

# The main challenges faced in the implementation of Government policy interventions towards access to pre-primary and primary education by street children in North Rift, Kenya

## ABSTRACT

**Aims:** Despite of the strong policy measures to have street children in school, many school-going-age are still not attending school. Therefore, the main purpose of this paper was to evaluate challenges faced in the implementation of Government policy interventions towards access to pre-primary and primary education by street children in North Rift, Kenya.

**Study Design:** The study adopted a mixed method research design.

**Place and Duration of the Study:** A survey was conducted in three towns of the North Rift Counties of Kenya (Kapsabet, Eldoret, and Kitale) which are the headquarters of the respective counties. Data collection done in the period between 1<sup>st</sup> December and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022

**Methodology:** Purposive and simple random sampling was used to select 322 respondents (218 males and 23 females with a modal age of 10 -15 years; 18 female and 27 female teachers were aged between 30 – above 40 years). Data was collected using observation guides, in-depth interviews, and questionnaires. Descriptive and inferential statistics as well as theme analysis were used to analyze the data, respectively. The data was coded and analyzed using themes.

**Results:** Main reasons street children had not enrolled in school were a lack of money for school materials (56.2%) and an unattractive school environment (30%). Other reasons included having to work to support their families (1.3%), distance to school (0.9%), being born and raised on the streets, being over-aged, and early parenting responsibilities.

**Conclusion:** The study concluded that government policy interventions alone are insufficient for improving street children's access to education. Effective implementation requires collaborative efforts from all stakeholders, addressing barriers like poverty and parenting responsibilities, and restructuring education to include informal systems.

*Key Words: Government Policy Interventions, Access to Education, Pre-primary Education, Primary Education, Street Children, North Rift, Kenya*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Despite several policy initiatives and significant financial commitments by the Kenyan Government for the purposes of enhancing access to education through national budget, a significant number of school-going-age children, especially those residing in the streets of Kenya's urban centres, are still not enrolled in school. Government policy interventions are aimed at addressing factors that contribute to many of these children not to be enrolled in school. Such policy interventions therefore should mitigate on the challenges contributing to non-enrolment and drop-out from school. This research therefore emphasized on how government policy initiatives impact street children's ability to attend pre-primary and primary school in Kenya's North Rift region.

A 2015 UNICEF study found that underdeveloped countries have more street children than industrialised ones due to ineffective policies and high rates of poverty. Twenty-five million were

believed to be in Asia and ten million in Africa. India is the country with the highest estimated number of street children globally, at 18 million [1]. Because of things like unemployment, increased rural-urban mobility, the pull of the city, and a lack of political will, the number of street children in developing countries is rapidly increasing. [2] states that concerns about street children are growing more and more, especially in African countries. More than ten million African children, he continued, are living away from their families; the bulk of these are known as street children and are found in cities and towns. One of the numerous reasons stated in the UNICEF report that have kept too many street children from obtaining an education could be ineffective policies. The appropriateness of the existing regulations is one more element that may have had a role in the previously described circumstance.

In several African countries, such as Ethiopia, Zambia, and Botswana, concerns about the wellbeing of street children are among those that are rapidly expanding [3]. In Zambia's major cities, it is common to see children who have been homeless for a considerable amount of time. According to a 1991 research by Lungwagwa, there were roughly 35,000 homeless children in the country. But as time went on, donor groups began to exert increasing pressure on the Zambian government to make arrangements for these children. Policy interventions in Zambia have not produced beneficial benefits because they have been implemented uniformly to a broad variety of populations (MCDSS, 2016). The reason that many interventions don't seem to have the expected effect of giving many street children the opportunity to attend school could be attributed mostly to this assumption.

Policy implementation challenges within the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) programme in the Philadelphia region demonstrate significant delays in programme launches and pressured programme operations [4]. These implementation difficulties occurs more frequently, but receives little public notice. Their studies concentrated on the kinds of interventions that can raise the standard of education in underdeveloped nations. Therefore, supply-side interventions are more effective when paired with incentives that alter behaviour, preferences, or involvement in the community. This study concentrated on providing high-quality education to pupils in the formal school system, which may have excluded street children because of the nature of their surroundings.

In order to provide care and protection for all children, the Child Act (2001) was adopted in Malaysia, where the Coordinating Council for the Protection of Children was established in addition to the National Advisory and Consultative Council on Children. The Children Act, protects the rights of all children. However, not much, if anything, has been accomplished in terms of putting these laws into practice with regard to providing basic services and protection to the street children.

In Nigeria, the Child Right Act (2003), for example, was passed by the Nigerian Parliament and established a system of child justice administration along with outlining the rights and obligations of children. [5] pointed out that in several third World nations, there have been progressive advancements in the field of child rights law throughout time.

In Egypt, the government is required to provide education for all children although several parties including international organisations, local communities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and religious organizations have a significant impact on the educational process. The government of Egypt has taken pride in a number of non-governmental organisations that work to educate "street children." Most non-governmental organisations strive to provide programmes that cater to the particular needs of homeless children. While the government uses non-governmental organisations to highlight the need of special education, the projects' success in helping street children receive a basic education has not been fully assessed. Therefore, it is vital to assess the success of government policies and initiatives in order to improve the circumstances of street children.

[6] investigated the effects of Hope Village Society (HVS) on the education of street children in Egypt to ascertain the benefits and drawbacks of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in this context. The study's findings demonstrated the critical role that HVS had in assisting Egyptian street children in obtaining an education. Nevertheless, since the institution's establishment, enrolment rates have varied. It is imperative that potential partners for HVS's educational programmes be contacted immediately, and the Egyptian government should increase funding to organisations that teach homeless children [6].

The research was concerned that the previously described study, which focused on the challenges of teaching street children, neglected to highlight how well the organization's policies were being

implemented in terms of providing street children with access to education. The study was done in North Rift Counties of Kenya and concentrated on the contributions of government policy initiatives in promoting access to pre-primary and primary education by street children, the earlier study was carried out in Egypt and examined the function of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in providing education to the impoverished children.

The social, economic, and cultural environments that street children live in provide a number of challenges. They are either ignored, abandoned, or both, or they are physically and emotionally attached to their relatives who live in the same households. Street children usually have the following characteristics: they are from low-income families and work in unofficial economy; they spend three to twenty-four hours a day in public places (streets, markets, shops, amusement parks); they have little or no education, have never attended school, have dropped out of school or/and are still in school.

Poverty is a major barrier inhibiting Kenya from meeting its national education goals. There have been policy changes in the education system that are geared towards addressing challenges on access to education by all children of school-going age through some strategies, like the Kenya Interim Poverty Eradication of 2000–2003 (K1PE). [7] concurs that a significant contributing reason to the high school dropout rate among students is the rise in home poverty. According to MOEST, funding 2002, 2003, and 2004, the School Feeding Programme (SFP) funding increased from Kenyan Shillings 172 million to 250 million and then to 267 million, correspondingly. This was carried out to guarantee school feeding, which would enhance student retention and enable increased enrolment.

According to [8] among others, learning disabilities, behavioural disorders, inappropriate curricula, sanctions, low academic performance and poverty are the primary reasons as to why children drop out of school. Many of these children end up on the streets as street children as a result of these school abandonments. [9] described the common problems that street children encounter on a regular basis. They include inadequate food, inadequate clothing, inadequate housing, and other necessities. They also include a dearth of educational opportunities, poor health care, and other social services. More specifically, [10] enumerated the three primary problems faced by street children as lack of employment, food insecurity, and housing. Most street children have to accept risky jobs in exchange for food and shelter. According to [11], a lot of street kids are compelled to labour in hazardous jobs to keep the wolf of hunger out of their bellies. To exacerbate the situation [12] argued that children experiencing homelessness frequently decide not to attend school due to the administrative expenditures involved, and they may try to avoid law enforcement by hiding in dangerous metropolitan locations. According to [13], some street kids genuinely struggle to survive, and when that happens, long-term solutions are typically constrained by the need to satiate fundamental needs. This conversation suggests that street children's refusal to go to school may have been caused by a variety of other factors, some of which may require additional research to determine and treat.

Kenya has put in place a lot of programmes, but it hasn't been easy to achieve education for all (EFA). Even now, there are children living on the streets who don't go to school all day. The 2009 research conducted by the National Working Committee sought to determine possible reasons for the marginalisation and exclusion of certain street children, particularly from formal schooling. The research, in contrast to the purpose of this study, concentrated more on the factors that caused street children to become homeless than on how well government policy interventions improved street children's access to pre-primary and primary education.

In order to address the aforementioned issues by the Kenyan Government, a meeting was held in February 2005 with representatives from the German Technical Cooperation (GTC), the National Council for Children Services (NCCS), MOEST, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the Department of Children Services (DCS), the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) and the Department of Adult Education (DAE). The main objective of the meeting was to raise the standard of care provided to impoverished children, of which street children constitute a subset. It was emphasised that in order to properly meet the educational needs of street children, the government and NGO partners needed to encourage focused networking and collaboration and better utilise their synergistic benefits. It was highlighted that many stakeholders have volunteered their time to help provide social services and education to children who were homeless. One example is the non-formal education provided to street children by the "Undugu" Society of Kenya (USK), which helps troubled youngsters by placing them in non-formal learning settings.

Concerns regarding the increasing number of street children in Kenya, especially in the neighbourhoods surrounding marketplaces and retail establishments in cities and metropolitan areas,

are shared by many, including scholars and writers. In addition to receiving a quality education to increase their knowledge, these children require free time to play and socialise with their friends. However, for a number of reasons, they don't receive what is rightfully theirs, and as a result, they begin to worry more about providing for their family financially. To make ends meet, some of them work as beggars, street entertainers, parking attendants, or bearers. Street children should have equal access to a high-quality basic education so they can play and study, just like other kids.

The programme theory advocate Weiss C.H. (1972) provided the groundwork for this study. Programme theory is defined by Weiss (Weiss, 1998) as the collection of mechanisms that act as a mediator between the delivery and receiving of the programme and the production of the intended outcomes. The three elements that programme theory use to explain a programme are programme activities or inputs, desired outcomes or outputs, and the mechanisms by which the intended outcomes are attained (Reynolds, 1998; Rogers, 2000; Rogers et al, 2000; Sedani& Sechrest, 1999). In this case, the resources (public funds) of the programme or policy intervention are called the inputs, and the expected results (access to education for the recipients and the nation as a whole) are called the outputs.

Since governments are held accountable for the use of public funds, it is more important to demonstrate the advantages of policy interventions and their initiatives [14]. When developing policy interventions, it is useful to use a theoretical model (logic model) or framework to help explain how the policy, its programmes, and interventions will work and how the policy is meant to have the desired effect. Programme theory is commonly used as the basis for measuring the impacts of programmes. It makes sense that the policy formulation phase should be used to define what will have an impact, outline the intended course of action, describe the intended effects of a programme on its beneficiaries, and outline the inputs and presumptions required for a successful implementation. Explaining to stakeholders what change is expected and why might be aided by the theory. It is also useful in justifying the time, resources, and labour expended to support the formulation of public policy.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

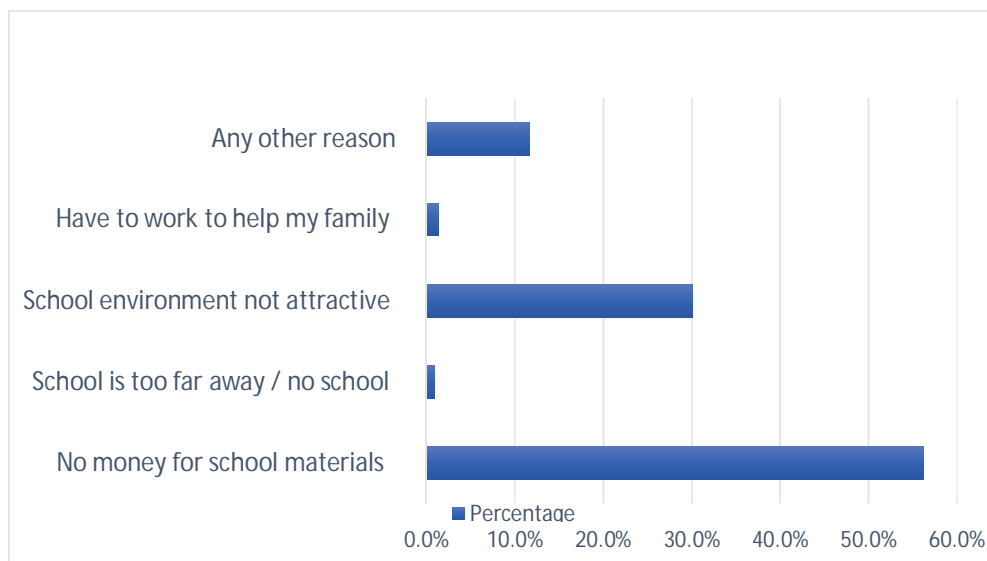
This study adopted Mixed Methods Research. This study utilized individual interviews for qualitative data collection. Qualitative research explores aspects of human life that cannot adequately be covered by quantitative research [15] and it was seen as appropriate for this study for exploring life experiences that children living on the street face. The focus was on the experiences that made them not to enroll in school and their subsequent life experiences on the streets.

For data analysis [16] approach on qualitative data was applied. This approach endorses the following steps; identification of common themes, generalization of experiences, manual coding of common themes, identification of key emerging themes and finally interpretation of data. An inductive approach was used to identify key themes about life experiences of participants.

## **3. Results and Discussions**

### **3.1 Why street children had not enrolled in school?**

The study sought to find out the reasons why the street children had not enrolled in school and the findings were given. Figure 1 is a graph showing the respondents' reasons for not having been enrolled in school. The result indicates that most of them 131 (56.2 %) had not been enrolled in school due to lack of money for school materials, 70 (30 %) had not enrolled because the school environment was not attractive to them, 27 (11.6 %) had other reasons, 3 (1.3 %) and 2 (0.9 %) had not enrolled in school because they had to work to help their families and that schools were too far for them respectively. Some of those who had other reasons reported that they had been born and raised in the street hence they had no idea about school life while others reported that they were over aged hence they could not join school with junior pupils. Some were trapped in early parenting responsibilities hence they had to be out of school to raise their young siblings.



**Figure 1: Reasons for non-enrollment in school**

### **3.2 Challenges that policy implementers face**

A number of policy related challenges were discussed from the implementers' perspectives and the following were the major challenges that were obtained;

#### **3.2.1 Poor funding**

Respondents emphasized the importance of funding towards the implementation process. It was discussed that the officers in charge of implementation process were allocated little funding which made it difficult to fully implement the policies. It was also discussed that the available policies were partially implemented because the Government did not fully commit funds towards the same.

#### **3.2.2 Poor Training and Lack of Periodical Inductions**

This was discussed as a major policy challenge. Education for street children require a specialized mode of handling which was not provided in the formal professional trainings hence there was need for the Government to allocate adequate funds and commit the same towards holding induction trainings for the policy implementation process.

Among other challenges that were discussed were; poor stakeholders' engagement, negligence of duties by the other stakeholders, minimal community engagement and lack of parental engagement.

### **3.3 Main challenges faced by street children resulting to school drop-out**

From the findings it was evident that the majority of the street children were not attending school by the time the data was collected despite the high enrolment ration previously. The study found out that majority of the street children who previously had been enrolled in school dropped out of school and preferred to live in the streets. A number of factors were found to have contributed to the respondents leaving school for street life. The common factors among many respondents included; constant migration, financial limitations, unfavorable education system, discrimination and stigmatization, lack of parental care and other relevant support, lack of access to Government aid and brutal punishment.

#### **3.3.1 Death of parents or guardians and high levels of poverty**

It was found that 181 (75%) of the respondents left school immediately their parents or guardians passed on. They could not afford any more to raise the funds to pay for their school fees, purchase school materials, purchase food and other basic needs. Despite the free primary education policy, schools charged some money for pupils to be allowed to attend school. Their efforts to seek for financial aid from well-wishers were not responded to positively. The children who had depended on their parents to access basic needs found their life suddenly changing to the worse as poverty hit them hard and hence, they could not sustain to either be in school or stay at home. There were quite a number of heartbreaking stories given by the respondents.

One street child commented:

*“My parents died when I was very young and no body among my relatives picked me up to stay with them, my constant pleading for food became irritating to the neighbours until they started chasing me away from their homes, I needed food to survive which made me to make a decision of leaving home for street life”.*

Another added,

*“When my parents died, we went to live with our grandmother who also died shortly after we had moved in. It remained my duty to look for food and clothing for my siblings which made me leave school to work for people to raise money. Those who used to give me domestic works started to call me a thief until I moved to the street with my young brothers to beg for food where we have lived for the past three years.”*

### **3.3.2 Domestic violence/ Abandonment by parents and relatives**

The study revealed that about 37 (15%) of the respondents had attended school until the time they were abandoned by the guardians. Upon the death of parents some children decided to move and live with their relatives. The animosity of some of the relatives resulted to their secondary problems since they were mistreated and even denied access to basic needs. The unending family conflict in some families made parents to be separated and none was willing to take the responsibility of taking care of the children which forced them to look for a new family in the streets.

One of the children commented

*“I was raised by my mother who was a single parent and who fell ill and died which forced me to move in and live with my uncle who was a drunkard. One day he came home very drunk and he started beating me up and wanted to rape me which forced me to go and live with my aunt who later conspired with my uncle until she chased me out of her house”.*

Another respondent further added that

*“My mother abandoned me to enable her move in with her newly found husband and no one took care of me”.*

### **3.4 Peer influence and drug abuse**

The study found out that roughly 17 (7%) of the respondents were forced to leave school by friends who introduced them to the use of drugs. The drug abuse did not let them live at home since they were scared about their parents. Some were sent away by their parents who could not sustain to live with them since drugs abuse embedded them with a bad character. They sought for ‘freedom’ so as to use the drugs and hence forced them to drop out of school and ultimately joined other children living in the streets.

### **3.5 Brutal punishments at home and school:**

The study reported that 6 (3%) of the respondents had been forced to drop out of school due to the brutal beatings at school and/or at home. Some girls reported that they were punished brutally by the parents and teachers for becoming pregnant while at school hence they could neither remain in school nor home and therefore moved into the street life out of fear. Brutal punishment in school and by some parents instilled fear in them until they were forced to run away from their homes.

### **3.6 Constant migration**

The regular eviction of street children from the streets had subjected them to a state of constant migration from one town to another which made it difficult to enrol in school. Their temporal living status hindered them from settling in one town and enroll to school. During the data collection it was noted that the majority of the street children in one of the streets in one town were immigrants from the other neighboring towns. With the prevailing education policy which required clearance from the Government authority, it became difficult to transfer from one school to another, It therefore became difficult for the street children to transfer from a school in one town to continue in the next school in

the other town. One of the respondents from Kitale town with an ambition to become a teacher alluded how difficult it was for him to enroll in school due to the constant migration,

He reported

*“It has been difficult for me to be in school because I am not assured of a long term stay in one town. Initially I was in Eldoret town but after two weeks I was forced to run for my safety due to brutality from the police in the name of performing security operations over the incidence where thieves broke into a supermarket. Now I am living in Kitale after another brutal eviction from Kapsabet town which forced me to run for safety after being suspected of robbing one shop. I really wished that I could have had an opportunity to access education to enable me to become a teacher.”*

### **3.7 Financial limitations**

Despite of the Governments guarantee of free primary education, most of the citizens have not enjoyed full access of free education. Financial costs like examination fees, holiday tuition fees, preps and remedial fees, Parent teachers’ association (PTA) fees, purchase of school stationeries, purchase of school uniforms and lunch fees made it difficult for street children to access pre-primary and primary education due to their vulnerability status. Reality could not be diverted from the fact that street children lived by chance and access to basic needs was a great challenge.

One street child stated that,

*“If I had money or financial support I could have enrolled for tailoring course to enable me acquire skills that will enable me become self-employed, now I am a survivor of town who just live in begging for food which is not an assurance to get in many days. If I cannot manage to buy food how can I get money to enrol for a course in school?”*

The constant sending away of the street children from the schools due to non-compliance to pay the required fees demoralized them from constantly attending school hence dropping out. Financial limitation stood out to be the top policy related challenge since it did not only affect enrolment, but also completion and transition to the next levels of education. Financial limitation was found to be the influencing factor towards other policy related challenges like, lack of food, clothing and decent housing conditions.

### **3.8 Unfavorable education system**

The study found out that street children were not comfortable with the formal education system. The formal education system did not equip the street children with technical skills which could enable them to become self-reliant and independently improve their living standards through entrepreneurship ventures. The formal education system required them to fully commit their time in school yet they needed to do some work to support their families and themselves to access food, clothing and medical support.

The formal education system conditionally placed the junior pupils from well of families in the same class with the older street children who due to their vulnerabilities, were not able to be enrolled in school in time.

*“I ever attempted to attend school but I was enrolled in class one where I was the biggest in the class until teachers and students were making fun of me whenever I came to school barefooted and in casual clothes. I can only go back to school to take a technical course which can enable me start my one business as I learn”,* said one of the respondents.

The formal education system was much involving with a lot of theoretical coverage which needed the student to have many books both for reading and writing of which the street children could not afford.

### **3.9 Discrimination and Stigmatization**

Street children were often excluded and avoided when they tried to interact with other children. They were always separated from other pupils since the teachers had the perception that they could influence the other pupils into drug abuse and other illicit behaviours. The stereotypes and perception

towards the street children by the other pupils made it difficult for them to socialize and make friends with other children.

According to one of the street children, he confessed that he was beaten up in school by the teachers because one of the teachers had lost a pen in class and the teacher by default said that he is the one who stole it.

Another child confessed that he was forced to snatch food from the kitchen since the teachers had barred him from being served by other children instead, they commanded him to take throw-away foodstuffs from the bin since in the street they were used to eating leftovers.

*"I ever attempted to attend school but I was enrolled in class one whereby I was the biggest in the class until teachers and students were making fun of me whenever I came to school barefooted and in casual clothing. The teacher always suspected me and beat me up when any of the other pupil lost an item"* one respondent said.

### 3.10 Lack of parental and other relevant support

Street children lacked parental, psychological and mental support. When they were in problem, they had no one to talk to or depend on to solve their problems. The street children were found to lack guidance and counselling hence most of them were victims of drug addiction, early pregnancies, unprotected sex and violence. Some of them reported that some people in the community took advantage of their vulnerability and used them to commit crimes like breaking in to shops and even some girls were victims of rape from the same people. The worrying thing was that when they reported the incidences to the authority no action was taken. They felt frustrated by all these issues that were never given due attention by the relevant authorities.

### 3.11 Lack of access to Government aid

Unlike the other pupils who were issued with bursaries, street children did not enjoy such opportunities. Government aid such as CDF bursaries and county Government bursaries did not reach them since they were considered not entitled to residency from areas where bursaries were allocated from. Lack of access to Government aid made the street children to remain with the option of giving up and dropping out of school.

### 3.12 How challenges affect Policy implementation process

The study sought to inquire on how much the major policy related challenges affect the policy implementation process. For those who indicated that there is policy related challenges, 3 (60%) of them indicated that policy related challenges affect the process of implementation of intervention policies very much whereas 2 (40%) indicated that the policy related challenges affect the implementation of such policies moderately.

**Table 1. How challenges affect implementation process**

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Very much	3	60 %	60 %
Moderately	2	40 %	100 %
Not at all	0	0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100%</b>	

## 4.0 Conclusion

Despite of the availability of the government policy interventions, effectiveness of their intervention remains unexplored. It was observed that availability of the government policy interventions for management of education in Kenya alone was not sufficient for enhancing access to pre-primary and

primary education by the street children. The government policies implementation needs a collaborative responsibility of education stakeholders in ensuring the implementation measures are effective. The study also revealed that many education stakeholders were not effectively playing their roles as they ought to in terms of supervising the implementation of the policy interventions towards access to pre-primary and primary education by street children. There was therefore need for Government or the Ministry in charge of education to come up with mechanisms of sensitizing and mobilizing all stakeholders to support the implementation of the Government Policy Interventions towards enhancing access to education by street children. There was also need for Government to address and mitigate the challenges that contributed to children resorting to street life in cities and urban centres rather than attending school.

The social setting has positioned the Street children with vulnerabilities which do not favour them in enrolling to school or even allowing them to concentrate well in school. Some of the instances include poverty, parenting responsibilities, constant migration, drug influence, lack of parenting or poor parenting and peer pressure. For effective implementation of education policies, the barriers should be moderated first. Additionally, the education structure of Kenya should be restructured to incorporate informal education systems which can provide convenient environment for the street children to enrol in school and learn as they engage on their social affairs.

## ETHICAL APPROVAL

The researcher prior to undertaking this study did the proposal defense and was approved by the school of education, Moi University and thereafter got a research permit from National Council of Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) and relevant letters to schools from the County Directors of Education.

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