Submission to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' report on the right of the child to birth registration[1]

1. Introduction

1.1 The Consortium for Street Children (CSC)[2] is the leading international network dedicated to realising the rights of street 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 policy and best practice worldwide.

1.2 CSC worked in close collaboration with the UN OHCHR, UNICEF and Aviva plc. to produce the UN OHCHR report on the *Protection and promotion of the rights of children working and/or living on the street* (A/HRC/19/35) presented to the UN Human Rights Council in March 2012.

2. Street children

2.1 Definitions of street children

There are various definitions of street children. The label, street child, is increasingly recognised to be a socially constructed category that in reality does not form a clearly defined, homogenous population or phenomenon. Research and practice have surfaced an enormous variation in children's experiences and considerable overlap between different groups: for example some children live on the streets all the time, others only occasionally or seasonally, while others move between home, the street and welfare shelters. Some retain strong links with their families whilst others have broken or lost all contact. 'Runaways' in developed countries include children sometimes described as 'detached', who in less developed countries would be considered street children. A recent definition to encompass the variety of experiences children have with the street focuses on the *connections* children make with the street and the relationships they form whilst there: a street-connected child is a child for whom the street is a central reference point, one which plays a significant role in his/her everyday life and identity[3].

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[1] The following CSC network members contributed to this submission: Moroccan Children's Trust, Dhaka Ahsania Mission UK, Street Child Africa, and The Hummingbird Trust.

[2] For more information on CSC please visit www.streetchildren.org. CSC currently has 80 network members working in over 130 countries.

[3] This definition is drawn from Dr. Sarah Thomas de Benitez's Global Research Paper on street children that informed the UN OHCHR report on the *Protection and promotion of the rights of children working and/or living on the street,* (2012), available here: http://www.streetchildrenresources.org/resources/research-paper-on-the-promotion-and-protection-of-the-rights-of-children-working-andor-living-on-the-streets/

2.2 Numbers of Street Children

Estimating numbers of street children is fraught with difficulties. In 1989, UNICEF estimated 100 million children were growing up on urban streets around the world. Fourteen years later UNICEF reported: 'The latest estimates put the numbers of these children as high as 100 million'. Even more recently: 'The exact number of street children is impossible to quantify, but the figure almost certainly runs into tens of millions across the world. It is likely that the numbers are increasing'. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' (OHCHR) report on the *Protection and promotion of the rights of children working and/or living on the street*[4] highlights the difficulties in determining numbers of street children and advocates for greater combined efforts to collect data of street children.

3.   Barriers to birth registration

3.1 The most complex challenge that street children face is negative perceptions of them from other members of society. These negative perceptions lead to discrimination that impedes street children's access to their human rights. For instance, street children commonly lack access to education, health care and legal services. Often these services are denied as street children do not have the necessary identity documents to prove that they are a citizen and therefore entitled to receive these public services. A recommendation of the OHCHR study on the *Protection and promotion of the rights of children working and/or living on the streets* is that States should:

> *Ensure that free, accessible, simple and expeditious birth registration is available to all children at all ages*[5].

3.2 Street children are marginalised and vulnerable. Problems present within wider society are exacerbated in street situations. Birth registration therefore serves as a vital social protection tool for street children. Birth registration and accompanying identity documents provide street children with an official status and therefore the ability to access social services. However, street children struggle to gain birth registration.

3.3 In many countries, to obtain a birth certificate, a child's parents need to produce their own identity documents and marriage certificate. For street children, this can be difficult whether or not they have retained connections with their parents. Many street children are completely separated from their families and thus have a complete lack of access to birth registration processes. Furthermore, even where street children live with their families on the street birth registration can still be difficult if his/her parents do not have the correct identity documentation themselves, as can often be the case for street families.

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[4] The final report can be accessed here: http://www.streetchildrenresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/OHCHR-protection-promotion.pdf

[5] UN OHCHR study on the *Protection and Promotion of the rights of children working and/or living on the streets*, (2012) paragraph 67, p.21, available here: http://www.streetchildrenresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/OHCHR-protection-promotion.pdf

3.4 The right to free birth registration was emphasised in UN Human Rights Council's Resolution 16/12, *Rights of the child: a holistic approach to the protection and promotion of the rights of children working and/or living on the street* (2011):

> *Ensuring birth registration of all children immediately after birth through universal, free, accessible, simple, expeditious and effective registration procedures; raising awareness of the importance of birth registration at the national, regional and local levels; facilitating late registration of birth; and ensuring that children who have not been registered have access without discrimination to health care, protection, education, safe drinking water and sanitation, and basic services[6].*

3.5 Despite this there is often an administrative cost associated with it, preventing many from accessing birth registration. When confronted with the cost, it is often a burden that street children and their families are unable to bear; particularly when the choice is between gaining an identity document or the ability to purchase food[7].

3.6 Moreover, the process of obtaining identity documents is often lengthy, vast and time-consuming[8]. Without additional support, street children struggle to navigate the system.

3.7 The discrimination that street children encounter on a daily basis is reinforced by their lack of access to birth registration and identity documents. Their lack of official identity is implicit discrimination and exacerbates the negative perceptions about street children – that they are not citizens. Their lack of official status heightens the vulnerabilities that street children experience and exacerbates their marginalisation.

3.8 As outlined above, street children cannot access basic services such as education and healthcare. They are also therefore more likely to work in the informal economy – unprotected by legislation and therefore more vulnerable to abuse from their employers. Street children without identity documents are much more susceptible to being trafficked or recruited by armed militias, particularly in times of war and natural disasters.

3.9 The psychological impact of being unregistered can also exacerbate street children's vulnerabilities; some have no knowledge of their place of origin and can lack a sense of belonging resulting in low self-esteem. It can also be a cause of children forming stronger attachments to the street.

3.10 In Bangladesh, one street girl commented,
> *'[w]ith the kind of life we lead on the street, we forget that we also have an identity. I know [identity documents have] a lot of value and [they] will be of use in every step in my future'[9].*

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[6] UN HRC Resolution 16/12, (2011), paragraph 3(a), p.3, available here: http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Children/Study/Pages/childrenonthestreet.aspx
[7] This is based on information sent to CSC from Street Child Africa
[8] This is based on information sent to CSC from Moroccan Children's Trust

4. Practices that improve rates of birth registration

4.1 Some organisations that work directly with street children have programmes to facilitate obtaining birth registration and identity documents. These range from awareness-raising campaigns to tailored, individual support.

4.2 Awareness-raising campaigns focus on promoting the benefits in communities of having identity documents which include access to social services. Such campaigns often involve outreach to specific marginalised communities. In Zimbabwe, a participatory rapid assessment of street children found that 70% did not have birth certificates. A specific recommendation was for mobile birth registration to be conducted[10] to increase the rate of birth registration amongst street children.

4.3 Many drop-in-centres for street children offer support to acquire identity documents. This is directly through social workers at the centre and the individual support available can alleviate some of the difficulties street children experience in confronting the often vast, administrative and bureaucratic birth registration systems in place. Many organisations note the complex and time-consuming process to acquire identity documents. This is exacerbated by a lack of State capacity and resources to create these documents. More support is needed from States to make the process more expeditious.

5. Case Study: Maryam

5.1 Maryam is 11 years old and she should be approaching the end of her primary education. In fact, she doesn't go to school and hasn't done so for several years, because of an unstable and disrupted home life. Maryam's mother and father separated three years ago and, since then, they have been in dispute over custody of Maryam and her four younger siblings. Unfortunately, neither parent is able to offer her the safe home environment she needs. Last year her father took all of the children away from their mother to live with him near Agadir. They stayed with him for several months, but he was eventually forced to return them to their mother's care. Maryam describes her father as 'a problem'. She says that he never does anything for her and her brothers and sisters and that he sometimes hits her. She wishes she had a better father who would help the children instead of obstructing them as her father does through his persistent refusal to support their application for ID papers.

5.2 Without these papers neither Maryam, nor her younger brother and sisters, are able to go to school. Thus, she spends every day at home where the family's current living conditions leave much to be desired. She lives with her 4 siblings, her mother and her mother's colleague, in a

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[9] Plan, *Count every child – the right to birth registration,* (2009), p.49, available here: http://www.streetchildrenresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/count-every-child-right-to-birth-registration.pdf

[10] Streets Ahead, Situational Analysis of Trajectories and Factors Leading to the Prevalence of Children Living and Working on the Streets of Harare*: a Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) of Jacha Area in Epworth, Harare, Zimbabwe,* (2007), p.12, available here: http://www.streetchildrenresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/analysis-of-factors-street-children.pdf

small apartment with only two rooms, a toilet and a kitchen. Her mother works a 12-hour day at the local hammam, but as the sole source of income she still struggles to provide a basic standing of living for her family. In their mother's absence, the four younger children (aged between 2 and 8 years) are all looked after by 11 year old Maryam. She cares for them, prepares their meals and also does the household chores. Maryam loves her mother and recognises that she works extremely hard in order to support her family. Yet, unsurprisingly, Maryam says that she doesn't want her life to be like her mother's.

5.3 In addition to an unstable home life, Maryam has other problems, which are currently being neglected. She suffers from an unidentified health problem, which causes her to experience palpitations, difficulty in breathing and dizziness after minor physical activity. So far, she has not seen a doctor and has no diagnosis for the condition. Maryam also has facial scarring from being accidentally burnt with a candle when she was two years old. Cosmetic surgery is the only way to remedy the scarring, but another consequence of not having ID papers is that Maryam is not automatically entitled to receive healthcare.

5.4 When talking about her hopes for the future, Maryam says that she'd like to get married. However, her experiences taking care of her younger siblings mean that at the age of 11 she has already decided that she doesn't want to have children. In her own words, it's a lot of responsibility. [Moroccan Children's Trust's] social workers found a practical, simple way to help ease some of Maryam's burden and give her back her childhood. – by helping to obtain ID papers for Maryam and her family.

5.5 This enabled our social work team to secure Maryam a visit to a healthcare worker, who has been able to assess and treat her ongoing medical problems. Obtaining ID papers has also allowed four of the children to enrol at school. Maryam's youngest sister enrolled at the preschool at Centre Afaq, where she is taken care of whilst Maryam is studying. At school Maryam was always a good student with a passion for drawing, and she has enjoyed returning to it in order to work on fulfilling her ambition to one day become a school principal. By offering her a place at our homework support classes, we have helped her through a difficult period of readjustment of returning to school and ensured that there is someone to recognise and celebrate her educational achievements with her.

Appendix – Example of specific project on street children and birth registration[11]

To raise awareness of the importance of obtaining ID papers and enable Moroccans to access papers	Raise awareness of the importance of obtaining ID papers among professionals in statutory services (education, health, administration)			
	Outputs	Staffing	Budget	Outcomes
	• Provide 7 training sessions (run by 'responsables') in institutions targeting school directors, teachers, nurses, midwives, GPs, cahier civil staff, Mukadem • Create a regional working group to discuss challenges to registration	-Team member 1+2 - Team of volunteers	• Salary (one year) • Costs for refreshments, trainer and materials at training session x 7 • Costs for materials and refreshments at working group meetings sessions x 4	- Number of people that attend - Number of children without ID on school roll - Number of children referred to get ID papers - Get information on referrals and their sources weekly
	Raise awareness of the importance of obtaining ID papers within the community, both with leaders and general public			
	Outputs	Staffing	Budget	Outcomes

[11] This project plan is taken from Moroccan Children's Trust's birth registration project that they began earlier this year.

	● Invite leaders of local organisations including Mosques and associations to training sessions ● Run monthly awareness raising events aimed at parents and children. Events will utilise varied media (ie. Drama, music) to share information and take place in target areas (ie. farms, Asarag) ● Recruit and train a team of volunteers to help run events	-Team member 1 -Team of volunteers	● Salary (one year) ● Costs for materials and refreshments at community events x11 ● Costs for refreshments and materials at volunteer training sessions x2	- Information collection at events – close the loop with the cahier civil - Questionnaires and focus groups at community events
	Promote the benefits of registration at a grassroots level			
	Outputs	Staffing	Budget	Outcomes
	● Run a public information campaign (utilising all forms of media communication) promoting the need and benefits of registration ● Provide sign-posting of required procedure to follow ● Create a communications kit for use by other organisations	-Team member 1 - Team of volunteers	● Salary (one year) ● Printed materials	- Question asked by clinic staff and by cahier civil staff

	Build capacity of other local actors to promote and support birth registration			
	Outputs	**Staffing**	**Budget**	**Outcomes**
	- Run 4 training sessions for staff of local associations - Create a toolkit for use by other associations	Team member 2	- Salary (one year) - Costs for refreshments and materials at training session x4 - Printing costs for manual	- Other associations to keep register of people who organise their ID papers - Toolkit - National distribution – evaluate who has used it

To support families in complex situations to secure ID papers	**Run a drop-in centre supporting referred families to obtain ID papers**			
	Outputs	**Staffing**	**Budget**	**Outcomes**
	- Create and sustain referral routes from local organisations - Criteria of complexity - Support x families to gain ID papers	Team member 2	- Salary (one year) - Office space and materials - Costs incurred obtaining papers (travel, administration cost)	- X families supported to obtain ID papers - Number of appropriate referrals according to the criteria
	Provide advice to other associations who are supporting vulnerable people to obtain ID papers			

	Outputs	Staffing	Budget	Outcomes
	- Create links with other organisations and publicise the work of the ID project - Offer phone and in-person support to other associations facing difficulties in the registration process	Team member 2	- Salary (one year - Office space and materials - Printed leaflets publicising drop-in centre to other associations	- monitor support provided - ask how useful support was

To contribute to research into the prevalence of unregistered births/ individuals in Morocco and the barriers to obtaining ID papers later in childhood	**Conduct quantitative and qualitative research within Taroudannt province to understand the scope and causes of unregistered children.**			
	Outputs	Staffing	Budget	Outcomes
	- Obtain registers of unregistered children from all schools in Taroudannt Province - Administer surveys to X families with unregistered children to understand causes	Team member 2	- Salary (1 year) - Office space and materials	- Questionnaires and focus groups at community events - Baseline data of unregistered children from schools and then continuous data collection of new cases from all schools throughout the year

	Produce case studies on the process for obtaining ID papers in a variety of situations			
	Outputs	**Staffing**	**Budget**	**Outcomes**
	• Write detailed 'suivi' of the complex cases supported to gain ID papers • Write case studies of cases highlighting challenges	• Team member 1	• Salary (1 year) • Office space and materials	- part of tool kit

To support the establishment of a system of registration which is permanent and sustained	**Liaise with local government to review the existing processes**			
	Outputs	**Staffing**	**Budget**	**Outcomes**

	Outputs	Staffing	Budget	Outcomes
	- Engage heads of departments in discussion about current procedures and challenges and operational problems - Run a conference attended by other associations working on ID papers and administrative 'responsables' to raise awareness of challenges and review existing processes - Create a paper of recommendations for procedural change	Team member 2	- Salary (1 year) - Office space and materials - Venue, refreshments and printed materials for conference	- laws and procedures changed - Conference run - Recommendations paper
	Lobby the local government to ensure systems match the local realities			

	• Hold regular meetings with 'responsables' to share specific case challenges • Provide local government with written case studies based on cases supported • Lobby administration to officially integrate registration into other services (ie. Immunisation campaigns, maternity wards) • Lobby government to make registration free	• Team member 2	• Salary (1 year)	
	Support the duty-bearers (government) to take responsibility for ensuring universal registration			
	Outputs	Staffing	Budget	Outcomes
	• Find a specified person within the administration to take the lead on the issue • Ensure administration involvement and attendance at awareness raising events • Encourage administration to identify	• Team member 2	• Salary (one year)	

	registration as a critical problem			

To build partnerships, coordination, cooperation, alliances and coalitions with international, national and local actors	**Work in partnership with international organisations to gain their expertise and experience**			
	Outputs	Staffing	Budget	Outcomes
	• Build links with Plan International, UNICEF and other international organisations	• Staff member 2	• Salary (one year)	
	Coordinate with national organisations working in the field of rights and advocacy to share information and expertise			
	Outputs	Staffing	Budget	Outcomes
	• Create a database of all organisations in Morocco working in the field of registration • Build links with all Associations and maintain regular communication	• Staff member 2	- Salary (one year)	- Linked to conference and its outcomes - Send toolkit to all contacts

		Staffing	Budget	Outcomes
	Engage with all relevant local actors to ensure widest possible reach and greatest possible impact of project			
	Outputs	Staffing	Budget	Outcomes
	- Create a database of all local organisations with an interest in registration - Build links with all local organisations and maintain regular contact - Involve local employers in dissemination of information - Engage local celebrities in the campaign	Staff member 2	- Salary (one year)	- Participation of local organisations in the data collection monitoring process!

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