

# YOUR World Research

Insecurity and Uncertainty: Marginalised youth living rights in fragile and conflict affected situations in Ethiopia and Nepal

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS YOUNG PEOPLE IN STREET SITUATIONS

May 2019

**act:onaid**  
NEPAL



**Goldsmiths**  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

**ChildHope**  
Inspired by children; challenging injustice



**Addis Ababa University**  
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Youth Uncertainty Rights (YOUR) World Research has carried out detailed qualitative and participatory research with some of the most marginalised young people across eight fragile environments in Ethiopia and Nepal. YOUR World Research shows that, when we include youth by listening to their views, a picture emerges of creativity and innovative ideas in the face of significant challenges. The research took place in 2016-2019, and has generated new knowledge about how marginalised young people perceive, navigate, negotiate and respond to uncertainty. By building on youth strategies, the research illuminates our understanding of young people's realities and rights, and how to support them to confront their feelings and experiences of marginalisation and find pathways out of poverty.

In Ethiopia and Nepal the national teams worked with a total of 1,000 young people including 500 in-depth and focused case studies – 500 young people and 250 case studies in each country. Four sites in each country provide evidence from youth in rural earthquake or drought affected fragile environments, conflict situations and of young lives on the streets of capital cities and smaller towns. Young people also provide illustrations of their journeys and reasons for migration in search of alternative futures.

In Ethiopia the research sites were: Addis Ketema in slums and with street connected youth; Hetosa in the drought affected zone; Woreta a transit town for migrants; and rural kebele's of Fogera Woreda, from where young people migrate to nearby towns. In Nepal the research sites were: Kathmandu to work in slums and with street connected youth; Sindhupalchowk in the earthquake affected area; and in Kapilvastu in the plains (Terai) urban and rural localities, with migration characteristic of each location.

## OVERVIEW

The number and problems of young people who are street connected or in street situations was found to be a major concern in both Ethiopia and Nepal. Although this is an issue predominantly in the capital cities, the young people of various ages had often migrated from rural areas, which indicates some of the diversity of youth in street situations. The terms 'street situations' and 'street connected youth' are used here interchangeably in recognition of the multiple dimensions, characteristics, backgrounds and lives of young people for whom the street is a focal point in some aspect of their regular living.

Street connected youth are not homogenous: they include young women, men, youth of third gender or genderfluid, and disabled youth, who are of varied ages, ethnicities/castes and backgrounds. Their street situations vary, from sleeping and living on the street, to employment or work based on the street, to use of the street for daily survival, becoming exploited and often misusing drugs. The reasons for their circumstances vary from escaping physical and sexual abuse and violence, migration and unsuccessful attempts to find employment, to family poverty, difficulties at school, status discrimination. When they are in street situations they experience further marginalisation, stigma and discrimination and are vulnerable to violence from peers, adults, and local authorities including the police, likely to be pushed into exploitative work in the informal sector or hassled when attempting to develop their own small businesses, vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation and to drug and other substance misuse. Their lives in street situations are often mobile, changing, insecure and uncertain.

In Ethiopia research was conducted with young people in street situations in Woreta and Addis Ketema. In Nepal, changes in government policy prohibits contact with youth currently in street situations, and research was conducted with young people recently street connected but placed in a shelter home run by non-government organisations.

## NEPAL

In Nepal, young people became street connected in Kathmandu through migration from other parts of the country or from home in the city, mainly in order to escape family or community violence, abuse and poverty. While some initially enjoyed the freedom, social life with peers and escape from family they found in street situations, they also rapidly experienced and became concerned about fear of violence and rape, exploitation, vulnerability to trafficking, including violence from authorities. Because it was often difficult to find work, some became involved in begging and petty crime to survive. They experienced exclusion, stigma and discrimination, and many began to use and misuse drugs and various substances to alleviate their situation, which exacerbated some problems.

Many young people left their family as a child, to escape abuse at home. For example, Tara ran away from violence and poverty at the age of 10 years, and spent periods in street situations and in shelter homes before settling in a home. *"In the street I stayed for two years, at that time I was only 10 years old. My father used to drink alcohol and beat me a lot.....Both of my parents did not care for us, they have neglected us, so I learnt to go to the bus and started begging over there."* (Tara, young woman aged 17 years, Kathmandu). A 16 year old young man, Kamel, left home in the Terai (southern plains area) at the age of 5 years with his older brother after their mother died, father remarried and they were neglected. When NGOs rescued and returned them, each time the neglect continued and they left again to travel, even to India, and survive through begging, until their father and step-mother died and they could not be returned again. Another 16 year old young man, Sajan, left home at 8 years because of being beaten in the community and the threat of further violence after he stole a copper wire from a shop.

Most street connected youth and young people living in slums have questioned the relevance of formal education, and some gave up school. *"I dropped out from the school with friends and started to live in the street for five years"* (Laxmi, young woman aged 15). They saw the lack of work available, and did not see how schooling could help them earn a living. Jay's family migrated from eastern Nepal to Kathmandu, but *"My family are poor. No money to fulfil daily necessities and requirements, and parents used to fight and drink alcohol. There was no care or concern for me."* (Jay, young man, 16 years old)

A few preferred street situations to life at home. *"Friendship, network and peer enjoyment in the street without any hesitation was the main attraction to children in the street."* (Mahesh young man, 16 years) *"Life in street is quite free and we enjoy a lot, although there are some uncertainties. Sometimes no food and no place to sleep. Sometimes, people feed us."* (Binita, young woman, 20 years)

In street situations, children and young people face exploitation from peers, adults and authorities. *"When I was in the street, there was fear that an older group maybe they capture all the money from me"* (Jay, young man, 16 years old). Both young men and women reported being forced into sex by men who found them on the street. *"Once, an adult man took me somewhere in hotel room and forced for sex too. It was very hard time for me. Though, at the end, I run away from the hotel"* (Kamal, young man 16 years) Many mentioned fear of rape: *"there are many problems, including clothes to wear and fear of rape"* (Rajani, young woman, aged 15). They also reported fear of trafficking and violence. *"Possibility for trafficking, elder domination, child labour, child abuse and fighting in the street are major insecure areas. Similarly, children and young people used to have dendrite, drug etc. Rape, harassment and sexual harassment are major insecurity areas"* (Mahesh young man, 16 years)

Most feared the police, for example *"Police used to beat us every night when we were in the street"* (Sagar, young man, 15 years), and *"I felt insecure seeing police in the street as they sometimes hit me."* (Kamal, young man 16 years). But one young woman said *"police is not a threat to us, because they are also like friends to us."* (Rajani, young woman, aged 15)

Alcohol and drug abuse is increasing as marginalised young people seek to escape insecurity and experiences of abuse, exclusion and rejection. *"I felt marginalized and dominated when people used the word "Khate" when I was in the street. I saw there was other vulnerable children who are working as domestic workers, as conductors, drug users etc who need support."* (Jay, young man, 16 years old). The main substance used is dendrite, a glue: *"Whenever I took 'Dendrite' I did not use to feel hunger. It used to make me 'Jhyap' (Dizzy)... With our own money, we did not buy good food instead, we used to go to the glue shop and buy 'Dendrite'."* (Sajan, young man, 16 years). The solvent is known for hallucinations, but also reducing hunger pangs and cold. *"Gradually I took it and it became habitual."* (Sagar, young man, 15 years).

## ETHIOPIA

In Ethiopia, young people's street connection often involved their families in two different situations. A large group of young people had run away from family abuse, but other young people had moved or ended up there in seeking work to support and contribute to families. Their experiences may include migration, problems in finding work, exploitative employment, and they are generally grappling with extreme poverty, discrimination and marginalisation. All of this is exacerbated by lack of support, opportunities, employment and access to services. Substance use and abuse is widespread as a means of alleviating their situation. This in turn becomes problematic and creates further difficulties.

Many urban marginalised youth have grown up in towns or cities or migrated to them in search of better futures. Some of those who migrate to urban sites of Woreda and Addis Ketema went with aspirations to find different ways to meet adult expectations and to support their families. Some sought to emulate their role models who are successful migrants. Through migration they are not seeking to break family and traditional community bonds, but want to feel proud of what they can contribute. However, some felt a burden of heavy expectations to provide for families in the face of high unemployment, landlessness and environmental fragility.

But when young people reach urban sites, whether by themselves or with family members, they often find it does not meet their creative aspirations. Some try to survive on very low pay in informal work such as hotels, or on the streets; they may then find more lucrative but exploitative employment, for example as commercial sex workers or become involved in criminal activity such as pick pocketing, vandalism and theft. Other young people find solace in substance use that can turn into addiction and alcoholism.

Yet, most street connected young people have come into this situation as a result of abuse, discrimination and problems in their families and communities. They receive their most significant support from other young people in street situations. They often work and live together for security and peer support, which provides some substitution for the love lost from their families. They say they experience psychological gratification through contact with other young people from street situations. They are alienated from life in the community, including local youth centres, and from local services. *"We [street connected young people] don't get the chance to take part in the affairs of the community. We are not taken as benefitting group of people by the local administration. There is a youth Centre in the Woreda. However, street youth hardly go there as they are regarded as outsiders."* (Zeru, young man aged 23 years)

In street situations, young men and women feel insecure, out of control of their lives and uncertain of how to survive day-to-day, let alone earn a living. They are marginalised and feel alienated from everyday social and economic life of the community. They suffer from the widespread discriminatory social labelling of young people who are in street situations as thieves and drug addicts. Particularly in the major market and bus station in Addis Ketema, but also elsewhere, street connected youth find they are often regarded as the primary suspects for any criminal activity. They reported non-judicial torture and imprisonment.

Even when street connected youth do have support amongst themselves, it is difficult finding someone who can and will help them get employment. They often have to become involved in informal activities which don't require relationships or other collateral. Some turn to exploitative work, for example commercial sex work, and/or the use of substances to relieve their difficulties. *"After I started working as a commercial sex worker, my life became all the same. The payment is very minimal and couldn't bring change in my way of life. Rather my life became a routine and boring one. This business made my life certain. I usually woke up in the middle of the day, drink coffee and chew khat and when I have customers I will work."* (Kokebe, young woman aged 24 years from Addis Ketema)

Government and non-government organisations have schemes for supporting street connected youth and vocational training, but there are still problems of finding jobs, very limited employment opportunities, and no guarantee of work on completion of training schemes. *"We were mobilised and got trained for two weeks in paving roads using cobblestones by the local government. However, we have not yet started working. Although they promised to offer us jobs right away it all turned out to be a lie. As the cost of living is rising, we found it very difficult to pay for house rentals and be able to eat three times a day working in the informal sector"* (Meron, young woman aged 23 years)

Various substances are used as a way of coping with life on the street, including glue and benzene sniffing, local liquor drinking, *Khat* chewing, tobacco smoking and in some instances marijuana use. Street connected youth says substances help them forget their vulnerability, reduce hunger and cold, offer entertainment, provide courage and a feeling of belonging with other young people. But the use of substances has detrimental effects such as losing confidence, boredom, feelings of shame, depression and hopelessness, nervousness, sleeping difficulties, sweating and mental fatigue. According to young people, substances are easily accessible and affordable despite laws prohibiting sale to minors, and there is a lack of detoxification and rehabilitation programmes.

Many street connected young people become involved in the justice system, often because of discrimination in communities and by authorities towards them. Some report violence from some policemen, even if innocent or if they have committed petty crimes. *"I have confidence in the fact that street children have minimal involvement in crimes, especially theft. There are some youth who live in the area who come to the bus station for robbery and fraud as if it's their legal work. They commit crime and go away immediately. The policemen come and point their finger at us. We will be arrested and suffer on something we don't have any involvement in. Youth from the surroundings have somewhere to hide. We stay here as we don't have places to hide."* (Zenabu, young man aged 22 years, Addis Ketema)

On the other hand, some youth appreciated community members and police trying to work with them to minimise crime in their area. *"The security condition of the vicinity was fragile before. Now the community is working very closely with the police. The youth are part of the effort to minimize criminal activities in the area. The local administration allows the youth to work in temporary parking lots in the evening. The youth also patrol the neighbourhood while watching over the cars."* (Yaye, young man aged 26 years, Addis Ketema)

In Ethiopia a group of street connected young people held a workshop as part of the National Seminar in March 2019. In discussions, they identified the severest problems of street connected youth as: lack of shelter; disagreements with the police over sleeping on the street; addiction; shortage of food. They identified four more severe problems: high rates of inflation; not having an ID card; not being able to save enough money to go back and visit their family or the city they came from; fighting with authorities over the need to have a business licence to do small businesses like shoe shining. One further problem is the increasing number of street youth and the resultant decreasing number of job opportunities.

# KEY MESSAGES FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The National Seminar in Ethiopia in March 2019 included a day workshop involving some 40 street connected young people aged 15 to 25 years. These included some (20) who work and live on the streets, some (13) who work and sleep on the streets, and seven disabled youth who tend to be street connected. The young people prepared a declaration, a set of messages for policy makers and practitioners, to show what they felt should be changed.

## DECLARATION BY YOUTH WHO LIVE AND WORK ON THE STREETS

1. The government should revise the current street connected institution-based intervention programmes.
2. The current institutionalised intervention programme, in which street connected are taken away out of the city for training in the regions, created fear among those who work and live on the streets.
3. Provision of opportunities to work: employment opportunities for street youth should be created by taking their financial and mental capacities into consideration.
4. Provision of seed money for those who want to go back and reunify with their family. The family may not have the capacity to provide the basic amenities for youth. The government and NGOs who work on reunification should consider giving the family or the youth input so that their lives are more sustainable.
5. Awareness creation for the community about the life of the youth is vital. The community think of street connected youth as burdens, drug addicts and thieves. There should be dialogue and community conversations that show street youth are not different from any other youth in the community.
6. Capacity building, and empowerment of youth through the provision of different services and facilities, is vital. However, they should always be supported by employment opportunities as without this there will be no visible change.
7. Managing food price inflation: street youth assert that it has become difficult for them to eat three times a day due to food price inflation. The inflation of food price forces them to eat leftover food collected from hotels and restaurants.
8. Provision of life skills training is vital for street connected youth.
9. Ethnic-based division among youth is also negatively affecting the life of street connected youth. The government should find solutions to help with the problem of ethnic-based group clashes among street youth.

**Employment:** once young people are on the street, services need to take youth perspectives into account to engage with, and find ways to work with, the most marginalised, and to ensure provision is non-discriminatory and inclusive. Employment support in the informal sector could offer alternatives to street connected youth and their families. If young people return to communities having not succeeded in employment or migration, mediation may be important in mending broken family bonds so that the youth can feel that they belong.

**Shelter homes:** in Nepal additional policy considerations involve the need to further develop policy and practice around the concept of transitional homes. Shelter homes have collected street connected children and young people and been used by them for many years. Children have often not engaged with the place and some experienced moving many times between homes and street situations before settling in.

Shelter homes are providing a safe environment for street connected young people and basic education. But they feel insecure about leaving the shelter homes after their designated 'two years' period. Youth in Nepal recommended providing support and after-care policy and programme along with life skills, livelihood and vocational skills training.

**Substance use:** in both Ethiopia and Nepal there is a need for appropriate policy and practice to address drug and substance use, which is not limited to young people in street situations. This needs to ensure that youth perspectives are understood, why they use substances and what would help them to overcome use and addiction. More research is needed towards youth-centred policies that will work.

**Prevention:** Policy and practice needs also to look at prevention, for example in terms of education, through family and community life, and diversion from and in the youth justice system. Many young people become street connected because of abuse and violence in the family, at home and in communities. There is a need to develop policy and practice to address the problems of violence, abuse, and exploitation particularly within families, providing support for youth and families. Services should include social support schemes for orphans and disintegrated families, and engage with children and young people through developing their participation in communities.

**Education:** the relevance of education and school for children and young people needs review to both address problems of dropping out and to make curriculum useful, with attention to vocational training. Many young people in street situations become involved with the police and justice system and this requires significant attention with aims of diversion. Authorities such as the police need training in working with young people to understand their complex realities.

**Recognition:** street connected youth should be engaged, involved and valued as members of the community. The experiences of abuse, discrimination, vulnerability and pressures on livelihoods, can alienate street connected youth from the local community in which they live. It is important to recognise the value and potential contributions of all young people to communities. Design services to engage with street-connected young people and support them to connect with local residents and local government, developing mutual relationships with peers, becoming involved in development work and participating in their community.

**Youth policy:** government policies to clear the streets from youth and support them in institutions can be counter-productive in supporting youth agency and innovation in their strategies out of poverty. One of the main strategies for the most marginalised youth in order for them to survive and try to support their families, in both Ethiopia and Nepal, is to work in the informal sector. If they are working hard on the streets and sometimes needing to sleep and live there, then authorities need to work with them rather to assume they are anti-social and involved in criminal activities. Their small enterprises and creative survival ideas need to be supported, and they need help to get out of exploitative and illegal work through working together on alternative paid work.

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