

Child Internet

Nexus for Research , Training and Information Network



Child Resource Development Center
(CRDC)



Forum on Street Children-Ethiopia
(FSCE)



CHILD INTERNET

PUBLISHED ANNUALLY

BY

Child Resource Development Center,
Nexus for Training, Research and Information Net-work

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Prepared By: Daniel Desta(Dr.)

Layout design by: Yosef Ali

CHILD INTERNET

No. 11, December 2008

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Exemplary Initiative against Gender-Based Discrimination: The Case of Dessie school Girls' Clubs and their Federation

1. Background

Gender based discrimination against girls' education and discrimination against women in general has been globally recognized as not only violation of human rights but also a practice that has an adverse effect on economic and social development of society. This stance has got political will which has been instrumental to changes and improvements achieved in advanced nations. In the Ethiopian context, though the government policies and strategies are in favor of improving girls' participation in education, the beliefs and practices at home, school and community levels appear not favorable. The wrong perceptions and meanings that are attached to sex differences play a determinant role on the fate of girls in all cultures across the country. Along this line, this paper attempts to identify and explain *the contextual factors, experiences and results of Forum on Street Children (FSCE) Dessie Girls' Empowerment Project.*

The paper attempts to answer three basic questions. Does sex difference make any difference in girls' participation in education? How does sex difference affect girls' participation in education? What is the impact of Dessie FSCE Girls' Empowerment Project on girl's empowerment and participation in education? To answer these questions, interviews were conducted in February-March/ 2008 with leaders of Dessie girls' club federation, leaders of girls' clubs at school level and girls who benefit from scholarships through their clubs. The assistant officer of Dessie FSCE girls' empowerment project was also interviewed as a key informant in the course of the study. Her cooperation in the course of the data collection was exemplary. Furthermore, focus group discussion was conducted with six girls that were drawn from different schools in Dessie town.

2. Theoretical framework

Scholars hold different perspectives on the notion of gender. For some, particularly for the essentialist thinkers, gender is the same as sex-which is innate and not subject to change. The non-essentialist scholars, however, distinguish between gender and sex. For the later group, sex

is just biological characteristic which designates an individual either as male or female. Gender, on the other hand, refers to culturally determined behaviors and personality characteristics that are associated with, but not determined by, biological sex. Essentialist thinkers define gender differences as being based in biology or human nature rather than questioning the role of cultural and social forces in creating gender differences. For



the non-essentialist writers the relationship between gender and sex is not direct and automatic. Rather it is believed that some mediating process such as socialization leads individuals to behave in gendered ways (Howard and Hollander, 1997: 11; Baker, 2001: 874).

Thus different cultures may develop distinct notions of gender, which seem natural because they are associated with sex but are socially determined rather than biologically driven. For the non-essentialist thinkers, gender refers to assumptions and beliefs on both individual and social levels-affecting thoughts, feelings, behaviors, resources and relationships-to the extent that men and women talk, dress and act differently because of societal expectations (Howard and Hollander, 1997: 10-11).

3. Rationale for supporting education of female students

Interviews and focus group discussions with the members, leaders and coordinators of Dessie school girls club revealed perspectives held by the residents of the town and the subsequent practices. Major culture based problems that have adverse effect on education of female students were identified. The major perspectives and practices are briefly presented below.

3.1. Early marriage

Early marriage has long been a norm in the area. Early marriage practices in the area lead to a situation where girls are forced to shoulder family responsibilities before attaining the requisite physical and psychological development. Coping with the situation is often a challenge and frustrating.

3.2. Marriage with unequal partner

It is common for men to marry a girl in their second or third marriage. Such marriage is often not in the best interest of the girls. Hence, quite many of them may not be happy in such marriage.

3.3. Marriage motivated by financial and material interest of parents

The fact that parents and close relatives arrange marriage of their daughters primarily motivated by financial and material gains for the former is another threatening practice reported by the research participants. With rare exceptions, girls often get married following the decision of parents.

3.4. Sexual harassment and rape

Girls are sexually harassed by people at home, in school or those on streets. Furthermore, the problem of rape is also not uncommon. It is a norm that the victims don't talk about what happened. The general situation is that neither the victim nor her family dares to report the incidence of rape to police.

3.5. Lack of assertiveness

Subsequent to series of suppressive practices and experiences, girls in the locality show low self esteem and are less assertive compared to boys. The assistant officer of Dessie girls' empowerment project says "By tradition girls are expected to be polite and to keep quite. They are expected to show descent and non-violent behavior despite the threats they face in their everyday life. As a result, they are generally less assertive compared to boys. They face difficulties in telling their problems to teachers, parents, etc;

3.6. Low expectations

Success of the young generation in education and other aspects of life, among other conditions, are greatly influenced by societal expectations. In the Ethiopian context, the values attached to education of girls and the associated societal expectations are generally low. This situation together with many other problems play negative role in girls' participation in education and success in life. Following the low expectations quite many girls limit their aspirations to marriage where they serve roles of a wife and mother.

3.7. Low level of awareness on gender issues

Although gender issues are considered at a policy level, readiness on the part of the implementers appears far below expected primarily. The problem lies both among men and women. The awareness work carried out in Dessie town and the surrounding communities (like it is case in other parts of the country) on gender issues is generally dependent on formal structures which often lack committed and knowledgeable activists. Hence, the level of knowledge and awareness on gender issues is generally low in locality.

3.8. Domestic labor

Domestic labor, particularly excessive involvement of girls in house hold activities, is among the major problems that are least addressed in Dessie town and through out the country. Boys are generally expected and encouraged to engage in out door activities including education and career development whereas girls are generally expected to engage in domestic activities starting from their early age. Although there is notable improvement in girl's enrollment in education, their extensive involvement in household activities limits their success rate as compared to boys.



The beliefs and practices presented above show that the perspectives and practices of people in Dessie town and the surrounding areas fall in the essentialist group of thinkers. This group of thinkers believes that differences in social, economic, etc; roles among people are determined by their sex, male or female which is biological; and therefore, not subject to change. The people in the town, as it is the case with most people in the country, think and practice consistent with the dominant tradition that deviates from progressive and advanced notion of gender. The fact that the socially constructed roles and status of men and women could change is threatening to most men and women in the locality. In fact, quite many women in the area may find such a position as neither acceptable and nor desirable due to the dominant cultural and social norms on the roles and status of men and women. This has been the ground on which school girls' clubs and the FSCE project were launched aiming at bringing about major shift in perspective and practice. The situation appears challenging and time taking to achieve good results. The following sections discuss efforts made by FSCE Dessie girls empowerment and school girls clubs and the results obtained.

4. Empowerment Girls: Intervention by FSCE Dessie project

In 1999, Forum on street children Ethiopia (FSCE) launched female student support program (FSSP) in Dessie town. The program aims at empowering girls and enhancing their participation in education and other spheres of life. The main objectives of the program include:

- a. improving the academic performance of female students through special support for low achievers;
- b. minimizing drop out rate of female students and preventing them from engaging in child prostitution;
- c. enhancing the awareness of school girls and the community as a whole on gender, HIV/Aids, rape, sexual harassment, and family planning; and
- d. increasing the self-assertiveness of schoolgirls.

The FSCE project has been instrumental in strengthening and transforming school girls' clubs in Dessie town. A lot has been done in developing capacities of school girls clubs. The following were some of the supports rendered by the FSCE project.

- a. Mini stationery shops are set up as means of generating income for school girls' club;
- b. Mini-media set up in 20 schools for use by the girls' clubs;
- c. Uniforms for sports and other in-door game facilities were purchased provided to the clubs;
- d. Financial support of over 300,000 Birr was provided by FSCE and Action Aid in support of the girls' club federation;

- e. *Reading rooms (with the necessary books and furniture) are set up particularly for girls. Teachers play important role following up whether the reading rooms are effectively used by the girls. The number of girls that use libraries had been extremely low until recently. Subsequently, the number of girls that use libraries has shown dramatic growth;*
- f. The FSCE project organizes *award programs* for high achiever girls every semester.
- g. A total of 153 girls that had economic problems were identified and given *short term training* in different skills. Most of them were further supported in *securing jobs*;
- h. At present, a total of 100 girls coming from low income family backgrounds are attending schools with *scholarship support* granted by FSCE project. Most of these girls are doing well in their education and quite many of them joined higher education. Those who jointed higher education in the period 1992-1996 E.C were 279. The assistant officer noted some of the girls who joined university are actively engaged in promoting gender issues in their respective universities. Addis Ababa University and Jimma University were sited as examples where girls from Dessie school girls club play active role;
- i. *Sport uniforms and facilities for in-door games are purchased for the school girls' clubs to bridge the gap between boys and girls in benefiting from recreational opportunities.* As a result, increasing number of girls are benefiting from such opportunities.

5. Major activities of the school girls' clubs

Formation of school girls' clubs and their federation as well as the launching of the FSCE girls empowerment project in Dessie town were triggered by the aforementioned perspectives and practices that have been obstacles to education and career development of girls in area. This section of the paper presents activities that have been carried out both by the clubs and the FCSE project as intervention mechanisms to improve gender-based discrimination and to enhance girls' participation in education. The major activities carried out by the clubs are briefly presented below

- a. Members of the clubs write stories, poems, drama, etc; on gender-based discrimination and related issue and presenting them through school mini media to the school community;
- b. The clubs *organize weekly discussion forum* on problems of gender based discrimination, HIV AIDS, family related issues, etc.
- c. Leaders of girls clubs *intervene whenever there is sexual harassment.* Two cases



were reported to illustrate the intervention. In both cases leaders of the girls clubs intervened effectively in favor of the victims. Counseling and other services were arranged for the victims. In a separate incidence, the leaders were able to *prevent organized offensive acts* against a girl by talking the matter with parents and other appropriate people.

- d. Members of the girls clubs, particularly those in the leadership role play important role in *following up the case of girls that have academic or home related problems*. If any girl drops out from school, the leaders discuss the matter with school administration, teacher and/parents depending on the cause for the dropout. Results of interviews revealed that quite many girls could not continue their education re-joint school after following intervention by the club leaders.
- e. Members of the clubs initiate *discussions with their family members on issues related gender based discrimination and expected positive action to change the situation*. The fact that girls should get equal attention and treatment to that of boys is also considered in family discussions. The discussions, as reported by the interview participants, focus particularly on gender based barriers of girls' education.

6. Federation of Dessie School Girls Clubs

The idea of forming federation of school girls club was felt and initiated by the clubs of five schools. The remaining 20 schools and 2 colleges in the town were invited to participate in the establishment conference of the federation. The invited representatives of the 20 school girls clubs and 2 colleges got attracted by the idea and joined the five schools in forming the federation. Thus, the federation was officially established by girls clubs of 25 schools and 2 colleges in 1998 E.C. getting license from zonal justice office. The federation facilitates attainment of the objectives of school girls clubs by serving as a *collective voice for the rights of school girls*; liaising with stakeholders as well as government offices to further the causes of school girls; and creating an enabling environment for the girls clubs

The federation is lead by executive committee composed of 9 members (five teachers, 3 students and an assistant officer of the FSCE project). The major activities of the federation include:

- a. *organizing short term training* on various topics including, education of girls, problems of gender based discrimination, basic life skills, HIV AIDS, family related issues;
- b. *facilitating collaboration and sharing of experiences* among different clubs;



- c. *Organizing bi-annual conferences* (in the months of January and February) on gender related issues and cultural barriers to girls' education. The wider public is represented in the conferences. The conferences are organized mainly to raise public awareness on gender related issues;
- d. hosting visitors that come to Dessie to share experiences of the school girls club; and
- e. working in close collaboration with school girls clubs in preventing and handling any discrimination against female students.

7. Impact

The results of interviews and focus group discussions show that the joint efforts of the FSCE project and school girls clubs in Dessie town were successful in bringing about change and improvement in gender-based discrimination in the area. The impact of the work done appears visible and encouraging. The major changes and improvements are reported below.

- a. Quite many teachers and male students showed *notable changes in their knowledge and attitudes on gender related issues*. Unlike the situation in the past, *teachers now volunteer to conduct tutorial classes for female students*. It was reported that there were cases where *students cover cost of school uniforms and learning materials* for needy girls who otherwise could not attend school.
- b. Increasing number of *schools are convinced and committed to take promotion of gender issues as part of their regular duties*. Teachers are becoming increasingly supportive to education of female students. In a locality where girls' assertiveness is generally discouraged, *girls now run campaigns* in their respective schools for election as members of executive committee of the clubs. This situation, as noted by the girls, is an opportunity to contribute to improvement of situation of girls in the area. Moreover, serving as members of the executive committee helps the elected girls to practice leadership skills.
- c. The leaders say "we were able to learn quite many things to protect ourselves from offensive acts".
- d. *Girls are organized more than ever before*. *Formation of the federation* of girls clubs is an achievement that enables the clubs to collaborate and work together in addressing problems of female students.
- e. *Girls are more committed to serve in their clubs than ever before*. Participants of FGD say "As girls, we are happy to contribute to the best of our capacity to prevent offence against girls". A study report by Kebede (1993) indicates that overwhelming majority of the members of the club (93.1%) have joined the clubs in their own interest. Results of the same study show that 71.6% of the members



- of the school girls' clubs were happy with the results.
- f. Members of the girls' clubs have *developed the capacity to protect themselves* from any sort of offense at home, in school and in the community at large.
 - g. *Girls are more assertive than ever before.* Assistant officer of Dessie girls' empowerment project says "*The biggest benefit of the clubs is self confidence girls have developed. They are more assertive. Now they do not hide offensive acts against them*". Until recently, flag ceremonies used to be lead exclusively by boys. Now, *girls participate in the flag ceremonies* equally with boys.
 - h. *The number of activist female teachers on gender issues is growing.* As reported by the assistant officer, some of the members of their clubs are now teachers. The girls have become the active *coordinators* of school girls clubs in their respective schools.
 - i. The clubs were able to *attract male teachers and boys (students) to join the clubs as associate members* working together with the girls to change and improve cultural barriers to girls' education.
 - j. The number of girls that use *libraries* had been extremely low until recently. Following the interventions, the number of *girls that use libraries* has shown dramatic growth.
 - k. *Gender issues got more recognition:* Recognizing the negative impact of cultural barriers on girls' education and appreciating the exemplary activities of the Dessie school girls' clubs, Amhara Education Bureau has included *teachers' efforts to encourage and support female students in their education* as *one of the points in teacher evaluation forms*. Here it is important to note that requiring teachers to give special attention and support to female students would be more effective if teachers engage in such activities with understanding and intrinsic motivation.
 - l. *Replication of the experience.* *Experience sharing* opportunities are created for interested girls clubs in other parts of the country. School girls' clubs drawn from different parts of the country (e.g. Tigray, Southern nations Nationalities and Peoples Regional State, Amara regional state-semen Shoa Zone) have visited the Dessie schools' clubs and their federation.

8. Challenges and Prospects

The activities carried out by the FSCE project and school girls' were carried out in the face several challenges. Although the impact is encouraging, there are still challenges that are threats to the sustainability of the results achieved. Interview results indicate that there is a lot more to be done to bring about sustainable change and improvement in the lives of girls in and around Dessie town. Participants of the focus group discussions reported differences among schools in the town. *Some schools are active and supportive to the activities of the clubs whereas others are not.* There are teachers and school principals



who are *not yet convinced in the importance of gender issues*. Such people generally show *resistance to change*. They do not support school girls clubs. In fact, they are obstacles to the activities of the clubs.

Although there are improvements, offensive acts against girls are still practiced. Sexual harassment and rape are practiced particularly in the suburbs where girls have to cross bush areas on the way to school and back to their homes. Members of school girls' clubs reported that *offense against female students* is also practiced by some teachers in the town. Interviews with the officer revealed that most *offensive acts against girls particularly by their family members and close relatives are not reported* due to fear of the adverse consequences. A lot more needs to be done to change this situation

On the other hand, the work that has been carried out so far has laid down strong foundation for further work. The capacity developed and positive attitudes created would serve as a stepping stone for more work to be done. Members of the school girls clubs are optimistic about the sustainability of the programs. The growth in the number of committed members and associate members of the girls' clubs is encouraging. Formation of the federation of the clubs is another source that could be considered as a potential support to the activities of the clubs. The federation has sufficient seed money (over 50,000 Birr) to run its programs. Members and associate members of the clubs make *regular financial contributions* in support of the clubs. Institutions such Dessie Business College shows commitment to make regular financial contributions in support of activities of the girls' clubs. At present, the college's administration earmarks 1000 Birr every year in support of the college's activities of girls' club. The results of interviews with the members of the girls' clubs show that the college is willing to give more financial assistance as long as there is need.

In general, the results of the interviews reveal that the intervention activities carried out by the Dessie Girls' empowerment project and by the school girls' clubs have been relevant and comprehensive. The impact of the interventions is visible and significant. Sustainability of the initiative and possibility of its replication in other parts of the country appears encouraging.



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Perspectives and Practices on Begging among Children

Background

We live in the age where knowledge of the fact that ‘childhood experiences lay an important foundation to adult life’ has become a convention and almost non-controversial truth among most educated people. A statement by Slee (2002:6) stresses the importance of childhood experiences in shaping the future. According to this writer, ‘Childhood shows the man as morning shows the day’. This knowledge base influences decisions of couples on nearly all questions related to having and raising children. In contrast to this knowledge and subsequent encouraging efforts to give care for optimal development of children, we witness a situation where children’s safety and development is at risk probably more than ever before. In quite many societies children live poverty; many children in rural communities are forced to flee to urban centers where they end up in begging and child prostitution.

We also witness a situation where quite many families fail to provide the minimum care for their children. The effects of drug and sexual abuse as well as HIV/AIDS have become social and economic crisis worsening the situation of children. In order to address the problem governments designed policies to safeguard wellbeing of children and ensure their optimal growth and development. Non-governmental organizations also play vital role in protecting children from abuse and various threats they face in families, schools, residential centers, streets, etc;

An international study of childhood poverty entitled ‘Young Lives’ has found that about a quarter of all Ethiopian children are involved in the work force. On average, these children work almost six hours a day. As a result even those who are in school have no time for homework, are frequently absent and often abandon school altogether (Johannesburg, 9 September 2008).

Article 18.1, 18.2, 36.1a of the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1995:82, 94) has provided protection of children from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, slavery or servitude, and forced labor which may be hazardous or harmful to his or her education, health or well-being. Subsequent Legal and policy interventions are encouraging.

This paper examines perspectives, issues and problems associated with begging in the city of Addis Ababa using a case study method. Interviews were conducted with three children- two boys and one girl. A mother of one of the three children was also interviewed. The interviews were conducted in April, 2008 in the areas commonly known as Ambassador and Georges in the city of Addis Ababa. The paper presents explanation of the conception



of begging among the general public and the beggars. Factors that influence begging among children and consequences of begging are discussed in the paper.

Conception of Begging

Begging is an activity emanated from poverty and destitution. It is practiced to obtain from others what one is unable to get by oneself. It is a requested directed to the rest of the society to bring oneself out of misery and poverty (MOLSA, 1992: 2).

This definition depicts the popular and widely shared notion of begging held by the general public in the country. The definition tells the shared meaning of begging in reference to who the beggars are; conditions that justify begging (poverty and destitution); and purpose of begging. Those who give money to beggars do so with the assumption that a begging person fulfils these conditions. It is observed that the begging person presents himself/herself in a way that is consistent with the shared conception of begging that is conveyed in the definition. This notion of begging and associated practice in Ethiopia is facing serious questions.

The definition presented here and the popular notion of begging have major fallacies. The meaning of begging and the actual practice in Ethiopia puts begging as acceptable. This definition associates begging with lack of basic needs such as food which is basic for survival. Theoretically, begging should not be taken as alternative way for survival. The fact that begging has become the truth, among other conditions, could be explained in relation to the belief widely held by the public. The real solution requires change in the same i.e., the conception and the beliefs.

Another major fallacy implied in the definition lies in the idea of ‘*inability of those engaged in begging to support themselves*’. Here lies the essence of the problem. This notion has contributed to the sustained practice of begging in the country. Begging has continued as a practice which is legitimate. In extreme cases, some adult beggars may prefer begging to work. Ethiopia is cited as a good example where some beggars make large sums of money that would enable them to live luxurious life (MOLSA, 1992:4). It is argued that a huge number of people that could have joined the productive force get attracted to the begging business. Such practice is now facing increasing resentment and strong critique from the public. This should and can stop with major shift in its shared meaning among the public and the beggars. Concerted and coordinated efforts among the government, non-governmental organizations and the general public are essential to make a difference.



Teachings in the Christian and Islamic religions, as put by MOLSA (1992:6), have reinforced the practice of begging. Both religions preach almsgiving as sacred and that it will help to get God's forgiveness for wrong doing. The philanthropic and religious principles presented here do not have problem in their essence. In fact, such benevolent initiatives are needed to raise resources when ever the need arises in a given society. Such a practice, however, is facing serious questions particularly in relation to the way the problem of begging is handled all over the country.

In the Ethiopian tradition, beggars generally appeal to the popular philanthropic and religious values that existed for generations as virtues of the society. There is general observation that some adult beggars abuse these values by presenting themselves in a way that catches the senses and triggers the benevolent behavior of the people. The most important aspect of beggar presentation of self to the public is non-verbal. For quite many Ethiopians looking at a person dressed up in tattered clothes and sitting on a ground in front of a church, mosque or by a road side is sufficient to be charitable. In quite many cases, the non-verbal language including the body position of the beggar is sufficient to get the little coins from the passersby. Beggars also use verbal language as people rushing to their ways may not give them attention. The verbal language used by the beggars often includes catchy poems, songs and instruments that are so strong that they draw attention and feelings of many people.

Begging children share some of the characteristic features of adult beggars. Begging children resemble begging adults in that both of them present themselves to the public barefoot and dressed up in tattered clothes. Begging children, however, differ from begging adults in some of the strategies they use. Unlike adults, children make fast move from one place to another following the passerbys. This situation makes walking on streets difficult particularly for strangers and dangerous for the begging children.

In the worst scenario, begging among children could be initiated and regulated by adults as a means of income generation. This happens often in close consultation with parents or caregivers. Children are trafficked for domestic services, commercial sexual exploitation, and for forced labor in activities such as weaving and begging. In the Ethiopian context, quite many children are transported from rural areas to urban centers where they engage in begging. Children of poor families in urban centers add the begging population. The root causes of the problem in either case include poverty, lack of education, and inadequate enforcement of child labor laws (Integrated Regional Information Networks, "Ethiopia, 2006).



Begging among children can also be explained in reference to adult roles or relationships. Economic problems of a family may influence adult decisions to force children to engage in begging. Very young children are generally escorted by adults or elder brothers/sisters who regulate and follow up begging by the younger ones. Such children are generally forced by the adults to engage in the begging business. The role of the adults includes:

- regulating the child's begging behavior; in extreme cases, children could be beaten if they stop begging;
- ensuring that the child does not engage in play or any other activity other than begging;
- ensuring that the money collected by the children is not robbed;
- protecting the child from threats from other people, often older street children;

Although child begging could be associated with adult roles and relationships in a family, the problem could be strongly linked with general economic and social crisis at community and societal levels. Poverty, displacement, HIV/AIDS, lack of education and subsequent lack of knowledge about child rights, among other problems, have threatened security of families and their members. Children have become victims of the crisis.

Interviews conducted with three begging children in selected sites in Addis Ababa reveal trends in the factors that lead to begging. In all the cases, parents of the children were separated for different reasons. Marriage out side wedlock was also a trend in two of the cases. The children had either poor or no relationship with their fathers. Eshet, eleven years old girl child says *"I saw him last about three years ago. He used to visit us occasionally. He never came to our place since then. I don't know where he lives and what happened to him."*

The responsibility of bringing up the children is left to the mothers who have little or no means of regular income. In all cases, children were required to engage in begging in order to support their families. Interview result with Eshet, illustrates a situation which could be typical to many begging children.

...I live with my grandmother in a two room kebele rented house. She is old...she has no job; no money...Her son is a taxi driver...Some times he gives money to my grandmother. He also buys school materials for me. He has his own family...the money we get from him is not enough...We don't have enough to eat...I beg and get some money after school and on weekends

A mother of Thomas, seven years old boy found begging in front of Ambassador Theatre says *"I depend on begging...my son also begs. I have no other choice..."*

These cases demonstrate the causes of begging among children. The details presented in the annex section of the paper indicate all interview cases had real economic problems. Non of the families of the begging children had regular means of income.



Effects of Child begging

Begging may appear helpful especially from the point of view of those who have no other option at least temporarily to depend on for survival. People may fall in a helpless situation as a result of natural and/or man made disasters where the scale of the problem is so overwhelming and beyond their control. Such a scenario may appear to justify begging. The truth is no scenario justifies begging. Begging can not be justified even as a temporary strategy.

The consequence of child begging is deep and far reaching. Begging affects personal growth and development of children especially if it continues for an extended period. Early life experiences are critical in preparing a child for a self-sufficient role in society. Begging children risk poor participation in education which is a key development. For instance, two of the children involved in the interviews conducted for this study do not attend school. The reasons are related basically to their poor family backgrounds. Eshet, eleven years old girl child was the only child attending school. She complains that she doesn't have time to focus on her education as she has to beg in the out of school hours (late afternoon), weekends and holy days. Eshet say *"I have to work at home as well. I don't have time to study and to do homework"*. The mother of Thomas noted *"He [Thomas] does not attend school... He will be enrolled next year, God willing. There are people who promised to support his education..."*

Interview results indicate begging children are characterized by three conditions in terms of their participation in education. First, they may not attend school at all. Second, if they attend school, they risk dropping out more than that of other children (non begging children who come from better family backgrounds). Third, those who beg in their out of school time, may not have enough time to study and to do their home works.

The family bears primary responsibility for meeting the child's basic physiological needs food, shelter and protection. First, love and affection are as essential to the child's growth and development as food, water, and play. Second, begging hampers children's opportunities to engage in productive activities that are essential at individual and societal levels. Third, begging is an activity that has damaging effect on the feeling of self-worth of the children. Damage to one's pride may lead to lack of trust in self and others which in turn may result in different psychological and social problems. Forth, begging children risk abuse of drug and subsequent anti-social behavior. They are at greater risk of abusing alcohol or drugs and of being sexually exploited. Moreover, such children risk engaging in petty crime and may up in trouble with the law. Fifth, child begging and begging in general damages the national image (Smith, Goodman, Ramsey, and Pasternack, 1982.



Phal (2008) presents the side effects of giving alms to beggars on streets. The writer identifies the following long term negative effects of begging in the lives of street children.

- Begging children are at high risk of sexual abuse and rape;
- They often use the money they get to buy drugs;
- The money given to them keeps them on the streets and takes away their childhood;
- Giving money to begging children prevents them from seeking a better and safer life;
- Money given to begging children keeps them trapped in a life of poverty and dependency; and
- Giving money to begging children actually hurts by keeping them in dangerous situations on the streets.

The data obtained from the three children and one mother indicates that children engaged in begging face different problems on streets. *Begging, as mentioned by one of the children, is a problem by itself. The child says “I hate begging... Most people understand my problem; they are also kind; but some boys are really bad... Another problem associated with begging relates to the safety of the children. The mother of one of the children says “I am always terrified that he [her child] may face car accident while running after people. There is nothing good her...” Sexual harassment was also among the problems reported by the children.*



Conclusions

The perspectives and practices presented and discussed in this paper dealt with basic issues in relation to begging. The rationale and practices of begging are seriously questioned. How long should a person beg to get out of begging? Is alms giving especially in the way it is practiced so far effective approach to rehabilitate begging children?

Begging among children is initiated and regulated generally by adults, especially parents. The problem appears particularly associated with mothers who often shoulder exclusive responsibility of raising children up on break down marriage relationships.

Family break down or separation of parents appears to result in poor conditions for growth and development of children with a potential risk of leading to begging among children.

It is important to note that beggars never get out of begging using begging as a strategy. Begging, while serving as means of survival, would lead to worst situation where the beggars face life threatening problems such as sexual harassment and HIVAIDS, drug abuse, engaging in criminal activities, etc.,

Begging among children, although it may appear helping as a temporary means of survival, affects their effective participation in education.

Begging among children can and should stop with change in the public conception of its meaning and with joint efforts of all stakeholders including, families, communities, government, non-government organizations and the society at large.



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Annex 1: Case One

An interview was conducted with *Muluken*, eight years old boy from Cherkos on his overall experience in relation to begging. He was barefoot and dressed in worn-out clothing. He is the second child for a mother who is a bread winner of the family. His elder sister also works on street selling small articles in out of school hours. His parents have separated for reasons Muluken could not explain. Muluken and his elder sister live with their mother who is a day laborer. The family, as reported by Muluken, lives in a single room rented from private owners. He begs on streets around Ambassador Theater. He was asked when and why he started begging. He says *'I started begging last year; my mother told me to beg; she told me other children are also begging. There is no problem with begging. If I beg I get money. But only few people give money.* Muluken was further asked to tell how much money he gets in a day out of begging and how he uses it. He posed for a minute to respond to this question. Then he replied *'I get eight Birr; nine Birr; sometimes only five Birr ... I give it to my mother'*. He was asked *'Do you give all the money to your mother?* The reply was *'yes; some times I buy bread and tea for myself...and give the rest...Muluken joined school last year but could not continue because he got sick for some time. He had dropped out in the middle of the year. However, he is promised by his mother that he would re-join school next year. He was asked "Do you like begging on street". The reply was "I don't like. There are bad boys here. Some times they cheat and take my money...They also beat me... but there are some good children.*



Annex 2: Case 2

Eshet is eleven years old girl child who lives with a grand mother in Gulale sub-city. She was grade 3 student in a public school. An interview was conducted with Eshet in front of one of the Georges church where she was begging. At the time of the interview, she was barefoot. Eshet lost her mother two years ago. They used to live together with the grandmother. Concerning her father she says *“I saw him last about three years ago. He used to visit us occasionally. He never came to our place since then. I don’t know where he lives and what happened to him. ...I live with my grandmother in a two room kebele rented house. She is old...she has no job; no money... Her son is a taxi driver...Some times he gives money to my grandmother. He also buys school materials for me. He has his own family...the money we get from him is not enough...We don’t have enough to eat...I beg and get some money after school and on weekends...I get about 2-10 Birr a day depending on the day...I have to work at home as well. I don’t have time to study and to do homework... I hate begging... Most people understand my problem; they are also kind; but some boys are really bad...Sexual harassment is one of problems in working on streets...*



Annex 3 : Case 3

Thomas is seven years old boy found begging in front of Ambassador Theatre. He was in a worn-out shoes and clothing, when he was contacted for the interview. In a few minutes after starting a talk with Thomas, a young women came and enquired about what is happening with child. She was a mother who was watching her child from a distance while she begs on the same street. She was 26 years. The mother volunteered to participate in the interview together with her child. She was not willing to tell about her background and her current living address. She said “It doesn’t help”. However, she mentioned she lives in a group rented house with her friend. As she mentioned, she had a husband, but not through formal marriage. She said *“I wanted to continue life in marriage; but I couldn’t. My husband was a daily laborer. We had good relationship for some years. However, his behavior changed gradually. He had little income; whatever he gets, he uses for drinking. He never cared for his child. In fact, he quarrels and fights when he drinks. My life became increasingly miserable. I waited with patience to see if it can be improve. There was no improvement. Therefore, I told him we can not continue in this way any more. Then I moved to a different place with my child.* The mother was asked about the current situation of her child, Thomas. She noted *“He [Thomas] does not attend school now. He will be enrolled next year, God willing. There are people who promised to support his education. I am also looking for job”*. To the question on their source of income, the mother mentioned *“I depend on begging...my son also begs. I have no other choice... We make 15-20 Birr a day. I use the money for food and other expenses including house rent. Some people help me paying part of the house rent.* To the question on possible problems she and her child face on street, she replied *“. It is obvious. We face many problems. The worst problem is seeing my child beaten by other street children; I am always terrified that he may face car accident while running after people. There is nothing good here. On my part, I face endless sexual harassment by all types of people. I have health problem as well. I hope I will get out of this life some day. My dream was different...*

Child Resource Development Center (CRDC)

Nexus for Training, Research and Information Net-work

P.O.Box 9562

Tel. 251-1-5-52 42 94/ 5-53 44 32/ 5- 53 47 22

Fax 251-1-5- 53 44 69

E-mail crdc@ethionet.et or FSCE@ethionet.et

www.fsc-e.org

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia