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STREET CHILDREN AND THE CITY LIFE: A CASE STUDY OF THE BULAWAYO SCRIPTURE UNION DROP-IN CENTRE AND THUTHUKA HOME

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The street children phenomenon is a problem experienced all over the world. The occurrence in developing countries is said to be increasing in response to global population increase. It has been assumed that children respond to development that is why they are found around big cities. The age groups of the children found living on the streets are of great concern. The study established that in Bulawayo the second largest city in Zimbabwe, there are children and youths, both boys and girls who have spent periods ranging from four days to more than eight years living on the street. There are always new cases coming in to join other street dwellers. The study further established that; children flee their rural homes after being orphaned, in response psychological and sexual abuse from the extended family, the main underlying factor being poverty. The majority are characterized by; being orphaned, never went to school, the level of education reached ranges from grade 1 to 7 and no personal documents like birth certificates and national identity cards. All of them are engaged on petty business on the streets; sweeping in front of shops, offloading delivery trucks, selling sweets, juice cards, cigarettes, and peanuts, begging and polishing car tryes for a small token of as much as $5. All of them have sound life skills learned back at home from their families at a young age. Skills learned from the primary education are nothing except to read and write. They sleep on pavements in front of shops, in alleys, at the Municipal Park and in old unused train wagons at the railway station. They have indicated that they are looking for jobs that can pay them a reasonable wage then they can plan for their lives. It is recommended that the primary school education be upgraded to include skills training and the current population of the street children be put into rehabilitation institutions, where they will begin to learn normal life.