



## NGO Shadow Report for the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child 55<sup>th</sup> Session: Burundi

Prepared by the Consortium for Street Children  
April 2010

### Table of contents:

1. Introduction
  - 1.1 The Consortium for Street Children
  - 1.2 Street children in Burundi
2. General principles and measures of implementation
  - 2.1 Assessment
  - 2.2 Recommendations
3. Family environment and alternative care
  - 3.1 Assessment
  - 3.2 Recommendations
4. Basic health and welfare
  - 4.1 Assessment
  - 4.2 Recommendations
5. Education, leisure and cultural activities
  - 5.1 Assessment
  - 5.2 Recommendations
6. Special protection measures
  - 6.1 Assessment
  - 6.2 Recommendations
7. Conclusion

For further information please contact Louise Meincke, Advocacy Manager,  
 Louise@streetchildren.org.uk / +44 (0) 20 7274 0087  
 Consortium for Street Children  
 Bon Marche Centre, Unit 210, 241-251 Ferndale Road, London, SW9 8BJ  
 Registered Charity Number: 1046579. Company limited by guarantee, Company No: 3040697  
[www.streetchildren.org.uk](http://www.streetchildren.org.uk)

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The Consortium for Street Children

The Consortium for Street Children (CSC) is the leading international member-based network dedicated to advocating, promoting and campaigning for the rights of street-involved children. We are committed to creating a better and sustainable future for some of the most disadvantaged and stigmatised children by working together to inform and inspire research and action that influences police and best practice worldwide. The network currently comprises of 50 organisations working in over 130 countries.

### 1.2 Street Children in Burundi

After many years of civil war, children in Burundi face a legacy of violence and the virtual collapse of society. This instability has contributed to the increase in children relying on the street in order to replace families that have either been killed or are missing. Former child soldiers struggle after being disbanded to adapt to society and/or to fend for themselves where familial structures have often been destroyed<sup>1</sup>.

In 2004 the Director of Social Affairs in the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and Social Action, Eugène Sinzumunsi, told IRIN that there were some 5,000 street children in the country, although 70% of them slept at home each night<sup>2</sup>. In a 2003 survey, the Association for Community Development (Association pour la Promotion de Développement Communautaire) found that 48 % of the street children in urban centres were where they were due to poverty. The survey further showed that 18.6% were on the streets because their parents had died, and 17% because of war. However, because the inherent difficulties of counting, defining and researching street children no one knows the exact number of street children in Burundi, although the State Report (2010) mentions that the numbers of street children are increasing and that the State Party is having difficulties managing and dealing with the issue.

## 2. General principles and measures of implementation

### 2.1. Assessment

The UN Committee noted in its final observations in 2000 that the State Party should introduce “a comprehensive children's rights policy” and work towards developing an “up-to-date national plan of action for the implementation of a children's rights policy in priority areas”.

CSC commends the State Party for recently adopting a national policy “in favour of orphans and other vulnerable children like the children of the street”, and for having supported the establishment of specific projects for street children, such as the ‘Children Sun’ and ‘Shaloom House’<sup>3</sup>. These projects aim to rehabilitate, resocialise and reintegrate street children into families and societies.

---

<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, *Burundi's Children Suffer*, September 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Cycnet Feature: Africa's Children Day 16 June, Focus on Street Children <http://www.cyc-net.org/features/ft-burundistreetsl.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Translated from French version of Burundi State Report 2010.

## **2.2. Recommendations**

- CSC recommends that the State Party pursues the implementation of the new National Plan of Action for Street Children with the ongoing support and advice from national and international NGOs.
- CSC further recommends that the State Party involves and increases its support and involvement of NGOs in the process of supporting street children, and that financial support is raised to the maximum of available resources for the support of street children.
- CSC recommends that the State Party prioritise the systematic data collection and research on street children and utilise this information to develop sustainable programmes and provision of basic services for street children.
- CSC encourages the State Party to continue with legislative children's reforms, in particular those with relevance to street children. Such legislative initiatives should be followed up with rigid implementation and monitoring and evaluation. The State Party should seek the involvement of national and international NGOs on this issue.
- It is vital that the State Party ensures that organisations working with street children have the correct legal status and registration, to guarantee their accountability, expertise and best interest of the child at heart.

## **3. Family environment and alternative care**

### **3.1. Assessment**

CSC acknowledges the problems facing the State Party due to prolonged periods of conflict, with increased separation and break up of families with a consequently negative impact on children's lives. CSC agrees with the UN Committee's final observations to the State Party (2000) that it is of paramount importance to strengthen the family unit, through psycho-social and parental guidance programmes, and with an increase in social workers to prevent children taking to the street.

But for many children already living on the street alternative care and support is vital. This can initially take the form of drop in centres and 'safe spaces' where street children can begin an engagement process without being forced. These centres should include the opportunity for showering, eating, informal learning and recreation time, and access to a trusted adult. Through the building of trust these centres will provide the children with the opportunity to reintegrate back into the families where possible/appropriate, or a subsequent easing into alternative forms of care and support, for example foster parents and extended family networks.

### **3.2 Recommendations**

- CSC recommends that the State Party encourage and financially support (where possible) NGOs setting up drop in centres and 'safe spaces' for street children, whilst ensuring the NGOs are legally operating and have the best interest of the child at heart.
- CSC recommends the State Party encourages street children NGOs and government run initiatives to seek support and advice on best practices concerning the repatriation and reintegration of street children, from for example the network of expertise found within CSC.

## **4. Basic health and welfare**

### **4.1 Assessment**

CSC commends the State Party for implementing health programmes, with the backing of major donors, with a specific component dedicated to 'vulnerable children', and acknowledging that much

more needs to be done in this area. Children living on the streets have often lost one or both parents to AIDS and war. But while on the street the children are at increased risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases due the nature of street living, such as injecting drug use, prostitution, and rape. Street children are also unlikely to be able to access health care clinics, not knowing where to seek help, understanding the nature of the diseases, or suffering from stigma and discrimination. Many street children are turned away because of being a child on the street, with no official documentation and birth certificate and no consenting adult. Therefore, many programmes aimed at 'vulnerable children' do not necessarily reach or trickle down to street children.

It is also particularly important to understand and react to the needs of street girls, who are at increased risk of rape and sexual abuse and often get pregnant giving birth to a second or even third generation of street children.

#### **4.2 Recommendations**

- CSC recommends that the State Party encourage and develop, in partnership with NGOs, prevention strategies targeted at street children, teaching them about the dangers of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, ways of protecting themselves and where to seek advice and support. This is particular relevant to street girls.
- The State Party should work with health professionals drawing attention to the high levels of stigma and discrimination faced by street children, and the ways in which this impacts on their access to health care services.
- CSC recommends that the State Party seek advice from international NGOs with an expertise in issues of street children and HIV/AIDS. For example, one of CSC's members, Street Action, recently carried out research into street children and HIV/AIDS in Durban, South Africa, with funding from the UK Department for International Development. Street Action plans to expand on the research project and lessons learned in Burundi. The final report will be published in autumn 2010.

### **5. Education, leisure and cultural activities**

#### **5.1 Assessment**

CSC acknowledges the current financial constraints on the State Party's educational system, but commends the 'back to school' initiative. As the State Party moves towards ensuring education for all, it is important that the needs of children currently living and working on the street are met, in the first instance through an acknowledgement and expansion of informal learning, which can eventually pave the way for a stronger skills set matching the labour market needs and/or integration into the formal education system.

UNESCO ran a pilot project from 2000-03 targeting street children for participating in primary education. This project succeeded in having 1446 street children graduate between 2000-2004, as well as setting up 210 host families and 9 hostels for street children to access while taking part in the project.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO. 'Scolarisation des enfants de la rue au Burundi'.

[http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/file\\_download.php/ee0819bfea408a3dc44b653b3ac4535fenfants+burundi.pdf](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/file_download.php/ee0819bfea408a3dc44b653b3ac4535fenfants+burundi.pdf)

In 2004 it was reported that the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and Social Action was preparing a one-year programme to rehabilitate street children. Initially, 1,500 children would be targeted, by sending 795 children back to school, reintegrating 137 with their families, and provide 885 with vocational training. The Ministry's role was to coordinate the different efforts of its partners<sup>5</sup>. It is unclear how successful this project was, but it is clear that a one year programme will not eradicate the phenomenon of street children in Burundi. There are no quick fixes.

## 5.2 Recommendations

- CSC recommends that the State Party engages with national and international NGOs on expanding the informal learning network for street children. Examples of best practice include the Street Side Schools in Tanzania carried out by Faraja Trust. The school adapt to the needs, interest and time constraints of children living and working on the streets, and opens the door to reintegration into the formal education system<sup>6</sup>.

## 6. Special Protection Measures

### 6.1 Assessment

The UN Committee noted in its final observations in 2000 its concern for the increasing number of children living and working on the streets, in particular girls, and their poor access to health, education and other services. It is also often the case that street children are arbitrarily arrested and imprisoned in the same cells as adults for long periods of time.

Street children are often harassed and abused by the very people who are supposed to protect them - police and judicial authorities round up street children and either dispose of them outside the city centres or put them in detention centres. Often street girls are the most vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation in the hands of police.

The UN Committee recommended in 2000 that the "State Party give greater support to the work of NGOs in this domain and provide the police services with training on children's rights so that the police can contribute to the protection of children from acts of violence or other abuse while on the street. The Committee recommends that special attention be given to improving the situation of girls". The State Party report (2010) does mention police training in child rights, although it is unclear to what extent the training has been implemented and the specific outcomes, in particular relating to violence against street children.

### 6.2 Recommendations

- CSC recommends that the State Party, if some police training has already been initiated, continue to expand this initiative with particular reference to the rights and needs of street children. If such a programme has not been initiated then the State Party is highly recommended to do so urgently. The State Party is advised to seek advice and support from CSC who has particular expertise in this area, having carried out police training in both Ethiopia and Guatemala.
- CSC recommends that the State Party continues with urgent juvenile justice legislative changes, and ensures that children are not kept in the same cells as adults with the possibility of separate cells for girls.

<sup>5</sup> Cynnet Feature: Africa's Children Day 16 June, Focus on Street Children <http://www.cyc-net.org/features/ft-burundistreetsl.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Faraja Trust, Street Side School, <http://www.farajatrust.org/youth.htm>

- The prosecution of individuals and police officers found to be violating the rights of children, including street children.

## **7. Conclusion**

After years of civil war Burundi is still faced with many extremely urgent socio-economic issues. One of the manifestations of years of civil unrest and poverty has been an increase in the numbers of children living and working on the streets. Only by working together with national and international NGOs can Burundi aim to tackle the urgent needs of these children, in particular under the current difficult financial situation. In particular CSC recommends that the State Party trains its police forces in the particular needs and rights of street children in collaboration with national and international NGOs, and ensures that programmes aimed at 'vulnerable children' also benefit street children. Especially the issues facing street girls, such as health and sexual abuse, need to be looked at urgently.