

# Community Based Rehabilitation of Street Children through Idirs in Jimma: A Model Project of “kinder unserer welt” and “Facilitators for Change in Ethiopia”

Georg Rieder, MD, MPH<sup>1</sup>

Translation by Dr. Alexandra Bechter

**kinder unserer welt e.V.** (children of our world) - initiative for destitute children (kuw) is a non-profit organization with over 600 members that supports the cause of sustainable improvement of the living conditions of children in Ethiopia and the Republic of South Africa, including the financing of the „Street Children and Youths Project“ (SCYP) in Jimma since 2003. Kuw does not work on location itself, but its Ethiopian partner organization „Facilitators for Change in Ethiopia“ (FCE) holds responsibility. A volunteer group manages the cooperation between the partners and this good cooperative work is being guaranteed through bi-annually supervisions.

The project town **Jimma** with its approximately 150,000 inhabitants is the administrative and economical center of the southwestern region of Ethiopia. But it has not the adequate infrastructure to integrate the migrant workers and their families. The official estimate of street children has been set at 3,000.

**Street children** have shifted their central focus and means of subsistence to the street. To a large part they come from destitute families of city slums. In Ethiopia the urbanization still is relatively small, only 16 % of its inhabitants live in cities, but these cities are growing rapidly (ca. 4 % per year). UNICEF (see chart) defines the living conditions of these children through work, sleeping place and contact to their family, and distances them from street criminals or children who only spend their free time on the street. Thereby the reasons and the length of time spent on the streets are disregarded. Also, school attendance, gender and age as well as the children’s relationships to their families, to the community, and to their own future are left unconsidered.

Chart: UNICEF Definition of Street Children (abbreviated)

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<b>on-street</b> children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ ca. 85-95 % of the street children</li><li>➤ live and work alone on the street during the day, return to sleep with their families during the night.</li><li>➤ Contribution to the family income</li></ul>
<b>of-street</b> children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ ca. 5-15 % of the street children</li><li>➤ live, work and sleep on the street</li><li>➤ are mostly organized in groups</li><li>➤ no family support, often loose contact to the family</li></ul>

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In Ethiopia many children live only seasonally on the street and contribute to the family income even when sleeping on the street, because the daily way home is too far.

„**Street**“ is not a culturally accepted, private living space, but a public thoroughfare, meaning in this context: shopping streets, busy intersections, market squares, bus stations, or the like. So places, where children should not linger without grownups and where no one usually should sleep. However this street terminology steers the focus unilateral onto the „visible“ children in the city centers, not onto those living in the back alleys and garbage dumps, whereby most of these children sleep at home at night. Girls are not so easily visible, because they preferably live and work in households, hotels or bars.

**Poverty** is the main reason for a life on the streets in Ethiopia. The children must contribute to the family income. But even if the financial hardships are not as bad the children are driven to the streets by domestic stress. Most families are not indifferent to their children's life on the streets so that a reintegration into the family after appropriate measures have been taken is often possible.

Street children work hard in the hidden economy and in occupations that afford hardly any capital or knowledge. Mostly younger children beg or begging is done additionally if the income is not sufficient. Boys work as shoe polishers, carriers, parking boys, ticket sellers in shared taxis, garbage collectors, windshield cleaners, lottery vendors, newspaper sellers, or vendors for odds and ends. Girls sell homemade bread, snacks and drinks at bus stations, work as room maids, kitchen maids, and servant maids, as waitresses or prostitutes.

**The negative effects of street life which must be the focus of an aid project:** The main problems are the missing physical, psychological, legal and material security when living on the street. A life without any space for retreat, under constant observation leads to the loss of privacy and security. Fear, hunger and loneliness tempt the children into the misuse of alcohol, chat, tobacco or glue sniffing. Despite work they often live off of food scraps from hotels or from food theft. Many street children are malnourished and sick. They often are the target for physical and psychological violence: besides the forceful eviction by store owners or the police the „bad boy image“ of children often only clothed in rags and hanging out in groups serves as justification for the mob for outbursts of violence and humiliation. But also inside the street children scene mafia-like structures lead to protection racket, theft, subordination in gangs, crime instigation and sexual assault of girls, but also of boys. Due to fear of rape older girls rent rooms for the night or sleep at their working place. Therefore they formally are no longer „of street children“. The authorities, overburdened staff-wise as well as financially, take the children into orphanages, put them into jail after a raid, or force the children onto trucks to take them out of the city. NGOs mostly put the emphasis on cushioning the specific hardships of street life by establishing safe sleeping places, helping with nutrition, or the like. They also provide accommodations in orphanages or boarding homes.

### **The Street Children and Youths Rehabilitation Project in Jimma**

A model project concept and infrastructure had to be newly developed during the first project phase (2003-2006) by all partners (FCE, kuw, Idirs). During the second project phase (2006-2008) the emphasis was put on the routine running of the project. During the current third project phase (2008-2013) the handover of the project into the organizational and financial responsibility of the four involved Idirs shall be prepared.

The goal of the project is to help street children end their street lives. Children under the age of 14 shall be reintegrated into their families or into foster homes. Youths (14 to 18 years of age) shall be either reunited with their families or live independently under the supervision and protection of the community by supporting them financially in the beginning into economic independence. This goal should be reached with a three to six months psychosocial rehabilitation program with devotion, recreation offers, schooling, basic vocational training and individual follow-ups. The practical work with the children is ensued by the Idirs, who are also sponsors of SCYP. Intensive capacity building by our local partner FCE shall enable these Idirs to run the street children project without any foreign aid as of 2013 and enable them to support the awareness-raising in the community and with the authorities, so that assistance offers instead of drastic measures will be implemented. Affected families should be supported emotionally as well as socially. The Idirs can give financial aid in single instances after close examination.

**Why are Idirs so suitable as project partners?** Idirs are non-profit oriented risk insurances, primarily in the case of death, that have been formed since ca. 100 years by people living in neighboring communities. Almost all households are organized in at least one Idir. Members have the right to claim the takeover of the costs for their funeral or the funeral of a family member, including the related social obligations. Some Idirs have restricted their burial funds to the bare minimum and have begun to take over social responsibilities, i.e. the home care of AIDS-patients, care for orphans, or weekend teaching of girls. The Idirs have no judiciary form known in our countries, are politically as well as financially independent, and currently need not be registered as NGO in Ethiopia. They finance their assignments through monthly membership dues. They are well organized, have written by-laws and experience money-wise. All tasks are being done on a voluntary basis. The elected board members are held in high esteem and authority. The members come from all social classes (socio-economically, ethnically, religiously, age-wise, gender-wise) and are stable due to high admission fees and the loss of all deposits by resignation. The members take over the collective responsibility for the formulation and implementation of project goals. Therefore it can be expected that the projects will continue to run even after external donors pull out.

**„Screening“, the selection of eligible street children:** Contact is being made by the street workers on the streets of Jimma with the request to take part in one of the selection meetings in the meeting hall of the Mahal Arada Idir at the market area. During this meeting project contents and project workers are introduced, trust is being developed and mutual expectations are being articulated. In return for their participation the children and youths receive breakfast. Only after repeated voluntary participation at one of these meetings an assessment of the motivation is possible. Admission into the project takes place twice a year, whereby the number of places in the project is smaller than the number of eligible children. The admission criteria had to be modified after earlier failures and are part of the contract with the FCE. The goal is a high reintegration quota even with lean financial resources. Therefore only children with a good social prognosis get into the project. They must be willing to accept the project's contents and rules, must be interested in reuniting with their family respectively be interested in help to self-help. They must not be addicted to alcohol or chat (addictions prolong the rehabilitation) and must have lived no longer than one year on the street (probability for successful reintegration falls with the amount of time spent on the street). Girls and younger children have priority, as well as children whose family lives in Jimma or in the near vicinity since the follow-ups cannot be guaranteed otherwise.

**Transitional Homes:** In the foster families carefully selected by the Idirs the „of-street“ children under the age of 14 are being accustomed again with family life for three to six months. Conflicts as a result of the „street behavior“ should not be brought into the own family. The requirements of the foster mother are very demanding: her family must be small, stable and unstressed. And there must be room for the foster child. This voluntary task is held in high esteem. Only the costs for the „basic equipment“ (clothing, school materials, bedding, soap, etc.) are being paid for by the project budget.

**Group Homes:** Here live two „of-street“ youths each (only boys), under the supervision of a guardian chosen by the Idir. They live for three to six months in a room basically equipped with two beds, some seating, cooking and washing utensils, rented by the project. The youths should get used again to a steady life, including the household basic tasks as keeping room, clothing and dishes clean or learning how to cook.

**Skill Training for youths over 14 years of age:** Working for your own survival has nothing to do with child labor. Education (vocational training, school) and support through the community with the choice and exertion of occupation safeguards from defenselessness and exploitation. With a three months long simple vocational training the youths should be placed in the position to earn their income for themselves and their family. Offered are for girls cooking, sewing, embroidering or hairdressing; for boys woodworking, metalworking, leather working, weaving, petty trading or hairdressing. The training is given by FCE staff, by skilled Idir members or sometimes by rehabilitated youths (as co trainers) in the training facility in Jimma´s town center. To increase the sales opportunities of the rehabilitated youths the building of a shop on the premises of the training center for goods on consignment is planned. The youths should visit public schools where possible. For all others teachers on a voluntary basis provide school lessons. Recreational facilities make relaxation possible in between.

**Reintegration:** First of all it has to be clarified whether or not the children want to go back to their families and whether or not the families are prepared to take them in again. A socio-economic evaluation and consultation of the families through the Idirs and the FCE is a prerequisite for the reintegration. While the younger children should only be going to school the older children could help secure the family´s income by practicing their „occupation“ learned in the project, being allocated a place of work and if necessary a place to live through the Idirs or the Kebele. Attending school at the same time is possible due to the in Ethiopia common shift system but very often the children give up because of the dual burden or their achievements are not good enough for the secondary schools. Financial help as starting capital (e.g. tools, sewing machine), granted on behalf of the Idir assembly and financed through the project budget, has emerged as an essential prerequisite for a successful reintegration, together with the yearlong follow-up

**What was achieved during the last six years?** Up to the beginning of the year 2009 487 street children were rehabilitated with a high success rate. Rehabilitated were 157 girls (32%) and 204 children under the age of 14 years (42%). In November 2008 a random selection of 29 youths (14 to 20 years of age), rehabilitated between 2006 and 2007, revealed only one relapse back to the streets. All others were living with their families or in their own households. Three had moved to better paying jobs. Ten had quit school, but two girls had successfully finished secondary school. Four did no longer work.

**Project expenses** between 2003-2009 totaled ETB 3.546.900 or € 325.264, incl. staff costs, material expenses and office costs of the FCE. The Idirs so far only contribute payment in

kind and payment in time, approximately 17 % of the total budget. In the future the Idirs must increasingly generate their own contribution to cover the budget costs.

**Sustainability through the handover to the Idirs:** The responsibility for the goals and the practical implementation of the project lay from the beginning on in the hands of the Idir. The planned handover for 2013 of the organizational and financial responsibilities is especially meaningful for the development policy, but it is also new ground for all parties involved and still requires intensive theoretical and practical training. Besides the training of street workers the FCE indoctrinates the layout of a finance strategy (local fundraising, income through commercial activities) and a network with the authorities, local NGOs and other Idirs. Two Idirs from the early stages got out because they did not believe to be ready for a project take-over.

**Summary:** The SCYP in Jimma is not an emergency relief project to facilitate the children's lives on the street, but it is a project based on the traditional „community support“ at child rearing, a jump start for a really self-determined life. A quota system ensures that younger children as well as girls are also included in the project. The three to six months long program with individual psycho-social rehabilitation, schooling, recreational activities and a simple vocational training, followed by the reintegration into the family and into society, and a year long follow-up is being implemented by voluntary lay persons from the four Idirs under the supervision of experts from FCE and financed by kuw. The project is not capable of handling the mass problem of street children in Jimma. The concentration on children with a positive social prognosis leads to a high success rate but excludes many street children from the beginning on. To run the rehabilitation program without any loss in quality long-term local financial resources must be found.