CHAPTER 1: THE STREET CHILDREN ISSUE
WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT STREET CHILDREN?

Key points: defining street children is a difficult task; the "ON/OFF" terminology of UNICEF, based on the relationship the child has with his/her family, is a useful one but some grey areas exist. About their characteristics, the majority of them are boys, still have their families, and work on the informal part of the economy. They are vulnerable, but their capacities in terms of adaptability, peer support and moral principles are high.

The causes of the street children issue are multiple, and we need to analyze it by using a multifactoral model which takes into account all the parameters. Finally, intervening in the street children life needs a subject oriented approach, which takes into account its capacities and which perceive them as capable human beings who know what they want and what they need.

1. DEFINING STREET CHILDREN

> *"The task of identifying, with any real precision, all the factors which define who is and who is not a street child is difficult, given the relative lack of systematic study of the phenomenon. If the complexities of the cultural variations are considered, the task is probably beyond the limits of current technology as well. What is possible is to select key indicators for each of the dimensions"*
> (Cosgrove, 1990, quoted in UNCHS, 2000: 73)

Street Children are a diverse and heterogeneous population, because of the diversity of their backgrounds and personal history, leading therefore to diverse definitions, and to a plethora of debates.

The term "street children" was first used by Henry Mayhew in 1851 when writing *London Labour and the London Poor*[4], although it came into general use only after the United Nations year of the child in 1979 (Scanlon and al, 1998). In 1983, the Inter-NGO Programme for Street Children and Street Youth was defining street children as[5]:

> "Any girl or boy who has not reached adulthood, for whom the street (in the broadest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc) has become her or his habitual abode or source of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults" (Hatloy and Huser, 2005; Ennew, 2000).

In the late 80's, witnessing the diversity characterizing street children, other definitions began to emerge, mainly in Latin America, where street children made a huge apparition on the public area. The most common definition which gained credibility among practitioners and academics is the "ON/OF terminology" of UNICEF (1986).[6]

The terminology suggests dividing street children into two main categories: "children of the streets" and "children on the streets, the distinction being mainly based on the degree of "disconnection" to their family.

> **"Children of the streets"** are children (i.e. persons under 18 years old) who *work and live on the streets without family support, the street being therefore a place for living 24/7 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)*;
>
> **"Children on the streets"** *work on the streets and spend most of the time there, but return back to their families/relatives at night, the street being therefore their major point of reference*

These two definitions are useful as long as their limitations are taken into account (O'Connor, 2003). Indeed, the complexity of the phenomenon means that overlaps and grey areas exist (Hatloy and Huser, 2005).

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[4] *« In the 1840's he observed, documented and described the state of working people in London for a series of articles in a newspaper, the Morning Chronicle. The articles go into deep, almost pedantic detail concerning the trades, habits, religion and domestic arrangements of the thousands of people working the streets of the city"* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Labour_and_the_London_Poor)

[5] Inter-NGO Program on Street Children and Street Use (1983), "Document 83/23-SC/35., International Catholic Child Bureau. Geneva", reference quoted in Blackman (2001)

[6] UNICEF (1986), "Children in especially difficult circumstances: Exploitation of working and street children" in New York: United Nations Children Fund, quoted in LeRoux and Smith. (1998)

Those "grey areas" are present in both categories. For example, some "children of the streets" may have cut all contacts with their family, and others may still visit their family once in a while before returning to the street.

On the other hand, some "children on the streets" may alternate between street and home, sometime sleeping at home, sometime in the streets, and some may stay with distant relatives (and not their parents).

Finally, one particular category, found for example in Bangladesh and India, is the children living in the pavement with their families, the street being their "home" and their family being present, creating therefore categorizing problems. So, both categories do contain diversity and "grey areas" exist, leading therefore local organisations to adapt the definition to their local context *(see Box 1.1)* and some experts to define "new categories", some speaking for example of 'children for the street', who comprise 'candidates for the street who live in the slums and suffer from family break-up, abuse, and who do not go to school' (Dunford, 1996).[7]

Box 1.1. : Some operational definitions

In Mongolia…

In 1994, the National Children's Committee in Mongolia organized a national conference on street children, involving representatives from Parliament, the Ministry of Science and Education, Juvenile Police Department, Juvenile Prison, the Aimag Centers for Children, as well as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Save the Children, United Kingdom (UK). The conference adopted three categories of street children:

1. Children who work on the streets during the day, but who maintain links with the family and who usually return to their homes in the evening;
2. Children who have some contact with their families, but who spend most of their time on the streets, especially during warm seasons; and
1. Children who have lost contact with their families and live permanently on the street.

In Vietnam…

The work of Tim Bond, in the early 90's influences a tripartite categorization of street children.

1. Category A: children who have left home and family, or have no home or family, and who sleep on the street;
2. Category B: children who sleep on the street with their family or guardian; and
3. Category C: children who have a family or guardian

From West (2003)

However, as pointed by Volpi (2002), "*many agencies argue that these definitions may be inappropriate because it does not reflect the interconnected dimensions of child vulnerability*". Indeed, a "street child" may be part of many "categories" of children-at-risk, having therefore a set of diverse characteristics depending on the category with which the street child is connected: working child, school dropout, or a homeless boy or girl. So, "street children" is a convenient umbrella description, but has the danger of hiding the high diversity that it contains.

Moreover, UNICEF (2006) warns about another danger and points out how this label may be stigmatizing. Sarah Thomas de Benitez[8] claims for example that "the label 'street children' is demeaning in itself as it depersonalizes each child, making him/her a 'problem to be solved", and nothing else. The greatest problems such children face is therefore their demonization by mainstream society as a threat and a source of criminal behaviour (UNICEF, 2006).

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[7] Quoted in Baker R.P. (1999)
[8] Quoted in Kobayashi (2004)

For example, in Bangladesh, street children are either called *Tokai* (child ragpickers), even if they are street vendors, or either Kangali *(see Box 1.2.)*

Considering all these elements, we can point out that a "typical" street child is difficult to define; however, all the previous definitions do indicate that a street child has "a special relationship to the street, among other domains of their lives" (Glauser, 1990; Lucchini, 1996; Connolly and Ennew, 1996). However, Lucchini (1997) and Ennew (2003) warn to be cautious on the way "street" is defined and indicate that it is only one domain among others (such as family homes, schools, welfare programmes, etc) and has a variety of meanings and connotations in different contexts. Indeed, street children's world cannot be distinguished between "home" and "street", and it is necessary to unpack the hidden assumptions in the way we use the words "child", "family", "home" and "street" (Ennew, 2000).

> **Box.1.2.: Being stigmatized…**
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> 'They [*mainstream society*] call us *kangali* and they say to us: 'What are you doing on the street? Go back home, find yourself a good job, don't dishonour your family' …. But we are not *kangali*, … we are working for living and we also do many other good things'.
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> Arif – 15 years old boy
> *From Conticini (2004)*

Finally, one consequence of the difficulty in the definition of the term is the inability of governments and aid agencies to quantify their exact numbers. UNICEF (2006: 40) estimates them at tens of millions worldwide and indicates that their number may be growing as the global population, the urbanization and the poverty grow. However, Ennew (2000:37) points out that the few estimates coming here and there in some reports *"have no validity or basis in fact"* (Ennew, 2000: 37).

2. CHARACTERISTICS

2.1. About their family

One 'myth' about street children is that they are "orphans" and "homeless" children. However, research tends to show that this is far to be the case and the findings tend to demonstrate two things.

First, the majority of street children are children "on" the streets, estimated at about 75% of the street children population (Shurink, 1993 quoted in Grundling and al., 2005)[9]. So, "only" an estimated 25% of street children are children "of" the streets, having therefore little or no contact with their families (see e.g. Taçon 1992 quoted in Lalor 1999). For example, they are 27 percent in Nairobi; 2 to 16 percent in Brazil; 10 percent in Mexico, and fewer in Italy [10](Blanc, 1994). This leads some experts to label this phenomenon *"home-based children on the street"* (see e.g. Komobarakaran, 2004)[11].

Second, the majority of children "of" the streets has still their families, but has run away from home, often in response to psychological, physical or sexual abuse (UNICEF, 2006: 41).

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[9] E.g. Makombe (1992), quoted in Grundling and al. (2005), estimates that 85% of all street children in Zimbabwe have homes.
[10] Essentialy among the Roma community (see e.g. Unicef, 2006: 24)
[11] Quoted in Grundling (2005)

The majority of street children is therefore not abandoned, but return regularly to their households to share income and maintain social relationships (Conticini, 2004). Therefore, they can be considered as being parts of a 'multispatial household' with 'mobile livelihoods' (Tacoli, 1999; Olwig and Sørensen, 2001; Stepputat and Sørensen, 2001).[12]

2.2. About their gender

Findings tend to show that the majority of street children are boys, the girls being more subject to exploitative conditions at home (UNICEF, 2006; Aderinto, 2000; Blanc, 1994)[13]. Lalor (1999) makes an interesting review of the literature and indicates that the street child population in Columbia (estimated as one of the highest in the world) is 75% male and 25% female. In Ethiopia, street boys and girls are also in the same proportion. Finally, ILO (2003), in a survey of street children in Bangladesh, found only 2.44% of girls.

However, beyond the question of the number, the World Health Organisation (WHO,) points interestingly how important it is to identify street girls, and highlights that

> "...*Girls on the street have more difficulties and are often overlooked by street educators. Street girls are looked down upon in many societies and are easily exploited. They usually have less economic opportunities than boys and are given less money than boys for similar activities. Educational opportunities are denied to them and street educators usually engage street boys in various activities while paying little attention to girls*". (WHO, 2000)

Consequently, street girls are doubly discriminated: by the society <u>and</u> by youth organisations.

2.3. About their economic activities

Grundling and al. (2005) indicate how street children share one common characteristic: "working the streets" to make a living. Indeed, Lucchini (1998)[14] highlights that the children are not content in the street when they are not able to pursue some concrete activity, that the child will feel ashamed of being in the street with nothing to do, and that being without any activity causes boredom, the need for diversion, and the feeling of being condemned. So, street children tend to work, and the relationship between street children and the work is so close that it has created new terminologies such as **"street-based working children"** (see e.g. Gilligan and al. ,2004; Foy, 2001).

Many would assume (or witness) that street children do beg or steal, and therefore can not be considered as "child workers". However, Ennew (2000) indicates that even begging and stealing are considered as a form of work from the child's perspective, as it is a way to survive[15]. So, although street children have specific problems, they can be considered as a direct subset of working children.

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[12] Quoted in Conticini (2004)

[13] However, once they leave home, they are generally less likely to return (Consortium for Street Children Worlwide, FAQs)

[14] Quoted in Liebel (2004: 59)

[15] However, the UNICEF does not consider it as a work, but does nevertheless include it in several programs as "illegal work" (Liebel, 2004 : 43)

The range of street children's economic activities stands mainly in the informal labour market (Bartlett, Hart, Satterthwaite, Barra et Missair, 1999). This market has different characteristics, depending on the local economy 'landscape', and comprises many types of work. However, despite this diversity, two common features can be drawn: first, it is unregulated,; and second, jobs are generally carried for short-term periods and do have low barriers to entry.

The income-generating activities of street children are therefore diverse, and include occupations such as vendors, scavengers, tea and juice shop helpers, mechanics

Box. 1.3.: Types of work of Street Children (from Ennew, 2000)	
Type of Work	Description
Domestic	Unpaid housework and childcare within family.
Non- Domestic	Unpaid work with family, such as helping the father in a job.
Tied or bonded labor	Forbidden by law- some families lend their children as worker to get a loan or pay a debt.
Wage labor	Working for goods or money.
Marginal activities	Varied occupations such as street selling, manufactured in workshops, rag picking, begging, prostitution, and stealing.

helpers, car washers, etc (Blanc, 1994: 326). Many of them are self-employed, but need to supply one part of their earnings to someone who supplies the good – for example, children who park or wash cars need to pay a premium to someone who controls the territory (Ennew, 2000: 29). Some other may be also working in small family enterprises – such as handicrafts and sweets-making – and despite being carried out in a family environment, some of these businesses can be extremely detrimental to the children's future (Blanc, 1994: 339).

However, as pointed by ILO (2003), when referring to street children in Bangladesh, "*most of the labouring children themselves do not mind having to work. What they object to are the humiliation, scorn and the various abuses they have to endure from their employers and clients*". Avoiding harassment of their employers might therefore explain why street children prefer to be self-employed, although they are quite limited as their access to capital in order to start their own business activity is limited.

2.4. About their vulnerability

The vulnerability, which we can define as the susceptibility of being harmed by some events, takes unfortunately a very important place in the street children characteristics. The street being a very harmful environment, the child is more vulnerable to harassment and abuse. The child does face many risks, such as: drug addiction, sexual promiscuity and abuse, work exploitation, involvement in criminal activities and violence (from the police, other street children or from adults). Volpi (2002) points out for example how, in Latin and Central America, a very high number of street children are victims of brutality by police and other adults. UNICEF (2006) indicates that, in Latin America, many of them are murdered by vigilantes in the name of 'cleaning up the city', often with the complicity of the police. Another mentioned problem is related to health, many children being alcohol and drug user, and subject to HIV. For example, Leroux and Smith (1998) report how Filipino street children experience loneliness, neglect, abuse, drug addiction, and various medical problems, and face constant harassment and arrest by the police, as well as abuse from other street children. In India, street children are also reported to be victims of violence, including physical and sexual abuse (Panicker, 1993)[16].

Vulnerability has different levels. Street children are all, inherently, vulnerable. But among them, children "of" the streets are said to be the most vulnerable ones as many of them sleep under bridges or in railway stations.

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[16] Quoted in Leroux and Smith (1998)

They are very mobile and difficult to locate, and many analysts point to the importance of considering proprietarily this "much smaller" and "extremely vulnerable" group (Kaminsy and Wright, 1992, Lusk 1989, Childhope 1993)[17]. Street girls are also a highly vulnerable population. Indeed, they are heavily exposed to the multiple risks of street life and sexual exploitation, and run the risk of being doubly exploited: at work and sexually (Blanc, 1994: 327). Finally, apart from the vulnerability arising directly from their life on the streets, another type of vulnerability is related to the work they are doing. Indeed, children generally lack marketable skills, and therefore can not access good jobs, pushing them to enter the world of hazardous jobs which enhances their vulnerability.

2.5. About their capacities

We can go long in depicting the street children vulnerability. However, only seeing them under the prism of vulnerability may lead to a pity vision of the street children.

Indeed, evidence tends to demonstrate that street children are active policymakers for them and that the street life made them develop resilience[18] and adaptability, having therefore a high ability to thrive in difficult circumstances (Felsman, 1981[19]). This self management capacity has also been reported by Aptekar (1988)[20].

Moreover, many of them hold high moral principles and are found to have altruistic and caring behaviour (see e.g. Swart, 1998, 1990)[21]. Chawla (2002)[22] reports that the interaction of children in street situations, within neighbourhoods and street communities, is the keystone for understanding the growth of impressive ethical behaviours among them. In fact, street children are found to contribute largely to their families' income, and to buy gifts to their siblings when returning back home (see e.g. Ennew, 2000).

Many fieldworkers report also the existence of supportive and co-operative peer relationships amongst these children (see e.g. *Boyden, 1991, Bar-On, 1997* quoted in Foy, 2001; Lalor, 1998; Conticini, 2004).

Conticini (2004) highlights how street children create peer groups as a replacement of natural family ties and how friendship was important for them and Lalor (1998) indicates how the group is having a positive impact on their mental health. This group organisation can be central for providing both emotional and physical security. Indeed, it enables them to develop both a feeling of belonging and a collective identity (Lucchini, 1997).

Peer relationships become therefore important sources of identity and social support for young people (Woodhead, 1999: 29). Moreover, this group organisation is also present in their working activities, where evidence tends to demonstrate that much street based work is strongly built around peer groups, in order to share resources, strategies, assets and care (*Tyler et al., 1991; Ennew, 1994; Panter-Brick, 2002* quoted in Woodhead, 2004:26)

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[17] Quoted in Blanc (1994)
[18] Resilience can be defined as "the manifestations of competence in children despite exposure to stressful events" (Garmezy, Masten, and Tellegen, 1984 quoted in *http://ohioline.osu.edu/b875/b875_1.html)*
[19] Quoted in Lalor (1999)
[20] Aptekar, L. (1988). *Street children of Cali.* Durham: Duke University Press, Quoted by Conticini and al (2006)
[21] Quoted in Ennew (2000)
[22] Quoted in Conticini (2004)

As pointed by Blanc (1994: 340) "To counter the negative perceptions of the street children, a new anthropological literature has emphasized the positive aspects of the street experience, and the new pride and confidence street work gives them (see e.g. Anderson 1990)

Consequently, in that new approach, street children are not passive human beings, but rather active contributors to their development, attempting to make sense of their social world, and coming to an understanding and evaluation of their own experiences of child development; they are therefore not "object of concern", but "subjects with concerns" (Woodhead, 1999). It requires therefore reviewing their status as competent to determine what is in their best interests (Prout, 1998). This new vision is summarized by Rizzini :

> *"Although exploited, poor and oppressed, 'he' was a 'strong and astute' being, a surviving hero for whom it was necessary to create 'critical, creative and participative action on the part of educators, who always had something to learn from the children and had to face opposition from the public, who only demanded immediate results.' There the children would be playing their part as, denouncers of an unjust society that evaded its due responsibilities"* (Rizzini, 1996)[23]

3. CAUSES OF THE STREET CHILDREN ISSUE

A common cited reason pushing children to the street is economic poverty (Alexandrescu, 1996; Peacock, 1994; Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman, 1998)[24]. Indeed, street children are said to move from the household for coping with insecurity and economic hardship (Conticini and al., 2006). For example, a recent UNDP/Government policy paper in Bangladesh (ARISE, 2001)[25] indicates poverty as the driving forces that pushes children to the streets, and points out that "*the influx of migration could be stopped if sufficient income earning opportunities are created in the rural sector through massive poverty alleviation interventions at the country side*" (ARISE, 2001).

Poverty leads therefore some families to send their children to work, and the street appears as a "promise of rewards" (Lucchini, 1997). But, if economic poverty was the only reason, all poor countries in the world would be filled up with street children ; in fact, only a small minority of households in the poorest metropolitan cities account for street children, and they are generally no poorer than their neighbours (Moura, 1997). Other reasons are therefore at the origin of the phenomenon.

Conticini (2004: 6-7), in his study of street children in Dhaka, points out how the majority of children interviewed did leave their villages because of abuse, especially in terms of physical violence and the breakdown of trust within households, and that "analysts and policymakers have so far missed the opportunity of significantly engaging with a growing body of literature that shows the decisive role played by non economic factors in children's decision to migrate to the street". Indeed, considerable evidence tends to show that street children have endured psychological and physical, including sexual abuse (Blanc, 1994 and Moura Castro, 1997).

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[23] Quoted in Ennew (2003)
[24] Quoted in Conticini and al. (2006)
[25] Quoted in Conticini (2004)

For example, a study of street children in Nepal (Pradhan, 1990)[26] revealed a range of different and mixed reasons:

> *maltreatment by stepmother, 23%; father's death, 28%; family abandoned by father, 5%; mother's death, 16%; family abandoned by mother, 9%; lack of home/food, 12%; neglect or abuse, 83%; abandoned by family, 5%; attraction to city life, 62%.*

Consequently, both economic and non economic factors are part of the equation and, unfortunately, plenty of theories have analysed the causal factors as mutually exclusive (Foy, 2001), and did not consider the complex mixture of factors that pushes and pulls children to the streets.

Lucchini (1997) tries to make some order in this complexity, by building up a multifactoral model, where he defines 3 levels of analysis: **macro-, meso-, and microscopic.**

- **Factors at the micro (individual) level:** escape from an individual situation (hunger, shame, abuse), failure at school, lack of money or feeling unwanted, desire of autonomy, etc.
- **Factors at the meso (family) level**: the breakdown or disintegration of the family structure, single-parent families, remarriage, desertion, poverty, child abuse, child neglect, family violence, lack of adequate care, etc.
- **Factors at Macro-level**: politics, economy, housing, health and welfare services, unemployment and rapid urbanization.

This multifactoral model does show the complexity of the analysis. Whereas the earlier assumptions identified two causes, **poverty** and **family breakdown**, the street children being either "throwaways" or "runaways" the new thinking about street children uses multifactoral models to explain the street children predicament (Ennew and Kruger, 2003; Foy, 2001). Indeed, "most poor families do not break down, nor do they inevitably abandon or discard their children and using simplified models can lead to the stigmatization of children and their families" (Ennew and Kruger, 2003).

Finally, Lucchini (1997) highlights the importance of considering the fact of leaving home as a process, whose length varies according to different parameters.

We therefore witness how the problem is diverse and complex, and needs therefore to be tackled in its complexity.

4. CONSEQUENCES, OR WHY IT MERITS OUR ATTENTION?

The consequences of the street children predicament are numerous, both for the child and the society at large, and can be categorized as social as well as economic.

Undeniably, life in the streets can be extremely damaging for the child. Our first section sketched some characteristics of the street children, and indicated how they are experiencing health problems, neglect, violence and abuse. Indeed, those children may experience some forms of exclusion from the official and institutional parts of society and rarely treated with respect, their views and opinions being seldom taken into consideration by anyone (West, 2003). Life in the streets prevents also children from getting education, and the dilemma between "education" and "work" is a complex one. As pointed by West (2003), "work" is not the only reason that prevents

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[26] Quoted in Leroux and Smith (1998)

children from getting education, as children do not generally see it as mutually exclusive, but the core explaining factor might be the discrimination, as the official and institutional parts of society exclude them partly because of their "perceived" picture of criminal.

We have also pointed out how much work is an integrated part of their daily life, and that many children are working for their families and themselves. Moreover, many are experiencing very hazardous working conditions, being therefore economically exploited, impacting therefore their development.

Combining social consequences as well as economical exploitation, we could assert that street children are living in an extreme poverty situation, Marshall (nd)[27] defining childhood poverty as *"growing up without an adequate livelihood, without opportunities for human development, without family and community structures that nurture and protect children, and growing up without opportunity for voice."* So, severe and chronic poverty[28] are both a cause and a consequence of the street children predicament.

Secondly, the street children issue has an impact on the society at large. Indeed, some street children in some parts of the world can be found in the drug trade, as they are cheaper to hire, and the majority of them do use chemical inhalants, such as solvents, adhesives and fuel gases, local drugs, or even alcohol and tobacco (Blanc, 1994). Some studies report e.g. that 75 percent of street children in Brazil, and increasing numbers in the Philippines, Kenya and Italy use dangerous substances (Alexander and al., 1993)[29]. This situation can increase considerably the criminality climate in some metropolitan cities. Moreover, when street children come into contact with the "bourgeoisie", it can generate unfortunate economic, political and social consequences, including some that are extremely damaging to the social order, as they are often perceived as threats to property and physical integrity (Moura, 1997).

However, stating this must not push us to blame and shame those children, as this is only true in some parts of the world and for some street children, but this argument must give incentive to governments to find a sustainable and effective way of acting, first for the well-being of children, and second for the well-being of all the society. Besides, many have outlined the intergenerational transmission of poverty in developing countries, describing how a poor child will have a higher likelihood to become a poor adult (see e.g. Moore, 2001) ; and the impact of adult poverty on a society is never good, as it is damaging the economic and social development of the society. This calls therefore for a necessity to invest in children and youth at risk. In such a perspective, the World Bank also points out how political and economic costs of not investing in children and youth are high, and that the sooner this investment is done, the higher will be the returns (World Bank, 2005).

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[27] Quoted in Iglebaeck and Hassan (2005)
[28] For more explanations about the concepts of severe and chronic poverty, see Hulme, Shepherd and Moore (2001)
[29] Quoted in Blanc (1994)

5. SOME IDEOLOGICAL ISSUES: CAN (STREET) CHILDREN WORK?

5.1. Child labour and child work: definitions

In 1973, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), under the *Minimum Age Convention* (Convention n°138), set the minimum legal age for starting work at 15 years old (and developing countries could set it at 14 years)[30].

In its definition, ILO considers work as the process which produces a marketable output. Domestic work is therefore not considered in their statistics.

The ILO estimates that the number of children aged 5-14 years in 2004 who were economically active was 190.7 million, while the number classed as child labourers was 165.8 million, which nevertheless represents a decline comparing to the figures of 2000 (ILO, 2006).

As we notice, these statistics make a distinction between children who are **economically active** (i.e. children working more than 1 hour but less than 14

Box 1.4. : EAC and child labour

ILO/IPEC (2003 :46)

hours a week in non hazardous conditions) and **child labourers** (i.e. children working either 14 hours or more in non-hazardous conditions, or 1or more hours of hazardous work per week). However, for all the children aged 5-11 years, being economically active is synonymous with being a child labourer. Thus, for 12-14 years, child labour is more restrictively defined (N.H.W.[31] ≥ 14 hours or H.W. ≥ 1 hour).

In the 1990s, the ILO took up the distinction between *labour* and *work,* in order to separate the 'harmful' forms of children's work from the 'tolerable', on the basis of hazard (Liebel, 2004; Woodhead, 1999). It lead to the adoption of the ILO Convention 182 in 1999, defining as hazardous work "*any activity or occupation that, by its nature or type, has or leads to adverse effects on child's safety, health (physical or mental) and moral development*" (ILO, 2006). The previous figure highlights the difference between a child labourer and an economically active child.

On the other side, child work refers to the work done occasionally and which can have positive effects on the children. Indeed, *"not all work is harmful to children. Some work activities develop practical knowledge and skills; and work also reinforces many children's sense of self-esteem and unity with their families"* (Jo Boyden et al., 2004).

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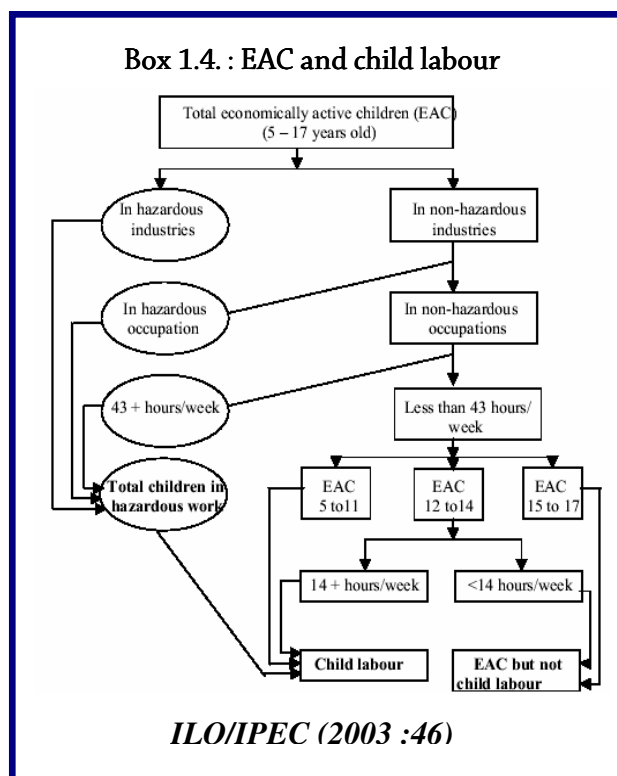
[30] Unfortunately, fewer than 50 countries have committed themselves to making it part of the national laws (Ennew, 2000)

[31] (N).H.W. : (Non) hazardous work

5.2. Ideological considerations

Myers (1991)[32], a famous specialist in child development, points out how the question of working children has often been seen as a dichotomy, depending on the beliefs of each. Let us review the two sets of approaches that are part of the vision on child work:

⊕ Approach 1: Abolitionist perspective or child-centered approach

> _**Description**_ - "_The crux of the problem is in the fact that children are allowed to engage in economic activity. They argue that childhood should be reserved primarily for study and play, with work consisting (only) of light chores in the home. Moreover, even if children are not mistreated, their participation in the work force weakens adult wages and employment and is thus a factor that generates the very poverty that forces them to work. A working child is considered by definition to be at risk (...) and the ultimate goal should be the elimination of all child labour_". (Myers, 1991)

As pointed by many experts, this approach is based on the unthinking adoption of the 'modern' western conception of childhood where "childhood is sacralised as a privileged phase of life properly dedicated only to play and schooling, as a time in which children have the right to protection and education but not to autonomy or participation" (Boyden and Myers, 1998). This approach takes mainly its roots from mainstream western developmental psychology theory where few considerations are being given to the cultural aspect of child development (ibid). Indeed, "it has long been the explicit goal of the West to crystallize such ideas in the fashioning of a universal system of rights for the child" (Boyden, 1990). Within this ideal, the family and school were regarded as the appropriate settings for the nurture, protection and socialisation of children (Foy, 2001). Although this approach may have positive effects, as education and family are two important notions for all children, this approach has the risk of not perceiving working children as a social group acting or able to act in an organised manner as protagonists (Liebel, 2004: 8). Regarding street children, the scope of solutions may therefore be limited, as school and family can not always be a viable solution.

Box 1.5.: What is a hazardous work?

- Children are too young to be doing this kind of work
- The hours are too long
- Children are too small for the tasks and tools involved
- They are paid too little
- The work is too hard for a small growing body
- Too much responsibility
- The work is too dull and repetitive and does not stimulate their development
- The working environment is too dangerous
- They are too unfree (i.e. there has been no choice about whether or not to work, or what kind of work to do; they can not leave; they loose their self-esteem)

From Ennew (2000)

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[32] Quoted in Liebel (2004)

⊕ Approach 2: Subject-oriented approach

Description: *"(Here), the work, under appropriate protection and supervision, is an essential vehicle of juvenile socialization, training and self-esteem. (…) The economic participation of children is therefore acceptable as long as it is consistent with healthy development and that the real problem is the special vulnerability of children when they enter the labor market. Although they support the elimination of child participation in hazardous work, they feel that youngsters wishing to work should have the right to do so. (…) To them, the central issue is how to protect the safety and development of children who work. (Myers, 1991)*

Criticizing the traditional abolitionist perspective, a new movement of child advocates emerged, witnessing that the abolitionist perspective did change few things and that children are still continuing to work (Moore, 1999)[33]

They point out the importance to see children as *subjects* who, "*precisely because they are different from adults and have their own specific interests and needs, must be able to decide themselves about their affaires, and should be supported in this*". (Liebel, 2004: 8).

This means considering working children as "social actors" who through their activity

> ## Box 1.6.: Some positive aspects of children's work
>
> **Work can:**
>
> - Increase children's sense of responsibility
>
> - Build their self-esteem
>
> - Enhance children's status as family members and citizens
>
> - Provide them with an opportunity to learn the skills of their parents and neighbours
>
> - Make children feel less marginalized, especially when combined with regular schooling.
>
> - Provide an important an gradual initiation into adult life
>
> From Blanc (1994: 346)

contribute to the preservation and further development of human life and the society in which they live (ibid).

In order to do so, it needs to replace the narrow view of children's work as exploitation by a wider view that takes account of its multifarious influences on children's growth and development (Boyden, 1998:11). Under this approach, children "*are not merely recipients of an experience, but do mainly contribute to its development*" (ibid: 11). In such a context, it is possible that "children seek and value work as a source of learning, social acceptance, independence, feelings of accomplishment and self-worth, or other personal benefits beyond strictly economic considerations" (ibid: 11). See Box...

As pointed by Woodhead (1999:14), the problem comes from the conceptualization of "child development".

He enlightens how "studying child development means studying Western concepts of childhood" and highlights how the field how developmental psychology is an ethnocentric one dominated by a Euro-American perspective, with no place to "work" in their model. Indeed, referring to Vygotsky, the author points out how every child is born into a particular social/cultural/historical context and how their development is therefore circumscribed by processes of maturation, but there is no such thing as a "natural environment" for their development (ibid: 18). Moreover, he warns about policies which are aimed to generalize "meeting children's needs", "promoting children's

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[33] Quoted in Foy (2001)

healthy development", or "enabling them to reach their full potential", and which distract attention away from more fundamental issues about the many different expressions of need, routes to health and human potentials (Woodhead, 1997 quoted in Woodhead, 1999: 49)

Applying a subject-oriented approach means avoiding the "rescue strategy", and building upon the capacities of the street children (as underlined in our section 1 "characteristics"). Williams (1993)[34], for instance, urges interventions to be directed at changing the *capabilities* of those for whom street use is, to some degree, a positive aspect of their existence. Consequently, Foy (2001), referring to Tolfree (1998) underlines that the overall objective is to provide this group with the opportunities and experiences which will enable them to become economically productive and eventually self-supporting, to facilitate their survival in the world of work and independent living. This will therefore be a move 'beyond conventions, towards empowerment' (Boyden and al, 1998;87).

⊕ Operational implications: towards a model of child development

The following of our paper will be built on a subject oriented approach, implying that we will seek solutions to alleviate the present suffering of street children, whilst looking for ways to improve their future, by constantly building on their *capabilities*. This approach advocates a holistic model of child development[35], which starts from considering what matters to street children and which seeks solutions which are consistent with their livelihoods strategies. As pointed by Conticini (2004), this will guarantee an intervention directed to strengthen children's own solutions rather than merely substitute for them. In order to do that, the following of our paper will try to listen to the street children's needs.

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[34] Quoted in Foy (2001)

[35] We will adopt the definition of "child development" raised by Petren and Hart (2000) and quoted in Conticini (2004): "Child development is a holistic process which underpins not only physical growth and health, but also economic, cultural, mental, moral and spiritual development. It represents the process of realising each child's inherent potential".