



Rehabilitating Uganda's Street Children

Our Key Mission

Africa Educational Trust (AET) aims to provide quality formal and non-formal education to children, youth and adults who have been excluded from educational opportunities due to poverty, conflict, displacement or discrimination. AET works in Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda and Kenya to finding innovative ways to reach the most disadvantaged including children and young people, girls, nomadic pastoralists, street children and remote, rural communities.

Existing. The project builds learning from a four-year pilot project implemented by AET and local partner Child Restoration Outreach (CRO) and funded by the Big Lottery Fund from 2013 – 2017. We successfully supported 300 street children in Mbale, Eastern Uganda to bridge the gap between street life and formal school and strengthened community and district structures for child protection. CRO Mbale has continued to support street children and currently works with around 700 street children across primary, secondary and vocational schools.

Funding will enable us to extend the initiative to Lira Town in Northern Uganda, add a stronger focus on family empowerment to prevent children returning to the streets and consolidate an evidence-based and sustainable model that can be replicated in other African cities.

The Issue

Our project aims to enable street children in Uganda to leave the street and provide them with the support they need to remain off the street, in school and with their families. In Uganda, there are an estimated 10,000 street-connected children; a 70% increase since 1993 (ANPPCAN, 2013). Our surveys (2013 – 2016) show increasing numbers of girls and of children under 10 on the streets. There are an estimated 500 children/young people working and/or living on the streets of Lira at any one time, due to reasons including poverty and neglect as well as the effects of the 20-year conflict, which left behind a generation of children without parental care. On the street, children talk of 'just enduring' and face many dangers including child labour, drug abuse, child trafficking, hunger, violence, sexual abuse, and exploitation. They are unable to access education even though it is essential to lift them from poverty.

Attending school is key to street children's inclusion in mainstream society and as a protective factor against living on the street. Yet they are at particular risk of dropping out of school as many still have to fend for themselves and their families resulting in irregular attendance. There is an urgent need to address poverty and protection in communities, issues which drive children to the street and prevent them from fully participating in school. This project will empower families of street connected children to improve their livelihoods so they can better contribute to their child's education in the longer term. This will provide sustained support for street children to continue in school and obtain the education and skills they need to transform their lives.



From sleeping on the street in Uganda to having the opportunity to learn and play

What We Plan to Do

Enabling street – connected children to gain the skills and confidence to transition successfully back to school. Funding will support 80 street children through catch-up classes, support for basic needs, counselling and recreation activities. Building a child's self-esteem and basic skills in literacy and numeracy empowers them and gives them the tools to improve their lives. Counselling, recreation activities and peer mentorship play a vital role in supporting children to drop street habits (e.g. drug abuse) and develop the skills and attributes (e.g. confidence, resilience) they need to stay in school. On completion of the catch-up class, we will support the transition to formal school or vocational training, by meeting the initial costs and training teachers on child protection and inclusive education, to enable them to support street children to adjust to formal school and address stigma.

Strengthening community child protection systems to support children to resettle with their families. We will engage local leaders, the police and Community Child Protection Committees (CCPCs), to monitor the situation of children on the street through night and day surveys, support resettlement and follow up on their well-being through home visits.

Empowering families to provide long-term support and prevent children returning to the street. To help prevent children returning to the street, we will train parents and caregivers on effective parenting skills to tackle neglect and encourage them to take responsibility for their children's education. We will also equip families with the skills to enhance their livelihoods through training in financial literacy, a livelihood skill of their choice and formation of cooperatives. This will enable parents to start small businesses, reducing family poverty and enabling them to meet their children's basic needs.

What Research Have We Undertaken?

Beneficiaries have been involved from the design of the pilot project. A need's assessment in 2012, engaged 50 current and former street-connected children to understand their day to day challenges and how we could best support them to access quality education. The pilot established mechanisms for improving street child literacy, numeracy and confidence and support and training for teachers to enable them to accept street children into formal schools. Street outreach, including quarterly night and day surveys and daily street walks, capture information on the numbers, trends and origins of street children as well as why they came to the street, their activities on the street and the challenges they face. Feedback from the pilot has also been used to inform the design of this project and fully involved a wide range of stakeholders in the community including the street

children themselves. This identified the need to work with parents to prevent children dropping out of school.

Our Experience

CRO has been working with street children since 1992 and has established strong working relationships with districts officials, the police and child protection services. CRO's community-based approach has proven successful in reintegrating street children into families and communities. CRO opened a centre in Lira in 2007.

AET has extensive experience in providing safe learning environments, improving teaching quality and learner support systems and has long standing good relationships with ministries of education and child protection services. AET provides technical support and has significant experience of capacity building local NGOs.

AET's partnership with CRO (2013 – 2017), successfully strengthened community and district structures for education and child protection in Mbale. 300 children (94%) completed the preparation class and transitioned to formal school, compared to 78% transitioning in the year before the project. The project built the capacity of Community Child Protection Committees, teachers and school management, established a Street Children Desk with the District Probation Office to support the resettlement of street-connected children and lobbied local government to pass a by-law on protecting vulnerable children. We will share learning between CRO in Mbale and Lira, in order to replicate this success in Lira.

How Will We Select Beneficiaries?

The programme is designed to benefit two groups of beneficiaries. Firstly, out-of-school children on the street in Lira. These children may be connected to the street either full-time (working and sleeping on the street) or part-time (working on the street and returning to sleep in a slum dwelling). CRO social workers and peer mentors (former street children) identify children through street outreach, building their trust and inviting them to the centre, where they have the opportunity to bathe and eat. Children choose when they are ready to receive support. Children are also referred to the centre by the police and probation office.

The second group are the parents or caregivers of the children enrolled in the catch-up class and will be identified as the children are resettled.

The project will support children like Ivan who came to the street, aged 11, after the death of his father and ill health of his mother forced him to drop out of school to fend for his family. Social Workers found him carrying water for the local food kiosks and invited him to the centre. He enrolled in the school preparation class in 2014 and was able to catch up on his lost years of school. Flexible learning at the centre, meant he could still fend for his family. With support, he resettled with his uncle and was then able to return to school in primary six at Nabuyonga Primary school and continue in school. He performed well in his primary leaving exams two years later and progressed to secondary school.

He says *"The transitional class helped me to change behaviour by dropping the street habits. It helped me catch up in literacy, numeracy, reading and writing which is my basis for the good performance at Primary level."* Ivan aspires to be a doctor in the future, so that he can save the life of the vulnerable people.

How will this programme complement and not duplicate other services in your sector?

Government funding for child protection both at district and national level is very low. Therefore, when the police encounter street connected children, there is little being done by local government officials, causing police personnel to turn to CRO. AET and CRO work closely with ministries of education, child protection services and the police, to identify and fill gaps in provision. However, CRO remains hugely under resourced to meet the increasing demand and a more sustainable solution needs to be found.

By engaging the District Officials, Police and CCPCs in resettlement and by sharing learning on successful approaches, we will strengthen the development of integrated child protection systems, crucial for preventing the separation of children from their families, for reducing violence against children on the streets and for facilitating appropriate care for homeless street children. This move aims to make child protection the role of the local authorities, which would ensure the sustainability of the service.

The programme addresses the core criteria of education and social impact:

Education Impact will be achieved through enabling street children to access to formal education and by training teachers to support vulnerable children in their schools. The project also raises community awareness on protecting vulnerable children by working with CCPCs and sharing learning on the children's journeys from street life to school and home.

Social Impact: Street children are socially excluded, face stigma and lack access to their rights (e.g. food, health care, family life, education and protection). The project equips these children with the basic literacy, numeracy and life skills they need to catch-up and successfully return to family life and formal school. Parents will gain sustainable financial independence and will be better able to meet the basic needs of their children through training on financial literacy and livelihood skills. Shared learning and engagement of stakeholders will promote change in social policy and strengthen community support for vulnerable children and their families.

Further Information

AET and CRO have undertaken an extensive study on the situation of street-children in Mbale and Lira. Quarterly night and day surveys conducted from 2013 – 2016 analysed 4,897 records of street children. Most street children are boys (77%) with boys more likely to be drawn to the street due to peer pressure. 25% of girls on the street are less than 10 years old, compared to 13% of boys. The streets are utilised by girls and boys of different ages in a wide range of different ways, and their relationship is fluid and dynamic. Girls on the street are especially vulnerable as they are less visible and easy prey for sexual exploitation. While the hidden nature of the problem makes it difficult to establish concrete statistics, a good number of street girls have been confirmed to be engaged in prostitution.

A large proportion of the girls on the street (47%) are from the Karamojong tribe. Many Karamojong, who are nomadic pastoralists, have moved to different areas of Uganda due to famine and insecurity. While multiple interlinking factors lead to street-connectedness, the most commonly cited reasons are poverty (39%), hunger (15%), mistreatment (17%), neglect (13%) and peer pressure (8%). 63% of day street children have lost one or both parents and 82% of children sleeping on the street have lost one or both parents. 22% of girls and 9% of boys on the street have never been to school and a further 50% dropped out of school in the first three years of primary school. On average, street children have missed two years of school.

This project will support these children, who are the most vulnerable in Ugandan society, to have better chances in life.