

# Chapter 6

## Comparing Street Children in Sub-Saharan African Countries (Ghana and Nigeria) and the West

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Street children are a common and alarming issue in most developing countries, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa. According to UNICEF (2021), there are around 30 million street children on the continent due to the deterioration of incomes and livelihoods, the impact of rising family poverty, malnutrition, and restricted access to essential health services. These conditions force children to depend on scrounging for food and money on the streets, sleeping in vacant buildings, abandoned basements, and sometimes open air. Western African countries like Ghana and Nigeria are not exceptions in dealing with street children. Both countries are relatively developed and have a significantly large population of street children. This study emphasizes the general aspects of street children in Ghana and Nigeria, including the background, contemporary issues, governmental reactions, and approaches. The chapter will also examine the strengths and limitations of Ghana and Nigeria's methods of dealing with street children, a comparison with Western perspectives.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Protecting children is society's fundamental moral and ethical obligation. Vulnerable children stand a much better chance of growing up in a society that allows

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them to thrive. Access to social protection is a universal human right, especially for children (ILO & UNICEF, 2023). Social protection empowers marginalized children and is a critical cornerstone to reaching their basic needs in many countries and its deficiency leads to the abandonment of children on the streets. The phenomenon of street children is not restricted to one society; there are cultural differences (Aptekar, 1994). One of the earliest studies about street children was by Henry Mayhew noted in 1851, “The number of street children increases with each passing year” (Briggs et al., 1966). Mayhew coined *street children* because it logically followed his other descriptors of individuals, including *street-sellers*. UNESCO repurposed the term *street children* to refer to war-vagrant children after World War II. Later in 1980, UNICEF created three street children’s classifications concentrating on developing countries. The first *Children for the street* are street-working kids who live with their families; *children on the street* who get little family assistance are the second type, and finally, *Street children* without familial support are the third type (Williams, 1993).

The association of street children positions their status as both victims and perpetrators of crime (Nhapi & Agere, 2019). Furthermore, street children's lack of formal representation excludes them from policy development. Since multiple definitions of *street children* exist in various contexts, they may prove that they are not a homogenous group, and that the specific context determines whether youngsters should be included in the criteria. In contemporary times, four rigid classifications of street children have been identified: *children of the street*, *children on the street*, *children who are part of a street family*, and *children in institutional care* (Owoaje et al., 2009). However, the United Nations defined the term 'street children' to include “any boy or girl... for whom the street in the widest sense of the word... has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised, or directed by responsible adults” (UNICEF, 2012). Street children face significant hazards as they lack access to a secure family environment, essential services such as economic problems, healthcare, education, and safeguards against exploitation.

Street children are one of the clear indicators of poverty and marginalization in the urban environment of a country’s growth. Still, their rights are frequently disregarded (Van Blerk, 2015). According to the UN (2022), the estimation of street children worldwide has increased to 150 million, however, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the population by 100 million more children experiencing multidimensional poverty. Further, the global economic recession does not mitigate for many countries, especially in the Sub-Saharan regions of Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa consists of 48 countries south of the Sahara Desert. The youth in the Sub-Saharan region face complex issues because of rapid societal change. Ghana and Nigeria have the same colonial pasts and are the most populous English-speaking

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