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**POVERTY AND SOCIAL  
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**AT THE MARGINS**  
**Street Children in**  
**Asia and the Pacific**

**Andrew West**

**Asian Development Bank**

Regional and Sustainable Development Department

**POVERTY AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PAPERS**  
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**At the Margins:  
Street Children in  
Asia and the Pacific**

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**Asian Development Bank**

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ADB's role for assisting street children will be discussed in a separate paper, "A Guide for Staff: Working with Street Children" which is currently being prepared.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRP	child rights programming
ILO	International Labour Organization
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
NGO	nongovernment organization
PRC	People's Republic of China

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Asia-Pacific Region is home to nearly half the world's children, including large numbers of street children. This paper provides an introductory snapshot of issues concerning "street children" in this vast and culturally diverse region.

Although the term *street children* is neither a precise, nor very useful classification for children "on" or "of" the street, the term does serve as a point of engagement in considering the variety of issues and problems facing far too many vulnerable children in urban centers throughout the Asia-Pacific region. In this paper, *street children* is used as shorthand for children who might transit to the street, children on the street, or children who previously lived on the street, with a variety of occupations, including beggar, rubbish picker, shoeshine boy or flower seller, sweat shop worker, sex worker, petty criminal, etc.

Major themes in most descriptions of street children include homelessness, separation from family, and being out of school, but often those children designated as street children do not possess all of these traits. A further set of characteristics includes poverty and the need to work. These in turn are linked to vulnerability to exploitation and risk of coming into conflict with the law.

The circumstances and experiences of street children overlap with several other categories of children, such as trafficked children, migrant children, and working children. There also is overlap with a range of problems and difficulties confronting many children, including endemic poverty, domestic and/or sexual abuse and other violence, hazardous working conditions, exploitative labor, substance abuse, conflict with the law and juvenile justice, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Some street children are highly visible, and the subject of public concern because they are "out of place." Some see such children as victims; others see them more as small criminals. Often, we choose not to see them at all. And then there are the "invisible" street children, those kept and controlled as underage sex workers or as laborers in dangerous jobs or in unhealthy working conditions.

Processes of placing children in categories run counter not only to development of holistic practice interventions, but also to the realization of children's rights, which, given the almost universal ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), provides the main international standard for work with children. This requires addressing street children's lives in context. The first context is connected with children's identity, (proscribed or realized) as citizens and inhabitants of a particular State. Each State offers different opportunities and dangers for life on the street.

In addition to difficulties in categorizing children, and the wide range of potential responses and starting points, there is enormous diversity within the countries of Asia and the Pacific. The region has varied economies and political systems that provide very different contexts for the reasons why children come to the streets, the problems they face on the street, their prospects for moving on from the street, and a wide range of government as well as civil society responses and interventions available to street children.

Some countries are linked through experiences, for example of colonization or economic models. Other connections stem from the migration and trafficking of children, many of whom are, or become, street children. The connections through children provide a set of different

international linkages, some of which follow established conventional trade, but others are part of informal, criminal syndication.

While there are common features in good practice to address problems faced by street children, the characteristics of these responses generally are linked to interventions designed to address other issues. For example, prevention initiatives need to cover the range of situations that place children at risk, including not only the transition to street life, but also in relation to human trafficking, child sexual exploitation, hazardous and exploitative labor, HIV/AIDS, drugs and other substance abuse, peer pressure, criminal behavior, and so on.

One important question in looking at the lives and experiences of street children is looking also to their future. What does an uneasy survival on the street now, or in other occupations, bode for children's development and future lives? Some are described as "permanent street children," indicative of the growing perception that street children are a permanent feature of the urban landscape throughout much of the Asia-Pacific region. Many children on the street are controlled by criminal gangs, and apparently even linked to larger criminal syndicates (such as those involved in widespread international trafficking). If they grow up retained in a controlled criminalized environment, what other options can exist for them? How can street children avoid the stigma associated with perceptions of them as deviant? How can they have a choice?

Since the almost universal ratification of the 1989 CRC, emphasis has been given to its effective implementation including the development of a "rights-based" approach as an overall framework for addressing the circumstances and lives of all children. The CRC is especially useful in addressing the needs of the world's most vulnerable children, including those in "difficult circumstances" whose rights are particularly unfulfilled. Other international instruments also apply to children, such as conventions against torture and discrimination and, particularly for street children, the International Labour Organization Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

In many countries in Asia and the Pacific, provision for street children has been developed mostly by nongovernment organizations (NGOs). The development of frameworks for child-rights programming recognizes that governments have responsibilities as duty bearers toward the realization of rights for children, and must provide at least minimum legal and regulatory frameworks. Governments also must ensure that services exist and are properly implemented.

Places and methods of work include the active participation of children, working with them to begin to address key protection issues. Beginning with where children are living, it is then possible to look at issues of prevention, street work, and children moving on from the street to situations that place them at increased risk. While the focus of much work with street children has been on provision of shelters or temporary accommodation, education, and training, increased attention now is being given to prevention work. There is a great need for coordination of services in order to seek out and fill gaps in the provision of services directed to street children, and for standards to be developed, implemented, and monitored.

It is important that practice is reflective, that is it is embedded in local circumstances of children's lives and issues, evaluates work, is dynamic, and responds to changing environment and changing needs. Such practice is essentially or implicitly rights-based, and holistic (that is, looking to the whole child, not a particular aspect of a child's life). This is a foundation on which projects concerned with prevention, protection, street activities, and moving children on from the

street can begin. In addition, such practice works to standards, ensures staff are trained, and works in partnership with others. It is necessary to recognize that isolated, charity based approaches will not adequately address the issues of street children—or the problems confronting children “at the margins.”

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. This report is a study commissioned by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on best practice concerning street children in the Asia-Pacific region, and potential areas of strategic intervention for ADB. In May 2001, an ADB-Nongovernment Organization (NGO) Roundtable on Street Children was held with a number of Philippines-based NGOs. A subsequent internal ADB meeting in June 2001 recommended greater involvement by ADB in street children issues within the context of its Poverty Reduction Strategy, ADB's Social Protection Strategy, and related policies and development priorities. The report is based on a literature survey and the experience of the author in the region.

2. Half of the world's population lives in the Asia-Pacific region; 30% of them live in poverty, and 40% are children and young people (ADB 2001). The region has countries with vastly different sizes, government structures, and economies, from the People's Republic of China (PRC), the most populous country in the world with more than 1.2 billion people, to tiny Pacific nations with populations of only a few thousands, such as Niue (2,000), and Palau (20,000).

3. Street children are not usually counted, nor subject to census, so their numbers are not known. Different organizations produce local estimates; even conservative figures indicate that there are millions of street children in the region. The problems experienced by street children include homelessness, exploitation, the worst forms of labor, abuse, health difficulties, coercion and control by adult gangs, conflict with the law, lack of education, and lack of identification papers. Their experiences overlap with other categories of children, such as those who are trafficked and those involved in exploitative work, which increases the problems of counting their numbers.

4. The region's geographic diversity alone begins to indicate the variety of contexts in which street children live. The range of circumstances in which children live is exacerbated by the different responses to street children by governments and NGOs in different States. In addition, there is an even larger range of problems and issues associated with children who spend a part of their lives on the street, working, in transit to other places, and who may or may not be permanently separated from parents, family or other adults.

5. This paper attempts only an overview of the issues connected with street children, and intervention practices in the region. Section II takes up the issue of definition, and problems of poverty, homelessness, and change. Section III explores the variety of childhoods of street children, and the causes and consequences of their moving onto the street. A brief overview of street children in the region is provided in Section IV. The outline follows a broad-based geographical breakdown of countries in an attempt to take account of the range of polities, economies, histories, and cultures across the region. Sections V and VI examine the scale and requirements of interventions in the lives of street children in the region. These sections outline frameworks and principles for good practice, and also examine places and methods of implementation. In Section VII, the kinds of interventions that make up good practice are described and examples from around the region are given, including activities developed by street children themselves. Finally, the roles of government and responses of nongovernment organizations are outlined in Section VIII, in particular the need for coordination and regulation of services to a common set of standards linked to the overall framework of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and principles of child rights programming.

## II. WHO ARE STREET CHILDREN?

### A. The Problem of Definition

6. Although the term *street children* passed into common use in the 1990s, the term was used in reference to urban centers in Europe as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The meaning and definition of *street children* is contested among academics, policymakers, practitioners, politicians, and the general public. Individuals and groups have their own preferred definition. These different definitions are important for several reasons. For policymakers and practitioners, the meanings given to *street children* define their response in terms of the law, its implementation, and services provided. The perceptions of street children held by the general public may or may not influence the nature of official policy and professional welfare interventions. But the attitude of the public is important for the nature and success of responses. Popular explanations of the causes of children coming onto the street—for instance, as either victims or criminals—and public reactions to individual children may legitimize some actions taken by authorities, such as the practice in some countries of relocating or incarcerating street children.

7. The children who are visible on the street, begging, and who may be popularly perceived as typical street children, are often imagined to be homeless, desolate, and separated from parents (or imagined to be devious, hardened little criminals). However, their circumstances are generally far more complex. Street children may or may not be living with parents and they may or may not be living with or supervised by adults. They may or may not return to some sort of home or shelter most nights. Many are working, often in dangerous or exploitative situations. They may be in conflict with the law. Street children constitute a dynamic population, shifting as opportunities arise, moving in and out of other designated categories of children. They may have been trafficked and escaped to the street, but then fallen prey to even worse circumstances. They may have run away from violence and abuse within the family, begun living on the street, and then be trafficked, or drawn into commercial sex work. They may be economic migrants. The permutations and combinations are numerous and depend on context.

8. Although street children are primarily associated with backgrounds of family poverty, it is to be emphasized that all children—whatever nationality, family situation, or socioeconomic class—potentially are vulnerable. Domestic violence and abuse is not limited to poor families, while school-related pressures may be more prevalent among children from better-off families with higher expectations. This phenomenon is seen mostly in more developed countries of the region, such as Japan and Singapore, where school pressures contribute to a high adolescent suicide rate, but also in some Pacific countries (such as Samoa and Tonga) and not related to school pressures.

9. The difficulties of definition lead to debates over numbers. For example, a narrow definition of street children in Mongolia as being those who have no contact with family and live underground, arguably produces a figure of a few hundred children at most. Popular perceptions, however, extend the definition to include children who are homeless, with or without family, and who work on the street, resulting in a far higher figure, well into the thousands, which represents a major problem given Mongolia's small and highly urbanized population.

10. The problem of applying a standard definition across the vast Asia-Pacific region is exacerbated in two ways. First, there is the difficulty of making equivalencies across different

countries and cultures. Second, the overlapping categories currently in use also include children who have had experiences in common with street children, who may have been street children or who may become street children. A broader perspective is necessary to make the term more meaningful, especially when considering the effectiveness of particular interventions.

## **B. Homeless, Out Of School, Out Of Place**

11. The term *street children* is in general use across countries with different polities, income levels, economic and social systems, and cultures. There is a tendency to resist the use of the term in developed countries, and replace it with, for example, “runaways” (children who have run away, or left home or residential care) or simply homeless young people. The implicit difference seems to be based on economies and polities, in that children are not expected to be able to find work, nor to be homeless under the age of 16 years in developed countries, because of legislative checks and welfare and police systems. But, this means that children who are separated from adult care, have to beg or become involved in informal or criminal activities and economies (often at risk of becoming invisible to the public) in order to survive, which stigmatizes them further. In Australia, a Royal Commission in the early 1990s reported some 20,000 homeless children and young people (increasing to 26,000 in 2001, according to Australia’s national census). Yet, children who are separated from adult care (including family and residential care) and are homeless—on the street—in developed countries face many of the same problems as those confronted by street children in other parts of the world.

12. Underlying the use of the term is a sense of children being out of place in a particular context; and that context depends upon local ideas of childhood and expectations of children’s development and behavior in particular. An ideal or stated aim in many countries may be for children to live with parents and attend school, while the reality may be very different. The particular situations of street children result in their not easily being covered by the rights defined by the CRC (see Box II.1). Street children generally do not attend school but they do work. They may not be registered or have official identity, they may not receive any public education or health care, they may be harassed by police, have no opportunity for recreation or play, and certainly are not consulted in matters that affect their daily lives.

### Box II.1: The Rights of the Child

The League of Nations pronounced a Declaration on the Rights of the Child in 1923. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 implicitly includes children, but a second declaration of the Rights of the Child was made by the UN General Assembly in 1959. Because children require additional attention and protection, a separate Convention on the Rights of the Child was seen as necessary. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted in 1989 and has since been ratified by nearly every State in the world (with the exception only of Somalia and the United States).

The 54 articles of the CRC are divided into the following components:

- ? General measures
- ? Definition of a child
- ? General principles
- ? Civil rights and freedoms
- ? Family environment and alternative care
- ? Basic health and welfare
- ? Education, leisure, and cultural activities
- ? Special protection measures
- ? Monitoring

The Convention has two general principles that underpin the whole: non-discrimination and the best interests of the child. Children's rights under the Convention are often cursorily discussed in terms of rights to survival and development, rights to protection, and rights to participation. These elements, however, are intertwined, and the Convention must be considered in its entirety, along with other human rights instruments, in developing rights-based approaches to practice, and in seeking international standards against which to measure children's lives and circumstances.

Countries that have ratified the CRC are required to submit periodic reports to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to indicate their progress in realizing child rights. In addition to national (governmental) reports, civil society organizations are encouraged to submit independent reports to the UNCRC.

For many organizations seeking to protect and realize children's rights, the principles and practice of child rights programming aim to use all appropriate international conventions, and not only the CRC.

In addition to the CRC, children are also implicitly and explicitly given rights under other UN and international instruments. These instruments include the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency, and others.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 182 and Recommendation 190 Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor, have particular relevance for many street children. The Convention defines the worst forms of child labor and implementation processes for ratifying governments.

The definitions of the worst forms of child labor include

- ? all forms of slavery or similar practices, such as debt bondage, trafficking, or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
- ? the use of children for prostitution and pornography;
- ? the use of children for illicit activities, such as the production and trafficking of drugs; and
- ? all work which is likely to endanger the health, safety or morals of children.

As of the end of 2002, the ILO Convention had been ratified by 134 countries.

13. Street children's lives are even more complex than this set of negative connotations would suggest. Many street children display a wide range of skills, competence, knowledge, and resilience in dealing with everyday life. In addition, they may be better nourished than their peers who live in poverty in rural areas (see, for example, Baker 1996 on Nepal). This offers a reason why some children move from their homes into conditions that might be an improvement only in some respects. Many children have become used to and may prefer their independent lives on the street to their lives at home (particularly in cases of abuse) or in institutions or foster care. However, in considering these complexities, the question of "best interests of the child" and a development perspective need to be taken into account. In some places, for some children, the street may be better than the local institutional care, but this does not mean that either is desirable; alternative or improved care is necessary in such cases.

14. The idea of street children as children "out of place" gives rise to a broad spectrum of potential meanings and associations that better express the vulnerable circumstances of street children and the risks to which they are exposed. The breadth of the issue then becomes apparent, and suggests why more specific definitions have been attempted. At the root of the definitional problem is a desire to make an intervention, the aim of which may vary on the part of organizations, projects or individuals, from "saving" children, to realizing children's rights, or to a more punitive attempt to put children back "in place."

15. The spectrum of meanings is bound up with cultural connotations of what the "place" of children should be. The CRC is clear that children should be with their family, unless it is in their best interests to be elsewhere. Street children "out of place," may be out of the family. Their family members may have separated themselves from the children, or caused the separation. The children may have been abandoned (as babies or older children), sold, been trafficked with or without their parents' collusion, or been sent away to work. Children's vulnerability to being trafficked may be because of poverty or violence or abuse in the home. Children may have left their family of their own accord. Again, this might be because of violence at home (or at school), sexual abuse, or abject poverty. Children may become economic migrants in their own right, in which case they may send money earned back home. This sample range of issues already includes what are often seen as separate categories of children, such as trafficked children, migrant children, abandoned children, separated children, unaccompanied children, as well as children subject to domestic violence or physical or sexual abuse.

### **C. Poverty and Work: Vulnerability and Risk**

16. The processes of children's transition to street work and the circumstances in which they find themselves afterwards, provide additional categories and problems. As noted earlier, poverty is often a key issue, in that children may be sent out by the family to work as a necessity for family survival. Families living in rural areas may send their children to the city to work, particularly in situations where problems of access to land or environmental degradation compromise family livelihoods. Families as a whole may have migrated to urban areas with their children, or have lived in the city for some time and send children out to work as part of a strategy for family survival. Families may have long depended on the work of children, or may have fallen on hard times due to unemployment, illness or death in the family, or changing welfare economies. Children may leave homes in rural areas as migrants in their own right. All of these children are confronted with the need to work for a living, and many end up working in exploitative and hazardous jobs. Children are trafficked mostly for exploitative purposes, although children sold for (domestic and foreign) family adoption might also come under the category of "trafficked children"—the issues here go beyond exploitation because children may be well treated, and instead revolve around ethics, identity, and rights. In trafficking, and in the

migration and movement of children in general, the issues of the worst forms of child labor come to the fore, including commercial sexual work and other forms of sexual exploitation.

17. For various reasons street children may be drawn into conflict with the law. Children who experience difficulty in finding work, or who are picked up by adults when they first arrive in cities, are particularly vulnerable. Some children are trafficked for use in illegal activities, such as carrying drugs, petty thievery, street crime, or commercial sex work. Many street children are associated in the public mind with crime and, when they become involved with police, are drawn into inadequate (and usually adult, rather than juvenile) justice systems; they are often incarcerated, where they are vulnerable to life-threatening risks. Through exploitation, children are also at risk of drug or other substance abuse as well as HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS affects children in different ways, including, in 2002, as many as 13.4 million children globally under the age of 15 who have lost one or both parents to the disease (UNICEF 2002). In countries most seriously affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic (e.g., subSaharan Africa), extended families or other communal "safety nets" are breaking down, being overtaxed or over-extended. This in turn has led to an increase in child-headed households but has also left many other "HIV/AIDS orphans" traumatized, stigmatized, and left to fend for themselves.<sup>1</sup>

#### **D. Children and Childhood**

18. The definition of a child varies in laws, traditions, and customs across States and cultures with different standards or approaches in many countries of the region. Legislation often complicates definitions, for example by different ages of criminal responsibility (often for different acts), by regulating the ages for different kinds of work, and by regulating the age for marriage.

19. In India, the census defines a person under the age of 14 years as a child, but social scientists there include females aged 15–19 in the category "girl children." Laws in India from 1860 onward regulate children working in different occupations, joining the army, and marrying (Government of India 1994). In the PRC, the law provides for persons of 18 years and over to be adults, but in certain cases, 16–17-year olds who work have "full civil capacity," while children under 10 years have no civil capacity and must have representatives. The marriage age in the PRC is higher than in India: 22 years for "boys" and 20 years for "girls." There are also variations in work ages (PRC 1998).

20. The Convention on the Rights of the Child includes a standard international definition of a child. This denotes children as humans under the age of 18 years, to whom all human rights conventions apply, taking into account the special circumstances regarding age, but emphasizing their humanity and rights, including respect for their person, privacy, and identity. The ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor follows the CRC: "A child includes anyone under the age of 18, with no exception."

21. The problems of definition are not limited to identifying the particular locations of street children, which necessarily include places other than the street, given that children may spend

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Lewis, the United Nations Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, recently presented a report on the crisis in the Southern African Countries of Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Zambia. Mr. Lewis reports that recent drought in southern Africa has exacerbated the crisis, with millions of people dying. Lewis calls the lack of effort to help "a crime against humanity." The report says that what is lacking in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Africa is money. And that makes it a form of "mass murder by complacency." As a result of the pandemic, the number of HIV/AIDS orphans living on the street is growing. And they are targets of sexual abuse, thus feeding the pandemic. The same situation could well face several countries in the Asia-Pacific region. CBC News, 8 January 2003: "Lewis calls African AIDS crisis 'mass murder by complacency.'"

time at home, in slums, in back alleys, or in brothels. There is also the assumption that “children” is a homogenous category (see James and Prout 1990). Street children, as children, comprise a range of ages, (dis)abilities, ethnicities, classes, and personal backgrounds and circumstances. Individual characteristics also must be set in the context of particular countries, cultures, and locations, as well as risks, opportunities, social systems, access to service provision, etc.

22. Children are not passive vessels, but have an effect on and influence other people in their surroundings—they are “social actors” (James and Prout 1990). The research work and findings that have developed into what some call a “new sociological paradigm on childhood,” provide reinforcement for the rights-based principles laid out in the CRC. The lack of homogeneity within childhood emphasizes the need for nondiscriminatory and inclusive approaches in programming. The notion of children as “social actors” demonstrates how children influence family relationships from birth, as well as how they gradually come to make decisions and take action in their own right. This notion, now widely accepted, underpins children’s right to participation. The notion further emphasizes children’s competence in this area, well illustrated by the skills and daily decision making of street children. Overall, research and work in the area of childhood over the past 15 years have exposed the problems created by the use of narrow categories to encompass children’s lives. The term “street children” provides a significant example in this debate.

#### **E. Alternative Terms or Definitions**

23. Attempts have been made at alternate terms or definitions, with researchers and projects often identifying a range of children perceived to fall within the category “street children” in any particular context. This usually has resulted in the use of key subcategories. Principal distinctions are made between those children who are separated from family, who are homeless, or for whom the street is a place for living “24/7” (24 hours a day, 7 days a week), and those who are not separated from their families or caregivers and who retain some contact with family or relatives. However, the complexities of even such a simple distinction rapidly emerge. Although children are separated from family it does not mean they are alone. They may be living in groups or gangs, they may be controlled or exploited by adults (or older children, such as the *bong tom* or “big brother” gangs in Cambodia), or live with adults who are not family members. Other terms also express this divide, such as “separated children” and “unaccompanied children,” but these terms are used mostly in reference to such circumstances as natural or human-made disasters, civil conflict or war, or the movement of refugees.

24. For example, typologies of street children adopted in Ho Chi Minh City in Viet Nam and different typologies used in projects in Mongolia (see Box II.2) continue to be used in different projects years after their introduction, although some analysts have expressed concern that they no longer apply to country circumstances. And because the question of definition is linked to aspects of service provision, definitional issues continue to be raised (although, it should be noted, with minimal impact on the ever-increasing number of street children throughout the Asia-Pacific region).

### Box II.2: Definitions or Categorizations of Street Children

In 1994, the National Children's Committee in Mongolia organized a national conference on street children, involving representatives from Parliament, the Ministry of Science and Education, Juvenile Police Department, Juvenile Prison, the *Aimag* Centers for Children, as well as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Save the Children, United Kingdom (UK). The conference adopted three categories of street children:

- ? children who work on the streets during the day, but who maintain links with the family and who usually return to their homes in the evening;
- ? children who have some contact with their families, but who spend most of their time on the streets, especially during warm seasons; and
- ? children who have lost contact with their families and live permanently on the street.

Accounts of street children in Mongolia, and especially by the external press, generally focus on children in the last category. These are the children who, because of Mongolia's harsh climate, live or sleep underground, in tunnels and access points to urban heating systems ("manholes"), or in the entrances and basements of apartment buildings or other shelters. The health of such children is obviously at risk, given the lack of sanitation and access to water, as well as generally poor diets. Reports indicate that "There is a high risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases" or "the children survive through marginal and illegal activities, stealing, begging, prostitution and doing odd jobs, and face violence, abuse and aggression from the police, from drunks" and also from their peers. The general public in Mongolia, however, would include all three categories as "street children." (Save the Children, UK 2002; West and Tungalag 2002)

In Viet Nam a notion of "real street children" pervades both academic and informal definitions or categorizations. In Ho Chi Minh City, the work of Tim Bond in the early 1990s, and the tripartite categorization of street children that he devised, had enormous and lasting influence. The classification scheme is as follows:

- ? Category A: children who have left home and family, or have no home or family, and who sleep on the street;
- ? Category B: children who sleep on the street with their family or guardian; and
- ? Category C: children who have a family or guardian and (generally) sleep at home.

These categories appear to have influenced most subsequent work in Viet Nam, including service provision, which often focuses on or otherwise targets one particular category of children.

Commonly, the children in category A are seen as "real" street children, reinforcing popular notions of street children as victims "rather than as competent social actors, vulnerable but not passive." (West 2000b)

In Uzbekistan, four different categorizations are employed:

- ? straightforward orphans who have never been in the custody of the State;
- ? residents of children's homes who only return to such shelters to sleep;
- ? children living with parents or close relatives, but who often lead antisocial lifestyles;
- ? children with relatives, but who have run away from home because of poverty or cruel treatment (from villages or towns in the regions) and also children who have escaped from children's homes (Tahlil 2002:15).

25. Furthermore, although definitions or categories are adopted, they may not be used. In the PRC, for example, the official definition of a street child is “a person under 18 who has left his/her family or guardian and lives a vagabond life for more than 24 hours without reliable safeguard for basic survival with the result of falling into dire straits” (Lauter 1998). There are now over 100 street children protection centers in the PRC, but many take custody of children who do not strictly fall within the definition, such as child flower sellers who are not necessarily separated from a parent or guardian.

## **F. Changes for Children**

26. Change is inherent in the lives of street children. It is essential that the street children population be seen as dynamic rather than static. As demonstrated above, street children do not consist of a homogeneous group; they come onto the street for a variety of reasons, and in response to varied and changing social conditions, and face different sets of circumstances. If they survive to become youths or young adults, they necessarily stop being classified as street children. Yet the numbers of street children generally do not decrease. The children who grow up are replaced by others, which suggests that in addition to circumstances that bring children to the streets, there also are formal and informal social structures and enterprises that need children, for example as cheap or compliant labor. Also, either because of necessity or lack of other opportunities, children also need the jobs and escape routes provided by life on the street. Street children themselves form relationships, or may have babies—children born on the street to children.

27. Other attempts at generic terms have included “street and working children” and “children in street situations.” Such terms suggest the variety and problems of vulnerability and risk of exploitation. While the problem should not be perceived as the children themselves but rather the situations in which they find themselves, such replacement terms tend to focus on the circumstances of children now, with insufficient attention to the reasons or causes that brought them to the street in the first place, including the trafficking or sale of children. The notion of “floating children”—which is the literal meaning of “street children” in some countries—is both descriptive and useful. But the phrase “floating children” belies the coercion experienced by many children, or the exceptionally difficult circumstances in which they find themselves, including dangerous or exploitative working situations. What emerges, then, is a set of issues associated with the term *street children*, including abandonment, migration, trafficking, abuse, exploitation, HIV/AIDS, becoming orphans, conflict with the law, and lack of access to education, health, recreation or other services and opportunities that should be the right of every child. The contextualization of this range of issues is key to determining appropriate responses to the ever-growing number of children on the streets of urban centers throughout the region.

## **G. Street Children**

28. As outlined above, *street children* is not a functional term in itself, because it is impossible to define clearly. Even if the category is restricted to homeless children separated from family, it still opens up difficulties in defining “homelessness” or “separation” from family. To be homeless might include staying in insecure accommodation with others; separation from family might mean physical separation while maintaining familial contact and possibly remitting money. Despite such shortcomings, the categorization or term *street children* remains in everyday use by the public, the media, and professionals and project staff who deal with such children (or “street kids”).

29. In this paper *street children* is used as shorthand for children who might transit to the street, children on the street, or children who previously lived on the street, with the street suggesting a variety of occupations, including beggar, rubbish picker, shoeshine boy or flower seller, sweat shop worker, sex worker, petty criminal, etc. For many of these children, the street itself is but an environment of their survival, including the process of growing up, developing, and hopefully moving on.

30. More important than definition is gaining a better understanding of the situations faced and problems experienced by these children: those who are “out of place”—those living and working on the streets, often without any contact with family. The underlying issue, then, is the thousands, if not millions of children who are denied their basic rights and who are at risk of damaged childhoods, such as through exploitation and abuse. Another key concern is the need to reach out to those children who are at risk on the street, but who cannot be realistically helped through service delivery or other interventions, including both child protection and child participation.

31. A framework for intervention approaches may be drawn from the CRC as the international standard for children’s lives. To make use of the CRC, some understanding of the issues and experiences of street children is necessary. A general overview of street children’s issues is given below, followed by a short regional survey.

### III. AT THE MARGINS? DAILY LIFE, ISSUES, AND CAUSES

32. An important factor in the lives of many street children, as well as in designing appropriate or effective intervention measures, is the increasing interconnectedness of various problems across the region. Intercountry trafficking (of humans and drugs), civil conflict, the movement of refugees, and economic or other migration are changing the circumstances, lives, and futures of street children. Processes of preventative interventions and resettlement and reintegration are needed that have some similarities for children in a variety of circumstances—the commonality is vulnerability and risk.

#### A. Daily Life

33. Street children are most evident in large cities, where they work in occupations that bring them into contact with the public, both the local population and foreign tourists. The range of work includes begging, collecting rubbish for recycling, scavenging rubbish dumps, shoe-shining, flower or magazine and newspaper sales, prostitution, or the less visible petty theft. In some of these occupations children work alone, although they frequently are under the control of adults, older street children, or gangs, and with or without knowledge of their parents (if they indeed remain in contact with their families). Many working children may be under coercion to deliver a certain amount of money each day. The adults in control of these children generally are careful not to be visible to the public.

34. Children do work openly with some adults in some places, for example with their families in food processing and selling, or as market porters. Solitary working makes children especially vulnerable to exploitation by adults, including kidnapping and trafficking, or being drawn or forced into criminal activities or commercial sex work.

35. There are also occupations invisible to the general public, such as work in factories or sweatshops, serving as drug couriers, or in brothels or other forms of sex work. Some of these

children may not have come directly to the street, but have followed paths and processes taken by other street children.

36. Street children come into conflict with the law in many ways. Some children are trafficked or otherwise coerced into involvement in illegal activities, from bag snatching and petty theft to drug or weapons smuggling. Children may steal food or clothes for themselves. Street children are often stigmatized by police and the public, who believe they are doing something wrong even if they are playing. Children are not always taken into justice systems when in conflict with the law, but may be dealt with “informally” when they are perceived to have behaved wrongly. Street children may be beaten by police, shopkeepers, or other adults, reinforcing the perception of street children as criminals. Children also report having to bribe authorities including police, and often are subject to harassment by police including beatings, abuse and other violence, including sexual violation.

37. By day or night, children may be bullied by other children or by adults. Children often report a lack of place or space to play, including being moved from parks or other public spaces by police or security guards. Children on the street also are exposed to other risks, including substance abuse (chiefly glue sniffing or solvents, amphetamine type substances, and opiates).

### **1. Rural Situations**

38. While street children are generally seen as an urban phenomenon, there are also rural “street children”—children who are unaccompanied and living and working outside cities but not in agriculture-related activities. Such work includes the transport of goods, particularly across borders. Also, as HIV/AIDS spreads in rural locations, increasing numbers of children whose parents have died become destitute, especially when family land or other possessions have been sold for medical care or seized by adult extended family members or other adults. Such children are left with no means of support and may not know how to, or completely lack the means to, migrate to urban centers.

### **2. Movement**

39. An important element in the lives of many street children is movement: from home to street, rural area to city, rural area to border, across borders and so on. Such movements can result from kidnapping or trafficking, parents’ migration, abandonment, flight from civil conflict, self-migration, running away, or being sent away to work. In addition, the actions of parents, family, or school or problems in the local community also are major causes of movement and separation from family. Once on the move, and especially in unfamiliar circumstances without the care or protection of parents or other adults, children are particularly vulnerable. They may be lured into brothels. Agents seeking child laborers go to railway and bus stations to pick up new arrivals. Many children who are en route to the street are taken instead into work and so may fall into different, but no less hazardous circumstances. There are also children who escape from traffickers and end up on the streets in cities far away from home.

### **3. Survival**

40. In many circumstances, children are adept at analyzing their situation and making decisions for their own benefit. These include daily decisions on coping or survival techniques, as well as general assessments of their own best interests. Children may be living in abusive or otherwise unsuitable residential homes/shelters, but find some aspects beneficial and on that basis may choose not to move onto, or back to, the street. Some children prefer their independence, including the freedom to make their own decisions and have control over their

lives. Children who have had difficulty with schooling may prefer not to continue with formal education. Others may choose to escape situations of family poverty when they can get more food on the street, or more freedom to play games, or freedom to go to the cinema and video parlors when they have earned or begged enough money.

41. The highly structured lives of children who spend most of the week in schooling activities, stands in complete contrast to the lives of street children. While some street children express concern about their long-term futures, most see this being largely beyond their control. Thus, many street children live for the moment, day-to-day. Such behavior carries its own set of risks (e.g., in terms of crime, substance abuse or reproductive health), but it also serves as a coping mechanism.

42. Also, despite the inherent dangers, many children find life on the street to be liberating. For some, it provides the possibility to earn money, eat reasonably well, and do things children usually are not allowed to do at home. The problems of life on the street may become apparent only when they grow older and their perspectives on life change. The notion of street children being “out of place” may primarily be a perception held by adults. Much depends on individual experience.

43. Street children who are “successful” have learned and practice a wide range of coping skills, which in most other social contexts would be recognized as highly desirable. For example, abilities to negotiate difficult situations, to bargain, and to assert themselves are attributes that might suit many small enterprises. Many street children might be better perceived as small entrepreneurs. The problem for these children is connected with the deprived and transitory nature of much of their life on the street and their inability to gain an education or other work skills or qualifications that will take them off the streets. Street children who do not readily become “street smart” have a particularly difficult time and are unlikely to survive the streets.

## **B. Causes**

44. The origins of the street children phenomenon are varied, and the direct causes are many. Any of the processes of children becoming separated from family may result in children living and working on the street at some point, perhaps via some other activity, and even then moving on to other places such as a brothel or sweat shop. Adults are often involved in children’s separation from home, sometimes directly in collusion with parents, more often by kidnappers or traffickers or by negligence. Often traffickers are known to children and families involved, although in some countries, such as Cambodia, NGO-led antitrafficking campaigns and child rights training for children, adults, and community leaders have made villagers more aware of the techniques and scams used by traffickers.

### **1. Poverty**

45. Poverty is perceived often as a major reason for children coming onto the street. Poverty may in turn have been caused by other factors, such as flood, drought, earthquake, or lack of state or other support in recovery efforts. Poverty also is caused by the shortage or loss of land, economic downturn, the closure of industries in transitional economies, and the use of unemployment to stabilize economies. Along with poverty, economic inequality has been shown to have a major impact on family health and to exacerbate family stresses, which often are manifested in domestic violence. Inequality also results in migration in search of opportunity believed to exist in urban areas inside or outside original countries of residence.

46. Outcomes of poverty include parents' selling or abandoning children. Children who are sold tend to be very young, while abandoned children usually are infants, particularly disabled children. In some countries, more female than male babies are abandoned (for example, in PRC and India because of preference for a son); in others (such as Cambodia) male infants are more frequently abandoned. But children as old as 12–14 years have been reported abandoned in cities, particularly in situations where families have too many children and too many mouths to feed.

47. More widespread is families' need to send children to work, either to supplement family income or to reduce family size. Children may go to work daily and return home to live with parents at night, or be sent away to work by parents, or go off to seek work by themselves. Families in urban locations may live in squatter camps, shanty towns, stay with friends or relatives, or "sleep rough," that is, the entire family may be homeless and live on the street. Children from such families may go to work locally on the street, with parents or separately, in various occupations. The work available may include factory labor in addition to scavenging or rubbish picking. Often, the more remunerative the work, the greater the health and safety hazards, or the poorer the working conditions.

## **2. Discrimination**

48. Discrimination also can force children onto the streets. In many places, communities have shunned the children of parents who have been taken to prison, for example for the murder of a spouse. Without any state support, children are left to their own devices and move to the streets. In the PRC, this problem has led to the formation of a local NGO for the children of prisoners (see Anon. 1999; Anon. 2002). The stigmatization of parents living with HIV/AIDS, and their children, may cause problems for those children, particularly when their parents become ill and die. Other issues specific to certain countries include the acid burning of the faces of young women in Bangladesh if they refuse the advances of certain men. Such women, who are seen as unmarriageable, may be abandoned by their families. Discrimination against girls and young women in all situations is an important factor in the lives of female street children, particularly in South Asia, but by no means limited to that region alone.

## **3. Domestic violence and abuse**

49. The reasons for children's self-migration, (that is, to seek economic opportunities elsewhere, especially older children), leaving home, or running away, often revolve around parents, family, or other members of the community. Domestic violence, physical abuse, sexual abuse and exploitation, all create conditions whereby children decide to leave home.

50. Problems of violence in families may stem from family histories and experiences, as well as the consequences of poverty. Factors include reconstituted families in certain situations, where step-parents reject or do not want stepsons or stepdaughters. The reconstitution of families also may lead to the abandonment of children, for example, where a mother or father remarries and does not take her or his children to the new household, at the behest of the new spouse. A woman may then become stepmother to her husband's child, and act violently toward the child, especially if she has a new baby of her own (stepmothers seem to be demonized in many places, including folk tales across cultures). But domestic violence is not limited to poor families; the children of better-off families also sometimes choose to escape and leave home.

#### **4. School**

51. Pressure and violence at school also cause children to run away. Children can be subject to bullying or violence from teachers or other children. Children may face enormous school pressures, including both the quantity of schoolwork and anxieties about doing well, particularly in cultures where a high premium is placed on educational achievement. In some countries, tuition is not free, while in many other places, although public school tuition is free, other school fees are levied or children are required to buy uniforms and school materials. Poorer families cannot afford these costs and their children are, thus, unable to attend school. In addition to being denied an education, this increases their vulnerability to be used as cheap labor, or to be sent away from the family to work.

#### **5. Drugs**

52. The increased availability of a variety of drugs, particularly amphetamine-type substances, is resulting in new categories of street children in parts of Asia. Drug use and dependence, and theft or other criminal activities to support such dependence, are causing some children from better-off families to be thrown out of home. Glue or solvent sniffing, which causes permanent brain damage, also is common in some countries as a cheap and readily available means to escape personal problems or to diminish hunger. Drug use by parents is also a cause of children coming onto the street.

#### **6. Armed conflict, natural disasters**

53. In parts of the region, children end up on the streets as a direct consequence of conflict or its aftermath—when families are separated, there are mass movements of people, and an absence of civil order. Afghanistan was a notable case in 2002, but such conflict is widespread in the region, for example, in Indonesia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Tajikistan. Natural (or human-made) disasters also contribute to the numbers of street children, either directly, or as a consequence of deepening poverty.

#### **7. HIV/AIDS**

54. While increased vulnerability to HIV/AIDS is a consequence of life on the streets for many children, HIV/AIDS is also an increasing cause of children coming onto and remaining on the streets. Many children who are abandoned come from families affected by HIV/AIDS or are HIV positive themselves. The phenomenon of “AIDS orphans” has brought some children onto the street. Children who are HIV positive experience discrimination. HIV/AIDS is linked to many other causes such as abuse, drugs, discrimination, exploitation, armed conflict, and is becoming increasingly significant.

### **C. Consequences**

55. Some of the major issues connected with street children are outlined briefly below. All of these issues impinge upon the lives of street children as a whole, as the result of children being on the street. Each street child has personal experiences that contribute to his or her current circumstances, but which are likely to include some, if not many, of the following issues or problems.

56. Similar experiences may not lead to the same outcome. Some trafficked children end up on the street, others in brothels. Whether children can be reintegrated into their families and communities depends upon their reasons for initially separating from home as well as their

experiences on the street, or their options for something other than life on the street. The patterns and potentials vary considerably across the Asia-Pacific region.

## **1. Domestic and cross-border trafficking for sex and other work**

57. Trafficking includes persuasion or tricking of the families of children and young people (particularly young women)—or children and young people themselves—to leave their homes, usually with an older person, and generally on promises of money, jewelry, or employment. The trafficked children or youths may go with or without their parent's knowledge or connivance. The trafficker may be male or female, local and known to the children and their family, or a complete stranger. Typically, children and young people find themselves passed on by their traffickers into exploitative circumstances, including brothels or sale to rich men who abuse them for a while and then sell them on to commercial sex work. The high premium placed on sex with a virgin, combined with associated folk beliefs (of prosperity and disease prevention and remedy), contributes to the market for trafficked children and young women. Conversely, for many girls and young women, the loss of their virginity as the result of abuse or rape is so great a diminution that it causes them to become careless of life, with their feelings of worthlessness leaving them vulnerable to further exploitation. It is such vulnerability that also poses a threat for street children, in that some impoverished adults living with HIV/AIDS are reported to seek out even more powerless people, such as children, with whom to have cheap and often unprotected sex.

58. Young women increasingly are sold into marriage, a problem that is growing because of skewed sex ratios in such countries as the PRC and India. Children of both sexes are trafficked for use in criminal activities, such as street theft; or other street work such as begging or flower selling. Such children may be separated from, abandoned by, or run away from adult caregivers, to be trafficked and become street children working and/or living on the street.

59. The destination of trafficked children and young people may be within their country or in other countries, depending on the location of demand and the traffickers' connections. Children from Asia and the Pacific (as well as Africa) are trafficked to both North America and to western Europe, for example, to work in the sex trade or domestic service (Tremlett and Hopkins 2002). Children also are trafficked within the region and within country. Distances from home may be small or great.

60. The borders in much of the Asia-Pacific region are porous, not least because many ethnic minorities straddle international boundaries. The trafficking of children, such as from Viet Nam into Cambodia, from Cambodia into Thailand, and from Myanmar into the PRC, is well known, but there are also instances of Bangladeshi children taken into Thailand, and Chinese children taken to Malaysia and Thailand. Much of this trafficking is for work in the sex industry. Some children are trafficked for commercial begging groups, although these may be younger and destined to later move into sex work. Trafficked children find it particularly difficult to escape, often not knowing exactly where they are, sometimes facing language barriers, and having particular fear of the police or other authorities.

## **2. Internal and cross-border migration**

61. Although migrants are more conventionally thought of as adults or families, many street children are themselves lone migrants. Children may migrate to cities on their own volition to seek work, or to escape poor family relationships, or may be sent by parents to find work. In many cases, they regularly remit money home. In other circumstances, children (or their

“controllers”) provide money for parents at the end of a period of work (and after the controllers have taken their cut).

62. Migration within countries is largely rural-urban and toward more prosperous areas. Children’s patterns of migration are less researched, and may be over shorter distances, at least initially. Movements across borders are also generally to more economically developed countries. Problems with migration include difficulty to find work or survive, and vulnerability to exploitation. Children living in border areas, such as the Cambodia-Thailand border, are especially attractive to employers for transporting (or smuggling) goods across the border.

### **3. Difference and discrimination**

63. Perceived differences among children—of gender, ethnicity, disability, caste, etc.—can affect their experiences and circumstances as street children.

#### **a. Gender**

64. Most street children across the Asia-Pacific region are boys. The immediate dangers to girls—of sex abuse from the public, from the authorities, and from other street children—are well known. In some places street girls keep their hair short in attempts at disguise (for example, IHT 2003).<sup>2</sup> In the Philippines, however, 30% of the street children population are girls and vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation, pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases. They also face stereotyping and derogatory terms and name calling, suggesting they are voluntarily promiscuous and have no morals (CRB 2003).

65. In some places, girls face additional problems concerning their future, for example, the difficulty of making a decent marriage without the sponsorship or protection of a male relative. In many countries in the region, girls who have been raped or involved in the sex industry face stigmatization and discrimination, although in other countries this is less of a problem. In Cambodia and northern Thailand, while it is known that girls who migrate to the cities often engage in some form of commercial sex work, it is euphemistically said that they “work in a factory.” Again, migration from home often involves issues of marriage, as well as self-identity, self-worth, and self-esteem, as well as having to cope with often traumatic experiences.

#### **b. Ethnicity**

66. Discrimination against various ethnic groups is rife in some countries. Where an ethnic distinction is obvious, then the affected street children face additional problems: for example, the children from Xinjiang in other parts of the PRC, Vietnamese children in Cambodia, etc.

#### **c. Disability**

67. Many street children in the region are disabled, and a large number work as beggars. Some, it is said, have been deliberately mutilated by adults in order to earn more money. Disabled children often are abandoned at birth. Some of the disabilities, such as cleft lip/cleft palate, can easily be corrected through surgery, but also are the subject of belief systems that require purification of both mother and family, sometimes resulting in infanticide and maternal

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<sup>2</sup> International Herald Tribune, “In Iran, runaway girls dodge abuse by dressing as boys,” 20 February 2003, p.1 and p.4. “[...]it is a growing phenomenon mainly among lower-class runaways who believe the disguise gives them a freedom and protection they could not enjoy as girls. Posing as boys on the streets makes it easier to avoid rape and falling victim to prostitution rings.”

suicide or ostracization and abandonment. Many disabled children face discrimination within their own cultures and society, where they are not valued.

#### **d. Caste**

68. Although officially abolished in South Asia, caste remains an important influence, and a key basis for discrimination. A high proportion of street children in India is reported to be of the Dalit or “untouchable” caste (HRWA 2000).

#### **e. Age**

69. Street children are of widely different ages, and may live in groups. Hierarchies exist on the streets; older and bigger children take care of and also bully younger and smaller children, from whom they may extort money or clothes. Some street children spend all they earn in a day in order that nothing is left to be taken from them by other children—or by street adults. Other adults (which in some places may include police or other authorities) also may demand “protection money.”

70. Although the length of time children spend on the streets influences their survival skills, extended street life likely will result in significant alienation from conventional social life. This makes it increasingly difficult for street children to successfully reintegrate into community life, for example, by entry into shelters or daycare projects as a way out of the street.

### **4. Justice system**

71. Street children face the risk of being placed in prisons, detention centers, or other forms of incarceration, which may further compromise the likelihood of their later being reintegrated into community life. The justice system and incarceration may be used inappropriately to remove children from the streets. Few countries in the region have adequate systems of juvenile justice. In many countries, street children report that police harassment is the major problem in their lives.

### **5. Alternative care**

72. It is not only incarceration within the “justice” system that results in institutionalization. Some shelters, especially institutions catering to large numbers of street children, develop institutional practices that are detrimental to children’s future well being. Such practices include bulk purchase of poor quality food, uniformity in service provision, lack of children’s participation, and insufficient acknowledgement of or respect for children’s identities and individuality. When children who have long been institutionalized become adults and face the withdrawal of support, they frequently find it difficult to adjust to independent life and decision making. Many drift into other institutions, such as the armed services. Although there are few firm data, it appears that prison populations have a large number of ex-street children.

### **6. Exploitation**

73. The need for street children to make a living makes them vulnerable to hazardous and/or exploitative labor situations. Many established businesses in both the formal and informal sectors depend on children as a source of cheap labor.

74. There is an apparently insatiable demand for child sex workers of both sexes. Children may be engaged in brothel-based commercial sex work or by street-based encounters with both

local and foreign men. Some countries, including Cambodia, Thailand, and Sri Lanka have become well known “sex tourism” destinations, drawing pedophiles and pimps as well as street children who may resort to commercial sex work.

75. Problems include early sexualization, in addition to reproductive health issues and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. Street children are particularly vulnerable to rape and to unprotected sex.

76. The issue of children exploited through various forms of work arises in all parts of the region and needs to be seen as, and linked to, the general question of child labor. The extent of such work emerged through a major study by the ILO (ILO 2002a). Of the 352 million children aged 5–17 years engaged in economic activity, “The report found that 246 million children—one in every six children aged 5 to 17—are involved in child labour” (ILO 2002b), meaning the type of labor that should be abolished. Such work includes that performed by children under the minimum age specified for a particular kind of work by national legislation or other standards; hazardous work that jeopardizes the physical, mental or moral wellbeing of a child; and unconditional worst forms of child labor as defined in the ILO Convention 182 (ILO 2002b). Much of the work undertaken by street children falls under the purview of the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, which specifies trafficking and sex work. Much of street children’s lives is structured around work, and shifting to different means of survival or opportunity. Much of the work available is controlled by criminal gangs, and children do not have a choice.

## **7. Identity and participation**

77. A key issue for street children is their exclusion from much of everyday social life. In addition to scavenging for food at restaurants, they are also chased away from shops and restaurants by both owners and customers. Street children rarely are treated with any respect, and their views and opinions are seldom taken into consideration by anyone.

78. Street children are further excluded in that they are unlikely to possess identity cards or other forms of identification, including birth registration. This may be due to parents’ selling or pawning their children’s identity materials, parents’ not registering their children, or registration processes not being readily available. In some countries, infants are not registered at birth because of customary belief and high infant mortality rates. When children migrate, with or without parents, and even within country, what identity papers they may possess may not be valid.

79. The lack of identity papers prevents street children from gaining access to education and health services that might otherwise be free, or result in them having to pay higher charges. Lack of identity, a key precept of the CRC, also can prevent street children from subsequently registering the birth of their own children.

## **8. Education**

80. Street children generally lack access to public education services. In some urban areas, children who do not need to work, but who have been in conflict with the law, are excluded from schools because they are seen as a potentially bad influence on their peers. These children spend their days on the street.

81. Other children are unable to go to school because of the need to work, because of discrimination, or because of costs. In some places, it is believed that girls do not need an

education, or that boys are better off working. While school tuition is supposedly free in many countries in Asia and the Pacific, tuition fees exist in some places, and these or other school fees or charges that are levied make it impossible for poor children to attend school. It matters little what reason is given for the fee: any charge prohibits many children attending school. A further problem is that traditional, rote methods of teaching often do not encourage children and the lessons are not seen to be useful by either children or their parents.

## **9. Health**

82. Street children cannot afford most health services; thus, receive no treatment for any ailments and injuries, although some buy medicine to treat themselves. Even where there are supposedly “free” hospitals and health services, their socially marginalized position means they may not be treated. Some preventable health problems occur because the children have no access to proper diagnosis and treatment or even hygiene and sanitation. Many street children suffer chronic diseases, including typhoid, tuberculosis, jaundice, liver and kidney disorders, and malaria. Other reported health problems include scabies, epilepsy, and broken limbs. Many street children also suffer from the effects of substance abuse, particularly when using drugs of unknown quality. Sexually transmitted diseases are prevalent amongst older street children, with increasing numbers of street children now living with HIV/AIDS.

## **IV. WELFARE OF STREET CHILDREN ACROSS THE REGION**

83. Although the geography, economies, and governance systems within the Asia-Pacific region are diverse, the circumstances and experiences of street children across the region are quite similar. This is reinforced to an extent by the interconnections of countries through trafficking and migration of children, criminal and drug connections, and sex tourism and pedophilia—that is, the impact of adults on children.

84. However, the social and structural response to street children and associated issues depends upon the particular national economic, political, and cultural context. Local ideas about childhood and both intra- and interfamily relationships form one contextual element, including attitudes toward girl children and sexual violence. Other key contextual elements are systems of governance, resource allocations (which again vary from country to country and include the input by civil society into state budgetary processes), as well as local economic conditions. In this section, the provision of welfare to street children in different countries and subregions within the Asia-Pacific region is discussed.

### **A. Central, Eastern, and Northern Asia**

85. In the Central Asian republics including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, and in Mongolia, the presence of street children is a comparatively recent phenomenon closely associated with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rapid transition to market-based economies. It is a new phenomenon in the Kyrgyz Republic (IRIN Bishkek 2001), the result of alcoholism of parents, poverty, abuse, and domestic violence. Often the children have stepfathers or stepmothers who push children to leave home (Anon., undated). A report on Uzbekistan summarizes the situation:

Uzbekistan, along with most of the other countries of the former Soviet Union, has experienced an increase in the number of street children. Street children are subject to the everyday risk of being abused, and experience violence at the hands of both adults and their peers. Many of them do not have timely access to

qualified medical services. Their major concern, though, is the day-to-day struggle to make a living. It is very common for these children to be involved in criminal activities because they do not have any other means of earning money (Tahlil 2002, p.15).

86. In many of these countries, street children appear to be new because of their increased numbers. Recent awareness of the problem of street children, however, occurs in a context where the presence of working children has been a long-established practice. Problems include the absence of welfare support systems for families and children in the new economies, and the emphasis on the “market” that has had governments struggling to design and implement new provisions in a climate that is dismantling rather than developing or improving state services.

87. Social and economic reforms in the Republic of Tajikistan are taking place under complex conditions of political instability. Consequently, owing to pressure of economic development in the transitional period and the implementation of market reforms, the actual means available for state bodies to provide children with the opportunity to obtain the necessary education have diminished (GRT 1998, paragraph 4).

...regrettably the list of children [in difficult circumstances] requiring special attention in the Republic has increased. That category should also include refugee children, children from unemployed families, child victims of armed conflict, child beggars and children left without supervision—and this is not a complete list (GRT 1998, paragraph 30).

88. The report noted that the category of children in difficult circumstances previously included “orphans, children left without parental care and support, children of asocial families, disabled children and children who have broken the law and need special conditions for their upbringing” (GRT 1998).

89. The case of Mongolia—the increasing numbers of urban “street and manhole” children over the past decade—is comparatively well known. Economic changes have resulted in the closure of many industries, high levels of unemployment, and families moving in a downward spiral toward homelessness. Mongolia’s harsh winters force these people to take shelter in Ulaanbaatar’s underground heating system. Growing numbers of children have become separated from parents or stayed with families and worked on the streets.

90. Mongolia’s economic transition brought an end to the previous Soviet-style welfare system, but the development of a replacement system is still underway. The Government is restricted in its ability to hire more staff and there are also issues of appropriate social work training. Training courses for social workers have recently been developed at the State Pedagogical University with the support of an international NGO (Quieta 2002). International NGOs continue to operate the bulk of shelters and other street children interventions in Ulaanbaatar and in other Mongolian towns. As the country continues its “transitory” path, a debate has begun over what the State and civil society can do to address the problem of an ever-increasing number of street children.

91. The Mongolian Government supports one large street children center, although some claim that the approach is too institutional. An international NGO has worked with the Government center to resettle many of the children with their families. However, with more than 20 domestic and international NGOs involved in street children programming, as well as the responsible government departments, coordination of work has become an important concern.

Another challenge for the Mongolian authorities is effective implementation of the country's child protection law.

92. The Central Asian republics have similar problems, but have received less international attention. For example, children in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, also live underground because of the climatic conditions. The street children population in the Kyrgyz Republic also includes child victims of armed conflict. In Tajikistan, the Government's report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child highlighted how the country's economic difficulties have worsened problems in running schools, orphanages, and other institutions for children. Although an increase in the numbers of child beggars was noted, the problem has not yet been given government attention. Other state reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child only briefly mention the increase in the numbers of street children. However, domestic and international NGOs working in the subregion have documented the situation in more detail.

93. Another category, "travelling children," has been identified in the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. These children provide sexual and other services (such as lookouts, guards, or porters) for male traders and travelers on trains. The children manage to cross borders easily enough and become street children at their destination until finding another customer to take them elsewhere. If caught, the children are returned to their "home countries" (depending on what information they provide); after spending a month or so in a detention or reception center, they return to the streets (see Blackley 1999).

94. In the PRC, although economic reform began in the late 1970s, somewhat earlier than other "transitional economies" in the Asia-Pacific region, the transition process has avoided the sudden and wide-sweeping changes experienced by other countries in East and Central Asia.

95. The reappearance of street children in the PRC during the transition provoked official concern, and by the mid-1990s, the Ministry of Civil Affairs began to create separate Street Children Protection Centers. By 2000, more than 100 such centers were in existence, mostly operated through municipal-level civil affairs bureaus, but some at the provincial level. Beijing's Street Children Protection Center is operated through the Public Security Bureau (police). The work of these centers focuses on the collection of street children, medical check-ups, and in-center education until the children's families are located and the children are returned to their parents' care. Despite such efforts, the numbers of street children have continued to increase. The last official estimate, in 1998, put the national figure at some 200,000 based on the numbers of children passing through the state protection centers, but not including children in related categories, such as working children with families.

96. Nearly all service provision in the PRC is operated by the Government. Beginning in the late 1990s, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) provided funding for initiatives in northeastern PRC, Shanghai, Anhui Hefei, and more recently in Henan. Save the Children, United Kingdom (UK) has worked in partnership with the Ministry of Civil Affairs, protection centers, and civil affairs bureaus in some 20 provinces, helping to establish information networks and providing seminars and other training. Save the Children also has worked in partnership with centers and civil affairs bureaus on prevention initiatives, research, and development of best practice in centers; encouraging child participation, reintegration, provision of alternative care for children who cannot return home; and related activities. As part of the "socialization of welfare," the Ministry of Civil Affairs is looking to the possible development of NGOs to support the provision of alternative care, as well as to promote increased participation of children in such operations.

97. Parts of the PRC have been under external control or influence for some time. Hong Kong, China, for example, has a developed social services system, based on a British model, with qualified and certificated social workers. NGOs in Hong Kong, China continue to play a role in service provision. Youth Outreach, linked to the Catholic Church, is a major initiative for street children that includes both a shelter and an outreach program. As in Britain, however, the problems of street children in Hong Kong, China often tend to fall outside the main mandate, coming instead under the category of “homeless young people.”

98. The border regions of the PRC have various links with neighbors to the north, west, and south. For example, the peoples of Inner Mongolia Province have links with Mongolia. The autonomous region of Xinjiang is home to minority ethnic groups such as Mongolians, Kazaks, Uzbeks, and others. The southern provinces of Guangxi and Yunnan have close links with adjacent countries and peoples. These many neighbors, as well as the porous borders and ethnic groups that straddle international borders, have served to promote international migration, including the trafficking of children.

99. As indicated above, state-run institutions are the dominant response in these countries. Part of the problem with institutionalization is that many children continue to spend their days on the street. In addition, children must leave state-run institutions at the age of 16 years, but the economic situation may not offer employment opportunities especially to an ill-educated and unskilled street child. Many older street children are picked up by police and held in detention centers, replacing one institution with another. In the Kyrgyz Republic, it is reported that some street children have to bribe militia or other authorities with all their daily earnings in order to retain their freedom (see Tahlil 2002; Anon., undated).

100. Such problems are common to many countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The expressed aim in many countries (and clearly an unexpressed intention elsewhere) is to clear the cities of street children through police raids or round-ups. Such a response can be understood as the result of the novelty of the phenomenon, lack of knowledge about or attention to workable alternatives, and because the very existence of street children belies a successful market-based transitional process (not that western industrial countries do not share the problem of “children out of place”).

101. The need to establish social work as a profession and to introduce social work methods has been noted, for example, in Mongolia and Uzbekistan. Although there is an emphasis on returning children home to parents, this has been seen to fail where there is no prior preparation of children and their families or careful monitoring or follow-up work (something noted in nearly all countries). Increased child prostitution has been observed in Uzbekistan and the Kyrgyz Republic, in addition to other work such as market portering, newspaper selling, and car washing. Parental migration (for example from the Kyrgyz Republic to Russia) without suitable arrangements for child care or for family reunification, including remission of money back to the child, has become common. There also has been an increase in abandonment of children, because parents simply cannot afford to maintain their offspring. Many children are working to help supplement family income, and it is reported that some parents force their children to beg (See GRT 1998; IRIN 2001; Tahlil 2002; Anon., undated).

102. The instability of many families in the transitional economies is part of wholesale changes in social structures including the lack of welfare provision, the emergence of social and material inequalities, new opportunities to exploit children (for example, at work), and the increasing need of children to work, either to help support their families or for their own

existence. All of these changes cause and exacerbate the problem of street children the subregion.

103. In addition, other changes in government provision have exacerbated problems for children. Teachers are chronically underpaid, with many having to take additional jobs in order to survive (a problem not limited to this subregion). In Uzbekistan, there also has been a shift from the Cyrillic to Roman alphabet, begun when teachers were poorly trained, and with an “absence of additional literature in Roman for home reading. [As a] result the children are isolated from Uzbek Cyrillic literature and surely from the Russian-language editions. The parents can’t help them with the lessons” (Azimova et al. 1999, p. 6; also see Blackley 1999). Inadequate and underfunded education systems, including poorly trained and disinterested teachers, contribute toward children’s staying out of school. As well as losing the opportunity or being denied the right to education, they are encouraged further by such limitations to drift to the street.

104. Such provision as exists for street children (and other categories of children at risk) is predominantly through “humanitarian and charitable funds,” for example, boarding schools for orphans in Tajikistan (GRT 1998, p. 35) and shelters in Mongolia (West and Tungalag 2002). The exceptions are the larger government institutions, which may or may not have been rehabilitated or refurbished from earlier political regimes and which are based on very different perceptions of child welfare. Such institutions tend to perceive and treat children as social deviants, rather than as the product or consequence of changing social mores and economic transition. The limited NGO sector cannot cover all the needs and rights of children—care shelters, access to education or to vocational training, social counseling, etc. Also, in places where access to education generally is a problem for poor families, there is a tendency for some parents to place their children in NGO shelters as a “preventative” measure so that their children might receive care, clothing, and education that they cannot otherwise afford.

## **B. South Asia**

105. South Asia is home to some of the largest concentrations of street children in the world. In this subregion, street children have been a distinct social underclass for a longer period than elsewhere. NGOs there also have had more experience in service provision and other interventions targeted to street children, including the establishment of children’s organizations and working children’s unions. Such organizations are based on the principle of children’s participation in personal decision making, such as voluntary residence in shelters. The approach has developed beyond the use of shelters toward working with children wherever they are living, and at times suitable to them, on the street or elsewhere. This approach includes a structural focus on children’s participation, including children’s involvement in research, involving them in the operation and management of shelters and other centers, and nonformal education for street children. Particular attention has been given to the problems of street children taken into justice systems, the roles and attitude of the police, and the issue of girl children and violence.

106. Many countries in South Asia remain influenced by the legacies of British colonialism, particularly with respect to legal codes and bureaucracies and other systems that have pre-independence roots. NGOs have been active since the 1920s. Although the northern kingdoms, such as Nepal and Bhutan, have different political backgrounds, overall the historical, political, legal, and economic frameworks of South Asia are quite different from those of East and Central Asia.

107. Poverty again is the major contributing cause of street children across South Asia, but the extent of poverty is such that it seems to be an accepted or given context. The daily experience of rural poverty and its privations probably is one reason why (rural) children are attracted to city life through the mass media, mainly films. Although poverty is an important reason for children working on the streets of South Asia, it seems that intrafamily conflict, abuse, and violence are leading causes for children's separation from family (SKCV 2000a). Some abuse is especially linked to reconstituted families, with reports of children beaten to death when they are forcibly reunited with their families.

108. Children's life on the streets of South Asia is characterized by discrimination and stigma, as well as problems of police harassment. Such harassment extends to illegal detention or being detained on false charges, beatings and torture, and examples where the lawyers of local drug dealers succeed in securing release of children from imprisonment where child rights organizations have failed. A key element of the legal quandary affecting millions of street children appears to be the use of antiquated, pre-independence legislation as the basis for criminalizing children. Such laws simply do not apply to the contemporary context, particularly in view of the CRC.

109. Afghanistan occupies a special position in the subregion, serving as something of a bridge to East and Central Asia. In Afghanistan, the emergence of large numbers of street children is the consequence of more than two decades of armed conflict rather than the demise of the Soviet Union and economic transition. A preliminary head count in early 2002 recorded more than 37,000 children working and begging on the streets of Kabul. Some 80% were boys, with 36% aged 8–10 years, and more than half aged 12–14 years. Nearly one third had begun begging or working on the streets in the previous year. Notably, nearly all the Kabul street children had a place to go at night, and a large number lived with their parent(s). It was reported that 98.5% of the children were sent by their families to the streets to work and beg in order to help the family to survive (TdH 2002). In March 2003, it was reported that "there are no statistics, but Afghans involved with women's issues say the selling of girls is on the rise" (Kaufman 2003). These girls are sold for marriage, seen by some as modernized version of "bride price." Although the current phenomenon of Afghanistan street children derives from the war, large numbers of Afghan children previously came onto the streets as refugees in neighboring Pakistan. A drop-in center in Quetta found their numbers rapidly increasing after 1999, and reported that in winter, the boys were likely to head to Karachi, where a warmer climate would allow them to continue scavenging, because this was their families' only source of income (SCUS, undated). In Karachi, it was reported that Afghan and Bengali immigrants had introduced glue sniffing to Pakistani street children and other children (Dawn 2002).

110. In Bangladesh, there are many NGOs working in the development and welfare fields, although "unfortunately very few national and international NGOs are active in the field of child rights" (Khair and Khan 2000, p. 41). In addition, many of the larger NGOs are now well established and institutionalized, and tend to look to the upper levels of the hierarchy of poverty. This "specialization" is important with respect to the development of children's organizations, particularly in Bangladesh and India. Such organizations emerge from a broader emphasis on children's participation. Because most agencies looking to the needs of street children in South Asia are NGOs, there is less emphasis on the placement of children in institutions as there is elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region. Voluntary attendance has been emphasized, with the result that services lean toward what children want, or what might benefit them the most, with aspirations of eventually operating such services in partnership with children. What is lacking, however, is linkage to the high incidence of child labor including organization to lobby for better working conditions and protection of children's basic rights.

111. India has as many as 18 million street children, the world's largest concentration. Whereas all of them are extremely poor, up to half of them are Dalit, or belong to other scheduled castes or tribes, pointing to deeply ingrained patterns of inequality (HRWA 2000). The context for street children in India is high numbers of working children, estimated by one source to be between 70 and 100 million children (CACLI 2000). National sample surveys give lower figures—estimating the number of working children to be 17 million in 1987, increasing to 20 million by 2000. These figures, however, do not include the “unorganized sector of the economy,” such as domestic workers and agricultural workers, etc., that, when included, result in the much higher estimates (CACLI 2000). India is clearly home to enormous numbers of street children, as well as millions of child workers, many of whom work in hazardous or exploitative circumstances. Because child labor is illegal in India, millions of child workers become officially nonexistent, without faces and without voice. In addition to a violation of the principles of the CRC, their lack of legal status makes them ineligible for worker protection including compensation for accidents at work (for example, losing a limb). These children are increasingly becoming known as “nowhere” children—effectively excluded from school (education) and from regulated work (employment), and from relevant statistics (see, for example, Joshi, undated; Kabeer 2002; Lakshmi 2002). The rapid increase in HIV/AIDS in India affects street children in many ways, and girls rescued from commercial sex work may be rejected by some refugees if HIV positive. “An estimated 400,000 children are trafficked in India every year,” some shipped to the Middle East (Stuart 2003).

112. In Nepal, there were an estimated 30,000 street children in 1996, with fewer than 4,000 living with their families (SCNT, undated). Most are said to come from families of poor farmers or agricultural workers, and who dropped out of school before achieving literacy or numeracy (CWIN 2002). In Nepal, as elsewhere, it has been noted that “the use of violence as a pedagogical tool by family and teachers alike is extremely common” (OMCT 1996). As elsewhere, police harassment was identified as a major issue.

113. A recent drop in the number of street children in Nepal has been attributed to an increase in facilities for them, linked to an increase in social awareness. However, this reduction seems to depend also on the way street children are counted, because the same source points to a worsening of the problem of sexual exploitation with an increase in sex tourism (CWIN 2002). One observer (Pradhan 2002) concluded that “one of the reasons for not attaining the target goals [for children] is the conventional approach toward development. Our development planning is generally not child friendly, nor are they rights based; they are guided by the charity-based approach instead.” While many agencies working with street children in Nepal have not yet involved the children actively in implementing their projects, others have developed “children’s clubs” or other groups, including groups looking at issues of violence against girls.

114. In Pakistan also, street children are found within the broader context of a large number of working children, conservatively estimated to involve 10 million children under 14-years old in 1994 (OMCT 1994). Children are said to be engaged in labor in poor and hazardous working conditions that approach “near slavery.” Some children in bonded labor abscond to the streets. Other children are trafficked. In 1992 it was estimated that some 20,000 were sent to the Gulf region to be used as camel jockeys. It was reported that children taken into detention were placed with adults and open to sexual exploitation and “re-education” by hardened criminals (ibid). In this context it may not be surprising that in Pakistan “the issue of street children has not been considered important or considerable enough for a check on magnitude to be drawn in this country, therefore numbers are not known” (Workshop SC 2002). However, one estimate for Lahore alone suggested 10,000 street children. Given that some 40% of the 14 million

population of Karachi live in squatter settlements, the figure for street children in this city could be many times that of Lahore.

115. Causes for children being on the street in Pakistan also include poverty and family violence and conflict. NGOs appear as a major resource in working with the children and undertaking practice-based research of the issue. In 1999, a “nongovernment initiative” was launched “to protect more than a million street children in Pakistan following the sensational murders of nearly 100 children in Lahore by a serial killer” (Najeeb 1999). A report in 2001 noted that the majority of the more than 10,000 children on the streets of Karachi were Bengalis and Burmese as well as other ethnic groups including Punjabis, Baluchis, and Urdu-speaking children. Nearly 90% used various drugs, with some 65% using solvents (Dawn 2001). The range of national origins, as well as extensive substance abuse, points to the vast differences traveled by some street children, as well as the plight of ethnic and minority groups in these countries.

116. The development of street and working children’s own organizations, and associations of other groups of children, has been recognized as an important characteristic of provision in South Asia. Such organizations have been successful to the extent that they have been challenged by some religious and political groups apparently opposed to children’s active participation as citizens, despite this being a fundamental element of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The existence of these organizations has had some impact on the development of provision for street children and an emphasis on meeting children’s needs on the street, including children’s empowerment. Many of these organizations have now reached the point that they are looking to mechanisms for organizational sustainability as some of their client groups move from adolescence into adulthood.

## **C. Southeast Asia**

### **1. Mainland Southeast Asia**

117. The countries of mainland Southeast Asia represent a diverse group of countries, not all of which were colonized, but which share a history of shifting power groups and capital locations. In addition, a number of minority ethnic groups straddle current international borders. Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam all share borders with the PRC. All of the countries in this subregion have large numbers of citizens who are ethnically Chinese but whom have intermarried with local populations.

118. An important characteristic of this subregion is human migration and movement including the trafficking of children and young women. Rapid change in the economies of Southeast Asia including the shift toward market economies in Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Viet Nam, have produced geographic and other forms of inequality, stimulating migration as well as providing opportunities for traffickers to earn money. These processes of human movement are also played out in-country, with migration and trafficking from rural to rapidly growing urban areas. While not all of those trafficked, for example, will become street children, the processes involved are similar for those who do end up on the street. The details of trafficking and other migration continues to be researched (see, for example, Caouette, undated; Derks 1997 and 1998a; SCUK 2001). It includes children moving from Viet Nam into Cambodia as well as southern PRC (and beyond), from Myanmar to Yunnan Province (PRC) and Thailand, from Cambodia to Viet Nam and Thailand, etc. Reasons for such movements of people vary, but include both economic migration and large-scale criminal trafficking networks, usually connected with the commercial sex trade. It has been estimated, for example, that some 20,000 children aged 3–16 years from Myanmar currently work in Thailand as beggars, street sellers, or

rubbish pickers, with many older girls (i.e., 12–19 years) working as sex workers (U Soe Soe 2002).

119. Another feature common to the countries of the subregion is the ever-increasing availability of a wide range of illegal drugs and narcotics, with increasing abuse of such substances by children and young people. Amphetamine-type substances are common in Cambodia, Thailand, and Viet Nam. Millions of such pills are manufactured in factories along the Myanmar-Thailand border. Heroin and other opium-based substances also are available and used, with established drug trafficking networks across the region and beyond. High quality marijuana production also is increasing, particularly in Cambodia. Children are used to transport drugs within countries as well as across borders.

120. Associated problems are not only children's drug dependence and the risk of HIV infection from shared needles or other injectibles, but also that street life can make the use of drugs an attractive recreation and/or escape from hunger and the psychosocial difficulties associated with life on the street. Children's need of money and their comparative powerlessness (both physically and socially) make them vulnerable to coercion, force, and exploitation by adults or older children. Street children frequently use glue, gasoline, or other readily available solvents to provide a temporary escape from their environment.

121. The cycle of living on the street, using drugs, imprisonment for drug use or trafficking, release, return to the street, drug use, and so on, was observed in a project in Thailand (West 2000a). The links between some street children and drugs are one cause of many street children falling foul of the law. The conditions of detention often further alienate children from adults and community life, or introduce them to new forms of criminality. In Thailand a series of riots broke out at youth detention centers in early 2000 over living conditions and treatment of children.

122. Children's and youths' use of drugs is another cause for their movement to the street. Well-off children who develop a drug dependency may steal from their families, or be thrown out of home as a family disgrace.

123. The context and circumstances of street children in countries in mainland Southeast Asia have some variation, albeit within an environment of large numbers of working children. For example, in Thailand agencies speak of a second generation of street children, while in Viet Nam the phenomenon of street children is linked to economic reform (as elsewhere, such as in East and Central Asia). The Thailand experience has led some social workers to make a useful distinction between temporary and permanent street children, or those who could return to their families, and those who cannot return because of abuse or other problems. Some older children in Viet Nam rent shelter in small groups, funded from their earnings. In Thailand, various NGOs provide shelters and undertake street work, using the principle of participation, particularly children's involvement in decision making. An example of such decision making is helping children to decide whether they should move from the street to a shelter or other accommodation. In other countries in the subregion, it remains the practice of authorities to collect children and take them to an institution.

124. While there are many commonalities, each country has its own particular circumstances for street children's lives. For example, in Cambodia, children work picking rubbish on tips, often living with their families who all depend on scavenging. The economy of rubbish picking is complex, with a hierarchy of status and variety of income opportunities (Gourley, Un, and Gray 1997). Cambodia also has an historical context of children working; during the Khmer Rouge

regime, all children more than 5-years old were required to work (ibid). The depth of poverty in Cambodia has meant that children are vulnerable to trafficking as well as migration to seek work. The country also has been a noted destination for sex tourism, although this problem is receiving increased attention, including prevention awareness raising at the village level, anti-child sex publicity at airports and hotels, etc. While such efforts have contributed to a wider understanding that sexual exploitation of children is a crime, inadequate legislation and enforcement mechanisms, as well as endemic poverty, have meant that child prostitution continues. Recent studies of tourism at Cambodia's Angkor Wat temple complex have shown that in addition to solicitation by both local and foreign men, children also seek sexual relationships for their livelihoods (see Nuon, Yit, and Gray 2001).

125. In Viet Nam, there remain social, economic, and cultural differences between north and south, with a history of street children and widespread drug use in the south that preceded reunification. Since the launching of the *doi moi* economic reform process, the focus on "making money" also has been instrumental in families splitting up. In 1995, it was estimated that there were 50,000 street children in Viet Nam. The Government's response initially focused on existing state institutions established to deal with perceived "deviants" or people out of their geographic place. By the mid-1990s, counseling centers were established by local NGOs, usually with the support of international NGOs. Provision now includes drop-in centers and open houses supported by the development of a profession of social work. Children's participation also is growing in Viet Nam, allowing children to decide whether to enter a shelter. Toward the end of the 1990s, the interest (and funding) of international NGOs appears to have shifted from street children toward child labor issues. This shift demonstrates both the influence of donor agencies and the difficulty of mounting long-term or sustainable programs to address the street children problem.

126. Sex tourism, HIV/AIDS, and gender issues are general problems for street children across the subregion. Increasing numbers of street children are contracting HIV/AIDS in Cambodia, Thailand, and Viet Nam (particularly in the south). "AIDS orphans" have existed in Thailand since the late 1980s and are increasing also in Cambodia at an alarming rate. At the end of 2002, Cambodia had the highest per capita rate of people living with HIV/AIDS in all of Asia (although it is predicted that India will soon take over this dubious distinction).

## 2. Southeast Asian Island Nations

127. In Indonesia, political instability, the 1999 military campaigns in Timor-Leste, and that country's subsequent independence, provide the contemporary context for street children in this part of the Asia-Pacific region. A 1999 survey of 12 cities in Indonesia found 170,000 street children (Childhope Asia News Bulletin 11 (1–2), from the Straits Times), a dramatic increase from an estimated 50,000 in 1997 (KKSP 2001). The numbers of street children have been increasing rapidly in northern Sumatra, trebling during 1999–2001 (Syamsul 2001). As of 2001, Yogyakarta in Java had large numbers of girl street children. Some 70% of street children in this city were reported to come from other parts of Indonesia. Although there are perhaps more than the usual problems of counting in these figures (the KKSP report suggested that total numbers would reach 100,000–150,000 in 2000), there is clear agreement that the number of Indonesian street children is fast increasing.

128. Significant numbers of street children have been present in Indonesia for more than two decades, with a group in 1984 developing their own cooperative. In 1992, this group even rented a house, but were evicted just over a year later because they did not have identity cards. These were children separated from family, but who needed a family in order to obtain the

necessary identity papers (Yanasan Humana, undated). At that time, street children were reported to be subject to national “cleansing operations,” which included detention and beatings (ibid). Violence by parents has been highlighted as a key reason for a child’s decision to leave home (ibid).

129. The Government refused to acknowledge the existence of street children in Indonesia until the late 1990s. A United Nations Development Programme grant and an ADB loan enabled a drop-in shelter program to be launched, and the definition of street children was broadened to include more children’s circumstances (SASC 2003). The end of the 1990s saw a number of significant changes in the lives of Indonesian children generally, partly as a result of economic crises and other sociopolitical changes. The numbers of children dropping out of school increased and there were increasing numbers of teenage sex workers. (Kearney 2000). More than half of the children on Indonesian streets in 2000 were reported as “new entrants” since the beginning of the Asian economic crisis in 1997 (Dursin 2000). The major response has come from international and local NGOs. These organizations see the country’s main children’s legislation, the 1979 Child Welfare Act, as ineffective, with urgent need for a new Child Protection Law as well as new institutional and implementation arrangements within government.

130. The incidence of street children across Malaysia appears to have not been documented, although one estimate suggests that peninsular and island Malaysia may be home to up to 75,000 street children (Austin, undated).

131. There are reportedly large numbers of street children in the Philippines, although estimates vary widely. One report suggests 1.5 million street children (Jubilee Action, undated), while another suggests only 15,000 street working children (Austin, undated). However, both reports agree that there are some 100,000 child sex workers in the country. The Department of Social Welfare and Development in 1998 estimated that there were 222,417 street children in 65 major cities in the country (CRB 2003). As elsewhere in the region, the context for Filipino street children is endemic poverty—more than half the country’s urban population is categorized as living below the country’s absolute poverty line, a figure rising to 64% in some rural areas according to one report (Jubilee Action, undated). The National Statistics Coordination Board reported that two out of every five Filipino families are now living in poverty (CRB 2003). Poverty in the Philippines has been linked to problems of “structural adjustment,” exacerbated by concentration of wealth, institutionalized graft and corruption, and natural disasters that drain national resources (Silva 1996). This is manifested in a lack of adequate employment opportunities and basic services, poor housing and slums, and poor law enforcement (CRB 2003).

132. The sexual exploitation of children, including sex tourism, continues to be a major problem in the Philippines. Filipino girls are trafficked out of the country for sex work (Son 1995). At least one NGO rescues children from brothels and other exploitative work situations. The incidence of sex tourism was reported to be aided in the past by parents in Olongapo encouraging children to “go with an American,” referring to naval personnel in that area (Jubilee Action, undated). Although the naval base has since been closed, the demand for child sex workers continues. The withdrawal of US troops from the Philippines in 1992 is said to have left behind some 50,000 AmerAsian children (Jubilee Action, undated).

133. In Timor-Leste, street children are reported to be new phenomenon, since 1999. Three reasons have been cited: the separation of families during the forced evacuation to West Timor; the destruction of many homes in the capital, Dili; and the September 1999 destruction of all

orphanages in the western part of Timor-Leste (Odling-Smee 2001). Around 1,000 street children have been reported in Dili, and two projects have been established by religious groups to provide some services. It has been reported that it is unlikely that the new Government or the United Nations will rebuild the country's orphanages, with orphan care left to NGOs or other civil society groups. In West Timor, orphanages are said to exist in all major townships, run principally by religious organizations—Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim—as well as some other groups.

#### **D. The Pacific**

134. The situation in the Pacific varies. Urban youth are identified as a problem in Papua New Guinea. There are large numbers of homeless children in neighboring Australia. Some Pacific nations report no issues associated with street children. In Vanuatu, for example, it was reported that there were no known cases of either child labor or child prostitution in the country (WVI V 1999). The same report, however, noted that the “issue of child prostitution is a new phenomenon and growing in the South Pacific.”

135. Research in Australia in 2002, using data from the 2001 census, found an 8% increase in homeless children in the country since 1994. There are now reported to be some 26,000 homeless children aged 12–18 years across Australia. The rate varies by State, from 69 out of every 1,000 children in the Northern Territory to 10 per 1,000 in Victoria, with an overall national average of 14 per 1,000. In the Northern Territory, high levels of domestic violence and family breakdown are associated with the problem of homelessness (ABC Newsonline 2002). As elsewhere, there are overlapping definitions or categorizations of street children, including children living on the street, children living in crisis or refuge accommodation, children living in temporary accommodation without security (e.g., staying with friends), and children in unsafe family circumstances including domestic violence and abuse (Social Policy Group 2000). These categories are somewhat different to those conventionally applied to street children, but are important in suggesting the range of child rights still to be realized. Service provision for homeless young people in Melbourne, across organizations, was found to have a high turnover. This was primarily attributed to inadequate funding, lack of resources, low salaries, stressful work, and a lack of professional supervision (Mallet, Rosenthal, and Myers 2001). It would seem that homeless children in developed countries also are publicly stigmatized, and given low priority for attention, much as with street children developing countries.

### **V. FRAMEWORKS AND PRINCIPLES FOR INTERVENTION**

136. The variety of circumstances in which street children find themselves and the problems they face, suggest that if interventions are to be effective they need to be guided by a set of principles leading to a framework for practice. The CRC provides a ready framework for any intervention in the lives of children, including street children. The CRC represents an international standard for children's rights to survival, development, protection, participation, and freedom from discrimination, within an overall context of the best interests of the child.

137. Following the almost universal ratification of the CRC, efforts have been directed to monitoring its implementation and to the development and refinement of what is commonly referred to as child rights programming (CRP). A CRP framework provides guidance in how to use and implement the CRC (and other international instruments) in the best interests of children everywhere. CRP combines legal-based responses to international conventions on child and human rights with perspectives of childhood and development. The CRP framework utilizes sociology (paradigms of childhood), cross-cultural psychology (childhood development),

provision (care and protection as well as education and health services), citizenship, governance, and good practice in the areas of child participation and field-based youth and community work. Further, CRP uses a rights-based analysis of the situation of children that seeks to identify the duty bearers responsible for protecting and supporting those rights. The purpose is to recognize children as rights holders, not as passive beneficiaries. Similarly, there is a need for accountability for children's rights (see, for example, James and Prout 1990; Theis 2001a and 2001b; Christensen 2002; ISCA 2002).

138. As signatories to the CRC, state parties are required to bring their legislation into line with its provisions. In some countries, the development of comprehensive child rights legislation is still in process. In other countries, appropriate legislation is in place, but mechanisms for effective implementation are absent. State parties too often lack either capacity or financial or other resources, such as a cadre of trained social workers. Similarly, a country's social context may be adverse to the realization of child rights, such as where the public or some state apparatus (e.g., police) continue to place children very low on the social hierarchy. Too often street children, in particular, are perceived as nuisances, if not lesser beings. There is need for awareness raising and behavior change among adults and society as a whole to realize the full scope of children's rights. There also is need for sensitization and training in a range of professions including police and the judiciary. Unfortunately, departments or ministries with overall responsibility for children and children's rights are often the weakest and most under-resourced units in national bureaucracies. One important issue is hostility to children's rights in some places, often from religious groups, but also, it seems, based on a misunderstanding of what children's rights entail. Some misconceptions are articulated in suggestions that children's rights are about children "staying up late and going to discos," "disrespecting others," "going out and taking drugs" (which are not in the CRC) rather than rights to protection from abuse, torture, and exploitation. Sensitization and training need to involve a variety of social groupings.

139. With respect to implementation of the CRC, two principles predominate: protection and participation. Protection is fundamental and constitutes the main reason for seeking interventions in the lives of street children. This includes protection from abuse and exploitation, but also suggests more preemptive approaches in enabling the development of children's skills and knowledge, and in building support structures and mechanisms that improve children's environments, making them safer and less vulnerable. One aspect of protection is preventing children from moving to the street.

140. Protection needs children's participation if it is to succeed, just as any successful prevention initiatives usually involve children. Participation means allowing children to express their views and to be involved in decision making to the extent of their capability. It should be obvious that street children know far more about their reasons for choosing to leave home or to migrate to the streets than anyone else. They certainly know far more about survival and making the most of street life through a variety of coping mechanisms. And they also know what they want in terms of care, reintegration, and acceptable work.

141. A key aspect of children's participation is the right to information in order to make decisions about their own best interests. Street children make decisions every day. Implementing their rights to information, knowledge, and understanding about such risks as unwanted or unprotected sex, HIV/AIDS, and substance and drugs usage, will assist them in making safer decisions. Not taking children's views into account or not involving them in decision making is one reason why many children who are forcibly returned to their families are "back on the street before the bus that took them home."

142. In many countries, children's participation is felt to be difficult, as a new practice, and there are fears that it might only be tokenistic or superficial. These fears can be addressed through support and training (particularly for adults). A great deal of children's participation work has been accomplished in different parts of the Asia-Pacific region, largely work with poor and disadvantaged children in difficult settings.

143. Following the principle of children's participation means that a child's current situation and circumstances must be taken as a starting point. The CRC suggests that the best place for a child's development is with his or her family (or to live in a family-type setting), for reasons including identity, care, and protection. While this implies that separated children should be returned to their family as soon as possible, at least two questions need to be addressed. The first question concerns reintegration and how children might not only be reunited and resettled within the family but also reintegrated into their community and surroundings. Stigma attached to street children (and especially those who have been involved in sex work), together with the sense of freedom, personal control, and enjoyment that some children find on the street, mean that their reunification may be less immediately possible than some adults expect. The second question is related: is it in children's best interests to be returned home? Adverse conditions at home, such as situations of domestic violence or abuse or abject poverty, make resettlement difficult if not impossible. It is not in a child's best interest to be sent to an environment that is injurious or dangerous. Children also may not know where they are from (given that some have simply gotten lost, or been trafficked at an early age). Alternative forms of care, protection, and living in other than a family environment might be in the best interests of many children, and necessary for some, such as children orphaned by HIV/AIDS.

144. There is some tension between the principles of protection and participation, given that adults' perceptions of protection and dangers may be quite different from those of children. But children's participation in protection is crucial for any intervention to be effective: what appears risky and dangerous to adults (especially those with secure homes) may be negotiated safely by children. A clear paradox is the removal of a child from the street for his or her safety, and subsequent placement in a family home or other accommodation that is abusive and exploitative. In some cases, children might be better off on the street because available alternatives bring no real improvements to their lives (or best interests). Such decisions, however, can only be made through careful analysis of a child's particular context with the active participation of that child, again according to his or her capabilities to participate in decision making. However, putting into practice the principle of best interests is not easy, particularly in institutional or bureaucratic settings.

145. The question of best interests also is linked to ethical practices. Street children are visible and elicit a diverse range of reactions from sympathy and regarding street children as victims, to disgust and regarding street children as criminals or inhuman beings. The CRC denotes children as humans under the age of 18 years, to whom all human rights conventions apply, taking into account the special circumstances regarding age, but emphasizing their humanity and rights, including respect for their person, privacy, and identity. Ethical principles require respecting children's views and decisions, while taking into account their best interests. Such principles also mean that street children should not be objectified or sensationalized in newspaper and other media accounts, or expected to recount their histories, or to continually be subject to viewing by project visitors (even if the visitors are donors).

146. The nature of provision designed for street children also poses significant challenges. The most common form of provision is shelter, which may fulfil children's needs in part, but in fact may more fulfil adult perceptions of children's needs, including adult feelings about the

importance of a home or not wanting children to “sleep rough.” For a child, the main issue may be a haunting traumatic experience or family relationship breakdown, rather than nights on the street.

147. CRP has enormous implications for the development of principles of good practice. First is the importance of research or careful case management to ensure that project work is based on the reality of children’s lives and circumstances rather than well-meaning assumptions. Such research needs to include and involve children, with some of the research activity possibly conducted by children themselves (as has been shown to be both possible and effective). Such research will ensure that particular contexts or circumstances are taken into account and include children’s own perceptions of the benefits and dangers of street life.

148. Second, the range of street children’s possible circumstances means that several areas of practice must be addressed, both with adults and with children, and that work is not limited to street-based interventions or to the provision of shelters. As noted earlier, children’s life “on the street” may involve places other than the street, such as brothels, factories, sweatshops, squatter homes, etc.

149. Third, the nature of provision created for street children must be safe, offer protection, and enable their personal development.

150. Fourth, and linked to the question of provision, the ways in which children move on from the street, particularly with respect to their possible reunification with family as well as their future lives, must be taken into account.

151. Highly varied street circumstances necessitate action-based research. Different circumstances create problems of process and place, which in turn create difficulties for practice. While there is a tendency to focus on the lives of those children who remain on the street, such an approach ignores the reality of transitions—that street children’s lives are not static, and that street children respond to opportunities and constraints, to coercion, and to their own growing older. A clear difficulty is mediating varying responses to individuals and groups through constraints of staffing and overall resources of projects, as well as the local context.

## **VI. METHODS OF IMPLEMENTATION**

152. Given the range of issues associated with street children and principles of good practice, a number of areas of work can be identified within three broad categories: prevention; interventions on the street; and helping children move on from situations of risk, abuse, or exploitation.

### **A. Prevention**

153. Prevention strategies cover a wide area, including public awareness raising, capacity building, and financial or other support to poor families to enable their children to stay at home. Strategies need to be linked to harm reduction so that children are better equipped to make informed decisions about their own best interests. Peer education has proven a particularly effective means of raising awareness about child rights, as well as the threats confronting children. Public discussion about the core principles of child rights and information about trafficking mechanisms similarly can help reduce the incidence of trafficking as well as other situations of abuse or exploitation. In addition to work with children, prevention methods require work with adults at all levels, including families, communities, community leaders, teachers,

police and the judiciary, and other government institutions. Increased knowledge of children's rights is an important starting point, but the work also must include information about the reality of life in cities, including the risk of trafficking.

154. Prevention can require behavioral changes regarding, for example, parenting styles and support for children to stay in school—which may require changes to the education system and schools so that children are able to attend, want to attend, and find schooling both enjoyable and useful. In many developing countries in the region, this might mean more flexible school calendars to allow children to assist their families during planting or harvesting seasons—a broadening of the current notion of “child-friendly schools.”

## **B. Interventions on the Street**

155. Establishing and maintaining contact with street children is the starting point for interventions. An immediate removal from the street might not be in the best interests of the child. Harm reduction and child protection are twin basic strategies that can be applied. For example, it may not be possible to stop street children from having sex or being involved in sex work in the short term, but the associated risks can be reduced easily through appropriate counseling (including by peer educators). The same can be done with substance use, where harm reduction involves knowledge about the effects of drugs and promoting their safe (or safer) use as a means of aiding street children's survival and potential future development.

156. Children's rights to health care and education can be addressed by taking into account their current circumstances and offering service provision on the street or in close proximity to where they live and work, and at times and in places which are accessible to street children. This might entail “street work” methods including both outreach and detached teams making direct contact with street children. Work in street situations also might include helping and supporting the development of children's own organizations.

157. Whereas outreach work generally involves teams of staff operating from drop-in centers and shelters, detached work takes provision such as healthcare and education to children where they are on the street. While outreach workers may work with children on the street, they also offer possibilities for the use of other facilities, including residential accommodation. Efforts also are required to address the needs and rights of children in sensitive or generally invisible areas, such as domestic servants or commercial sex workers. Principles of protection and harm reduction must be involved where “rescue” is not possible or would lead to children shifting to even worse circumstances or more exploitative situations. Encouraging children to help decide what is in their own best interests is essential.

158. In order to establish contact and make service provision available, drop-in centers need to be open at appropriate times for children, respecting their working day and lives. The same tenet of accessibility applies to both outreach and detached work

159. Part of street work, either through detached teams or drop-in centers, includes ensuring that children have the opportunity to access available services including medical and hospital services; training and education including literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills; legal aid and advice; and refuges at times of risk or danger.

## **C. Leaving the Street and Moving On**

160. In order for children to successfully move on from the street they need to be involved in decision making about the opportunities available to them. Returning to their families often

requires more than transport, and may entail some preparation of both children and family, as well as support for reintegration into families and communities. “Moving on” expresses both physical and emotional progress, and encompasses a range of processes and possible destinations, with some consideration given to the child’s best interests for the future.

161. Several steps may be required in the process of “moving on” including provision of temporary accommodation when children are not able to return to families, or alternative care, such as foster families. For older children who may be moving on to independent life, considerable preparation may be required through appropriate training to enable them to earn a living off the street. An important principle is that such vocational or skills training be realistic, given economic and work opportunities actually available in a particular country or setting.

162. In the process of moving on, shelters for street children are a widespread component of practice, based on the notion (mostly by adults) of returning children to settled life. Shelters should involve children in their design and daily operation. Shelters need to be appropriate to the local economic conditions in order that they do not attract additional children, or that parents might send their children to such shelters as a way of providing their children with education or healthcare, or simply to relieve the costs of care. That shelters can provide better conditions than ordinary home life is one reason why other causal factors need to be addressed, such as support for poor families to be able to keep and provide for their children at home. In addition, shelters need to avoid the “institutionalization” of children, which reduces their competency and compromises their opportunities for future independence. This can be done by setting minimum standards, and children’s participation in the organization and day-to-day running of shelters or any residential care.

163. Shelters must not be seen as final “ends” for children but rather part of a longer process of moving on, which means also moving back into community life. Children and young people who have been away from communities, or enter new places but whose past is known, are often stigmatized because of real or perceived involvement in sex work. Again, principles of participation are important, with the recognition that it may be difficult for some children to be off the street. Forcing or coercing children to live in residential or other accommodation often fails.

#### **D. General**

164. The question of support to families is linked to prevention and to antipoverty initiatives. These might work on two levels, individual development and social-structural change. A discussion of antipoverty initiatives is beyond the scope of this paper, but clearly includes the use of vocational or skills training to enable children and families to generate income on the one hand, and links into broader structural concerns such as the use of taxes, anticorruption initiatives, and issues of good governance on the other. Other elements include capacity building on children’s rights, on child protection issues, and on how to work with children. Other, more general, needs are coordination of services, the establishment of standards, the implementation of existing legislation, and the promulgation of new child protection laws that are more in accordance with the CRC.

165. There are many crosscutting elements to the principles for intervention. The development of reflective practice, that is analyzing development and current activities in the context of the environment, means that some attention must be paid to current, urgent issues, such as HIV/AIDS.

166. Finally, research is an important part of practice, particularly when used to establish baselines against which the impact of an intervention can be measured. Research also is fundamental in better understanding the lives of street children and in designing appropriate interventions. The involvement of children in research activities increasingly is regarded as fundamental, although in some countries such practice is still comparatively new. Whereas merely asking children questions is seen as innovative in some countries, in others it is taken for granted that child input can guide or inform all aspects of the research process, and that children may be able to assist in conducting research.

## **VII. PRACTICE AND EXAMPLES**

167. There are numerous examples of good practice in projects across the Asia-Pacific region, although it must be recognized that individual projects cannot address every aspect of a street child's life. Rather, approaches usually are limited to particular issues, such as health or education, children and work, children and drugs, and trafficking. Figure VII.1 provides an indicative list of necessary practice areas relating to street children.

168. The following section provides some examples of good practice from the Asia-Pacific region.

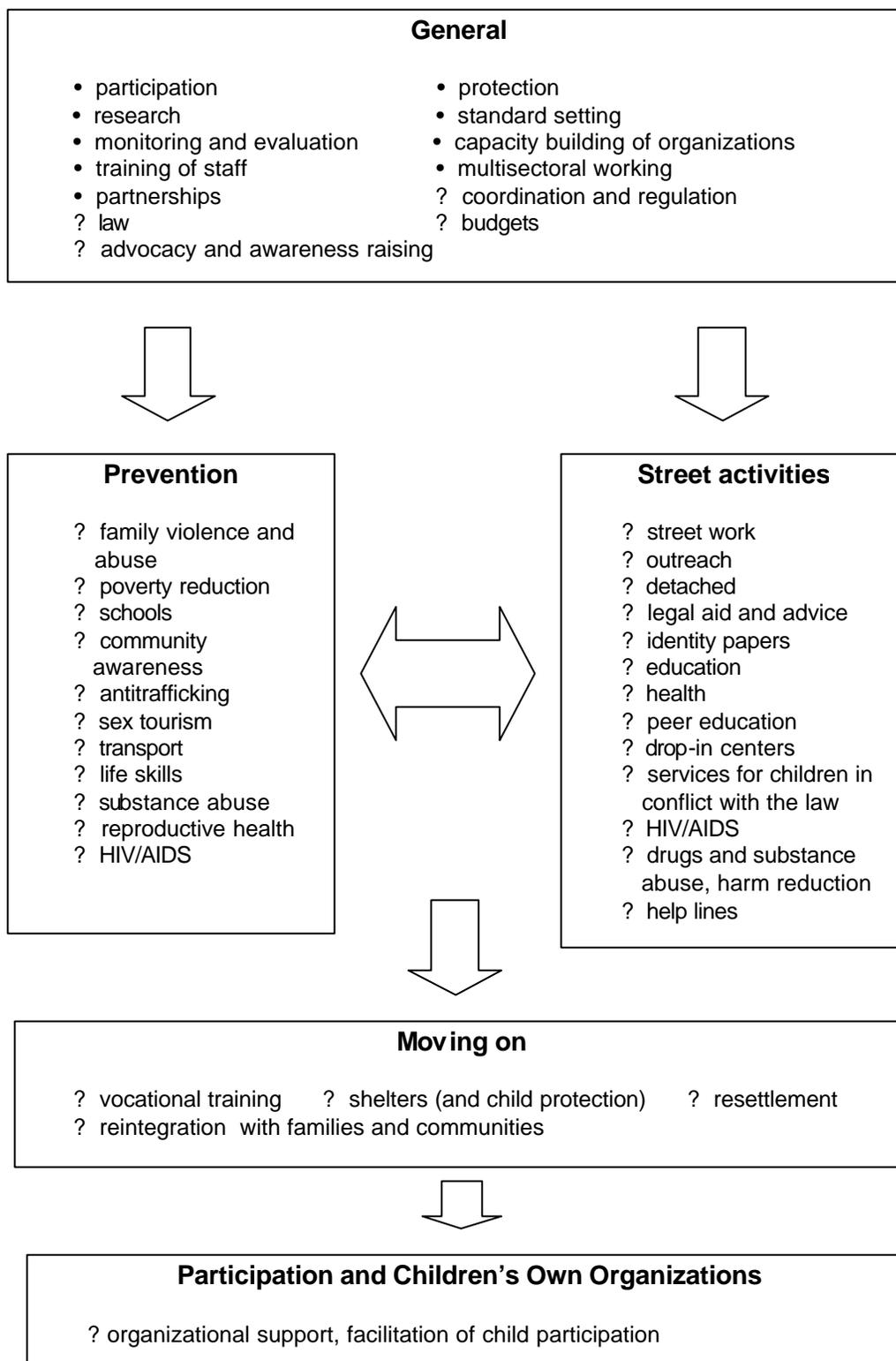
### **A. Participation**

169. The practice of children's participation is uneven across the region, and probably best developed in parts of South Asia and the Philippines. Preparations for the May 2002 United Nations Special Session on Children featured child participation. While such activity is important, particularly in popularizing the notion that the voices of children are important, one-off promotional events often detract from the need for children's ongoing involvement in decision making in family and community and daily life. In addition, such opportunities rarely extend to poor or vulnerable children, including street children. Well known examples of child participation include children's unions in India (Box VII.1), the Child-Brigade in Bangladesh (see Box VII.1), and the street children "Butterflies" project in India (Box VII.2). Other examples include the children's clubs of Nepal (a series of projects for all children—see Rajbhavidary, Hart, and Khatiwarda 1999), and children's involvement in decision making in connection with making a move to shelters in Thailand (Foundation for a Better Life for Children).

### **B. Standards, Cooperation, and Coordination**

170. The setting of national standards for provision has been undertaken by many developed countries as well as by some Asian States. The establishment of such standards is linked to the development of legislation and the coordination of services. In the PRC, the Ministry of Civil Affairs has begun the development of standards of care. In Thailand, new legislation for children was developed by 2000. While cooperation and multisectoral working are in evidence in some countries (see examples in ESCAP, Undated), there are many gaps and issues that require further attention. Research, certain prevention initiatives, development of street work, provision of temporary accommodation, and education and vocational training are more advanced. Capacity building has been an integral part of most good projects, if only to train project staff in ways of communicating and working with children. In some countries, effort has been directed to the development of social work and related professions including the establishment of university courses, for example, Save the Children, UK's support of a social work course at the State Pedagogical University in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

**Figure VII.1: Street Children—Basic Areas of Practice**



### Box VII.1: Children's Own Organizations

#### The Bal Mazdoor Union (Child Workers Union), New Delhi, India

The Bal Mazdoor Union sees itself as a platform of and for children who are denied access to their basic rights. It enables children to gain strength from their unity and increases their bargaining power. The Union is concerned with the situations of abuse, exploitation, and/or denial of basic fundamental rights, such as the right to a childhood, education, recreation, leisure, shelter, health care, the right to respect, and opportunities to participate in policies and programs affecting children. Through their Union, the children also seek to mobilize public opinion to redress conditions and pressures that force them to work including the situation of poverty and unemployment of their families. The Bal Mazdoor Union in its various collective actions has also highlighted the situation of children in this larger context and has held adults accountable when children's rights have been severely violated. For example, in 1994 the Union brought to the attention of people the callous death of 15-year-old Zaffar Imam by his employer. In this case, the Union, through its dialogue with the Chief Minister of Delhi, was able to change the charge from attempted murder to murder. Further, on behalf of the child's parents, the Union filed a case in the Delhi High Court for compensation.

Source: O'Kane 2002.

#### Child Brigade, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Child Brigade is an organization that started in Dhaka in 1995 as a pilot project of Save the Children, Sweden. Child Brigade since has become an established and well known organization its own right. Its motto is "Be Together and Organized." Child Brigade also strives to improve the circumstances of street children. The children of Child Brigade seek to participate at all levels in issues affecting them.

A core group, elected by a wider group of street children, bears responsibility for carrying out the organization's activities. Any street child aged 10–16 years who is willing to follow the rules and regulations of Child Brigade can become a member. Members have opportunities for training and personal development, education, health care, space to leave belongings, and some income-generating activities. Child Brigade also organizes a street and social networking program to raise awareness among street children through a group training process. The organization reaches out to some 400 street and working children through 6 contact points in the city. Through drama and "Babloo," their own literacy kit, Child Brigade involves street children in discussions on issues affecting them, on child rights, and on literacy and numeracy. Child Brigade has published its own book, *Amra*, based on the observations of street children, and has produced a series of posters highlighting the problems facing street children in Bangladesh.

Child Brigade members have made linkages with street children involved in other projects and with child rights activists. For example, Child Brigade members played an active role in discussions and actions related to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children, together with a wider forum of children from other NGOs and children's organizations. Child Brigade recently formed partnerships with an adult human rights organization (*Adhikar*) as well as with a group of journalists. In addition to helping to sensitize the wider public in Bangladesh about the abuse and exploitation of children, Child Brigade has helped to establish a "monitoring cell" that provides street children with immediate, free legal assistance.

Source: O'Kane 2002.

### Box VII.2: The Butterflies of New Delhi

The Butterflies Organization of Street and Working Children has been working with children on the streets of New Delhi since 1988. Through a team of street educators, the organization is in contact with approximately 700 children at 9 contact points where there are concentrations of street and working children. Butterflies' general objectives are to empower street children with the knowledge and skills necessary to protect their rights as children and develop as respected and productive citizens; to provide such children with necessary support and assistance for reinstatement in their families where possible; and to use the CRC as a major tool for ensuring government and public accountability for the well-being of all vulnerable children.

Butterflies believes in the principles of democracy and community participation in decision making. Every fortnight, children of each contact point hold a meeting to discuss issues, critique ongoing activities, plan future activities, etc. Once a month, representatives from each contact point come together for the Bal Sabha (Children's Council, the supreme body and the guiding force and mechanism of the Butterflies program). The children elect a chairperson and a minute taker. Each member is encouraged to share any agenda issues, and each of the outlined points is discussed, with key decisions recorded. Most often, the issues concern police harassment, nonpayment of wages, need for better jobs, wages, education, saving schemes, problems of gambling or drugs, and planning picnics and other outings.

The meetings enable children to discuss and share information that concerns their lives, to analyze various social and political events and decisions, and to work together toward collective action. It has helped in refining Butterflies program interventions, as well as helping to organize children and create a forum where they can speak and share their ideas. The idea of a Children's Council provides a concrete mechanism for children's collective voice to be heard.

Butterflies also helped launch children-planned initiatives. For example, in 1989, children started their own Butterflies Restaurant as a training venture as well as to provide subsidized meals to other street children. In 1991, children formed their own Child Workers Union (Bal Mazdoor Union, Box VII.1) and in 1996, children established a media group called "Bal Mazdoor ki Awaz" (Child Workers' Voice) that produces a regular wall newspaper on issues affecting children. In 2000, a Children's Health Cooperative was established. All these initiatives were the outcomes of children's collective response to Bal Sabha discussions.

Source: O'Kane 2002.

## C. Protection

171. Child protection usually has been linked more to issues of protection from abuse or exploitation rather than the broader remit of social protection. Increasingly, child protection looks beyond physical protection to the varied circumstances and reasons why children are at risk. Collaborative and multisectoral working, the coordination of services, and partnerships are playing important parts in the wider protection of children's rights.

172. In Sri Lanka, for example, national coordination has been developed through the National Child Protection Authority (PEACE, undated). In Pakistan, a lawyers' organization has developed partnerships with other groups focusing on legal aid, awareness raising on child abuse, and policy input (LHRLA, undated). The Philippines has developed a multisectoral approach to case management in the area of sexual exploitation of children (DSWD, undated).

173. Another example of a broad approach to protection is found in Bangladesh, through the Bangladesh Shishu Adikar Forum. This is a national network of 130 NGOs that are actively involved in child rights activities, with the objective of establishing a social environment that “respects, promotes and protects the rights of children...where the child is free of abuse, discrimination and exploitation irrespective of her nationality, religion, caste, color or religion” (CSC 2002). The Forum’s activities include interagency networking, coordination, capacity building, and lobbying.

174. The problem of sex tourism has also led to protection initiatives including research (such as that of World Vision in Cambodia—see Gray, Gourley, and Paul 1996; Chuan Wathuana et al. 2002). Work with and within the tourism industry on training for prevention has been undertaken by ECPAT Australia, including “child-wise tourism” in addition to programs (“choose with care”) to prevent known child sex offenders from joining organizations working with children (ECPAT Australia, undated). Other initiatives have included the implementation of child protection policies within international NGOs, such as Save the Children, UK.

175. NGOs also have undertaken training and rights awareness activities with police, such as in antitrafficking partnerships. One NGO, Helpline International, is attempting to provide vulnerable children and street children with information and services of which they can avail, as well as a crisis line for assistance (Box VII.3).

### **Box VII.3: Child Helpline International**

The NGO Child Helpline International aims for a global network of telephone and outreach services for children and young people.

As of 2002, there were some 38 help lines for children in different countries. A children’s telephone help line is accessible and free of charge to children around the clock, enabling them to contact someone in an emergency situation. Children’s help lines allow children to directly express their concerns on issues affecting them. Child Helpline International believes that children have rights and that children can identify the problems that confront them. A telephone help line ensures that children have access to assistance whenever they want and also provides a platform for the community to partner in protecting children.

The experience of help lines across the world includes listening to children, responding to crisis situations, networking amongst organizations working with children, and generating data to feed into government policies. Children in need of care and protection often are unaware of services available to them, or do not have easy access to such services.

Help lines could provide 24-hour service for children and young persons in emergency situations and include a range of media, such as telephone (fixed line and mobile telephones, text messaging), internet, band radio, and mail (including free post). The target groups are the most marginalized groups of children in developing countries.

Source: Abridged from Childline 2002.

## D. Research

176. Research is required to identify issues of children's rights that remain unmet, as well as to address the question of who are duty bearers and how they can fulfil their responsibilities. Such effort should lead to development of standards and the regulation and coordination of services—all of which are major gaps in the realization of children's rights.

177. Research also is necessary to understand the complexities of local situations and the circumstances of children, to give a more accurate idea of the scale of the problems to be confronted. In development work and other practice, research ideally is undertaken first in order to provide a "baseline" against which to measure future development. But in some situations and contexts it is not possible to undertake preliminary research. In addition, the usefulness of extensive baseline research for the measurement of change has been questioned because of the nature of social change and issues relating to what exactly influences attitudinal or behavioral change. Research in this area is more often used as part of a process for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness and use of specific interventions.

178. There is a need to investigate the multiple areas in which street children find themselves. In Cambodia, for example, World Vision has conducted research not only on sex tourism, mentioned above, but also on life on rubbish dumps and child labor as a way of promoting better understanding of the range of issues confronting vulnerable children. There also is a need to understand local complexities in order to consider and design appropriate interventions. For example, the hierarchy of status and variety of income opportunities in rubbish picking in Cambodia has been shown to be far more complicated than cursory observation would suggest (see Gourley, Un, and Gray 1997). In Uzbekistan, research indicated the particular problems and circumstances of children sleeping in residential care but working on the streets during the daytime (Tahlil 2002). In Afghanistan, a study on street children in a disaster or postconflict emergency situation provided the basis for planning interventions, especially by revealing the extent of ongoing family links (see, for example, TdH 2002).

179. Research, particularly participatory action research, has been used to identify problems and initiatives. This type of research has been used in "cross-border projects" in Southeast Asia and the PRC to reduce the incidence of trafficking (for example, Caouette, undated; SCUK 2001). Such work has been very effective in promoting awareness about trafficking. But underlying issues such as poverty, abuse, discrimination, and exclusion, all need to be tackled to prevent children's drift away from home.

180. An important development in the research agenda has been the active participation of children in research as well as children's own research (Box VII.4). Such research has brought new insights into children's situations and the processes needed to realize children's rights. Adults, including those with much experience of work with street children, have expressed surprise at some findings, with children highlighting issues not otherwise seen as important. For example, street children in Bangladesh highlighted the problems they experienced in playing outside because of police harassment and the attitude of the general public (see Khan 1997; West 1999).

**Box VII.4: Children’s Own Research  
Shoshur Bari and street children’s research in Dhaka, Bangladesh**

Since 1997, street children in Bangladesh have conducted research with support and help by adults. The “Shoshur Bari” research focused on street children who, at some stage of their lives, came into contact with law-enforcing agents, which resulted either in their being taken into custody or incarcerated in jail or a home for vagrants. There were 14 children in the research group, comprising both boys and girls. The research took place over six months. Uniquely, the children were given the authority and space within broad parameters to decide specific research issues and various methods for accumulating information, and identifying, analyzing, and prioritizing key findings and recommendations. Interviews were also taken of lawyers, magistrates, government officials, police personnel, jail officials, and former and current child and adult prisoners. The adult core team members then carried out interviews with a similar sample group to strengthen the children’s research findings.

The study described the stages through which children often leave home and how they often end up in jail. Maltreatment by family members emerged as the major cause of children leaving home. On the street, they often are picked up by police, usually without any specific case or warrant, and become victims with no recourse to legal representation. Police have various tactics to apprehend street children, usually intensified during the eve of *hartal* [strike] days on account of “street violence,” as described by the children. Under custody, children experience physical and psychological abuse from the police, and when taken to court, are not properly represented, leading to their indefinite detention in jail without any follow-up for release. In jail and shelter homes, they suffer a denial of the basic necessities of life as well as egregious violations of their human rights.

The child researchers also developed recommendations to improve the situation of street children in detention: stopping police from apprehending children without specific charge, the establishment of alternative center(s) exclusively for child detainees, stopping abuse of children by family members at home, treating street children’s situation with special consideration, and effective NGO involvement to ensure the protection and well-being of street children. In support of these recommendations, the children suggested certain advocacy measures, including meetings with senior government officials and NGO representatives as well as holding press conferences and producing television features on street children issues.

Source: Khair and Khan 2000.

## **E. Prevention**

181. Prevention work includes advocacy at different levels and training of adults (professionals, community leaders, local residents) as well as children (including peer educators). This type of work has been very successful in the western PRC, in reducing the numbers of children migrating or being trafficked eastwards. The style of advocacy and training, however, must fit local conditions and culture—mass meetings were used, *inter alia*, in western PRC, but they might not be as effective elsewhere. Other examples of prevention work in the PRC are given in Box VII.5. Campaigns against sex tourism in Cambodia have included printed material (such as maps of Phnom Penh and Siem Reap) given away free to tourists upon arrival.

### **Box VII.5: Prevention Work in the People's Republic of China**

In Yunnan Province, the Provincial Public Security Bureau (PSB), together with the Provincial Women's Federation, the Civil Affairs Bureau, and the Ethnic Commission, undertook projects in two prefectures (Honghe and Wenshan) along with the local PSB and Women's Federation; the work was supported by Save the Children, UK.

The principal aim at the Honghe Township sites was to influence local people in a joint effort to produce educational material related to trafficking prevention. The focus included rescued women and girls, mobile children and youth under 18, children within the community, and community members in general. Among the activities used was the singing of mountain folk and popular songs revolving around the subject of trafficking, production of Sansun Village's 2002 Prevention of Trafficking in Women and Children Calendar, and the knitting of a fabric poster on the same subject in the style of the Hani people by persons from the Bamu Village Office (a grassroots-level administrative district), Sancun Administrative Village. A video recording (VCD) of community-based activities at project sites in Honghe was produced with strong support from the Honghe Prefecture PSB, Honghe County Women's Federation, and Honghe County Bureau of Culture. The VCD was shown on the Honghe Prefecture TV station as part of the program "Twenty Minute Police Forum" and had significant social impact.

In Wenshan Prefecture, project objectives included engaging in projects that benefited the community as a whole, improving the organizational skills and self-determination of community members (especially women); bringing about community-wide participation; increasing trafficking prevention awareness and skills among community members; and making the village into a "trafficking prevention civilized village" involving interdepartmental cooperation. The responsibilities and functions of the different organizations were established and village laws drafted with the support of the Guangnan County PSB and Women's Federation, the Nanping Township Government, the Women's House, Village Protection Brigade, and the Villagers' Team.

To the northwest, in Xinjiang, the provincial Street Children Protection Center involved the Justice Bureau, Civil Affairs Bureau, the Women's Federation, and the University and Social Science Academy, again with the support of Save the Children, UK, in providing training on children's rights, parenting and children's issues, awareness-raising workshops on trafficking and urban life, and participatory action research. The collaboration was repeated around the province and included mass meetings in local languages. In addition, much use was made of local television. Apparently as a result of the project, the numbers of street children coming from Xinjiang Province dropped significantly over the following year.

Source: He Ye 2001.

182. Prevention work must be undertaken in different places and in different ways, just as children become vulnerable or at risk in different ways, and at different times in their lives. Families, schools, and communities are important starting places, but other kinds of prevention work are required. At present, statutory social welfare services either do not exist, or are very unevenly distributed. Some projects have looked to community awareness raising and training in different areas, but this work needs also to be linked to issues of poverty.

183. Thus, prevention work should include poverty reduction strategies including income generation and skills training. Thailand offers an interesting example of preventative training of vulnerable girls from poor communities (Box VII.6). Schools are a fundamental part of children's lives; making education free and friendly is an important contribution toward prevention and reducing children's vulnerability.

### **Box VII.6: The Youth Career Development Program, Thailand**

The Youth Career Development Program has contributed toward a reduction in commercial sexual exploitation of children by giving girls aged 17 to 20 employment training for the hotel and travel industry. The girls are selected from provinces in northern and northeastern Thailand. The target provinces are among the poorest in Thailand and have the lowest levels of nonagricultural employment. Social pressures, parental expectations, poverty, and a lack of educational and employment opportunities can put girls at risk of economic and sexual exploitation. Each year thousands of young women flock to Bangkok and other urban areas in search of work. Many young women without appropriate skills end up working in bars, massage parlors, and brothels. Some girls are even sold into prostitution by parents and relatives, and in several areas of northern Thailand it has become acceptable to encourage daughters to enter commercial sex work. The Thai Government estimates that 20,000–40,000 girls under the age of 18 are engaged in commercial sex work.

The Pan Pacific Hotel in Bangkok and the Child Protection Section of UNICEF Thailand worked together to develop the program, which uses the hotel's expertise in human resources development to provide disadvantaged young girls with the skills to work in the hotel and travel industry. UNICEF finances the girls' stay in Bangkok and their transportation to and within the city. It also organizes child rights training and coordinates the activities of a number of other partners, such as the Thai Ministry of Education and NGOs. The Pan Pacific Bangkok coordinates the activities of 17 other hotels participating in the project. The course covers hotel service and life skills and lasts 22 weeks. The hotel service component is taught by department heads and supervisors from participating hotels and includes housekeeping, laundry, floral arrangement, food preparation, and food and beverage services.

By providing vocational and life skills training, the program ensures long-term social and economic security for young girls otherwise at risk of economic and sexual exploitation. When the program was first launched in 1995, it had nine participants. A year later, the program expanded to include five other hotels with a total of 35 participants. The program since has grown to involve 18 hotels and has trained a total of 450 young women from 17 provinces.

Source: Panpac/UNICEF, undated.

184. Prevention initiatives need also to include issues of gender, disability, and ethnicity that contribute toward children's vulnerability. In South Asia, there are many projects working against violence toward girl children, as well as projects focusing on disabled children. While not necessarily undertaken to prevent children coming onto the street, such work has impact on the context of children's lives and the opportunities that correlate with the development of circumstances of risk and vulnerability. Prevention initiatives may also include ensuring the provision of identity papers for children and their registration with authorities.

## **F. Street Work**

185. There are many kinds of street work, such as providing education on the street at designated times and places, or in drop-in centers, helping children without formal identity papers to access hospital services and medicines, and providing legal aid services through drop-in centers.

186. The development of street work is unevenly distributed across the region. While common in some countries, it does not exist in the PRC and has only recently started in other parts of East and Central Asia. For example, street educators have been employed recently in

Mongolia with the aim of drawing street children into services provided by day centers or drop-in centers (West and Tungalag 2002).

187. Two particularly important aspects of work on the street include HIV/AIDS awareness and the provision of “life skills,” and/or harm reduction training around the use of drugs and other substances as well as sex and reproductive health. Useful strategies have included peer education, whereby a group of children are trained to be able to pass on accurate information to others. There are a number of issues in the provision of accurate material and sustaining projects (West 2002). Peer counselling among abused and exploited children has also been found to be useful in the Philippines in community-based programs (CRB 2003). Another important area is vulnerability of street children in relation to the law, and particularly their relationship with police. A number of (non-street children) projects have been established to look at juvenile justice system issues. Services are needed for children in conflict with the law including access to advice and representation, in addition to advocacy on such related issues as the treatment of children in detention. Some projects and localities have established telephone help lines and emergency lines for children and especially street children (see Box VII.3).

### **G. Centers and Shelters**

188. Drop-in centers and shelters are common means of maintaining contact with children and providing a range of services, from healthcare and advice to education and vocational training. While drop-in centers are the key component of work for some projects and provide a visible face to donors and point of engagement with street children (e.g., see Box VII.7), for others, such centers are viewed merely as an extension of street work, i.e., conducting informal education sessions, peer information, etc., in a building rather than on the street, perhaps for reasons of safety.

### **H. Moving On**

189. There are several components to providing support to children moving from the street. The provision of accommodation and/or places of refuge is widespread, although quality varies and there often is an absence of standards. While child protection remains an important element, not all projects place priority on this or have the capacity for protection mechanisms, being run on a low-cost basis. Police checks on the identity of personnel working with children, for any record of abusing children, have become common in the west, and mandatory in many countries. But these require circumstances of governance; systems of child protection including arrest, trial, and record; and levels of technology not always available. Continuous observation and awareness is necessary.

190. Although projects directed to the development and improvement of foster care and residential care have been undertaken in many countries, projects for street children more often focus on temporary accommodation (shelters) and education/training. The two are linked in that a project will attempt to provide or find vocational training (or education) for children who live in project-based shelters.

### Box VII.7: Mith Samlanh (Friends), Phnom Penh, Cambodia

It is estimated that as many as 20,000 children live and work on the streets of Phnom Penh. They are on the streets because their families cannot support them. Some of them have been orphaned by the war or their parents have been maimed by land mines left by the war. Formed in 1997, *Mith Samlanh*, Cambodia's leading street children program, reaches an average of 1,500 children daily. The organization's target group is homeless and vulnerable street children and adolescents, including their families, who are at high risk of exploitation and physical and emotional abuse through commercial sex and violence in the streets.

The objective of *Mith Samlanh* is to provide care for the health and well being of street children while working for their reintegration into Cambodian society. The organization addresses this objective through vocational training and employment, education and reintegration into the public school system, and linking children back to their families and to their own culture. *Mith Samlanh's* activities for street children include 12 interlinked programs: outreach, transitional home, boarding house, training, education, family reintegration, youth reproductive health, HIV/AIDS awareness, substance abuse prevention and harm reduction, incarcerated children, child rights, and staff development. *Mith Samlanh* also operates a restaurant that provides apprenticeship, training, and employment for street children. Although *Mith Samlanh* mainly serves the street children of Phnom Penh, it also operates smaller programs in the cities of Kampong Cham and Kampong Speu. *Mith Samlanh* staff travel extensively in all Cambodian provinces to locate children's families and to assist in their return home, where this is feasible and in the best interests of the child.

*Mith Samlanh* has a staff of 120, supervised by a board of directors. It is supported by grants from AusAID, UNICEF, UNAIDS, UNFPA/EC, World Food Program, FHI-Impact, DOH-International, CCFD, Save the Children, Australia, private donors, and the Australian and British Embassies in Cambodia.

191. Less importance seems to have been placed on resettlement and reintegration work for street children, i.e., returning children home and ensuring their protection and reintegration, or provision of longer-term alternative care. Part of the problem is the level of resources required not only to prepare and transport children, but also to undertake necessary follow-up, including counseling for both returning children and their families. Where large distances are involved, this becomes especially difficult for smaller NGOs, particularly in the absence of national or international networks.

#### I. Law and Governance

192. Any overview of practice for street children must be linked to related sectors. The issues of coordination and cooperation have been noted above including the importance of partnership between projects. The role of state parties (to the CRC) also is necessarily linked including the establishment and minimum implementation of appropriate legislation. There are also the roles of duty bearers in relation to children's rights.

193. The question of finance is always raised in relation to project work and practice, both by NGOs and government. One means of looking further at this issue has been the development of children's budgets, specifically detailing how much of national budgets are spent on children and in which areas. Children's budgets help to link the role of the State with children's rights, at least in terms of spending. Analysis of overall resources allocations (including nonfinancial resources) provides a starting point in examining how gaps in children's rights might be filled (Box VII.8).

### Box VII.8: Children's Budgets

The idea of "children's budgets" or a "child-focused budget" has emerged as researchers and policymakers have paid more attention to the links between macroeconomic development and children's rights. The "main research issues of studies on this theme [are] to clarify resources, especially financial resources from governments, which have been spent (directly or indirectly) on children, and to analyze [the] possibility to improve efficiency of this spending....Such child-centered budget studies are clearly problem-oriented, as they can be a basis for suggestion and advocacy for children's rights, especially in countries which have ratified the international Convention on the Rights of the Child" (Nguyen Thi Van Anh et al. 2000, Viet Nam study, p. 8).

Child-focused budgets are an aspect of the general framework of budget setting and particularly the transparency of the link between policy commitments and outcomes that are, partially at least, expressed in financial commitments and expenditure. Problems associated with transparency include lack of knowledge and information, but also issues such as pressures to ensure policy commitments and legal obligations are followed up. This is especially true in the case of children's issues "since children have no political voice and are subject to many other disadvantages" (Nguyen Thi Van Anh et al. 2000, Viet Nam study, p. 8).

Much initial work in this area was conducted in Africa, for example, in South Africa (see Robinson and Biersteker 1997; and [www.idasact.org.za/bis/](http://www.idasact.org.za/bis/)), Ghana, and elsewhere. There is also interest in Asia, particularly in Viet Nam (for example Nguyen Thi Van Anh et al. 2000, on education and disabilities; and Crumpton and Giap 2002, on basic education).

One study in Viet Nam aimed to make children, especially children with disabilities, more visible in policy and decision-making processes. The study focused on the budget for primary education at the district level to identify and clarify the link between budget and policies related to children's right to education. The study determined that existing school budgets were inadequate to provide for children with disabilities or other special circumstances (see Nguyen Thi Van Anh et al. 2000, Viet Nam study).

A 2002 study in Viet Nam (Crumpton and Giap 2002) similarly identified that "the consistent feature of the budget allocation process is that salary costs take precedence over other budget items and represent the lion's share of the recurrent (and overall) education budget. This translates into an acute shortage of state expenditure on basic learning materials, facilities and maintenance at the school level, negatively affecting the quality of teaching and learning as well as investment in the sector." The study pointed out that this shortage means that "parental and community contributions are increasingly important to address high funding gaps at the school level and ensure a minimum standard of education." This "reliance on parental contributions to provide a minimal level of service....[adds] to the financial and learning disadvantage of poor families, thus contributing to the cycle of poverty."

Although these examples are drawn from children's budgets in education, such budgeting review also can be linked to street children issues, where poverty prevents children from attending school and, thus, at risk of moving to the streets.

## VIII. GOVERNMENTS AND NONGOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS

194. In western countries where welfare services have been “privatized,” service provision often is contracted to nonprofit NGOs (which may supplement the monies provided by the State with their own contributions raised as charity). Where for-profit concerns have taken over, for example, residential care for older people, there have been debates about standards and the quality of care provided to those who have no funds of their own. Private care for street children remains limited, although some adults engaged in the informal economy supply basic accommodation and food for street children in return for part or all of the income they earn through begging and other street activities. At issue is the degree of coercion and exploitation involved (which might also exist in family settings where children are sent off to work).

195. Another link with private or for-profit concerns is where profits are partly used to pay for the operation of provision for street children; this seems more often to be for orphans and children abandoned when young. There have been problems with some of this “private” provision, which has in reality been established in order for adult(s) to gain profit (e.g., through foreign adoption) or for sexual access to children (this may also happen in other sectors, such as the creation of NGOs for similar purposes). This is one area where regulation, standards, and monitoring and evaluation by an outside body with some degree of power are essential, and an area that requires action by governments in the development of appropriate legislation as well as realistic enforcement mechanisms.

196. The majority of provision for street children is organized through NGOs. A main issue in the response to street children and providing the context for their lives, is the relationship between NGOs and government organizations, and their respective responsibilities. In several parts of the Asia-Pacific region, the provision of welfare services was, until the late 1980s or early 1990s, the responsibility of the State through work units or other mechanisms. The shift to market economies has brought new social problems that existing mechanisms of provision are unable to address. Funding and the development of new, replacement provision generally has proven difficult and also often requires new laws and new types of services and professions, such as social work. The introduction of such changes in the region was hampered by the Asian economic crisis. The development of NGOs—often tentative at first, because NGOs are new little-understood forms of social organization in many countries—and the expansion of international NGO-supported activities represent responses to these new social problems. In some countries the development of NGOs is seen as an important indication of the development of “civil society” and new forms of governance.

197. Elsewhere, NGOs have long been in existence, and are a main provider of welfare and other services, especially for the poor. NGOs have been at the forefront of street children work in several countries in the region for some time. It is noted, however, that relatively few NGOs have a particular focus on children, and especially a focus on children’s rights and associated approaches to work. Despite nearly universal ratification of the CRC, a key problem remains lack of overall vision as well as real government commitment or involvement in such work.

198. A problem common to all the countries is the need for at least minimal coordination and regulations or standards for provision. There is much competition for profile and status, as well as for scarce donor funding. The problem of raising funds is linked not only to issues of sustainability, but also to public perceptions of street children problems and issues. Funding through international NGOs is dependent on work in their home countries, or skills in raising money from other donors, such as western governments. In the region, there are a number of “bilateral NGOs,” such as trusts or other organizations working in just one country (for example

in Afghanistan, Nepal, or Sri Lanka) and dependent on funds raised, for example, in the United Kingdom in a competitive “charity market.” Other organizations may limit their work to a small number of countries. The easiest way for such organizations to raise funds is to simplify the issue and present graphic images of street children, even if these conform to stereotypes of public expectations.

199. In addition to coordination, a set of minimum standards is required for provision of accommodation and other services, so as to ensure child protection. These coordination and standard-setting mechanisms normally are encoded in legislation and, thus, generally need to be supervised by government. In places where government is the main provider of services, standards may consist of regulations rather than law. Because child rights address all of a child’s needs and rights, children’s legislation must address issues such as labor regulation, working hours, pay, conditions and age, etc., as well as regulation of sex work, police behavior, children and young people in conflict with law, juvenile justice systems, and so on.

200. The mechanisms for implementation of legislation also are crucial and may bring NGOs and government organizations into conflict. For example, the protection of children from sexual and physical abuse may require some agency to take the lead and have formal investigative authority.

201. Analysis of who should be the duty bearers with responsibility for children’s rights is a useful approach in determining the roles of government and nongovernment agencies and individuals. For example, responsibility to ensure that children are not abused in shelters might fall to individuals employed at the shelter, managers, or a board of directors or trustees. The analysis would point to those responsible for monitoring such organizations, or for enforcing legislation meant to protect children including bringing perpetrators to justice. In many countries, however, there is an absence of effective supervision and delineation of roles and responsibilities.

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