



VULNERABLE CHILDREN

2007 RESOURCE PACKS

Children are one of the most vulnerable groups in any society but this is particularly true for many in the developing world. Vulnerable children are often all alone in the world. They have nobody to stand up for and protect their basic human rights - these being; food, clean water, shelter, education and healthcare.

GOAL works in many poor countries with vulnerable and disadvantaged children, providing them with shelter, clothes, food, access to education, healthcare and counselling.

A lack of protection and care, and absolute poverty, means that many children are living on the streets of some of the world's poorest cities. Many children work as child labourers and in countries affected by war or conflict, some are forced to become child soldiers.

In this factsheet we will examine the issues surrounding **street children, child labourers and child soldiers.**

STREET CHILDREN

Street children live in slums and on the streets of some of the world's poorest cities. They have nobody to care for them and the street is their home.

HOW DO CHILDREN END UP ON THE STREETS?

Children live on the streets of the world's poorest cities for many different reasons, but the overriding reason is poverty.

Many street children have been orphaned or have been abused or abandoned by their parents. Sometimes their parents are too poor to provide for them so the children learn to survive by begging for food on the streets.

Sometimes children run away to the cities in search of a better life, only to find that conditions are harsh and each day is a struggle for survival.

In some incidences, children have been displaced due to man-made disasters such as war and conflict or natural disasters such as floods or earthquakes.

HOW DO CHILDREN SURVIVE ON THE STREETS?

Children living without anyone to care for them are at risk of becoming victims of violence, abuse and trafficking (being transported by force).

Street children have to find their own food and shelter. Many try to earn money by begging, shining shoes and searching in rubbish tips for food to eat and scraps to sell. Others are exploited by working in illegal factories, often in dangerous conditions for very long hours and very low wages.



A child lives off the dumps of Calcutta, India.

GOAL'S WORK WITH STREET CHILDREN

GOAL has a special place in its heart for street children. In many of the countries where we operate, we have established programmes to help vulnerable children by providing them with shelter, healthcare, food, clothes, access to education and in many cases, reunite them with their families. Above all, these children are given love and understanding.

GOAL is currently working with street children in India, Honduras, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Sierra Leone. In these countries, GOAL has established night shelters, half-way houses and drop-in centres to provide emergency shelter for children at risk, and we have also set up informal schools and homework clubs.

In Kenya, GOAL has established a programme whereby sporting activities are used as educational tools and we encourage children and teenagers to plan, organise and take part in sports tournaments. This gives the children a sense of responsibility, pride and gets



A bridge in Mukuru, a slum in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya.



GOAL promotes education and development through sport in Nairobi, Kenya.



20,000 children live on the streets of Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. GOAL provides children with a safe place to stay and access to education, healthcare, counselling and vocational training.



Street children enjoy a party at GOAL's programme in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone.

CASE STUDY

Solamanit Alemu lives in GOAL's half-way house for girls in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital.

Solamanit is not sure of her age but she thinks she's about 13.

Both of her parents died when she was a baby. Left in the care of a step-mother, she was often physically abused. At only five-years-of-age, Solamanit found herself alone on the streets of Addis Ababa.

"Life on the streets was very difficult," she says. "I was always afraid of being abused and it was very difficult to survive. I had no food or shelter so I took leftovers and slept wherever I could." Solamanit can never remember anyone showing her kindness at all.

After surviving for five years on the streets Solamanit has now been with GOAL for three years. Happy that she now has a real chance for a new life, she has dreams and hope for



Solamanit Alemu (right) and a friend at GOAL's half-way house in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

the future. Her first priority is to continue her education and training. After that she would like to get a job and get married.

Solamanit never intends to return to the streets. "The showers, clothing, shelter and food provided by GOAL have shown me a better way of living. Now that I've found something great, and I'm happy and secure, I'm not going to let it go."

CHILD LABOUR

Every child has the right to a childhood. No child, in any country, should have to work just to survive.

However, some children have no choice but to work every day in order to live. Many street children are involved in work which is very often exploitative.

Often, children have to work in a variety of ways to support both themselves and their families. These include:

- Scavenging in dumps for items to sell
- Selling cigarettes on the streets
- Shining shoes
- Farm work
- Factory work
- Domestic servants

The problem of child labour is not just one facing one particular country or continent, it is a worldwide issue.

It is estimated that in developing countries, there are currently 250 million children between the ages of five and fourteen who work every day. (*International Labour Organisation 2006*)

Many work in hazardous situations with dangerous chemicals or in mines, where they carry loads heavier than the children themselves (see picture on next page).

The majority of working children are unpaid and even those who are paid do not receive fair wages. The working day is long, with many child labourers working in excess of 56 hours per week.

Children who work long hours, often in dangerous and unhealthy conditions, are exposed to lasting physical and psychological harm. For example, working with machinery such as looms in factories has left some children disabled with eye damage, lung disease, stunted growth, and a susceptibility to arthritis when they grow older. Sometimes, working children breathe dangerous smoke and fumes in factories and cut their fingers and hands, or seriously injure themselves with tools they work with.

Like street children, it is very difficult for working children to stand up for their basic human rights. Without anyone to help them, these children are easily exploited.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO TACKLE THE PROBLEM OF CHILD LABOUR?

Child labour continues in communities where there is little emphasis on education. For families living in extreme poverty, there is little option but to send children out to work to earn money.

Tackling the problem of child labour means dealing with all of the problems facing those living in extreme poverty, including promoting and providing access to education and assisting families to ensure that children do not have to go out to work.



Carrying a heavy load of coal in Calcutta, India

CHILD SOLDIERS

Armies in the developing world often use children because they are small, vulnerable and easy to intimidate. Also, they are 'cheap' because they are not paid wages and don't eat as much as bigger adult soldiers. They are used to carry weapons and to work for the armed groups.

Since 1990, more than two million children are thought to have died because of armed conflict.

Many children are forced into conflict by armies and rebels in more than 30 countries, including Angola, Uganda, and Sudan.

In Uganda, it is estimated that 20,000 children has been abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army, a rebel group who have waged a 20-year war against the Ugandan Government. The children are often forced to commit violent acts so that they become hardened to violence or 'desensitised'.

HOW ARE CHILDREN USED AS SOLDIERS?

Many children have no choice when they become a child soldier; they are abducted and forced to fight in wars they know nothing about.

However, other children volunteer to become soldiers because they cannot see an alternative to their lives. Poverty and lack of access to education mean that children sometimes see the army as a way out; joining the army means regular meals, clothes and somewhere to sleep.

Violence is often used. This is deliberate on the part of the armies or rebel groups to make the children feel that their actions have been so terrible that they can never return to their communities. The child soldiers fear that they will be rejected or killed. This ensures that they will stay with the army.

Children are sometimes brainwashed into believing that war is justified. If they have lost a family member in war, often armies or 'freedom fighters' will recruit vulnerable disadvantaged children (sometimes from the streets) by telling them they will get revenge or justice.

Children, often orphans, will join an army or rebel group for a sense of belonging, as they have no other family or friends to care for them.

Children become soldiers for all these reasons. GOAL works with thousands of ex-child soldiers in many countries affected by war and conflict.

CASE STUDY

Two terrified young boys wandered into the village of Kalongo in the Pader district of Northern Uganda. Distressed and disorientated, they had escaped from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) just two days previously and had been wandering in the bush since.

Thirteen year old Simon Edopu was too traumatised to talk. He stared blankly ahead darting occasional glances around him.

His 15 year old companion Walter Onen (right) spoke of the day he was captured by an LRA raiding party.

"It was in the afternoon about six months ago and I was having a meal with my mother and father and the rest of the family when suddenly we saw men with guns coming in to our compound. I ran with my younger brother to hide but they saw us and we were grabbed".

They took all the family food and made my brother and I and some other boys who had also been grabbed walk all day carrying heavy bags and equipment. The man who was in charge was shouting all the time and if we slowed down or stopped for a rest he would get other men to beat us with sticks and guns".

We walked for many hours and didn't even stop when it got dark. Finally they stopped and the men lit a fire to cook a meal but we boys got nothing except scraps. We were tied to a tree but even though we were very tired we were too frightened to sleep. We cried all night".

In the morning I was cut free but my brother and some other boys were left tied to the trees. I was forced to leave and my brother



was crying when I left. I have not seen him since then.

One day Simon and I were taken to a point on a hill and left to watch for soldiers. When it was dark we decided to run away, to try to get home. We were very scared because we knew if they caught us they would surely kill us. We just kept walking.

I am very happy now I have escaped. I am looking forward very much to going to my village again."

Walter is now being cared for by GOAL in Kalongo in northern Uganda.

But reintegration for escaped child soldiers is not all that straightforward. Because they have taken part in raids on the community there is often hostility towards them. This hostility is gradually being overcome however, by the work of some local organisations and women's groups who are spreading the message that these children are victims too and were forced to take part in the raids and atrocities by their LRA captors.

DID YOU KNOW?



115 million children do not attend school, two thirds of them are girls. (UN)

It would cost \$10 billion a year to ensure that all children have access to education by 2015. This is less than what Europeans spend on ice-cream each year - \$13 billion. (New Internationalist Magazine)



Nobody knows for sure how many children live on the streets around the world. Estimates differ widely - anywhere from 30 to 170 million children.

Their mobility and the fact that they move in and out of street living make them difficult to count. They are not included in surveys or censuses. (New Internationalist 2005)



In 2000, the United Nations adopted a new international protocol banning the use of soldiers under the age of 18. Since June 2001, 80 countries have signed the treaty. (UN)

WHAT CAN YOU DO?



- Learn more about global campaigns that focus on providing education for all and on stopping child labour. Can you or your class become involved?
- If you lived on the street, how would you...
 - Feed yourself?
 - Stay clean?
 - Find somewhere safe to sleep?
 - Get new clothes as you grew bigger?
- How would life living on the streets of your town be different from life on the streets of the world's poorest countries?
- Can you remember the reasons why children end up living in poverty on the streets in the world's poorest countries?
- What is GOAL doing to help?

GOAL'S DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION OFFICERS

GOAL aims to increase young people's awareness and understanding of the plight of the poorest of the poor and of global issues that affect the developing world.

GOAL's development education officers visit primary and post primary schools, third level institutions and youth and after school groups to share information on their first hand experiences of working with GOAL in the developing world.

If you would like a member of our development education staff to visit your school please contact GOAL on 01 2809779,

visit www.goal.ie or email info@goal.ie

GOAL, PO Box 19, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin