

<b>Institution:</b> University of Dundee		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA14 Geography and Environmental Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Growing up on the streets: influencing global and local policy and practice with and for street children/youth		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2012-2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>  Lorraine van Blerk	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>  Professor of Human Geography	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>  Nov 2009 to present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016 - 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		

### 1. Summary of the impact

Growing up on the Streets has achieved sustained impact through representation of street children/youth in global policy. Research involving young people as participants and researchers produced findings that have been shared globally through the development of bespoke training and a *Knowledge Exchange Training Pack*. Impacts include 1,044 street children/youth from Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe directly informing the UN General Comment 21 on Children in Street Situations 2017 (UNGC21). The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child described their participation as “*inspirational*” and “*ground-breaking*”. Meaningful engagement of street children/youth in UNGC21 implementation continues and has influenced national policies for street children in countries including DRC, Brazil, India, Uruguay and the Philippines. The *Knowledge Exchange Training Pack* is being adapted into an Advocacy Resource Pack for 150 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in 135 countries.

### 2. Underpinning research

Despite widespread ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), street children’s rights are rarely recognised or upheld. Professor van Blerk has been working at the intersection of participation, rights and street children’s lives in African cities for 20 years. She was invited to present to the UNOHCHR Expert Consultation on Children Living and Working on the Streets 2011, advising that street children must be included as experts in the policy and research process.

Growing up on the Streets (GUOTS) was an 8-year (2012-19) academic–practitioner research collaboration between the University of Dundee and UK-based street children charity StreetInvest, exploring street children/youth’s socio-temporal lived experiences. GUOTS aimed to change policy discourse around street children/youth by involving them in in-depth research, and was innovative (1) in scale and scope: being longitudinal and qualitative, with breadth across countries and lives of street children/youth in African cities (Accra, Ghana; Bukavu, DRC; Harare, Zimbabwe); (2) in methodology: co-producing ethnographic research (after intensive bespoke training) with street children/youth as researchers, positioning their self-defined capabilities (rather than vulnerabilities) as central to understanding their lives and advocating for their rights [R1; R2].

Between 2012-16, 2676 qualitative files (plus 694 surveys and over 1000 items of visual data) were gathered involving 628 street children/youth: 229 key participants, plus a network of 399 street children/youth, creating the largest ever database of their lives. The fully anonymised interview data are available for secondary data analysis globally via the UK Data Service

ReShare [R3], further expanding the potential for impact. The research demonstrated the gap between realities and political attitudes about street children/youth by providing extensive cross-cultural evidence, challenging prevailing binary views that children are at risk 'on' but safe 'off' the streets. GUOTS reveals the complexity of life for young people for whom the street is their home, source of income and identity; repositioning them as contributors rather than antagonists to society and communities [R4; R5; R6].

### Key Findings

Key findings have been shared via 14 Briefing Papers (English and French) and publications [R2; R4-R6]. Those particularly informing the UNGC21 principles are:

1. Street children/youth are deprived of their basic rights; such as food, shelter, fair and just treatment, health care, education, and protection.
2. States globally fail to protect street children/youth against rights violations; data across the three cities highlighted violence, discrimination, and exploitation by state agents.
3. Street children/youth have the right to be on the streets and should be supported to access identity documents and legitimate work to survive; fundamental to achieving citizenship and opportunities to contribute to society/communities.
4. Street children/youth are experts in their own lives and with training have skills, knowledge and capabilities to share insights into shaping policy, practice and the environments in which they live.
5. Findings consistently challenge orthodoxies about street children/youth as safer off streets; revealing young people as capable of creating networks of support while on the street; and forced removal, damages their resilience and survival strategies.

Through ESRC funding (2015-16) GUOTS developed the Knowledge Exchange Training Pack (KETP) [R1] for effective involvement of street children/youth in evidence gathering and policy. It was based on learning from events that created dialogue between street children/youth, police, government, judiciary, social work, schools, churches, charities, NGOs, the public and media. Findings from these events were shared via Briefing Papers [R2] and resulted in Consultation for the UNGC21.

### 3. References to the research

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[R1] Growing up on the Streets (2016). *Growing up on the Streets: Knowledge Exchange Training Pack* (KETP). London: StreetInvest. DOI: [10.20933/100001150](https://doi.org/10.20933/100001150)

[R2] van Blerk, L., Shand, W. and Hunter, J. (2013 – 2018). *Growing up on the Streets: Briefing Papers*. London: StreetInvest. Available at: <https://streetinvest.org/resource/growing-up-on-the-streets/> (Accessed 22 March 2021)

[R3] van Blerk, L., Shand, W., Shanahan, P., Hunter, J. (2020). 'Growing up on the Streets: Research with and for young people on the streets, 2012-2016'. Colchester: UK Data Service. DOI: [10.5255/UKDA-SN-854123](https://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-854123)

[R4] van Blerk, L., Shand, W., Shanahan, P. (2016). 'Street Children as Researchers: Critical Reflections on a Participatory Methodological Process in the "Growing Up on the Streets" Research Project in Africa', in Holt, L., Evans, R., Skelton, T. (eds) *Methodological Approaches, Geographies of Children and Young People*, 2. Singapore: Springer pp.159-178. DOI: [10.1007/978-981-4585-89-7\\_6-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4585-89-7_6-2)

[R5] Shand, W., van Blerk, L., Hunter, J. (2016). 'Economic Practices of African Street Youth: The Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, and Zimbabwe'. In: Abebe, T., Waters, J., Skelton, T. (eds) *Labouring and Learning, Geographies of Children and Young People*, 10. Singapore: Springer pp. 1-21. DOI: [10.1007/978-981-4585-97-2\\_5-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4585-97-2_5-1)

[R6] van Blerk, L., Shand, W. and Hunter, J.(2020). "Street citizenship': informal processes of engaging youth as citizens through research and knowledge exchange in three African cities', *Space and Polity* DOI: [10.1080/13562576.2020.1747937](https://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2020.1747937)

The research was funded by 3 grants from Backstage Trust totalling £3,140,000 between 2012 to 2019, on which van Blerk was academic PI (£447,126 to UoD). An ESRC knowledge exchange grant of £170,000 was also awarded to van Blerk with StreetInvest as the collaborating partner (£66,558 to UoD).

#### 4. Details of the impact

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GUOTS research directly informed UNGC21 by bringing the views of street children/youth into global policy [E1; E2; E3]. The KETP is changing how NGOs globally engage with marginalised young people, creating multiple opportunities for them to be heard and participate in decisions made about their lives. Since 2016, the KETP has been adopted by 161 organisations across 67 countries to enhance life outcomes for young people [E1-E10]. At least 2597 young people have been trained across multiple countries, including: Belgium, Brazil, DRC, Ghana, India, Mexico, Philippines, Russia, Tanzania, Uruguay and Zimbabwe [E1-E10]. In addition, the KETP has been adapted twice for use by Consortium for Street Children's (CSC) 180 organisations in 135 countries, creating countless opportunities for engaging young people [E3].

##### Informing UNGC21

UNGC21 provides guidance to states on developing comprehensive, long-term national strategies for children in street situations and is a key tool for advocates campaigning for street children's rights nationally and globally. GUOTS research Key Findings 1, 2 and 3 (street children are deprived of their basic rights; states fail to protect them and the right to be on the streets) directly informed the Key Principles of UNGC21. Key Finding 4 (children are experts on their own lives) and the associated KETP were adopted for the consultation process [E1].

GUOTS KETP and Rights Focus Groups' findings were adopted into the UNGC21 through Expert Consultation (van Blerk presented Key Findings to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in January 2016) [E11] and specifically through the African Consultation process [E4]; this was led by GUOTS and engaged a 200-strong network of street children/youth in Bukavu (DRC), Accra (Ghana) and Harare (Zimbabwe). In addition, CSC conducted a consultation exercise for the UN Working Group, adopting GUOTS KETP guidance and tools. 674 young people were consulted in an additional 8 countries by 41 different NGOs as part of submissions to the UNGC21.

In total, 1044 street children globally, trained using GUOTS KETP, fed into UNGC21. This was the first-time young people had been consulted and their voices included in a General Comment. The Consortium for Street Children CEO described the KETP as "invaluable" in their UN work; noting that as a result of its use, "*street-connected young people have contributed to and informed a much-needed legal instrument at the highest level*" [E2]. The Co-funder, Comic Relief, stated that the methods used to engage with young people will be "*the global benchmark for consulting with young people in matters that affect their lives*" [E12]. Subsequent uptake of the KETP supports this [E1-E10]. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child described the consultation process as "*grounded in the experiences of those whose lives it is aimed to improve*" and "*a major achievement*" [E1].

### Giving voice to street children

The training tools developed by GUOTS have been adopted worldwide for engaging young people in policymaking and dialogue as well as community development. The KETP is available on the University of Dundee Discovery website, StreetInvest's website, and on the CSC's Resource pages. Since using the KETP in 2016 for the UNGC21 global consultations CSC have adapted it for (1) An 'Advocacy Action Guide' – a training toolkit outlining how NGOs can develop effective advocacy strategies to make rights a reality for street-connected children, particularly in the implementation of UNGC21; (2) to build "*a pioneering e-Learning course to empower those from around the world to undertake rights-based advocacy for street-connected children*"; and (3) are currently developing a Resource Pack utilizing the KETP for their expanding membership [E3]. In May 2020, in the aftermath of Cyclone Amphan and COVID-19, young people in India whose "*confidence, capacity, and standing in the community built by the GUOTS Knowledge Exchange Training Pack, successfully lobbied for relief support for 2000 vulnerable families*" [E5].

### Influencing national action on street children

Between 2016 and 2021, the research findings and KETP have resulted in significant impacts on national policy and action for street children in several countries ranging from the provision of health care to international sports campaigning and assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

GUOTS research on health, presented to the Provincial Minister of Health for South Kivu, DRC, May 2017, resulted in a promise to provide state subsidised health care to street children. The Provincial Division of Social Affairs has since issued certificates of indigence to several street children enabling them to receive free health care. The Minister is also giving technical support to create an operational action plan to improve access to health care for street children [E13].

The significant impacts are:

- KETP resources were used in the international sporting/campaigning Street Child United events, including the Street Child Games (Rio 2016), Street Child World Cup (Moscow 2018) and Street Child Cricket World Cup (London 2019) [E5; E9].
- Following the Street Child Games (Brazil, 2016), there was up-take of the KETP for the 10th National Conference of Children's and Teenagers' Rights (CNDCA), involving 461 street children. The KETP methodology was adapted and translated into Portuguese for children, and strategic objectives developed at the 10th CNDCA fed into municipal and State Decennial plans [E10].
- The KETP is part of projects in Tanzania, funded by UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) [E3] to develop capacity among street children and youth to conduct advocacy and in Kolkata, funded by Wellcome Trust, to train street children/youth as 'street champions', who facilitate participatory research and advocate for support to tackle discrimination and abuse [E6].
- In 2020, and to be repeated in 2021, the KETP was used in India with over 500 street children/youth in assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their rights [E5; E6].
- CSC's 'Advocacy Action Guide' is being used to translate the UNGC21 into national policy in Uruguay (the first adopting country) and the Philippines [E3].

### Aiding individual opportunities

Participation in the research, enhanced by training, led to street youth becoming active citizens and peer advocates to government, using their research skills as a new generation of street workers. In Accra in 2016 three GUOTS Research Assistants were taken on temporarily as street workers by a local NGO. In Harare, Street Empowerment Trust has embedded GUOTS

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findings into their practice, and currently (December 2020) employs two GUOTS participants (five have been employed in total) [E7]. In November 2017, 'Didier', from DRC participated as a "youth expert" in the International Summit on the Legal Rights of Street-Connected Children and Youth, São Paulo, Brazil, organised by The American Bar Association. Additionally, 23 Street Champions were trained as peer supporters and advocates across three cities in Ghana in 2019 [E8].

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

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[E1] United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child/CSC (2017). *Rights of Children in Street Situations. General Comment No.21* (2017).

[E2] CSC/UNGC21 Working Group: Role of KETP in global consultations and creation of UNGC21 (10-Oct-16).

[E3] CSC Letter of Support for KETP (1-Dec-20).

[E4] Africa Consultation Report for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment on Children in Street Situations February–March 2016.

[E5] StreetInvest: GUOTS participatory methodology and tools used in India, East Africa and West Africa (2-Dec-20).

[E6] Child in Need Institute (CINI), India: Currently using KETP in Kolkata (26-Nov-20).

[E7] Street Empowerment Trust, Zimbabwe: Ongoing impact on street work and individuals (6-Jul-2020).

[E8] MFCS/Alliance for Street Work, West Africa Network: KETP used in Street Champions programme in Ghana over the past 2 years and ongoing (9-Dec-20).

[E9] Street Child United: KETP used globally in advance (30-Nov-15) and during Street Child Games and Congress, Brazil in developing the Rio Resolution presented to the UN and national governments (18-Mar-16).

[E10] Pavement Project Director, Lifeworlds and member of the National Council of Child and Adolescent Rights in Brazil (CONANDA) about the use of the KETP with street children for the National Conference on the Rights of the Child and Adolescent (X CNDCA) (15 April 2016).

[E11] Expert Consultation with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on draft General Comment on Children in Street Situations, Geneva (19-Jan-16).

[E12] Comic Relief Feedback on UNGC Focus Groups (31-Aug-16).

[E13] PEDER, DRC: Impact of GUOTS findings on Government healthcare provision (21-Jan-21).