



**SOS CHILDREN'S  
VILLAGES**

# **Universal Periodic Review of Ghana**

**42<sup>nd</sup> session, January - February 2023**

## **Submission of SOS Children's Villages in Ghana**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. SOS Children's Villages Ghana presents this submission concerning the rights of the child in Ghana for consideration by the UPR Working Group at its 42<sup>nd</sup> session (January – February 2023).
2. SOS Children's Villages was founded in 1949 to provide long-term support to children who had lost their homes or families in the Second World War by offering them a new family environment. In Ghana, SOS Children's Villages has been active since 1974, and has presence in Tema, Asiakwa, Kumasi and Tamale.
3. SOS Children's Villages provide alternative families to children without adequate parental care. Over the past years, we have provided quality childcare and protection to orphaned and abandoned children that grow up in SOS Children's Villages family-like care and Family Strengthening Programme.
4. SOS Children's Villages Family Strengthening Programmes work directly with families and communities to help them to effectively protect and care for their children, in cooperation with local authorities and in collaboration with other charities on the ground. This model aims to prevent children from losing the care of their capacity, to protect and care for their children, and strengthening the safety nets for vulnerable children and their families within the community. The goal is to prepare and equip the children for an independent future therefore each child receives education and training according to his or her needs, so that when the time comes to leave the SOS Children's Village, they are able to stand on their own two feet and achieve the goals of self-reliance, financial independence and social integration.
5. SOS Children's Villages in Ghana provides children's education, health, spiritual and psychosocial needs up to the age of 23 years. At this age, young people are empowered with career initiatives to ensure that they are innovative and consciously equipped with the right skills for various marketable career paths. These career initiatives include mentorship, counselling, individual learning plans, job search assistance, skills development, apprenticeship and internships. They are then integrated back into the community through a gradual disengagement process.
6. Based on our many years of experience working with children, we influence policymakers, institutions, and society to work for political, social, economic, and cultural changes that ensure that children can fully enjoy their rights; in a supportive and nurturing environment and that as adults they have the same chances as their peers to be included in society.
7. This report is based on the evaluation of the commitments made by the Government of Ghana to implement recommendations on children's rights accepted during its previous UPR. The data and information obtained for this submission came from various sources, including first-hand information from our programmatic work supporting children and young people. In 2017, SOS Children's Villages in Ghana commissioned Stratcomm Africa, a total communications and reputation management agency to conduct research on children in street situations in Ghana. Findings of that research form the basis of this submission.
8. The present report addresses the widespread phenomenon of children in street situations.

## **I. CHILDREN IN STREET SITUATIONS**

### ***A. Third-cycle UPR Recommendations***

The issue of children in street situations has not received adequate attention in previous reviews and no recommendations have been made to Ghana in this regard.

In 2015, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that Ghana:

- “a) Undertake an in-depth study and statistical analysis on the root causes and scope of the issue of children in street situations in the State party;
- (b) Develop a national strategy and a national plan of action to support children in street situations with sufficient financial, human and technical resources and to address socioeconomic disadvantages and other root causes of vulnerability of children in street situation, as well as the violence they are sometimes exposed including in the hands of law enforcement officials;
- (c) Ensure the appropriate implementation of initiatives to provide these children with adequate nutrition, clothing, housing, health care and educational opportunities, especially informal education and life-skills training, in order to support their full development and when in the best interest of the child return to their families and community and;
- (d) Provide, as appropriate, all child in street situations victims of physical, sexual and substance abuse with reintegration and recovery services.”<sup>1</sup>

### ***B. Legal and Institutional Framework***

In Ghana, the number of children living on the streets keeps growing year on year. The Government of Ghana, through the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection is implementing various measures to address the situation. Numerous Non-Governmental Organisations, corporate bodies and individuals have also put their shoulders to the wheel, yet the phenomenon of children in street situations has not abated.

A Child and Family Welfare Policy introduced by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection in 2014 acknowledged that the situation of children living and or working on the streets is an issue that requires urgent attention. Based on this, in 2017, the Ministry developed a comprehensive action plan to reduce streetism dubbed, “operation get off the street for a better life”. The Operation get off the Street now for a Better Life initiative was developed based on the findings and on the recommendations made in the Mapping and Analysis of the Child Protection System Report on strengthening Child and Family Welfare System. The project was a process towards identifying the numbers of persons on the streets, profiling, integrating them with their parents, caregivers, communities and was in line with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), Goal 1, 2 and 5.

The Department of Children and the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) are among the government agencies established by law to ensure the welfare of vulnerable children. These agencies seek to undertake activities aimed at ensuring the protection and promotion of the rights of children. However, they remain constrained by budgetary limitations.

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<sup>1</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined third to fifth periodic reports of Ghana, CRC/C/GHA/CO/3-5, 9 June 2015, para. 66.

Ghana as a developing country has a great deal of demand on its budget. Governments perpetually have to manage limited national resources to meet a range of national needs. Inevitably, some needs are inadequately met. Social sector needs, such as resources for addressing child streetism, are very often the needs that suffer in these circumstances.

In the face of limited resources, governments have typically not prioritized social welfare. The lack of continuity of governmental policies when there is a change of government also deepens the issue of inadequate resource allocation for social welfare. Consequently, children from deprived backgrounds find themselves resorting to the streets for a living.

Ghana has established a relatively comprehensive legal framework for child protection, with provisions in the Constitution and the Children's Act 1998 (Act 560).

Article 36 (1) of the 1992 Constitution urges the taking of all necessary actions to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every person in Ghana and to provide adequate means of livelihood and suitable employment and public assistance to the needy.

According to the Children's Act (560) district assemblies shall protect the welfare and promote the rights of children within its area of authority and shall ensure that within the district, governmental agencies liaise with each other in matters concerning children. A significant number of the children on the streets are migrants from the rural areas. Creating the enabling environment in these areas to prevent them from leaving their communities, giving them skills training opportunities in their communities will help address the child streetism situation in urban areas.

The Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA) II, 2014-2017 - Vol I: Policy Framework provides a consistent set of policy objectives and strategies to guide the realization of its goals and serve as a platform for donor coordination.

Part of the vision focused on provision of quality education aimed at achieving increase in inclusive and equitable access to, and participation in education at all levels; which entails removing the physical, financial and social barriers and constraints to access to education at all levels; and also strengthening institutional arrangements for enhancing the roles of CBOs and CSOs in advocacy.

This vision also included bridging the equity gaps in access to healthcare to ensure sustainable healthcare financing arrangements that protect the poor by reviewing and accelerating the implementation of the Community-Based Health Planning and Services (CHPS) strategy, especially in under-served areas.<sup>2</sup>

Even though there were some interventions by Government, such as the Free and Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) programme, introduced in 1995 to attain basic universal education by 2005, and Operation get off the street for a better life; the situation keeps deteriorating.

There are so many legal frameworks aimed at addressing this situation, yet are not implemented due to logistic constraints by State Agencies tasked. As a child development organization, we intend to draw Government's attention to this canker.

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<sup>2</sup> The Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA) II, 2014-2017 - Vol I: Policy Framework

### ***C. Promotion and Protection of Human Rights on the Ground***

The situation of children working and/or living in the streets in Ghana is quite dire. As the government acknowledges in its recent report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the exact number of children in street situations is unknown, but the phenomenon is widespread and poses enormous problems<sup>3</sup>. In 2017, it was estimated that there were approximately 300,000 children living and/or working on the streets of Ghana.<sup>4</sup> Majority are girls who remain particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and sexual exploitation. In all the regional capitals and smaller towns and cities, there are many children living and/or working on the streets. The causes include extreme poverty, parental neglect, rural urban migration, second generational street children, truancy, child labour and exploitation.

Lack of economic development in the five northern regions of Ghana cause young people from these areas to migrate to the urban centres in expectation of greener pastures. Even when they realize that life in the cities is not any better, they stay on and make a living on the streets. Often, street children are victims of circumstances such as divorce and death of parents or irresponsible parenting. The growing number of young parents, late enrolment of children into school and strained parent-child relationships are among other factors contributing to growing numbers of street children. Joblessness of parents, economic and financial distress, single parenting, lack of sex education, influence from external families and incompatibility between couples can also result in children finding their way onto the streets to make a living. The cost of living for the average Ghanaian is high. Parents who have difficulty in discharging their responsibilities therefore decide to stop educating their children. Instead, these children help their parents with various economic activities. This practice often exposes the children to life on the streets.

Limited employment opportunities and lack of development in rural areas lead many young people to migrate to the urban centres, where they begin to operate outside parental or adult control. Some migrants from other countries such as Mali, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, etc, in their quest for better conditions of living find their way to Ghana. Without any gainful employment, they find themselves on the streets eking out a living.

Other factors that have been identified as causing child streetism are abuse of children by parents, relatives and other members of the community, cultural beliefs and practices that result in delinquent children being cast out of their homes and weakened extended family system. Non-appreciation of the value of education, non-enforcement of existing laws and exposure to social media are contributory factors.

According to the Children's Act 1998, (Act 560) amended in 2016; every child of school going age should be in school and stay in school, in particular during school days and times<sup>5</sup>.

However, the number of children seen washing windscreens, begging, selling, sleeping and or loitering on the streets, around traffic lights and under bridges has escalated over the years and has resulted in abuse, accidents, deaths, littering and overcrowding on the streets of major cities in the country. Girls from the northern parts of the country often become head porters (popularly known as kayayei). Long working hours, a lack of food and shelter, sexual abuse, early pregnancy and drug abuse are common problems facing these children. This is

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<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection, Ghana's combined sixth and seventh periodic reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, November 2020, para. 196.

<sup>4</sup> According to statistics from the Department of Child Protection, as of December 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Children's Act 1998, (Act 560) Article 8, Clause 1

an indication of weakened extended family values and governance systems, which are increasingly unable to protect and provide for children and care for the vulnerable.

These children are categorized into three groups:

- Children off the street (those engaged in economic activities but go home and contribute their earnings to their family sustenance),
- Children on the street (those who have cut off all ties with their biological families and are completely on their own, including orphans, runaways, refugees etc.) and
- Children in the street (urban or city children who were born in the street because of extreme poverty and deprivation).

Child streetism has very serious effects on the child, family and the nation as a whole with the child suffering the most. As a result of constant exposure to irresponsible adolescent lifestyles, most street youth grow to become social misfits, engaging in various criminal activities such as pick-pocketing, armed robbery, child prostitution, drug abuse, child trafficking, child labour, rape, among others. Other effects of child streetism experienced by the individual include death due to poor nutrition and teenage pregnancy and unsafe abortions; poor mental and psychological health; multiple sexual partners leading to Sexually Transmitted Infections etc.

#### ***D. Recommendations***

SOS Children's Villages Ghana recommends to the Government of Ghana to:

- Formulate a specific policy targeted at addressing children in street situations.
- Allocate and release more resources to support State Agencies working for children.
- Allocate specific funds to minimize rural-urban migration.
- Effective public education on the hazards of streetism in Ghana
- Develop and implement a comprehensive rural development programme.
- Tighten immigration procedures to curb illegal migration of children from neighbouring countries into the country.
- Roll out economic empowerment programmes for vulnerable families.

Demonstrate greater interest in the implementation of international and local laws and policies for the wellbeing of children. The State must demonstrate enough commitment to the International Conventions and Protocols that it is signatory to. Examples of which include the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 23 and 24) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.<sup>6</sup>

Effectively implementing social protection programmes, such as the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme, will serve to address the factors that lead to child streetism. Giving priority to the welfare of children, especially their education, is an important objective of social protection programmes.

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<sup>6</sup> Ghana NGOs Coalition on the Rights of the Child (GNCRC) Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) Report to UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2014

Providing opportunities for the youth through preparing them for the labour market and arming them with required employable skills will go a long way towards curbing child streetism. Improve access to the labour market for street children.

Effective implementation of the Free Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) and Free SHS programmes and giving increased access to educational opportunities will enable families to keep their children within the educational system rather than have them on the streets. Educated children can contribute their quota to the development of the country.

Many children find themselves on the streets because of domestic abuse and violence. While on the streets, they are exposed to various kinds of abuse and violence. Protecting children from all forms of abuse and violence is very important for their wellbeing and helps take them off the streets. Perpetrators of child abuse and violence against children ought to be made to face the rigours of the law.