



Reaching out to Children living in Especially Difficult Circumstances

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Peter is 12 years old. His single mother died of AIDS two years ago leaving him and his two siblings in the care of her brother, Kamau. But Kamau had a family of his own and his meagre salary could not afford to feed three extra mouths much less take them to school. He therefore became abusive to Peter and his sisters denying them food and locking them out of the house at the slightest provocation. Peter could not bear it anymore and he decided to run away to the city, where, he heard, there was plenty of money.

Once in the city, he discovers that this rumour is not true. He however meets Otieno, who has lost both parents to HIV/AIDS and his elderly grandmother is too sick and old to provide for him and Tony who has no idea who his parents are. This becomes Peter's new family and his new home - the pavements of Nairobi city. He joins a gang of street children and learns that survival is by begging and rummaging through dustbins for food.

This scenario is becoming very common in most African countries. As HIV/AIDS takes its toll on the population, many orphaned children are finding themselves fighting to survive. In the olden days, members of the extended family took care of orphans. It was the responsibility of the community to take in such children and fend for them. Not anymore! The social fabric has disintegrated and such children end up with no where else to go but to the streets.

As more parents contract and die of HIV/AIDS, so does the number of street children continue to multiply. Street children are just but one of the categories of children living under extremely difficult situations. Others include: abandoned children, disabled children, child soldiers, child victims of armed conflicts and wars, drug addicts and child labourers. These are the groups of children that have been collectively referred to as Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances (CIEDCs).

The Africa Scout Region recognises the plight of these children and acknowledges that they possess immense potential that remains untapped. We are reaching out to these children and providing the benefits of Scouting to them. National Scout Organisations are working with children in difficult conditions - rehabilitating them through counselling, integrating them into Scout groups and involving them in Scouting activities both local and international, without discrimination. The Kenya Scout Association for example, through its Extension Scouting Programme has recruited 1,200 street children into Scout groups/units where they have been rehabilitated and with the help of well-wishers started income generating projects to make them self sufficient. They have also managed to re-unite 450 former street children with their families. With the help of well wishers, some of these children have also joined formal schools and others are taking vocational training.

Scouting has given meaning to the lives of these children, a sense of belonging. The World Scout Bureau, Africa Regional Office plans to implement a five-year development project with the purpose of availing the age-proven benefits of Scouting to Children in Especially Difficult Circumstance (CIEDC). As the largest youth organisation in the world, the Scout Movement has the capacity and the mandate to implement an innovative project that would avail the fundamental benefits of Scouting to girls and boys who have found themselves in especially difficult circumstances for no fault of their own.