'in the year of the OAU [Organization of African Unity] conference'. Another that he did so in 'the year the Pope came'. Street children often look younger than their years because they are malnourished. Nevertheless, according to various eyewitness accounts, the youngest are probably around 7 and the oldest 25 or even more. Not only children are involved but also adolescents and young adults. In many countries, more than half may be between 13 and 18 years of age.

A situation analysis carried out in Nigeria with UNICEF support found that street children are very young when they begin their working life. Out of 800 children questioned, over 60 per cent had started street work before they were 9 and some were as young as 6. Studies carried out by the National Council for Children in Sierra Leone found that most street children had left their families at a very early age, on average at age 8 for boys and age 12 for girls.[11]

This first tentative outline for a typological description of the street child may seem demoralizing and may give a gloomy image of street children. And yet the daily lives of street children, dominated as they are from an early age by work and hardship, contain riches that could be tapped – especially, perhaps, a very strong capacity for mutual self-help. This is clear from the following testimony from James, a Freetown street child: 'Initially I had no friends. I was nearly always hungry. It was a hard time for me. I used to roam the streets. At that time oranges and mangoes were being sold in the streets. I used to pick these fruit from the ground and eat them.

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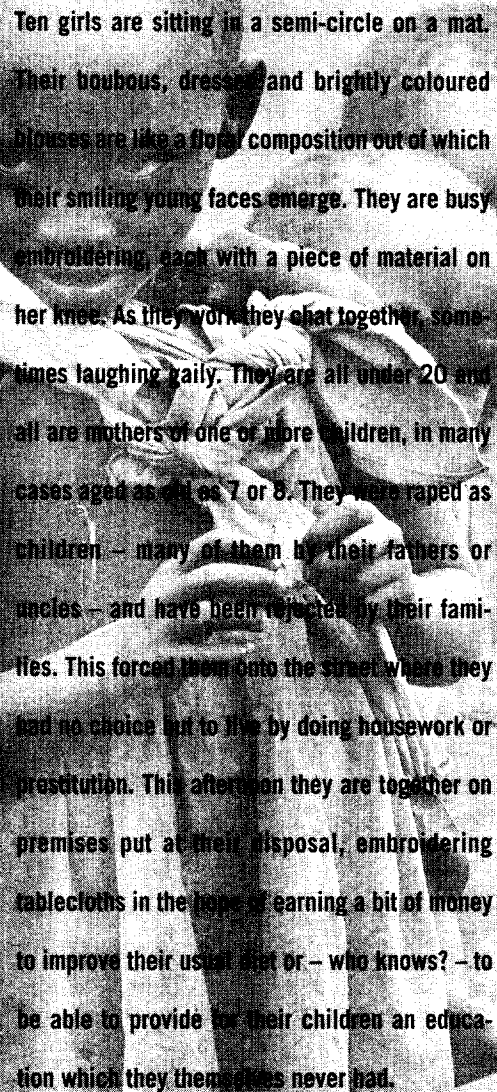
11. A contribution to the workshop on 'The Urban Child in Especially Difficult Circumstances', organized jointly by UNESCO and UNICEF and held at Nairobi (Kenya) from 3 to 8 December 1990.



Ten girls are sitting in a semi-circle on a mat. Their boubous, dresses and brightly coloured blouses are like a floral composition out of which their smiling young faces emerge. They are busy embroidering, each with a piece of material on her knee. As they work they chat together, sometimes laughing gaily. They are all under 20 and all are mothers of one or more children, in many cases aged as old as 7 or 8. They were raped as children – many of them by their fathers or uncles – and have been rejected by their families. This forced them onto the street where they had no choice but to live by doing housework or prostitution. This afternoon they are together on premises put at their disposal, embroidering tablecloths in the hope of earning a bit of money to improve their usual diet or – who knows? – to be able to provide for their children an education which they themselves never had.

Bujumbura, November 1992.

Later on I made some friends. These boys told me that if I went to Malamah-Thomas Street I could get some food if I agreed to wash plates for some "cookery women". I asked them to show me the place. One boy took me there. I asked a "cookery woman" if I could wash her plates. She said, "Yes, but don't steal anything from me." I used to wash her cookery plates and she would give me the "Krao" (i.e. burnt part of the rice that forms a mat in the pot). I would wash the "Krao" with water to take the bitter taste away and she would put some *plasas* on it for me to eat. I was living this sort of life for quite some time until I got a "Bra" down Sawpit. I used to sleep with these "big brothers". I used to wash their clothes, do other odd jobs for them.'[12]

As a young Burkinabe child has said, 'It's quite true, I don't know much, but I can still show what I know to someone else. And if he's willing to, he can show it to someone else. In the end, there'll be no one left for people to say, "That one knows nothing at all."'[13]

On the basis of statements like this, participants at the Cotonou workshop insisted on the importance of recognizing and giving priority to 'the values that are revealed in their everyday life. They are clearly capable of making the most of everything the street environment offers. Their ingenuity and initiative seem superior to those of many adults who are imprisoned in their routine. Many of them have manual skills which may help them later in an apprenticeship. They are dynamic and the relationship networks they create are based on

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12. *Bras, Greens and Ballheads, Interviews with Freetown 'Street Boys'*, Freetown, People's Educational Association of Sierra Leone, 1989.

13. Report of the seminar 'Les Enfants en Situations Difficiles', organized by UNICEF, UNESCO and the Republic of Benin, Cotonou, 19–23 November 1990.

solidarity and mutual assistance. These networks reveal what are, or could become, new forms of solidarity.'

The resourcefulness of African street children is well documented. In Grand-Bassam, a suburb of Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), some children work as ushers in cinemas, taking entrance tickets and hoping for a tip. 'Their approach is to be helpful, to be on the lookout for things to do for people and to be ready to give a hand to anyone who asks. They are paid in tips, the amount of which depends on the customer. This is their way of coping with lack of occupation and unemployment. When a popular film is shown they are much in demand, earning around 1,000 to 1,500 CFA francs, but on slack days they only earn around 50 francs.' It should also be noted that: 'The children are between 10 and 20 years of age. The majority are illiterate and have never done an apprenticeship. Some come from divided families and from a poor environment which fails to provide them with even the basic necessities of life, clothes and food. Some of them are alcoholics or take drugs.'[14]

The somewhat hackneyed image of a child with his nose pressed against a car window, imagining himself at the wheel, is a modern version of Hans Christian Anderson's little match girl or Perrault's Cinderella. In Grand-Bassam many young people do not wait for a fairy godmother to appear with a magic wand or for their imagination to run away with them. For them driving is a dream job because it brings in a lot of money. They learn to drive when working as carwashers. Drivers sometimes help them by leaving the ignition key in the car.

African street children share the same dreams and hopes as other

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14. *Le carrefour-jeunesse de Grand-Bassam, présentation et perspectives*, Grand-Bassam (Côte d'Ivoire), Communauté ABEL-LVIA.

children of their age the world over. When they were asked what they would like to be when they grow up, an overwhelming majority of Windhoek street children said that they would like to be mechanics, electricians, carpenters, seamstresses, tailors, cooks or drivers. A smaller group, generally the younger ones, wanted to be professional people – doctors, teachers or nurses. Three girls indicated that they wanted to marry rich men 'and live happily ever after'. But they are very realistic. When asked how they could improve their lives and fulfil their ambitions, an overwhelming majority of the children claimed that educational opportunities were the answer.

There is nothing surprising about this. Specialists from Guinea have said: 'These children want more than anything to become people who count and on whom others can count. They need to be able to provide something concrete for themselves, their family, their group, their village and their society. They want to be treated like everyone else, to have a family, friends and a normal emotional life. In short, they want to fulfil their social obligations like everyone else.'

What about school?

It is reasonable to think that in normal circumstances at their age children should be enrolled in school where they could at least acquire the rudiments of an education – reading, writing and arithmetic. This is far from being the case.

In Africa, even in the cities, schooling is still out of reach for many children from needy families, especially when they have been rejected by their families or have run away from home.[1] It is barely conceivable that street children like Momoh from Sierra Leone (see page 72) could find the resources to attend school: schooling costs both time and money. All pupils must have a uniform and various items of school equipment that it would be difficult, if not totally impossible, for street children to acquire. Pupils must attend school regularly and follow the timetable. Children who spend most of the day trying to find the means of subsistence for themselves or their families do not have enough time left over to sit on a school bench. When every day that dawns poses the problem of where and how to find enough to eat, then school is a luxury.

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1. For children living in rural areas distance is an additional obstacle to schooling. Some African children have to walk several kilometres to school.

Question: Were you going to school when you were on the street?

Momoh: No, I did not go to school in Freetown. But before that I attended school in Kailahun.

Question: Was there no possibility for you to go to school?

Momoh: There was no way for me to go to school. Because I had no books, no uniform, etc.

Question: Did you intend going to school when you were on the street or did you not want to go to school?

Momoh: I wanted to go to school. But I had no books, no school uniform.

Question: Is it possible for you to go to school when you are on the street and have to work for the whole day to earn your living?

Momoh: No. There is no chance because if we have our school materials our friends will take them from where we keep them.

Interview with Momoh, aged 14, Freetown, June 1987, in *Bras, Greens and Ballheads*, op. cit.

If attending school is difficult for street children, then staying the course at school and succeeding is even more problematic. So many children fail in their studies that what one might call 'unlearning' is a phenomenon that exists on a massive scale in a number of African countries. A child who 'unlearns' is one who has attended primary school but either left very early after having more or less successfully acquired a few rudiments but who did not reach what is regarded as a minimum basic level; or a child who stayed in school by repeating years but eventually left without obtaining his or her primary-school certificate. And then there are the many children who, for various reasons, never attend school at all. They are city children and so where else can they go but onto the streets?

It is thus not surprising that surveys always reveal a high rate of illiteracy among children and young workers living in the street: only 18 per cent of them were literate in Nigeria according to a UNICEF-supported situation analysis, while 30 per cent were illiterate in Nairobi according to Katete Oorwa of the University of Nairobi, who remarks that many of those who attended school dropped out because of low-quality educational premises, overcrowding and shortage of teachers and learning materials.[2]

Let us look again at the 1990 figures for Abidjan quoted above: 21 per cent of street children were illiterate; 14.2 per cent had attended a Koranic school; most had not gone beyond primary education (49 per cent); 15 per cent had attended secondary school (Grades 1, 2 and 3); 17 per cent said they had dropped out of school for lack

2. A contribution to the workshop on 'The Urban Child in Especially Difficult Circumstances', organized jointly by UNESCO and UNICEF and held at Nairobi (Kenya) from 3 to 8 December 1990.

of support, 7 per cent because they were ill-treated at home and 12 per cent because their natural parents were separated.[3]

These avowed reasons for dropping out of school are not the only ones; other factors are involved, according to International Labour Organization (ILO) specialists. Some working children also attend school but owing to the tedious nature of their jobs they are less industrious at school because of fatigue. In poor communities where children also work, attending school is not a priority because of lack of perceived impact of education on employment prospects. Consequently many parents prefer to keep their children out of school.[4]

Even if we are careful not to blame the education system for everything that goes wrong, it must be said that school is to some extent perceived as the scapegoat. Participants at the Cotonou workshop maintained that 'school provides the street with many of its recruits', and added that 'dropping out of school encourages children and young people to hang about in the street for the sake of something to do, and to work there, especially since there are hardly any facilities for the supervision of school drop-outs.

'The main reasons for the high wastage rates are low family income levels which make it impossible for many families to pay the cost of schooling, the fact that the system is highly selective and failure in studies. Many pupils who enrol in the first year of primary school never obtain their primary-school certificate. So many

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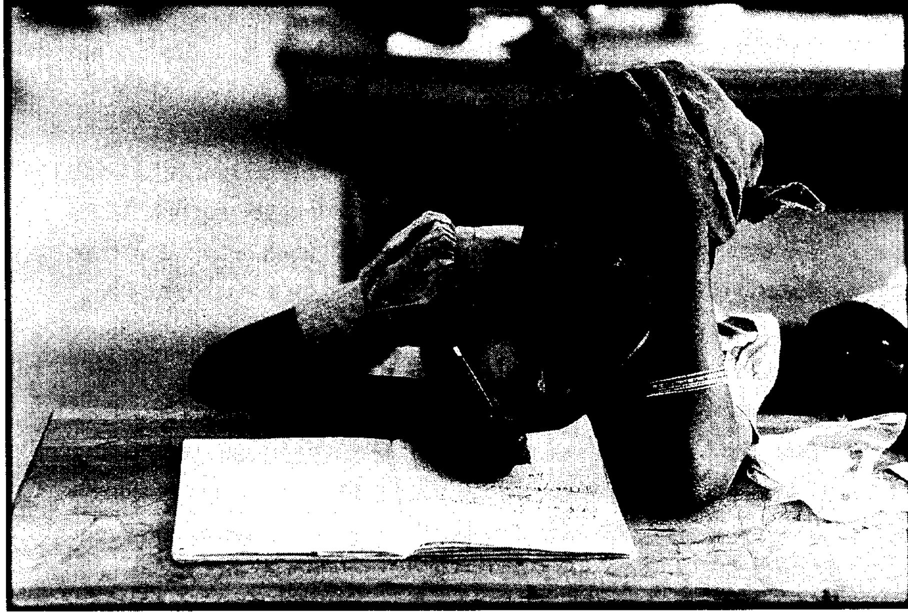
3. *Situation des jeunes de la rue et les perspectives de leur réinsertion socio-professionelle*, a study carried out by the University of Abidjan's Institute of Ethnosociology for the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Social Affairs of Côte d'Ivoire and for UNICEF, Abidjan, 1990.

4. 'The Urban Child in Especially Difficult Circumstances', op. cit.



pupils fail that the need for further school reform is universally accepted. This means that street and working children rarely have the chance of normal primary schooling.'

Those attending school do not seem to be much more fortunate since education is not geared to employment, and the school is not adapted to the needs of young people and of society in general. These shortcomings have regularly been noted and deplored. 'What skills do young people acquire at school that will be useful to them in their daily lives? Generally speaking, very few. They find they are not equipped to enter working life.'

While the schools that are run like those of the former European colonial powers are widely criticized, so too are other types of school, such as the Koranic schools. At Cotonou it was suggested that 'while Western schools develop a competitive spirit in children rather than a sense of solidarity, some Koranic schools are a reservoir of beggars. Many children find themselves in the street after running away from this type of institution.'

In 1987 ENDA Third World interviewers in Bamako described how 'the Koranic schools are known for mendicity, and send young *talibés* out onto the street to search for food and coins for their master. To cap it all, the *talibés* themselves earn nothing from begging. Once they are on the street, the young *talibés* soon move over to pickpocketing. They team up with young drug addicts and become dealers themselves. They become potential delinquents, hang out with children who are already confirmed delinquents, and get involved in a new type of drug addiction. They say it helps them to forget their problems.'[5]

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5. Moussa Abdoulaye Sissoko, *Enquête sur les jeunes et enfants de la rue dans le district de Bamako (Mali),* Dakar, ENDA Third World, 1987.

A few years after this discouraging verdict, an ENDA team tried to do something to help these young *talibés*. They went to see the *marabout* in charge of the Koranic school at Thiaroye on the outskirts of Dakar and discussed what they could do to provide some educational activities for the children, in particular literacy work that they would organize themselves. The biggest difficulty was that the children would no longer be able to help the school to finance itself by handing over to the *marabout* the money they earned from begging. If the children took part in afternoon activities with the ENDA team, the *marabout* said, who would compensate for the loss of their earnings? How could he look after all these children? The ENDA organizers and literacy workers lacked the resources to deal with this problem so they decided to ask families living in the neighbourhood to show their solidarity by 'adopting' the *talibés* and giving them meals. So every day each of the fifty-seven *talibés* concerned went to his foster family where he was given a bowl of food which he took to the *daara* (Koranic school and refuge) and ate with the others. Once the problem of the daily meal had been solved and the alms collected in the morning (on average 150 CFA francs per child) had proved to be enough to cover the *daara*'s financial needs, it became possible to organize a timetable for the children which included two hours a day of either literacy work in French or sport. The timetable was organized as follows:

- 5 a.m. to 7 a.m., studying the Koran;
- 7 a.m. to 9.30 a.m., collecting alms;
- 10 a.m. to midday, learning Arabic;
- midday to 3 p.m., collecting and eating meals;
- 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., literacy work in French or sport.

Many of these children do not know their parents or have had no contact with them for many years. In theory they are 'entrusted' children but in fact they are more or less abandoned and the *marabout*

has been appointed their guardian. Most of them come from the countryside and their home village is known. In some cases there has been occasional contact between the children and their parents. The ENDA group intends to launch a new stage in this initiative by creating links of solidarity that would encourage parents to organize visits to the *daara* after a general assembly had been held in their village.[6]

If children in Koranic schools have a full timetable, children in some Catholic institutions are also kept fully occupied. Here, for example, is the daily timetable of the Irebu Home which was set up by the Œuvre de Sauvegarde et de Protection des Enfants et des Jeunes in Kinshasa (Zaire). In 1989, 100 or so children and young people aged 8 to 24 were living in this home.

- 5.30 a.m., children get up, collective prayers;
- 6 a.m., Mass in the chapel;
- 6.30 a.m., breakfast (maize gruel);
- 6.45 a.m., departure for school (weekly morning group); cleaning the house and the garden in teams (weekly afternoon group);
- 8 a.m., departure for the parish hall for remedial, literacy or French lessons with a teacher or games (weekly afternoon group);
- 10.30 to 11 a.m., afternoon group leaves for school taking their bread with them;
- midday, morning group returns to the home;
- 1 p.m., 'midday meal' (half a loaf of bread);
- 3 p.m., choice of recreational activities with monitors;

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6. Information taken from *Aspects techniques éducationnels et/ou de formation professionnelle pour les études de cas relatifs aux projets des enfants en situations difficiles*, Dakar, ENDA Youth Action, 1992. (A document prepared for UNESCO within the framework of its programme on the identification and selection of projects on behalf of children in difficult circumstances.)

- 5 p.m., all children back at the home; washing;
- 6 p.m., group prayers, evening meal (*fufu* + vegetables or fish and very occasionally meat);
- 7 to 7.30 p.m., homework;
- 8.30 p.m., evening prayers;
- 9 p.m., bedtime.

Twice a week, on Mondays and Fridays, a prayer is said in front of a statue of the Virgin Mary at 8 to 8.30 p.m. Each Saturday the children attend catechism.

All this information and empirical data collected by field-workers helps to flesh out the picture provided by statistical studies. The latter, arid though they may seem, do, however, repay careful study.

It is known that in the Sahel the rate of primary-school enrolment is only 51 per cent. Projections suggest that in sub-Saharan Africa there will still not be enough primary-school places by the year 2000 and that there will still be a marked disparity between school enrolment rates for boys and girls, a major obstacle to achieving universal primary education. At the end of the century, one out of two children in this part of the world will be living in a country where universal primary education has not been implemented.

In the year 2000 in countries such as Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger and Somalia the gross enrolment ratio for primary education will still be less than 50 per cent; in Burkina Faso and Ethiopia it will be between 50 and 59 per cent; in Djibouti and the Sudan between 60 and 69 per cent; in Benin, Chad, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Senegal and Sierra Leone between 70 and 79 per cent; in Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Malawi, Morocco, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania between 80 and 89 per cent; and in Burundi and the Central African Republic between 90 and 94 per cent. In all other African countries (except for Angola, Congo, Gabon, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Namibia and Zimbabwe, for which it has not been

possible to make projections) gross enrolment rates are over 95 per cent.

At the same time, projections of the number of children of primary-school age in sub-Saharan Africa (an increase of 47 million between now and the year 2000, i.e. a relative increase of 64 per cent) show that demographic pressure is a major handicap to the achievement of universal primary education.

Statisticians have observed a reduction – which is likely to be maintained – in the numbers of out-of-school children everywhere, except in sub-Saharan Africa where numbers are likely to grow steadily. In this region almost 38 million children aged 6 to 11 will not be enrolled in school at the end of the century. Projections also suggest that the numbers of young people aged 12 to 17 not attending a formal educational institution will continue to grow, reaching an absolute total of 47 million in sub-Saharan Africa at the end of the century.

In 1990 the illiteracy rate was more than 40 per cent in forty-eight countries, twenty-nine of them in sub-Saharan Africa. If this trend continues thirty-two countries, twenty-one of them in sub-Saharan Africa, will still be in this situation in the year 2000.

To round off this rather gloomy picture, let us look at what statisticians call 'school survival'. The completion of four grades of primary education is considered a prerequisite for children to become literate. How many children actually complete these grades? It seems that in Latin America and the Caribbean, southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa the retention rates are relatively low (in 1986 between 55 and 66 per cent of children reached Grade 4) and an important proportion of pupils do not reach Grade 2 (30 per cent for southern Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, and 20 per cent for sub-Saharan Africa).

According to statisticians: 'These figures cast doubt on the ex-

tent to which the educational systems of the countries in these subregions, despite the rapid growth of enrolment during the last seventeen years, were able to have a positive impact on the problem of illiteracy.'[7]

Not surprisingly the lowest rates of school survival are found in those areas of the world where the problem of children in difficult circumstances is most acute. If these children are not in school, have never been there, or have left, then they must be somewhere – at work, in the street or elsewhere.

This does not mean that street children do not express the need for training. But even if 'those who have never been to school want to go and sometimes try very hard to succeed in their studies',[8] what is often referred to as the 'formal' system of education no longer seems to be *the* solution.

Because major setbacks in basic education were noted in many less-developed countries during the 1980s it was decided to convene a World Conference on Education for All, which was held in Jomtien (Thailand) in March 1990. The final Declaration of the Jomtien Conference stated: 'An active commitment must be made to removing educational disparities. Underserved groups – the poor; street and working children [. . .] should not suffer any discrimination in access to learning opportunities' (Art. 3). The Declaration

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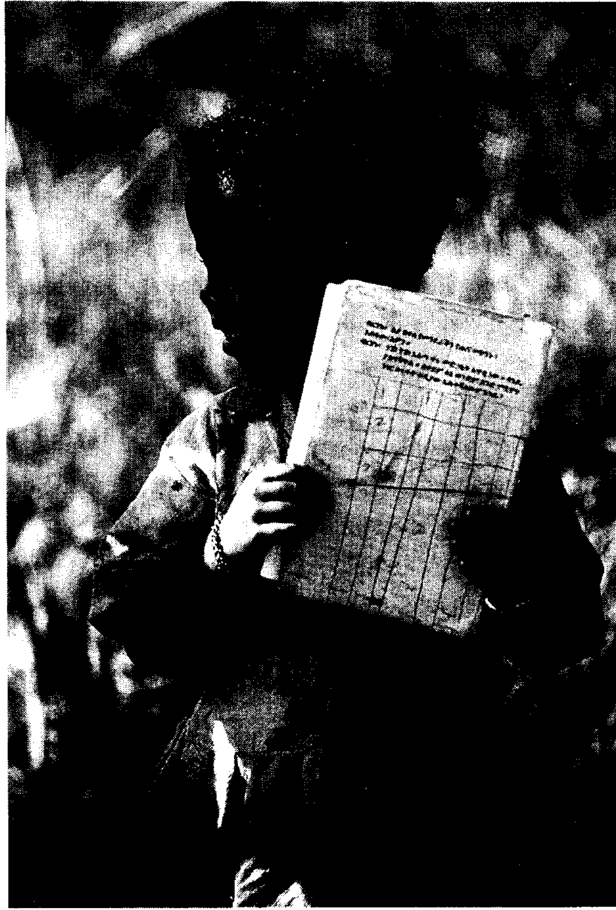
7. All figures taken from *Basic Education and Literacy. World Statistical Indicators*, Paris, UNESCO, 1990.

8. 'Évaluation des besoins fondamentaux relatifs à l'éducation de base pour les projets consacrés aux enfants de la rue et enfants travailleurs', a contribution by Jean-Baptiste Babo of the archbishopric of Cotonou, at an international meeting on the educational needs of street children and working children held at UNESCO Headquarters from 30 September to 4 October 1991.



includes a notable passage on the acquisition of learning: 'Whether or not expanded educational opportunities will translate into meaningful development – for an individual or for society – depends ultimately on whether people actually learn as a result of these opportunities, i.e. whether they incorporate useful knowledge, reasoning ability, skills, and values. The focus of basic education must, therefore, be on actual learning acquisition and outcome, rather than exclusively upon enrolment, continued participation in organized programmes and completion of certification requirements. Active and participatory approaches are particularly valuable in assuring learning acquisition and allowing learners to reach their fullest potential' (Art. 4). The Jomtien Declaration also stressed the need for 'broadening and constantly redefining the scope of basic education' (Art. 5), which will often make it necessary to provide extra programmes: 'Supplementary alternative programmes can help meet the basic learning needs of children with limited or no access to formal schooling' (Art. 5). It will also be useful to set up 'formal and non-formal education programmes in health, nutrition, population, agricultural techniques, the environment, science, technology, family life, including fertility awareness, and other societal issues' (Art. 5).[9]

Within the United Nations system the protection of women and children forms part of the mandate of UNICEF, while questions relating to education fall within UNESCO's sphere of competence. In 1989, UNESCO began to look for ways of responding to the educational needs of street children, over and above their urgent problems

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9. World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 5–9 Mars 1990), *World Declaration on Education for All* and *Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs,* New York, Inter-Agency Commission (UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank) for WCEFA, 1990.

of survival. UNICEF and UNESCO held a number of meetings and reached a consensus in this field. An important outcome was the joint organization in 1990 of the two meetings mentioned earlier, one in Cotonou for French-speaking countries, the other in Nairobi for English-speaking countries. The goal was to evaluate the situation by asking people who were active in the field to report on their work and describe their needs. The Nairobi and Cotonou meetings showed UNESCO the immensity of the needs, and the organisation then sought out a gateway into the problem. To this end another meeting was held in Paris in September–October of the following year at which specialists enabled UNESCO to identify needs in relation to the Organization's field of competence.

To find out whether needs were the same everywhere, a questionnaire was sent to dozens of organizations running projects to help street children throughout the world. UNESCO received more than 170 replies which were then analysed. Out of these twenty-one projects were identified and selected because they seemed to provide particularly useful information where education was concerned. In this task UNESCO benefited from the co-operation of UNICEF, at various levels, and of the International Catholic Child Bureau (ICCB). This approach was in line with the conclusions of the Jomtien Conference. 'To sum up, after the conference the conclusion that prevails is that we can no longer go on doing the same things,' says Alphonse Tay, UNESCO specialist working on the Street and Working Children Programme. 'We cannot go on providing more and more teachers, classrooms, books and so on. It is better to concentrate on innovative methods that could be passed on to people working in this field throughout the world and give a new impetus to their work. The educational effort must go on, but it must be based on innovations.'

The process launched by UNESCO in 1989 (incorporating re-

search, the organization of conferences and field visits) has pinpointed a number of urgent needs. Firstly, many existing projects have stressed the need for their work to be recognized; the effort to alert public opinion to the problem must thus continue. Secondly, street educators and social workers have drawn attention to a serious shortage of targeted training programmes: ways and means must therefore be found to underpin their professional training with technical support. The third major need is money: new sources of funding must be found.

These are the three main facets of UNESCO's current programme in this field. The campaign to alert public opinion is already well under way (through articles, co-operation in film production and distribution, press conferences and the publication of this book). Technical support for training may take the form of on-the-ground operations: regional meetings, training seminars, the publication of books and information for professionals. Two meetings are already planned, one in South-East Asia, the other in Latin America. Finance has already been found for specific initiatives: Luxembourg is providing aid for a project in Dakar; Germany is aiding three projects in Mexico, Romania and Viet Nam and has committed itself to substantial aid for the future. 'My conviction is, however, that goodwill sources will never be sufficient for this purpose; governments must become involved,' Tay says. 'To this end UNESCO's General Conference and Executive Board, that is the Member States, must provide the Organization with the resources to intervene on behalf of these children through the work of people who are already in the field. UNESCO will not set up projects but will co-operate with its Member States in the field of technical and financial support and by engaging in awareness-raising activities.'

On 30 September 1990, seventy-one heads of state and government meeting at United Nations Headquarters in New York on the

occasion of the World Summit for Children proclaimed a World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children. They drew up a Plan of Action intended as a guide for governments, international organizations, bilateral aid agencies, non-governmental organizations and all other sectors of society in formulating their own programmes of action for ensuring the implementation of the Declaration.[10] The Plan of Action contained overall child survival and development goals proposed for the 1990s, among which are: 'by the year 2000, basic education for all children and completion of primary education by at least 80 per cent and protection for the many millions of children in especially difficult circumstances.' It is possible to gauge the extent of the task to be accomplished and the commitment that will be needed from the figures and forecasts given earlier in this book.

Choices must be made. Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, then Secretary-General of the United Nations, made the point that, however good it might look on paper, the Convention on the Rights of the Child – like any declaration of its kind – was of real value only if a follow-up and monitoring body was established to ensure that it was actually applied. He remarked that unfortunately the convention had not been signed by a sufficient number of governments and that to date not enough governments had committed themselves legally.[11]

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10. The proceedings of the World Summit for Children and the text of the Declaration and Plan of Action which resulted from it, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted in 1989 by the General Assembly of the United Nations, feature in *The State of the World's Children 1991*, prepared and compiled by P. and L. Adamson (Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press for UNICEF, 1991.) Extracts from these documents are published as appendices to this book.

11. On the French television programme *La marche du siècle*, 4 December 1991.

The problem of children living in difficult circumstances all over the world is so far-reaching and so urgent, he added, that unremitting efforts will be required to make sure the convention is truly universal.

So now the ball is in the politicians' court. A 'best guess' of the funds required to implement the goals adopted by the World Summit for Children (in the fields of health, food, education, water and sanitation) has been put at close to $20 billion a year for the next decade. This figure is so enormous as to be meaningless for most of us. To bring the cost into perspective $20 billion is roughly equivalent to world military expenditure over ten days.

Question: Did you have any problem with the police?

Abu: Yes, we did. If they caught us they would beat us mercilessly. They would leave us alone, if we gave them money. If we didn't they would give us a bad beating. Sometimes if we did not give them money they would take us to the police station and give us all sorts of wicked punishments. They would throw us on the ground, kick us, again and again and make us 'pump'. Then they would light cigarettes and hold them to our heads until they went out. Then they would beat us again and again and kick us with their boots before they let us go. Sometimes, after all this torture, they would take us to court before a magistrate who would send us to the approved school or to the home for young delinquents.

Interview with Abu, aged 16,
in *Bras, Greens and Ballheads,* op. cit.

Wanted: a sympathetic ear

There is nothing extraordinary in what Abu says. Street children often tell stories of this kind. How far are they to be believed? Perhaps Abu is exaggerating. But then perhaps he isn't: if so many children in his situation say that they have had the same kind of experience, then surely there must be a strong element of truth in what they say. James, another Freetown child, said that after the police had caught him and given him a beating, and while he was crying, they said to him that he had left his mother at home and run away to live on the street so they did not care what happened to him.

Alphonse Tay has described a group of street children who frequent one of the beaches in Cotonou. 'They performed a sketch for us,' he said, 'in which they acted out the behaviour of the police towards them, behaviour that children sometimes find disconcerting. The fact is that these children feel let down by the immorality of adult society. What do they do to show that they are honest according to their lights? On a part of the beach that they have earmarked as their hunting ground, they have put up a notice which says: "Beyond this point we can steal from you." If a tourist crosses the line and has something stolen, they say: "It serves you right. Don't say we didn't warn you." What they are trying to say is: "I just want to live; I am not dishonest. If your things get stolen, then that's your business."'

In situations of this kind it is clear that before any attempt is made to meet the educational needs of children in difficult circumstances, a number of things must be done – in addition to solving their health and nutritional problems.

The first thing to be done is to re-establish, or perhaps even establish for the first time, a measure of trust on their part towards the adult world, of which the police are prominent representatives in the street environment.

This is one of the first obstacles encountered by the social workers and non-governmental organizations that try to help street children.

According to Fabio Dallape, street children generally are so mistrustful that when they are asked questions during the course of a survey, 'they rarely give correct answers to your questions, whether you are a foreigner or a local. Whether you belong to their same tribe or not, they tell you what they think you want to know from them. They enjoy elaborating on the hardship of their life and how they must survive. They want to impress you, they act like actors in a theatre.'

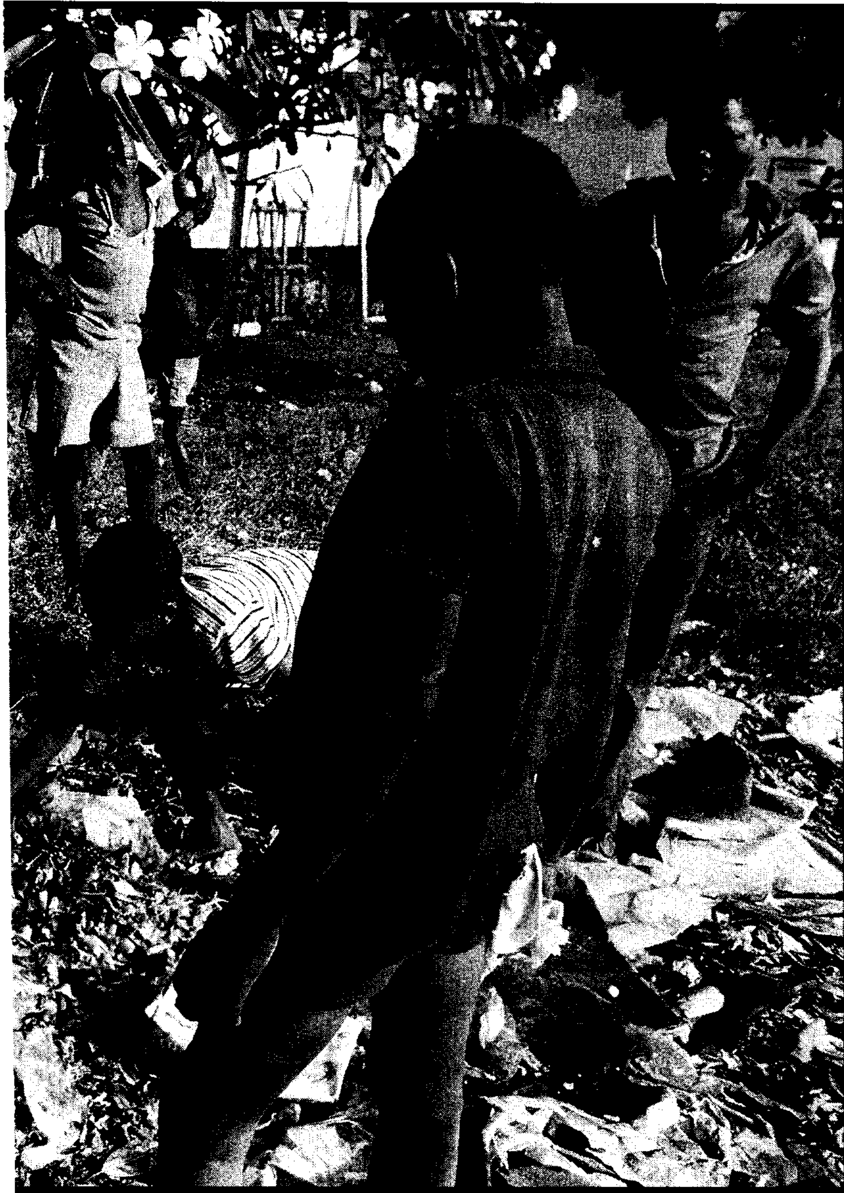
Speaking on the basis of several years' field experience in Nairobi, Dallape identified the following mistakes to be avoided when first making contact with street children: 'Treating them with fear: they notice whether we respect or fear them by the way in which we give them some coins; underestimating their intelligence! They are clever and capable of coping with life; considering them as thieves: if they steal it is because they are hungry or in need of money; imposing your values on them without understanding theirs; being put off by how they look physically and refusing to touch them or take what they offer you; competing with their time of work: make sure that they don't miss earning money because of you; and creating dependency by linking your visits to the handing out of food or drink

or clothes.'[1] At the Nairobi workshop, Professor Roberta Mutiso of the University of Nairobi reported that some projects made slow progress because trainers at first found that the children were reticent and reluctant to express their views in front of adults, due to lack of trust.

The behaviour of adults in general and of law-enforcement officers in particular is not really calculated to inspire this confidence. The laws of their countries do not always help, either. At Nairobi another Kenya university teacher, Victoria Mucai, referred to a legal provision in her country that allowed children to be imprisoned with their mothers. 'Many street children come from prison backgrounds,' she said, 'experiences which have had negative effects on their development. The health of many imprisoned women and their newborn babies is also affected, when women give birth in poorly equipped prisons.' What prospect can there be for a child born in such conditions? And what will the child's opinion be later of a country where the laws do not provide all the protection which citizens have a right to expect?

In the opinion of Claude Dumont of the International Labour Organization, the law – when it exists – offers no absolute guarantee. 'The rights that many adults take for granted do not apply to working children,' he said. 'For example, most working children do not have decent working hours, or safe working conditions. In many cases they also remain exploited and endangered by the work they are involved in.' In response to the rapid increase in the number of children working illegally or in dangerous conditions, many governments are trying to do more to help them, notably by adopting

1. Fabio Dallape, *An Experience with Street Children,* Nairobi, Undugu Society of Kenya, 1988.



legislation to ensure their protection. Nevertheless, there is still a wide gap between law and practice. In some cases laws may even have the opposite effect to that intended, and 'result in clandestine employment of children in some unregulated sectors of the economy'.[2]

At Cotonou it was stressed that 'laws providing for the protection of child workers exist in many countries, but they usually apply to the structured sector in which few children are employed. These laws are not applied in the informal sector, which accounts for the largest number of child workers, and as a rule they are not adapted to on-the-ground conditions. In some countries where laws against this exist but are not enforced, minors are held together with adults in police custody, being kept for days in degrading conditions with inadequate sanitary facilities or in prison.'[3]

In order to restore the children's self-confidence and to win their trust, educators must reach out to them. Most people who work with street children say how important it is to listen attentively to what they say. The child-care worker must work and even live very close to the children: 'Once the child feels someone is listening, he or she eventually begins to feel understood and can then begin to see his or her problems more clearly.'[4] Not everyone is a born listener, but lending a sympathetic ear is an accomplishment that can be learned. In Abidjan, for example, the International Catholic Child Bureau (ICCB) has launched a project called 'Lieux d'Écoute' where young

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2. A contribution to the workshop on 'The Urban Child in Especially Difficult Circumstances', organized jointly by UNESCO and UNICEF and held at Nairobi (Kenya) from 3 to 8 December 1990.

3. Report of the seminar on 'Les Enfants en Situations Difficiles', op. cit.

4. Ibid.

people and their parents can meet volunteers who will listen to them, try to restore their confidence and provide them with information.

Since 1990, a team of trainers centring on a child psychiatrist and a clinical psychologist, with a support group that includes sociologists, criminologists and psychiatric social workers, has been holding fortnightly training sessions to help the volunteers to become better listeners. Lectures and films, followed up by discussions, are used to teach them how to listen. They are backed up with a brief account of theories of the different stages of human development. Initially the *lieux d'écoute* were not located in any specific place; a *lieux d'écoute* was part and parcel of the 'listener-educator' when he or she went to meet young people and their families. Later the project acquired premises in the form of *bureaux d'écoute*, where groups of educators were available twelve hours at a stretch, officially for three days a week. In 1992, ICCB opened twelve *lieux d'écoute* in four communes of Abidjan, plus a thirteenth at its own headquarters. The latter was a place where educators could swap experiences with a view to finding solutions to the problems they met in their work.

The aim of educators engaged in this work is not simply to receive confidences but to establish a climate of trust in which offers of help can be made. Theoretically, different objectives can be envisaged. One major objective is to promote social and professional integration. Many projects and experiments have concentrated on providing pre-vocational and vocational training. The methods vary (apprenticeship with a craftsman, training in a workshop run by the project, etc.) but the aim is usually to help the young person acquire some kind of occupational skill and thereby achieve independence. It is here that problems arise. It is often difficult to find master-craftsmen who are willing to take these young people on as apprentices. In this case it is the adults who lack confidence. 'Since the

labour market is already saturated in most of the branches that tend to attract children in difficult circumstances and because of the negative image of these children, goodwill is rare.' On the other hand, 'employers who use children to make them work usually do not realize that they are exploiting them. In some cases, they do not think of themselves as employers and then the exploitation is even worse,' said one project leader at the Cotonou meeting.

In the best-case scenario – when the many obstacles described above have been overcome – young people out of school may feel during their training programme the need to become literate and consequently ask for literacy teaching. Literacy courses are then organized for them. In some cases training in agriculture or animal husbandry is provided.

Here too mutual trust is all-important. Giving children the opportunity – or even obliging them – to do something that does not really correspond to their expectations often leads to failure. This was the unfortunate experience of the ENDA Youth Action team in Dakar during its first attempt to provide literacy teaching for young people attending a carpentry workshop at Guinaw Rails. The pupils dropped out because the educational content was too remote from their interests. When they subsequently analysed the reasons for this failure, the ENDA project leaders listed the following failings, all relating to the literacy teacher himself: an over-didactic approach; failure to take into account the children's interests; lack of professionalism; inappropriate dress; and communication problems.

They added that 'an experience in teaching household management taking place near the Guinaw Falls Crossroads gave us something to compare with. There the girls themselves said they wanted to become literate, the timetable is integrated into their household management training and they get on well with the teacher, who lives in the same neighbourhood.'

However, it is not always easy to strike a balance between demand (the children) and supply (from leaders of associations). The choice of language for literacy work is a good example of this problem, although it is not exclusive to street children. Should literacy be taught in one of the country's national languages or in that of the former colonial power (in this case French), which is still often the official language and is in any case spoken internationally? An overwhelming majority of the children on the outskirts of Dakar with whom ENDA Youth Action has worked speak Wolof, one of Senegal's national languages. Literacy work began in Wolof, which literacy workers had been trained to use. However, this was not what was wanted by the children, who all gave priority to French. Some of them, who worked as porters at the Kermel market, even asked to become literate in French and in English. The result is an arrangement that more or less satisfies everyone. Literacy lessons are given in French, and Wolof is taught on the side 'to uphold the value of their cultural heritage', though the officials of the association add lucidly and honestly, 'but the children don't see the need for it.'[5]

Another major objective is to reintegrate the child into his or her family or at least, when this is possible, to maintain or restore links with the family. Two countries where this is done are Uganda and Ethiopia, where many families have been dislocated by war as well as poverty. In Ethiopia family rehabilitation centres have been created to give advice and re-establish relations between children and their families.

Even when such dramatic situations do not exist, 'the parents

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5. *Aspects techniques éducationnels et/ou de formation professionnelle pour les études de cas relatifs aux projets des enfants en situations difficiles,* Dakar, ENDA Youth Action, 1992.

must not give up. They must try to work out the underlying reasons why their children have gone astray. The children need their help. They must stand behind the children in their choice of occupation, encourage them to take responsibility, motivate them to help them feel useful. Children will understand, provided that feel part of the family. Fathers and mothers must listen to that children, know what their aspirations are and set them on the right track. Parents must be aware that their children need their advice at all times, for, as we say jokingly in our country: "What the adult sees sitting down, the youth does not see standing up." '[6]

All this is easier said than done. When they talk about these things field-workers cannot but deplore the obstacles facing them. Some parents reject their children and working with them is difficult. At Cotonou, one project leader described how he set off to return ten young people to their families and came back with nine of them. One does not have to look far for the reasons. 'These parents are usually up against economic, social and emotional problems they cannot cope with, and they are reluctant to face yet another problem, that of their child in difficulty.'

Here too someone's confidence has been undermined – that of the parents who have a negative image of their children's past behaviour. They expect their child to prove himself before they can trust him again. Confidence seems to be the key word. Where can it be found and how can it be restored?

Let us not forget that although these children and young people are faced with extremely difficult circumstances they are like people of their age all over the world in the sense that they like to play

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6. Moussa Abdoulaye Sissoko, *Enquête sur les jeunes et enfants de la rue dans le district de Bamako (Mali),* Dakar, ENDA Third World, 1987.

and have fun. As the Bamako researchers pointed out, 'the station children and the Medina and Badialan children give first priority to their leisure activities. First of all they think of enjoying themselves, which they've never been able to do in the past. Only after that do they contemplate the useful activities that will help them in the future.' They 'all want to be footballers or actors'.[7] So the time-honoured method is used of arranging socio-educative and sporting activities in which young people can take part together, whether they are in difficult circumstances or not. At Ouagadougou, for example, a non-governmental organization has created 'a multi-occupational centre', an open space frequented each year by between 250 and 300 children and youths aged from 8 to 25-plus. Here they can wash, receive first aid and meet adults who will listen to their problems. There are many activities on offer. In these surroundings the first timid steps can be taken towards a new, more informal type of relationship between young people and adults, based on mutual trust.

But perhaps all this is a little too abstract and theoretical.

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7. Sissoko, op. cit.

Getting to the root of the problem

In Africa, 'traditional education is diffuse, informal, pragmatic and functional. A type of knowledge bound up with the conditions of life is associated with every age. Each young person gradually discovers the world, society and cultures, through experience. Only the period of initiation, which precedes entry into adult life, is comparable to a modern school. At that time, young people are assembled in groups, sometimes in isolation, and receive systematic teaching. Among other things they learn the history of their clan from the time when their village was founded, creation myths, morality, technical skills and codes of behaviour. In spite of its formal nature, initiation encourages integration insofar as it creates a lifelong bond of solidarity between those who have been through it together. An important feature of traditional education is the role it plays in the transmission of knowledge.'[1]

Oddly enough, these words were said in Nairobi, at a meeting

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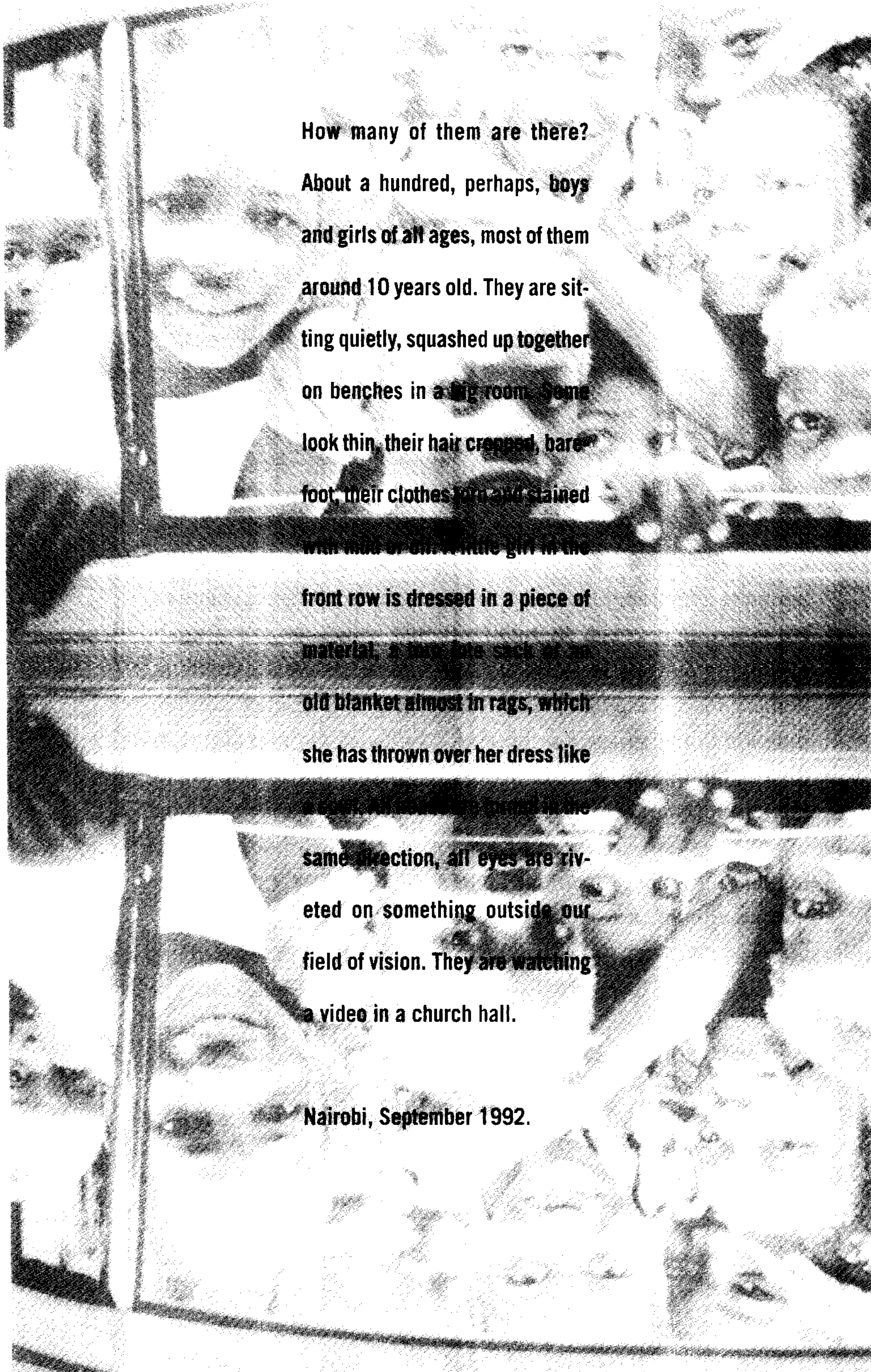
1. Boubakar Ly, 'La jeunesse africaine entre la tradition et la modernité', in *Jeunesse, tradition et développement en Afrique*, Paris, UNESCO, 1981. This work was published following an African regional meeting on youth organized by UNESCO and held in Nairobi from 17 to 22 December 1979, as part of a series of meetings whose purpose was to analyse the main trends and most serious problems relating to youth in the major world regions.



How many of them are there? About a hundred, perhaps, boys and girls of all ages, most of them around 10 years old. They are sitting quietly, squashed up together on benches in a big room. Some look thin, their hair cropped, barefoot, their clothes torn and stained with mud or dirt. A little girl in the front row is dressed in a piece of material, a torn jute sack or an old blanket almost in rags, which she has thrown over her dress like a coat. All heads are turned in the same direction, all eyes are riveted on something outside our field of vision. They are watching a video in a church hall.

Nairobi, September 1992.

held there some fifteen years ago. Reading them one might think that some people who give lectures at conferences are so absorbed by their studies and research they do not notice what is actually going on in the world around them. Nairobi is no longer a village, an idyllic setting for transmitting the benefits of the kind of traditional education that now seems Utopian or at least a reminder of a vanished past.

Like most African capitals, Nairobi is a metropolis of the kind that exists all over the world today, an international centre with a business district bristling with skyscrapers, residential areas where superb villas shelter behind doors with iron grilles, alarm systems and guard dogs, blocks of middle-class flats, working-class suburbs spreading out into the countryside and squalid slums. Nairobi today is a city of some 2.5 million inhabitants, over 50 per cent of whom are estimated to be living below the poverty line. Tens of thousands of families barely manage to survive. Their homes are makeshift shelters made from planks, scrap metal and plastic tarpaulin in squatter settlements permanently threatened with demolition by armies of bulldozers. Living in a state of almost complete deprivation, these families are often unable to bring up their children at all, never mind send them to school. It is estimated that there are at least 130,000 street children in Nairobi whose basic needs for food, clothing, lodging and education are not met.[2]

On a September morning in 1992, just over 100 boys and girls are gathered in a one-storey house in a poor neighbourhood a stone's throw away from one of Nairobi's slum areas, quietly seated behind neat rows of tables in three rooms being used as classrooms. Some of them are having an English lesson. Others are studying the rudi-

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2. According to *Experiences in Community Development. Biennial Report (1990–1991)*, Nairobi, Undugu Society of Kenya, 1991.

ments of the social sciences (a glance at the blackboard, above which is the obligatory portrait of the Head of State, shows that today's lesson in this classroom is about agriculture), others are doing music. In a room used for more technical activities at the back of the building eight young people, including three girls, are drawing and cutting out sewing patterns. This is Pumwani School, one of four 'Machuma Centres' created by the Undugu Society[3] as part of its basic education programme.

It is a school with a difference. To begin with, its pupils are children who otherwise would not be at school at all (in 1991 it was estimated that in Kenya 327,000 children of primary-school age were not enrolled in school). The children, aged 11 to 19, have made an effort to dress decently, but not one of them wears the uniform that the children who attend the traditional kind of school have to wear. Their timetable is also unusual: lessons are from 8 to 10 o'clock in the morning, or from 1 to 3 o'clock in the afternoon, only two hours a day, every day of the week. The schooling is adapted to the way of life of its pupils, most of whom spend the rest of the day collecting garbage that they sell in order to survive and to help their families to survive. Their school life does not conform to the traditional pattern, either. Over a three-year period efforts are made to give them an educational grounding (notably in the three Rs) of the kind that is taught in ordinary primary schools over eight years. A fourth year is devoted to more technical training (especially in carpentry, metalwork and sewing) in order to equip them with some practical skills that may, with the help of the social workers who will take over from the teachers, give them a chance of making out in what is known as the 'informal' sector of the economy.

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3. In Kiswahili, *undugu* means 'brotherhood', 'solidarity'.

This programme has been developed by the Kenya Institute of Education. It is recognized by the government and run by teachers who have been trained in the normal education system. In theory the school is not in competition with the traditional system, but fills in its gaps and works in parallel to it. Susan Gathoni, the head of Pumwani School, has no illusions. She says that 'the primary school gives a better and more solid foundation for secondary studies'. This is not, however, Pumwani's major objective.

If any further proof of the lack of competition is needed, it lies in the fact that the Undugu Society tries to provide support for families who want to send their children to schools within the normal education system. When the society's social workers are asked for help and are convinced that parents are determined that a child of theirs shall go to school and are ready to give it all the support that their limited resources will allow, they examine the possibilities of providing financial and practical assistance. The idea is not to support the child fully, with its attendant risk of dependence, but to create a kind of partnership with poor families within the framework of a sponsorship programme, sharing the expense with them and in some cases acting as a go-between between them and the school. In 1991, almost 400 children and their families benefited from this programme (181 in primary education, 5 in secondary, 14 in technical education and 99 in apprenticeships in the informal sector).

The Undugu Society has come a long way since its creation twenty years ago. It was founded in 1973 as a non-governmental organization by Father Arnold Grol of the White Fathers in response to the problem of the parking boys which had attracted his attention when he first arrived in Nairobi. (In Nairobi, parking boys are the many children whose main activity is taking drivers to vacant parking places. They are generally aged between 8 and 16, and usually sleep in the street, in gutters, huts, kiosks, dustbins or beneath

ramshackle huts made of plastic and cardboard, often known as *chuom*. Many of them smoke *bhangi* (marijuana) and sniff petrol. Most of them live in gangs half a dozen strong.)

At first the society's main objective was to open centres for young people in Nairobi's slum areas – Makadara, Kariobangi and Mathare Valley. Following a pattern that is often found in such situations, Father Grol began by organizing the kind of activities that appeal to young people, such as sport (especially boxing, which has a wide following among Kenyans), dancing, music (the Undugu Beat 75 Jazz Band became very popular and has toured overseas, notably in Germany) and scouting.

Things are different today. In the last twenty years, the Undugu Society has acquired a philosophy, resources and experience that have attracted interest from other movements, some of them far away from Kenya, which have sent observers to Nairobi to see what they can learn from the society's work. Today, solidly established in its headquarters, Delta House, a three-storey building that houses offices and workshops, the Undugu Society employs some 140 professionals and support staff, and is engaged in a wide range of activities. It has four departments (Community Organization, Business Development, Low Cost Shelter and Administrative Support), each of which is responsible for a number of units and programmes.

Taking time out from the thousand-and-one jobs he has to do, the secretary of the Society, Ezra Mbogori, summed up the nature of the challenge it faces in a few sentences: 'Undugu has been in existence for over fifteen years and the problem it is grappling with is still growing. There are a number of reasons for this, including population growth combined with the move from the land, economic recession, increasing poverty and unemployment, political instability and the destruction of traditional family structures. A combination of all these factors is throwing onto the streets more and more chil-

dren whom their parents cannot enrol in school or even feed. The problem of street children is not a problem of individuals; it is a problem of society, the problem of poverty in an urban environment. Rehabilitation work will never be enough. Preventive measures must be taken and the root cause of the problem be attacked. In a word, poverty must be overcome.'

To listen to him is to understand why Undugu's action is so wide-ranging. Today its efforts to provide assistance for children, families and their communities are based on three principles: creating cohesion within the community as the basis for action, stimulating job creation by encouraging community members to use business skills and encouraging the members of the community to develop low-cost shelter for themselves – in short, helping the poor to help themselves by finding a way to subsist decently and thereby prevent their children from running away, being rejected or abandoned.

The Community Organization Department co-ordinates a range of educational and social services for street children, and for slum children and their families. The Parking Boys Programme incorporates all the features of the programmes in Asia described earlier. Social workers make contact with the children in the street and the children then go to a reception centre where their basic needs – food, hygiene, health care and shelter – are catered for, or to one of several community homes, hostels in poor neighbourhoods where a small number of adults are permanently on call to try to provide the children with a semblance of security and care. Special efforts are made to get girls who have become prostitutes back into school wherever possible, or else to teach them money-earning skills such as crocheting and embroidery.

The department carries out other activities. Considering that women play a central role in African society, the Undugu Society has helped to organize groups of women who can build bridgeheads

into needy communities. Because of the advice and training these women are given, they sometimes become leaders of their communities and take action on their own initiative without waiting for instructions from the society. One group of forty-odd women at Pumwani, a slum area where the Undugu Society is active, is particularly remarkable. The women first got together to find ways of coping with common problems such as paying school fees and obtaining food, clothing and shelter, but they were soon taking an imaginative approach to other areas of their lives, using all the resources of the Undugu Society (notably credit facilities). First they built a house – which they rent out today – while earning money from paid work such as crocheting and selling water. Later they devised a project for selling paraffin. They contacted a wholesaler, who before agreeing to work with them insisted that a building should be constructed to house a pump and that they should be given some basic management training. Thanks to their own commitment and to support from Undugu, the women fulfilled these two requirements, and today they manage a paraffin sales point that brings in an average of 50,000 Kenyan shillings a month.[4] In 1991 they were thinking of launching new projects and were hoping to buy a plot of land where their families could settle permanently and live in decent conditions.

This department of Undugu also runs a Community Health Programme that works with groups of slum-dwellers in all fields of health and hygiene, covering sexually transmissible diseases and inevitably including Aids. In the last few years it has been instrumental in training community health workers, each of whom is re-

4. In 1990 the monthly gross national product per capita was 700 Kenyan shillings.

sponsible for a specific area and relates the Undugu health programme to the needs of the population.

Although it may seem surprising that the Undugu Society's Basic Education Programme, referred to above, should be administered by the Society's Business Development Department, this actually makes good sense, since the programme sets out to provide children with basic education and with practical technical training so that, one hopes, they will be able to look after themselves. This is 'functional' education in a real sense.

The Informal Skills Training Programme has adopted the same extremely pragmatic approach. It is helping some eighty young people from the slums to acquire technical and management skills that will enable them one day to set up as craftsmen on their own account. Almost twenty crafts and skills are taught, including motor mechanics, carpentry, metalwork, leatherwork, weaving, hairdressing, electronics and watch-mending.

An Industrial Design Unit carries out intensive research and experimentation on new products which use the skills acquired by the young craftsmen and are in keeping with the demands of the informal sector of the economy, in which almost half the jobs in Kenya are found. At the end of 1991, the unit held an exhibition at the Goethe Institute in Nairobi. Among the highlights of the exhibition was wooden office furniture of a quality comparable to that produced by professional designers. The unit works hand in glove with production workshops (motor mechanics, carpentry and ironwork) which train skilled apprentices and market products whose quality meets professional standards.

The department also offers business advisory services, providing management training and back-up for selected projects. A leading role in this is played by an Assistance to Business Creation Project, which helps small associations wishing to go into business.

Undugu's many activities also include efforts to improve nutrition. A study carried out by Undugu showed that food accounts for 50 per cent of household expenditure in the slums: an Urban Agriculture Project was launched as a consequence. Still at the experimental stage, it involves farming plots of land where currently onions are grown from bulbs recovered from garbage.

No less important is the Low Cost Shelter Department, which enables slum-dwellers to leave their squalid densely packed shanties built of plastic, scrap metal, cardboard and planks, devoid of all hygiene, and to settle in solidly built dwellings made from salvaged materials and equipped with basic collective sanitary facilities. So far, the Undugu Society has helped to build over 1,000 low-cost shelters in four slum areas with a total population of some 41,000. Over twenty reservoirs have been built, providing water for some 30,000 people. Sanitary facilities such as latrines have also been provided. All these activities have been largely a matter of self-help. One group of women has even erected a building made of rammed earth bricks covered with fibro-cement tiles. Today it is rented as offices by Undugu and presented as a model of low-cost building technology.

This brief account of the work of the Undugu Society would not be complete without a reference to public relations and information. The society produces a wide range of documentation and an internal newsletter, *Flash Magazine*, which is produced by Herbert Kassamani, a professional journalist. All through September 1992 many of the society's staff took part in an intensive campaign to publicize their work and raise public awareness. Many articles appeared in the press, and many events were held; a special showcase was devoted to Undugu in a leading bookshop in the centre of town; videos were shown and a marquee was put up outside the International Conference Centre – everything possible was done to attract

public attention. In the tent, in front of tables where objects made by former parking boys and slum families were displayed, was white-haired Father Grol, the founder, his eternal scarf knotted around his neck. Perhaps he was thinking of all that had been done and dreaming of new projects.

Different continents, the same story (continued)

With his white soutane and his thick black beard, Father Vincent Xavier cuts an impressive figure as he takes the steps of Madras Central Station two at a time. It is late at night and no trains are due. All the same he strides along the platforms and through the hall on an errand which tonight as every other night takes him all over the capital of Tamil Nadu state.

He is looking for children – the children and adolescents who live night and day in and around the station, the place where they first encountered the city, when they arrived there alone. During the day they manage to survive by illegally offering their services as porters or by picking up plastic cups discarded by travellers and selling them for recycling. At night, they sleep huddled together in groups of three or four on pieces of cardboard.

Father Vincent seems totally absorbed in his task as he hurries along, looking into every nook and cranny. Far away in the darkness he sees a glimmer of light where somebody has lit a small fire. He calls out, but whoever is there runs away.

He sees a group of figures on the next platform. When he calls to them, four boys cross the tracks and come over to him. Behind them trots a little dog. He knows them. They know him. They seem to be in good spirits and happy to see him. They are adolescents, old hands. Father Vincent listens as they tell him what they have been

up to. They gossip and joke about the dog, their latest recruit. When he talks to each one, Father Vincent takes him by the arm and puts a hand on his shoulder. Body contact is always made.

Someone emerges from the darkness and joins the group. Father Vincent knows who it is – the lad who ran away a few minutes before. He also knows why he ran away; he didn't want to be caught smoking *ganja* (marijuana).

Later, at another railway terminus, on a flight of steps leading to a footbridge, Father Vincent comes across another group of boys. They are sleeping heavily, their bodies twisted across the steps. Father Vincent wakes them up unceremoniously. They are wild-eyed and their breath reeks of alcohol. They have got drunk on bad brandy and collapsed there for the night.

As he is leaving the station, Father Vincent discovers a child alone, a newcomer who has perhaps just arrived from his native village. He is around 10 or 12 years old. Taking him by the shoulder as if he was taking him under his wing, Father Vincent ushers him along. He speaks to him kindly, asking his name and age, where he is from, what he is doing there, where his family lives. Before leaving, he tells the boy that he or one of his friends will come and see him the next day.

The night is not yet over. Father Vincent makes for another part of the city. Here whole families live on the pavement in shacks improvised from tarpaulin, planks, pieces of sheet iron and plastic bags. Here too Father Vincent is a familiar figure. Although it is late at night, many people are standing about amid a cluster of rickshaws. Father Vincent is expected. Men and women of all ages crowd around him. One of them is a young father who is hoping for the papers that will enable him to enrol his child at school. Father Vincent has brought them, correctly filled in.

A woman comes to look for him. She too needs help over an

administrative matter. She hands a piece of paper to Father Vincent, who scans it and then bursts out laughing. When he gives it back to her she looks embarrassed, and the people round her start laughing too. She has given him a letter from her beloved. Perhaps she has just made a mistake. More likely she is illiterate.

On the wall behind the knot of people a brightly lit advertising hoarding sings the praises of a brand of textile: 'Jiyagee. The Fabric of Life'.

For the last ten years or so, Father Vincent Xavier, a Salesian brother,[1] has devoted his life to the street children of Madras. In 1984 the Salesian Provincial for the province of Madras asked him, a newly ordained young priest, to take on the job full-time. In 1985, he was instrumental in founding Don Bosco Anbu Illam (DBAI), an officially registered institution which exists to help the neediest waste-paper scavengers and station children of Madras.

After a hesitant start, the organization he leads has come to be involved in a wide range of activities and institutions all over Madras, including children's hostels, a service station for motor cycles, night schools, a technical-training centre, a waste-paper collection co-operative and a number of social centres. These institutions form part of a general process that comprises three main stages.

Nocturnal visits to the station form part of the first and trickiest preparatory stage, when contact is made with the children and an attempt is made to win their trust and encourage them take the de-

1. Salesian: a member of the Order founded by the Italian priest and educator St John Bosco, who worked with needy children in a Turin suburb in the mid-nineteenth century. He later founded the Society of St Francis of Sales (known as the Salesians) and the Daughters of Our Lady of Help of Christians (the Salesian Sisters).

cision to go to one of DBAI's two Home Shelters where, in premises equipped with a bare minimum of amenities, the children can wash themselves and their clothes, get a square meal and some sleep. Attentive adults are always present in the shelter in the form of one or two Salesian brothers who have rooms there. The shelter doors are always open so that the children can come and go as they please. They can even have their own lockers where they can store their few belongings – if they have any. All they are obliged to do is show respect towards others and to abstain from violence, alcohol and drugs. The Salesian nuns have also opened a shelter for girls.

When children have got to know the place and its occupants, and are used to going there, it is possible to learn more about them and encourage them to talk about themselves. In a word, they are listened to.

Then the second stage of the process organized by DBAI begins, the process that Father Vincent calls rehabilitation. The child is directed towards an activity commensurate with his or her aspirations, needs and possibilities. This may involve the provision of education, vocational training or help in finding a job. Whenever possible, an effort is first made to locate the child's family and to try to reintegrate the child into it. In fact this is the prime objective of DBAI and takes priority over all its other work.

Some of the children attend night-school courses held in the Home Shelters, where they rub shoulders with out-of-school children of needy families who live in the neighbourhood. These courses are held in the evening because during the daytime the children are either out in the streets or at the station doing odd jobs.

After receiving 'non-formal'[2] education of this kind, which starts

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2. The term designating forms of education that do not belong to the institutionalized or 'formal' school system.

with literacy teaching, they may be given other forms of assistance. They may be encouraged to enrol in the normal school system and be given support during their schooling; they may join the waste-paper collection co-operative or attend a purpose-built centre to learn skills related to dressmaking, motor mechanics and electricity.

During the third stage DBAI helps young people to set up on their own account, possibly to establish their own homes. Many boys want to own a rickshaw, or better still, an auto-rickshaw. DBAI helps them to take this kind of initiative in a number of ways, notably by encouraging thrift – it puts money in a savings bank for them and adds to it at the appropriate time. This is only one of DBAI's many activities.

At the end of this process, which lasts several years, the street child, regarded as a social parasite and an outcast, has become an adult who in the words of Father Vincent 'stands on his own two feet in life'.

Such a brief account of DBAI's work cannot do justice to the many tasks it performs each day or to the difficulties it encounters. It is true that the charisma, the dynamism and the apparently boundless fervour of Father Vincent Xavier and the other Salesians and lay helpers who work with him are such that they seem to take everything in their stride and display a resolute optimism.

A full account of DBAI's activities would have to include all the preventive work carried out with the 'street families' and slum-dwellers; awareness-raising efforts which alert public opinion through the media and often take the form of demonstrations, shows and festivities of all kinds; co-operation with the government and local authorities, and especially with police chiefs (in many places, for example, the children who are really integrated in a project have identity cards that are supposed to protect them from police harassment during systematic raids); and attempts to co-ordinate the dif-

ferent organizations that operate in a single city and often enjoy the support of the local representatives of UNICEF and other organizations.

Madras may be far from Lagos, Nouakchott or Kigali. Southern India may be far from Africa. Never mind; cities and continents can learn from each other. This brief presentation of the work of DBAI gives some idea of a programme that is representative of the kind of thing that is being done for street children by many associations and movements of different origins and affiliations (it should be noted in passing that they are often of religious persuasion, whatever their denomination). Similar work is being done all over the world, including in the industrialized countries. To cite only one example, the Beat the Street programme launched for street children in 1985 by Frontier College in Toronto (Canada) has the same objectives and follows the same guidelines as DBAI.[3]

Whatever their names – Home Shelters in Madras, Boys' Homes in Bombay, Yuvodaya in Bangalore, Drop-in Center in Manila, Reception Centres in Nairobi, Itahiriro in Bujumbura, to name but a few – all hostels for street children obey the same principle, even if the way they are organized differs to some extent from place to place (in some cases, for example, food is given to them free, whereas in others they are asked to pay a small, perhaps symbolic, sum for a daily meal). They are places whose doors are open, a kind of airlock between the world of the street and the structured world of ordinary society. Anyone who wants to can come and go (in Colombia, the

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3. The UNESCO programme described earlier (see pp. 84 et seq.) seeks to identify a large number of projects worldwide, to select the most promising and innovative, and to circulate information about them in order to provide inspiration to others.

Bosconia-La Florida programme created over twenty years ago for the street kids of Bogotá goes even further: after thirty nights' lodging in the El Patio hostel, the children are sent back into the street for three days so that they can make a comparison and choose for themselves).[4] This is clearly a subjective judgement, but it is striking for a short-term visitor to see how much children separated by thousands of kilometres and all the obvious cultural differences have in common: they want to be seen, heard and touched. They are often cheerful – at least in appearance – expansive, curious and even full of fun.

The schools that have been created for street children also have many features in common. Whether they are next door to a vast heap of refuse from which and in which the children and their families live,[5] in a parish hall, or in an ordinary, inconspicuous house in the middle of a working-class neighbourhood, they all more or less follow the same teaching methods, develop the same kind of curriculum and use the same kind of equipment, however rudimentary and limited in quantity. Imagination and experience acquired on the ground often compensate for a lack of material resources and initial educational training.

For vocation, conviction and goodwill, necessary though they are, are definitely not enough. More is needed, and certainly a spe-

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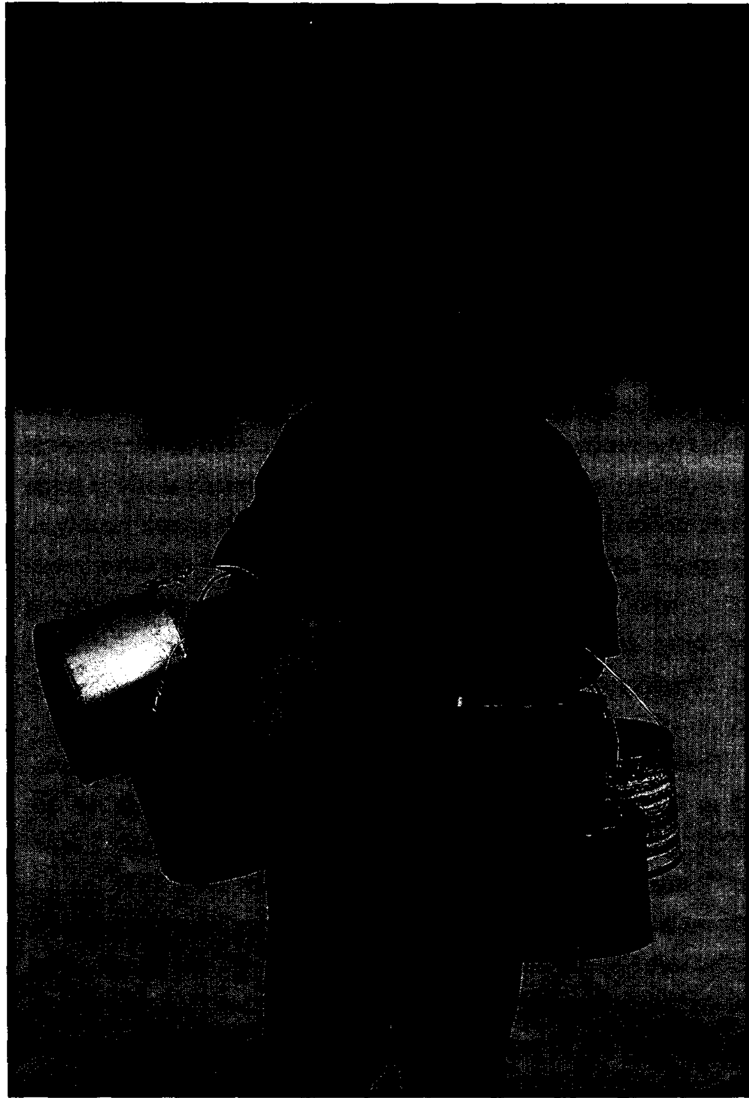
4. See Virgilio Hoyos Rodriguez, Leonardo Rodriguez Rodriguez and Mercy Abreu de Armengol, *Non-formal and Alternative Approaches to Provide Primary Level Education for Out-of-school Children. The Bosconia-La Florida Programme. A Case Study from Colombia*, Hamburg, UNESCO Institute for Education, 1989.

5. The school of the Children's Laboratory for Drama in Education Foundation (CLF). It is located on the edge of a huge garbage heap outside Manila, known as 'Smokey Mountain'. Some 20,000 people live from scavenging its detritus.

cific preparation, if serious failures are to be avoided. An African catechist has said frankly that when he started out he did not know how to go about things and simply tried to keep the thirty-odd children aged from 12 to 19 that the diocese had entrusted to him busy with farm work.

'To begin with we just let them use a barn. Then they took over an uninhabited house nearby. They prepared their meals there themselves with food we provided for them. We installed a tap so that they could wash themselves. They took everything to pieces. Roof, walls, pipes: everything disappeared. They even sold their saucepans and went back to sleeping in the barn with the local hoodlums.' Today this project no longer provides children with lodging but teaches the rudiments of the catechism and tries to inculcate some vague notions of home economics and basic literacy skills to some fifteen unoccupied children and adolescents who attend mainly to take part in the games organized for them by one of the three monitors . . . who also acts as a guard! This is, it is true, an example of how things should not be done, but it shows the risks inherent in lack of preparation. Many young people of this type behave in the way described above; one just has to learn to cope with it.

The head of Africa Foundation, a non-governmental organization in Uganda, eventually realized that 'these street children are difficult to handle primarily because what seems essential for a "normal" human being is not necessarily so in their eyes. Give them a mattress and a blanket today, and tomorrow they'll have sold them. Do the same again and again and they'll still sell the things. They keep on doing this, perhaps four or five times, until they realize how important it is for them to hang on to the things. At the same time, if you don't provide them with what they need, they can always go back into the street or on the market.' All the same one should never give in. One must always be willing to start again. Since the Africa



Foundation began to operate in 1979 almost 4,500 children have received help from it. Today the foundation is based fifteen kilometres from Kampala and looks after 1,500 children.[6]

Most projects that last for any length of time reach the same conclusions: they cannot restrict their work to the children alone. If you want the children to return to their families (if they have one), if you want children still living with their families (and those yet unborn) to stay there, if you want to stem the flow of street children at its source, then you must take action at family and community level. This is the thrust of the remarkable work being done in Asia by the Community of Learners Foundation[7] and the Integrated Social Services Enhancement Center (ISSEC),[8] to name only two among many. The Undugu Society of Nairobi is, as we have already seen, working along the same lines.

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6. *A Description and Analysis of the Work Involved in Recruiting, Rehabilitating, Settling and Training Street Children,* Kampala, Uganda Africa Foundation, 1992. (A document prepared for UNESCO as part of a programme for identifying and selecting projects on behalf of children in difficult circumstances.)

7. Community of Learners Foundation, Quezon City, Philippines.

8. The Penafrancia Project for Urban Poor and Street Children, a project described in *CHILDHOPE,* Manila, CHILDHOPE South-East Asia Field Office, 1990. (Research Series, 2.)

What can be done?

The experience of the Undugu Society contains echoes of many of the theories that inspire comparable non-conventional education systems elsewhere in the world.[1] The society has adapted to the African context principles and methods that are designed to meet three basic requirements: child-centred education, flexibility and a participatory approach. Those who attended the Cotonou workshop insisted that 'reciprocal teaching, a close relationship between educational content and the environment are the educational principles traditionally practised and are necessary both in formal and non-conventional education. Methods such as 'child-to-child' may be profitably used.'[2] At the Dandora Reception Centre in Nairobi, one of the permanent monitors is a former street child whose edifying story was told in a leading Kenya daily newspaper in September 1992.

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1. See R. H. Dave, A. M. Ranaweera and P. J. Sutton, *Meeting the Basic Learning Needs of Out-of-school Children: Non-formal Approaches*, Hamburg, UNESCO Institute for Education, 1990. This document, prepared for the World Conference on Education for All, analyses and compares innovatory alternative approaches to education for children outside the school system in twelve developing countries.

2. See A. K. B. Tay, *Child-to-Child in Africa. Towards an Open Learning Strategy*, Paris, UNESCO-UNICEF Co-operative Programme, 1989. (Digest 29.)

The specialists who met at Cotonou went on: 'There are no ready-made solutions. Educational activities that can be carried out with young people must be adapted to their specific needs and this means a thoroughgoing decentralization of education. . . . Varied, flexible teaching models will be defined with the young people themselves. They will take account of specific conditions and requirements as regards language, timetable and other factors, will be integrated into daily life, and will respond effectively to the young people's interests and their economic, health and occupational needs. A form of health education that incorporates the struggle against Aids and the ravages of drugs can be integrated into a framework of this kind. We must transmit the basic tools of learning and the skills needed in everyday life to those who otherwise would not know how to use them. . . . It is important to respond to young people's need for training, but parental training is equally important.

'As a preventive measure against the phenomenon of children in difficult circumstances it is essential to encourage all parents, whatever their economic situation, to be aware of their responsibilities. The forms this education may take will vary from country to country and depend on the dynamism of each community. But they will all stress the emotional needs of children and young people, communication within the family and the essential role of each parent.' During the Cotonou and Nairobi meetings speakers stressed time and again that solutions require innovatory approaches based on the participation of young people and communities, for a response to needs as they arise can be found not in preconceived structures but in what young people themselves can do with the help of caring adults.

This is clearly light years away from certain very different approaches that have turned out to be ineffective and even counter-productive, discouraging the integration of young people in coun-

tries where the authorities organize raids on street children and then send them to the countryside or place them in supervised education centres. In every case these extremely formal methods have proved unsuccessful, for the young people concerned eventually returned to the city and the street.

A visit I once paid to a certain government-run home for young people in an Asian country still remains in the memory as a chilling experience. Some 350 girls aged between 8 and 18, all spotlessly clean, stared sadly at me. At a given gesture they all stood up as one and soullessly sang a song of welcome to their visitor, and then sat down in impeccable order without my being able to exchange a word with any of them. Need I say more?

Doing things differently is, of course, bound to pose problems, not the least of which is lack of funding. Non-conventional education processes often appear to be palliatives, last-ditch substitutes for formal systems that nevertheless produce high rates of failure, drop-outs and exclusion. In Africa, most projects based on innovative methods are launched and run by the churches and by local non-governmental organizations whose material and human resources are limited. At the same time, many governments are tending to reduce the proportion of their budgets devoted to social work and education. According to James Kaboggoza Ssembatya of the Friends of Children Association in Uganda, less than 5 per cent of government funds go to social programmes. Ultimately this is bound to raise the question of whether projects can continue, especially since, as was pointed out at Cotonou, productive activities carried out with children, while profitable from a socio-educative point of view, are rarely so in economic terms. But is it right to jump to this conclusion? There is a great deal of experience, including that of the Undugu Society, to suggest the opposite.

It should be added, as a study carried out by the UNESCO Insti-

tute for Education in Hamburg shows,[3] that non-formal education seems to be cheaper than formal education, since in the developing countries examined the programme costs of non-formal education are less than half of those of formal primary education. The main reasons for this are that non-formal education generally demands fewer hours than does the formal system, the programme is shorter, lessons take place in private buildings or on community premises, and the educators are less well paid – all these features are to be found in the Undugu Society's basic education programme.

Problems that may arise with teachers or educators often concern remuneration – and hence recruitment – and also training. 'In the field,' it was said at Cotonou, 'educators and youth leaders, who usually work in very difficult conditions, sometimes have problems in relating to the young people. They do not always know how to get marginalized children involved in projects. In fact, they find it hard to trust them. In-service training and in-service programme assessment rarely take place within groups of educators; there is a shortage of supervisors of youth leaders.' If Fabio Dallape is to be believed, 'there is no special training for people dealing with street children and youth and therefore no specific qualifications. [. . .] Someone dealing with street children should have the qualities of a teacher, of a social worker, of a psychologist, of a parent. Since there are no colleges giving such a training, the organizations concerned should train their own staff members.'[4] A regional training programme was launched at Dakar in 1991, under the auspices of Envi-

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3. Dave et al., op. cit.

4. Fabio Dallape, *An Experience with Street Children,* Nairobi, Undugu Society of Kenya, 1988.

ronmental Development in the Third World (ENDA), in order to train staff who would then go on to organize pre-service and in-service training for street educators and youth leaders. Both the Cotonou and Nairobi meetings stressed that field-workers need closer contact with training structures and stronger back-up from them. Feedback networks are essential for the evaluation of on-the-ground experience as a basis for in-service training.

There is a growing awareness of the problem. Only a few years ago there was only one project in Bujumbura for street children, a government project supported by UNICEF and named Enfants Soleil (Sun Children). Since then ten or so other projects of various sizes have been launched. Today they are co-ordinated by a body sponsored by the Prime Minister, who is also president of the National Council for Childhood and Youth. In addition to associations and private individuals assisting children in difficult circumstances, this co-ordinating body – called Ils Sont les Nôtres (They Are Ours) – includes the principal ministers concerned and funding organizations, with UNICEF in the forefront.

This kind of body is useful because it encourages co-operation and helps to reduce wastage of energy and of human and material resources. Training programmes for educators can be organized jointly, and information and documentation can be usefully pooled. It has been known for a child believed lost or back on the streets by the leaders of one project to be found living in a hostel run by another association. Children sometimes move in this way from one project to another.

Where a co-ordinating body exists, more ambitious types of action can usefully be envisaged. One association, Terre des Hommes, held a meeting in August 1992 at a hostel that it had recently opened. Two main subjects were on the agenda. The first concerned a series of nationwide radio and television programmes intended to mobi-

lize public opinion. A letter had been written to the director of the national radio and television network, and the ten people present at the meeting discussed its terms. When signed by a representative of the co-ordinating body, the letter would clearly carry more weight. The meeting also discussed the terms of a motion asking the Prime Minister to enable 'social committees' to be set up in each section of the city. In Bujumbura, as in Nairobi, people who work with street children firmly believe that their work must not be restricted to the children at risk; their families and the communities in which they live must also be involved.

Nairobi has a population of some 2.5 million, an annual demographic growth rate of around 10 per cent and, according to Undugu Society officials, an estimated 130,000 children who could profitably be enrolled in non-formal education. In comparison, the Undugu Society – which has been active in Nairobi for twenty years – reaches only some 600 children through its basic education programme.

Burundi's Enfants Soleil project, which was created in 1990 by the Ministry of Social Affairs and launched with UNICEF support, provides shelter and assistance for street children in Bujumbura. According to a situation analysis made in 1990, there were some 1,800 of these boys and girls, out of an estimated population of some 400,000. The project's initial target was to reach 120 to 150 children; in December 1992 it was in fact caring for 90, 30 of whom had rejoined the school system.

In Bombay (India), 220,000 children are born each year. How many of them will survive beyond their third year? How many of the survivors will become street children?

In view of these figures, it is not hard to understand why the participants at the Cotonou meeting should have asked this question: 'How is it possible to reach a large number of young people when certain types of action are very costly and are only targeted at

a limited number?' At a meeting organized by UNESCO in Paris in October 1991, one participant was even more critical, claiming that 'there is no example of a non-formal system that has led to anything but tinkering'.

In the Philippines, Bing Baguioro, founder and director of the Children's Laboratory for Drama in Education, was even more dismissive when he said in an interview that 'most of the projects that "go down" to people do not work. We feel very seriously that concepts like partnership and equality have been hijacked from their original meanings. In fact, needy children are "tamed" and returned to the mainstream of society without society itself being changed. If they happen to go beyond primary education, they fail at the secondary school and only non-qualified work is open to them.' He went on to say that 'alternative education is bound to be subversive. If it isn't, we are simply acting as an alternative to the system we criticize.' Perhaps he was making a personal interpretation of the work of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire when he added: 'A teacher cannot free a learner if he is not aware of his own oppression.'

This radical analysis of the problem is not necessarily shared by everyone. Given the fact that street children are exploited in all kinds of ways, and in many cases only survive by imaginatively recycling the wastes produced by rich and technologically advanced societies – their situation can be symbolized by the street children whose job is to refill disposable cigarette lighters! – it is wrong to dismiss out of hand any initiative that could bring about an improvement, however slight, in their condition. Bing Baguioro may be right. However, the youth leaders of ENDA Youth Action in Dakar clearly opt for pragmatism when they state their belief that 'a housemaid capable of expressing herself in French in her work and with a good training as a cook will be able to find a better paid job, and one in

more secure conditions (comparatively speaking) with expatriates, embassy staff and well-off families'.[5]

Another point of view is expressed by a priest in Bangalore (India). Trying to understand why a youth had run away again just when he was being offered training, he said he believed that the youth had said to himself: 'You want me to become like my enemies, this society that has rejected me! Wash, dress, learn, work? Why?' His faith undimmed, the priest concludes: 'Only love can bring them back.'

Jacques Meunier, a man with extensive experience of contact with the street kids of Bogotá, once said: 'I wonder whether a street kid is not an aristocrat of destitution. He's poor but he's not ashamed of it. Perhaps I am confusing anarchy with freedom?' He went on: 'There are only two ways of answering these questions: either you think the kid is poor and weak and you use the terms subculture and charity; or you are interested in him because he is strong and you talk of an alternative society.' He concluded with a splendid image: 'I prefer the second way. And I'll stick to my guns. The kid takes to the street as pirates take to the sea.'[6]

Differences of literary style apart, isn't this what Victor Hugo wanted us to think over a hundred years ago in his novel *Les Misérables*? Here is Gavroche, one of the most famous characters in world literature and also a precursor of the street kids of our time, talking in his usual cheeky manner to two children who have lost their parents. 'Listen,' he said, 'shut up moaning. I'll take care of you. You'll see what a good time we'll have. In the summer we'll go

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5. See *Aspects techniques educationnels et/ou de formation professionnelle pour les études de cas relatifs aux projets des enfants en situations difficiles,* Dakar, ENDA Youth Action, 1992.

6. Jacques Meunier, *Les gamins de Bogota,* Paris, A. M. Métailié, 1989.

to the Glacière with Navet, a pal of mine, we'll bathe at the station, we'll run naked on the trains in front of the Austerlitz bridge, that drives the washerwomen mad. They shout, they get cross, you can't imagine what fools they look! We'll go and see the human skeleton. He's still alive. On the Champs-Elysées. What a specimen, he's thin as a rake. And I'll take you to a show. I'll take you to Frédérick-Lemaître. I've got tickets, I know some actors, I even acted in a play once. We were kids and we had to run about under a piece of canvas to make it seem like the sea. I'll get you taken on at my theatre. We'll go and see the savages. They aren't real savages. They wear pink jerseys that are all creased and you can see they're darned at the elbows with white cotton. Then we'll go to the Opera. We'll go in with the claque. The claque at the Opera is a good lot. I wouldn't go with the claque on the boulevards. You know what, there are people who pay twenty sous to go to the Opera, but they're dimwits. We call them the drips. And then we'll go and see somebody being guillotined. I'll show you the executioner. He lives in the rue des Marais. Monsieur Sanson. He's got a letter box on the door. Oh, we have a great time!'

In spite of the many criticisms levelled at 'educational tinkering' in all its different forms and with all its different motivations, many people feel that it has much to offer, primarily because its content is rooted in everyday life. However, they would not dream of stretching it beyond its limits or of proposing it as a parallel education system – what is often described at meetings of specialists as a system of education on the cheap. They see it rather as a source of lessons and inspiration.

It seems then to be accepted that the great flexibility of non-conventional educational approaches makes them more suitable for meeting the basic educational needs of out-of-school children. This being so, is it really necessary to discuss the question in terms of

competition? 'Formal and non-formal education must be conceived as mutually complementary. Non-formal programmes must be completed by establishing and developing links with formal education. On the other hand, formal programmes, methods, and organization must be more flexible, and non-formal whenever possible. . . . The main danger is that two educational systems of different quality and prestige will develop, and thus contribute to perpetuating and increasing existing socioeconomic disparities.'[7]

In Africa, as elsewhere in the world, 'two-speed education' is unacceptable. Education for street children is bound to be non-formal. Do they have the choice?

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7. *Meeting the Challenge of Basic Education and Literacy in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Paris, UNESCO-UNICEF Co-operative Programme, 1987. (Digest 24.)

Dangerous crossroads

Over ten years ago, social scientists and informed observers were already becoming concerned. 'Traditional society,' said one of them, 'succeeded, by constantly referring to the history of the group, in creating a sense of belonging to a community and of being steeped in enduring values, and an acceptance of society's goals. . . . Modern African youth is often deprived of an important dimension in the formation of its social and cultural personality: an opportunity to identify with the group and its common values.'[1]

More recently, Alphonse Tay has noted that: 'The European model of development and urbanization has destroyed family structures. The traditional African house is round, integrated. Modern architecture and apartment living no longer make it possible for the grandmother or an uncle to be with the family. If the parents are not at home, children go onto the streets. African culture has disappeared from our big cities, which, in addition, lack the social services available to city-dwellers in the industrialized countries. Here, in Africa, it goes without saying that the child is sacred. The child is our

1. Boubakar Ly, 'La jeunesse africaine entre la tradition et la modernité', in *Jeunesse, tradition et développement en Afrique,* Paris, UNESCO, 1981.

future. For us, the existence of street children indicates moral degradation, the end of our traditional values.'[2]

We may misunderstand or at least get a slanted view of children in difficult circumstances if we do not compare the conditions in which they find themselves with the background of social, economic and above all cultural traditions from which they come. This is not the place to open a new chapter in the endless debate about the nature of childhood, work and education. In any case the various conventions on the rights of the child have set forth the legal position on these questions. We may nevertheless look again at the concepts which should be used in making choices and policy decisions for the future.

In a report on research she carried out among the Hausa of Kano in northern Nigeria, American anthropologist Enid Schildkrout wrote: 'In countries where most children have no productive role, the prevailing conception of childhood is that it is a kind of rehearsal for adult life, and that most children's activities are, or should be, learning experiences. This folk view of childhood has found its way into much of the literature on socialisation, child psychology and education. This is, however, an ethnocentric viewpoint which complicates cross-cultural comparison and makes clear conceptualization of terms difficult.'[3]

It is generally accepted that definitions of work may vary from country to country and from culture to culture. 'Remuneration is not the main definitional criterion of work in Hausa culture,' Schildkrout

2. *UNESCO Sources* (Paris), No. 22, January 1991.

3. Enid Schildkrout, 'The Employment of Children in Kano', in Gerry Rodgers and Guy Standing, eds., *Childwork, Poverty and Underdevelopment*, Geneva, International Labour Organization, 1981.

notes. 'There are many activities which produce income which are not regarded as work. Work can only be defined in relation to the age and sex of the person performing a particular task and in the context of the cultural expectations appropriate to this person's status. If a 12-year-old boy spends time minding a baby this is not considered work, although it is regarded as work if a married girl of the same age does it.'[4]

The same kind of relativism should also be applied to education systems, as is shown by a number of observations that emerged from an inquiry into traditional education conducted by the UNESCO-UNICEF Co-operative Programme in Mauritania and Niger. The inquiry refers to 'educational methods that at times can be very strict, especially as far as girls are concerned, and which link learning closely to all the activities of daily life that are within the young child's capabilities. This strictness, which would be quite unacceptable in other cultures, appeared absolutely normal to nearly all those asked.'[5]

These observations have been confirmed by other inquiries and other authors, including Manga Bekombo, who believes that 'far from invariably implying *exploitation*, the work of children can be, according to cultural context, an expression of an educational principle according to which, if only in *anticipation*, each individual makes a sacrifice to the community who then accepts him or her as a member.'[6] Bekombo adds that 'An educational concept which

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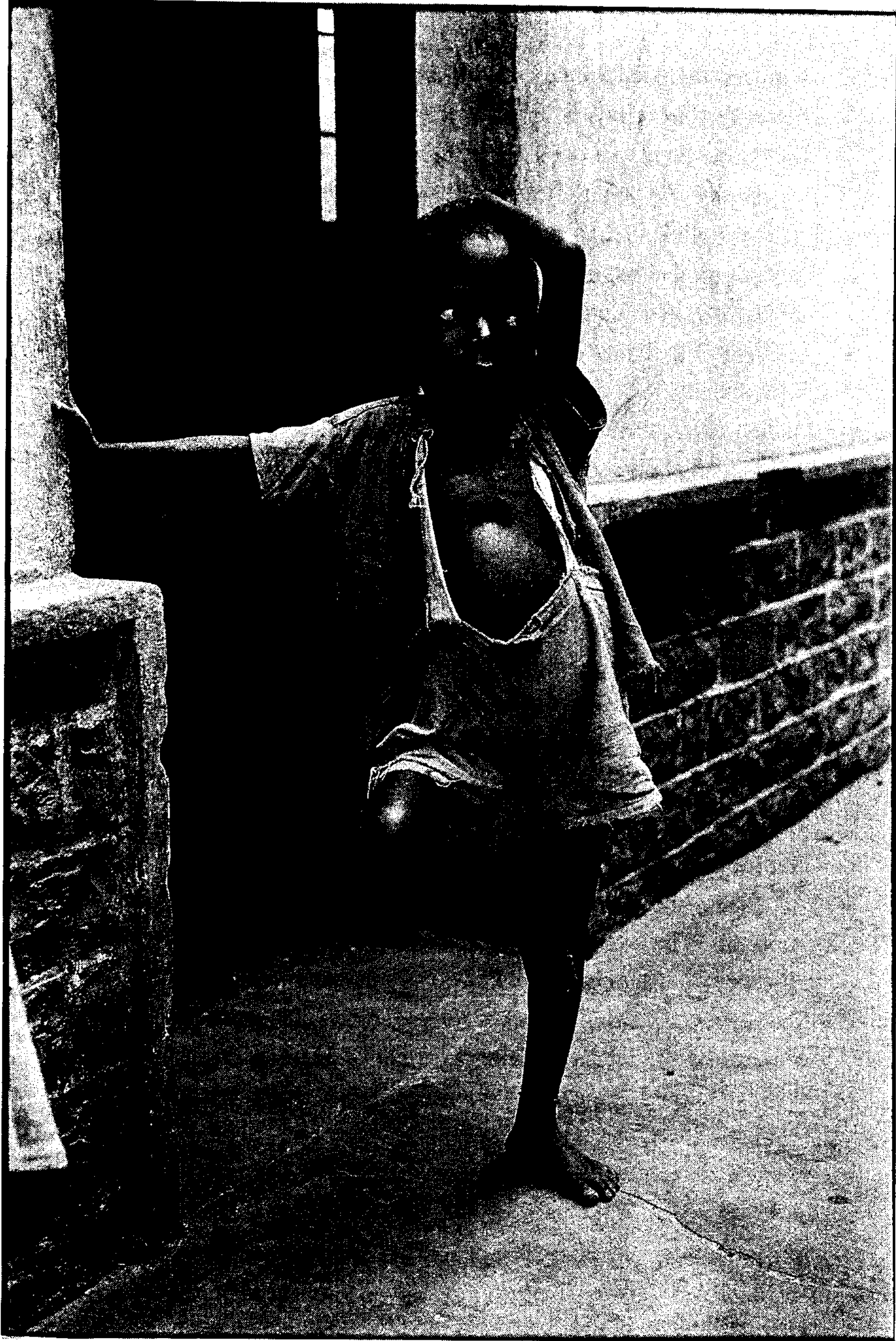
4. Schildkrout, op. cit.

5. A. K. B. Tay. *'Child-to-Child' in Africa. Towards an Open Learning Strategy,* Paris, UNESCO-UNICEF Co-operative Programme, 1989. (Digest 29.)

6. Manga Bekombo, 'The Child in Africa: Socialisation, Education and Work', in Rodgers and Standing, op. cit.



requires the participation of children in productive activities as a prelude to their assumption of adult responsibilities is the background for the emerging modern urban society.'

Here is the nub of the problem – the collision between a universe rich in traditions and a modern urban society that relegates to the sidelines those who cannot avoid getting caught up in its turmoil. In 1979, Boubakar Ly analysed the phenomenon in these terms: 'Moving from the countryside to the city does not automatically create delinquency; it all depends on the "reception facilities". In most cases delinquents are in a social vacuum, especially a family vacuum. Young Africans feel a strong desire for dependence, which is still a cultural value today. In this context they see their parents as people who are no longer playing an educational role. Many young people turn to the state, wanting it to provide what it cannot provide. The parents do the same – their reactions are those of traditional society in the sense that they wish to entrust to the state – in this case the police – children they find difficult to control. The family's socializing functions are not backed up by the institutions of society as a whole. Modern society does not take any responsibility – or if it does it does so unsatisfactorily – for young people who react to this vacuum by turning in on themselves and trying to find their own solutions.'[7]

Today modern society is essentially urban and will become even more so. 'The twentieth century has been a century of urbanization. The twenty-first century will be the century of megalopolis,' said the mayor of Tokyo, Shunichi Suzuki, when closing the third world summit of the world's big cities, held in Montreal on 17 October 1991.[8] At the beginning of the nineteenth century just under 3 per

7. Ly, op. cit.

8. Charles Vial, 'Le siècle des mégapoles', *Le Monde* (Paris), 22 October 1991.

cent of the world's population lived in cities, whereas at the turn of the millennium more than half of humanity will be city-dwellers. This urban explosion is happening in the developing countries just as much as in the industrialized countries: twenty-five of the world's thirty-seven cities with over 5 million inhabitants are in the South.

Africa will not be exempt from this irresistible growth. Each year its urban population increases by 10 per cent. The population of Kinshasa has risen twentyfold, that of Lagos thirtyfold and that of Abidjan thirty-five fold. By the year 2000, it is estimated that there will be twenty-one megacities worldwide, each with more than 10 million inhabitants. Eighteen of these cities are in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

Urban growth in developing countries has had far-reaching consequences. 'Urbanization means the dislocation of communities, the dissolution of the ties of family, clan, tribe, village or the old quarters of the medina. True it means liberation from societies that are closed in on themselves, where the individual is what Jacques Berque has called "a stitch in the fabric", from the prison of tradition. But this freedom is negative if it is only the freedom of the market or of joblessness, if it destroys the old models under the impact of models imported from outside.'[9]

If only because of their numbers, children and young people are the front-line troops in this clash between eras and development models. 'The urban design of the colonizers, as well as most post-independence planning, did not take sufficient account of children and young people. Amenities and public services barely keep up with the growth of human settlements, and inequalities get worse.

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9. Claude Liauzu, 'L'impossible modèle urbain', *La ville partout, et partout en crise*, Paris, Le Monde diplomatique, 1991. ('Manière de voir' series.)

The environment of everyday life is one of open drains, garbage and dangers of all kinds, including the ever-present threat of being run down by a bus. And young people often feel that their expectations, their preoccupations and their demands are smothered in a blanket of repression by a badly run society which slams its doors in their face and trembles before the threath of youth.[10]

Some respond to this situation and these prospects by making alarmist statements. One of them is Stanislas S. Adotevi, who in his opening address to the Cotonou workshop made the following equation: 'Street children, children in difficult circumstances = lost society; in any society loss = waste.' Nobel Peace laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel echoed this cry of alarm when he wrote: 'If they do not succumb to some form of child mortality, these children will in a few years be adolescents then citizens of our societies. They will demand explanations from their own governments and from the countries of the North. They will revolt. An enormously powerful delayed-action time-bomb is being primed, and promises and fair words will be of no avail. Should we not return to reason before time runs out and build a new international economic order that is the only chance we have of making the world a more harmonious place and restoring to humanity a sense of sharing? We are confronted with a drama that concerns the whole of humanity, which must collectively define new formulae for development; it must display audacity and generosity or risk implosion in the turmoil of unbridled selfishness.'[11] Not long ago, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar (former United

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10. Jacques Bugnicourt, 'Les murs de Dakar', in *La ville partout, et partout en crise*, op. cit.

11. Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, 'Enfants des rues', in *La ville partout, et partout en crise*, op. cit.

Nations Secretary-General) declared that 'our stability will not last as long as need, famine and poverty continue to exist in Africa'.[12]

At the Cotonou meeting, Yves Yehouessi, Benin's Minister of Justice and Legislation, quoted UNICEF Executive Director James P. Grant as saying, in reference to what he called a 'quiet catastrophe': 'If there is one lesson which history insists on, it is that political and social turmoil will follow when persistent poverty and personal tragedy sit side by side with the evident capacity for improvement in the lives of the poor.'

Eduardo Galleano, speaking on French television in 1991, was even more angry and pessimistic. 'Reality imitates television,' he said. 'Street violence is an extension of screen violence by other means. Street children practise private enterprise by means of crime, which is the only area in which they can express themselves. The only human rights they possess are the rights to steal and to die. Like little wild creatures abandoned to their fate, they go hunting. At the first street corner they come to they scratch somebody with their claws and then run off. They don't last long. Their lives are stunted by sniffing glue and taking other drugs to stave off hunger, cold and solitude. Some of them die by the bullet. The state – which is a police state now, no longer a paternalistic one – does not hand out charity. That's all gone forever, the days when people talked about bringing the lost sheep back to the fold by study and hard work. In the age of market economics, surplus offspring are eliminated by hunger and the gun. Street kids, the children of marginal workers, are not and cannot be useful to society. Education is for those who can pay for it. Those who can't buy it are put down.

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12. During the French television programme *La marche du siècle* shown on 4 December 1991.

According to *The New York Times*, the police have killed more than forty children in the streets of Guatemala City. Child beggars, thieves, garbage scavengers, whose mutilated corpses without tongues, eyes or ears, have been found thrown amidst the rubbish. According to Amnesty International, in 1989 some 457 children and adolescents were executed in the Brazilian cities of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Recife. These crimes committed by death squads and other parallel police forces did not take place in backward rural areas but in Brazil's biggest cities. They were not committed where there is too little capitalism but where there is too much. Social injustice and contempt for human life increase with economic growth. In countries where the death penalty does not exist, it is applied day in day out to defend property rights. And day in day out opinion-makers find excuses for crime. Around the middle of 1990, in the city of Buenos Aires, an engineer shot and killed two young thieves who were running away with the cassette-recorder from his car. Bernardo Neustadt, Argentina's most influential journalist, said on television, "I would have done the same thing." Afanasio Jazadji won a deputy's seat in São Paulo state. He was elected with one of the biggest majorities in the history of Brazil. Jazadji had acquired his immense popularity on radio, at the microphone. His programme was an outspoken defender of the death squads and came out in favour of torture and the elimination of delinquents.'[13]

In Africa the situation of children in difficult circumstances has not yet plumbed such depths of abjection – yet another reason, if one were needed, not to give in, to act while there is still time. Every-

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13. Eduardo Galeano, 'Être comme eux', *Le Monde diplomatique* (Paris), October 1991.

thing humanly and materially possible must be done to respond to this serious and far-reaching challenge.

To try to meet the educational needs of these children is a challenge that must be met, although it is not, as we have seen, the only one. Education, whether formal or non-conventional, cannot solve every problem, but it is one way whereby innovatory solutions can win acceptance, especially if it is accepted that 'where the level is extremely low and where there are not enough school places, there is something worse than a working child and that is a child who does nothing.'[14]

Time is short. 'On present trends, the number of children being born into the world each year is predicted to peak in about the year 2000 and begin to fall. The children of the 1990s will therefore be the largest generation ever to be entrusted to mankind. And the present generation will rightly be judged by how it meets the challenge of protecting their lives, their growth, their education and their rights.'[15]

At the end of this short journey among the world's neediest people, the impression remains that they are all alike, so many common features do they share. Alphonse Tay, who is an African and an anthropologist, as well as an international civil servant in charge of UNESCO's programme on street children, calls for a more discriminating response. 'In one sense it is a problem with a single face,' he says. 'When you see street children, whether you are in Africa, Latin America or Asia, they have the same basic needs. When you look into the question of how the children have come to be where they

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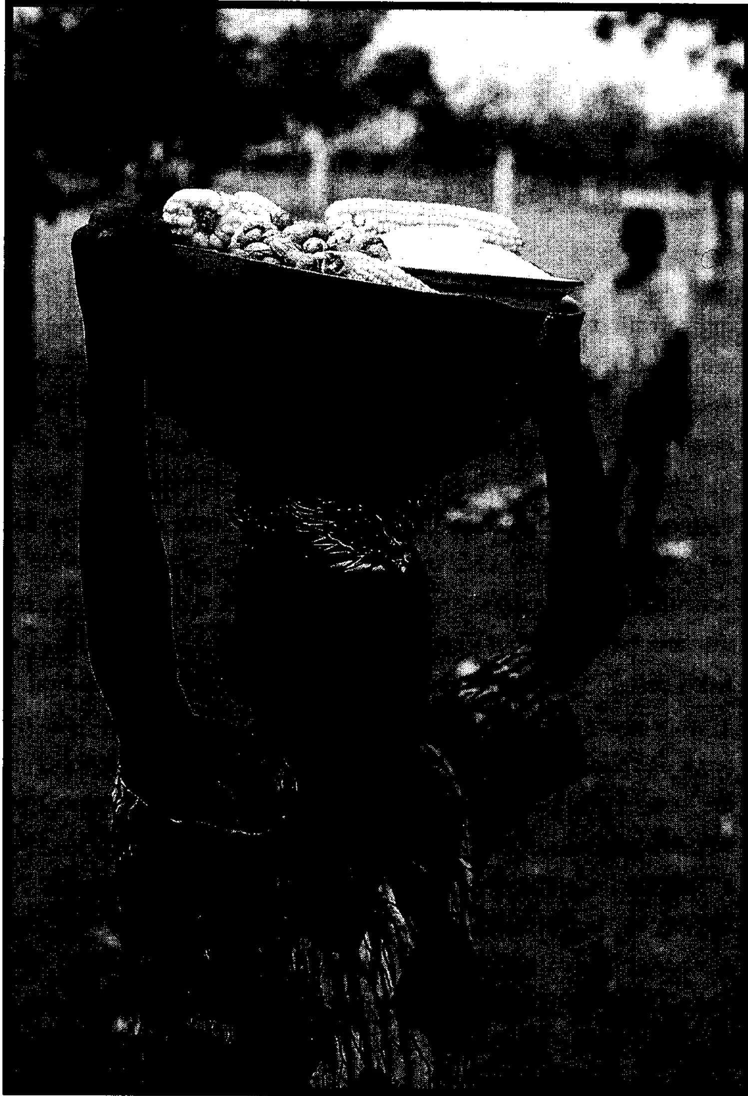
14. A text presented by the Executive Secretary of ENDA Third World at a meeting on the Human Rights Convention held in Dakar in December 1988.

15. *The State of the World's Children 1991*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press for UNICEF, 1991.



are, you realize that the causes are practically the same. They are the same age, for instance. They have many common features, but at the same time one is bound to take into account the specific environments in which they live. Though they have many things in common, this doesn't necessarily mean that the same approach to finding a solution should be adopted. There are things that can be done in one place that can't be done in another. And that depends on many factors – the legal situation, for example. Nor is there universal agreement about the gravity of the problem: in some places there is killing; in others there is rehabilitation; elsewhere preventive measures are taken. The situations are not totally identical in one place and another. At the risk of oversimplification, one might sum up the situation by saying that in Asia the dominant factor is children at work, in Latin America you have delinquent children who have to meet violence with violence in order to survive, and in Africa you have children engaged in what one might call a strategy for survival. Of course they may be light-fingered, like children everywhere, but here the situation is not yet the same as it is in Latin America. Nor, apart from certain rare and well-known cases of slavery, do you find the kind of thing that happens in some cases in Asia where you have rows of children working away in sweatshops. There is nothing like the same violence or risk of accident. Nothing like the same intensity of exploitation, not even any exploitation at all. In Africa street children are not starving and skeletal as elsewhere, except when they are the victims of a civil war. Sometimes they are even fed, freely and voluntarily by the women who sell food in the markets or by people who are concerned about them. It may occasionally happen that in some big cities the police kill a few young people. But often the victims are no longer street children but "delinquents" who have turned dangerous or have been mixed up with the police at least once, who are totally desperate and act accordingly. These are young

recidivists, a phenomenon well-known in criminology. "We can only exist through recidivism," they seem to tell themselves, "because whatever we do to try to be like everyone else it won't get us back into 'normal society'. The only thing we can do to show that we are not stupid is to show intelligence in doing what society blames us for doing." It is impossible to deny that violence towards street children exists in Africa, but it is not yet as organized as it is elsewhere.'

And so there may be encouraging signs in Africa. Alphonse Tay goes on to describe how, 'At the Cotonou meeting I showed a film about street children in Latin America. Many of those who saw it were astonished. They were horrified by certain images and by the moral degradation they reflected. After seeing a child whose organ had been removed for sale or a street girl who had been left on the pavement holding in her hand the money that had been given her to pay for the eyes that had been taken from her, the viewers said: "We must do something before it's too late." They know that the same causes produce the same effects and could easily imagine the terrible situations that are to be expected in their countries since it is impossible to call a halt to "progress".'

Postscript

We had been aware of each other for quite a while, he and I. And yet we had never exchanged a word. We had passed each other in the street. That was all.

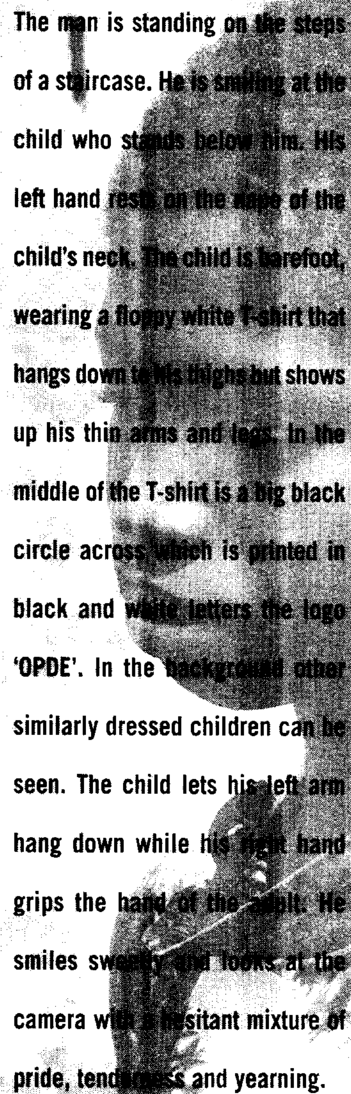
The first time I saw him was in spring 1991. He was one of the children staying at the hostel run by the Enfants Soleil project in Bujumbura. It was hard to say how old he was – around 10 or 12, perhaps. He wore shorts and a beige shirt with a printed pattern, clothes provided by the association. With three other children, he suddenly put on an improvised show. He threw himself into it heart and soul, dancing and singing like mad, jumping up and down and swaying his hips rhythmically. I thought he was cheerful, funny, cheeky. He looked a rebellious kid. That day I was told that he was a thief, that he lived in the street and only came to the centre occasionally. He was as lively and elusive as a will-o'-the-wisp.

The second time we met was in a street in the centre of town, a few months later. He was in the midst of a gang of ragged urchins who, as often happens, rushed to the car as we were getting out of it and offered to keep an eye on it for us in return for a handout. They all jostled with each other, hoping to be chosen, but he stood out. As he contemptuously pushed the others aside he pointed to himself and yelled out: 'Me! Me! Me! Enfant Soleil.' The Enfants Soleil

centre had been officially opened a few weeks before in the presence of leading government figures serenaded by a host of tambourine players. He must have been present then and had the idea of using the occasion to guarantee his trustworthiness as a street child.

The third time I saw him was over a year later. He was taller and thinner, but I recognized him immediately among the thirty-odd children in one of the classrooms of the OPDE (Œuvre Humanitaire pour la Protection et le Développement de l'Enfant en Difficulté). He was in the front row, the only one who was asleep – or pretending to be asleep – with his head resting on his folded arms. As the exchange with the children was coming to a close, he seemed to wake up and stood up in front of his table. Very politely and apparently very seriously he put a question to the project organizer, who was present in the room. Since he spoke in Kirundi, I didn't understand what he said, but to judge from the gust of laughter he raised from his friends and the teacher, his hangdog appearance brilliantly concealed his talent as a comedian.

As I was preparing to leave the OPDE Centre, he came running up to me. He wanted me to take a photo of him with one of the monitors.



The man is standing on the steps of a staircase. He is smiling at the child who stands below him. His left hand rests on the nape of the child's neck. The child is barefoot, wearing a floppy white T-shirt that hangs down to his thighs but shows up his thin arms and legs. In the middle of the T-shirt is a big black circle across which is printed in black and white letters the logo 'OPDE'. In the background other similarly dressed children can be seen. The child lets his left arm hang down while his right hand grips the hand of the adult. He smiles sweetly and looks at the camera with a hesitant mixture of pride, tenderness and yearning.

Bujumbura, August 1992.

Appendices

EXTRACTS FROM THE WORLD DECLARATION ON THE SURVIVAL, PROTECTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN

On 30 September 1990, the World Summit for Children was held at the United Nations in New York. Seventy-one presidents and prime ministers took part. The meeting produced a Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and a Plan of Action for its application. Below are extracts from the two documents which are directly relevant to the problem of children in difficult circumstances:

1. We have gathered at the World Summit for Children to undertake a joint commitment and to make an urgent universal appeal – to give every child a better future. [. . .]
5. Each day, millions of children suffer from the scourges of poverty and economic crisis – from hunger and homelessness, from epidemics and illiteracy, from degradation of the environment. They suffer from the grave effects of the problems of external indebtedness and also from the lack of sustained and sustainable growth in many developing countries, particularly the least developed ones. [. . .]

13. At present, over 100 million children are without basic schooling, and two-thirds of them are girls. The provision of basic education and literacy for all are among the most important contributions that can be made to the development of the world's children. [. . .]
16. Economic conditions will continue to influence greatly the fate of children, especially in developing nations. For the sake of the future of all children, it is urgently necessary to ensure or reactivate sustained and sustainable economic growth and development in all countries and also to continue to give urgent attention to an early, broad and durable solution to the external debt problems facing developing debtor countries. [. . .]
19. We ourselves hereby make a solemn commitment to give high priority to the rights of children, to their survival and to their protection and development. This will also ensure the well-being of all societies.
20. We have agreed that we will act together, in international cooperation as well as in our respective countries. We now commit ourselves to the following 10-point programme to protect the rights of children and to improve their lives:

(1) We will work to promote earliest possible ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Programmes to encourage information about children's rights should be launched worldwide, taking into account the distinct cultural and social values in different countries. [. . .]

(5) We will work for respect for the role of the family in providing for children and will support the efforts of parents, other caregivers and communities to nurture and care for children, from the earliest stages of childhood through adolescence. We also recognize the special needs of children who are separated from their families. [. . .]

(6) We will work for programmes that reduce illiteracy and provide

educational opportunities for all children, irrespective of their background and gender; that prepare children for productive employment and lifelong learning opportunities, i.e. through vocational training; and that enable children to grow to adulthood within a supportive and nurturing cultural and social context.

(7) We will work to ameliorate the plight of millions of children who live under especially difficult circumstances – as victims of apartheid and foreign occupation; orphans and street children and children of migrant workers; the displaced children and victims of natural and man-made disasters; the disabled and the abused, the socially disadvantaged and the exploited. Refugee children must be helped to find new roots in life. We will work for special protection of the working child and for the abolition of illegal child labour. We will do our best to ensure that children are not drawn into becoming victims of the scourge of illicit drugs. [. . .]

Among the objectives set by the Plan of Action is point (5)(e): 'Universal access to basic education and completion of primary education by at least 80 per cent of primary school age children.'

Points 20 and 21 of the Plan of Action are more specifically focused on measures in favour of basic education and literacy and reiterate the commitments made at the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, 1990). Points 22, 23 and 24 are more directly concerned with children living in particularly difficult conditions. Point 23 makes this proposal: 'More than 100 million children are engaged in employment, often heavy and hazardous and in contravention of international conventions which provide for their protection from economic exploitation and from performing work that in-

terferes with their education and is harmful to their health and full development. With this in mind, all states should work to end such child-labour practices and see how the conditions and circumstances of children in legitimate employment can be protected to provide adequate opportunity for their healthy upbringing and development.'

EXTRACTS FROM THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

On 20 November 1989, the General Assembly of the United Nations unanimously adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The convention sets universal legal standards designed to protect children from lack of care, ill-treatment and exploitation, and to guarantee that they enjoy basic human rights, including the right to survival, to development and to full participation in social, cultural and educational activities, as well as other activities necessary for their fulfilment and individual welfare. The Declaration of the World Summit for Children (New York, 1990) calls on all governments to do everything in their power for the convention to be ratified and applied as quickly as possible. Below are some of the articles of the convention relating to education and children in difficult circumstances.

Article 28

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

(a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;

(b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;

(c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;

(d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;

(e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.

3. States Parties shall promote and encourage international co-operation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

Article 32

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

2. States Parties shall take legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to ensure the implementation of the present article. To this end, and having regard to the relevant provisions of other international instruments, States Parties shall in particular:

(a) Provide for a minimum age or minimum ages for admission to employment;

(b) Provide for appropriate regulation of the hours and conditions of employment;

(c) Provide for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of the present article.

Article 33

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislative, administrative, social and educational measures, to protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances as defined in the relevant international treaties, and to prevent the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of such substances.

Article 34

States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. For these purposes, States Parties shall in particular take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent:

(a) The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity;
(b) The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices;
(c) The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.

Article 35

States Parties shall take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form.

Article 36

States Parties shall protect the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare.

[Article 40 relates to the rights of the child with respect to penal law. However, the whole of the convention concerns children in difficult circumstances.]

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He is wearing dirty mauve trousers and a torn, sleeveless brown sweater; beneath the sweater is a long-sleeved shirt from which a green polo-neck sweater sticks out. On his feet are shapeless boots covered in red dust. On his head is a blue and white hat which half-conceals his forehead. He nods to show us that he would like to be photographed. He poses, hands in pockets, legs slightly apart, resting his weight on his right hip. He looks calmly at the camera. The bags and the deep hollows beneath his eyes tell us far more than the unfathomable silence of his closed mouth.

Nairobi, September 1992

For many African children today the grim realities of everyday life are far removed from models of education based on traditional wisdom. An attempt to draw the attention of a wide public to the situation of street children, this book focuses on the educational aspects of a problem from which no country is spared. The international community has considerable intellectual and material resources with which the problem could be tackled. What is required is strong political commitment over a long period.

Jean-Pierre Vélis has long experience as a journalist specializing in educational questions. He has been assistant editor-in-chief of the French journal *l'Éducation* and in 1988 published *La France illettrée*, a study on functional illiteracy in France (Le Seuil, Paris). In 1990, within the framework of International Literacy Year, he wrote at UNESCO's request *Through a Glass, Darkly: Functional Illiteracy in Industrialized Countries* (UNESCO, 1990). He has for some years been a consultant on literacy teaching and adult education with a number of international organizations, notably the Commission of the European Union, UNESCO and UNICEF.

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