



Newsletter 77

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## COALITIONS

# Gov't unveils robust plan to give better life to 300,000 street dwellers

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Dear Reader,

In November 2017, the minister of Gender and Social Protection, Mrs. Otiko Afisah Djaba, Launched the project;” Get off the street for a better life”.

Some selected NGO’s are members of the Technical Committee which is responsible for the successful implementations of the project. The aim is to offer all persons including children, who presently are in the streets a better future. Members of street children NGO’s are working together with officers of the Department of Social Welfare for the same course. Before we explain more about this coalition, we have to brief you on some historical facts.

In the early nineties, CAS formed a coalition with its sister NGO’s Street Girls Aid and the Salvation Army. We met often under the umbrella UNICEF who supported the NGO’s in their activities. Monthly, we held meetings with AMA officials (Accra Metropolitan Assembly) and the Mayor of Accra. The reasons were to obtain permission and seek support to carry out our planned activities.



These activities included establishment of Crèches for street babies and provide medical support services to these babies and their mothers.

In addition, we established meeting points called mini refuges at various points in the city. In these kiosks, NGO workers met street children and gave them advice and direction. Unfortunately, it did not work out as planned. Whilst the main office of AMA gave the support, managers and personnel of sub-units of the AMA kicked against it. Kiosks locations were destroyed and shanty crèches were declared illegal. During this time we discovered that there are many authorities in the city who all have to be recognized.

The NGO's were also highly involved in organizing the Child Friendly Cities initiative forum organized in Accra in the early nineties to address many of the city problems.

Mayors of various Cities around the world were invited to Accra to deliberate on this issue. Although, the discussions went well, the main part of the report had been concluded long before the closing of the workshops. We noticed this because the reporters were writing statements which had not been discussed. We launched an official complain but we did not succeed to change the outcome of the final report which was subsequently published.

The coalition met on regular basis and new members were registered under the social welfare umbrella. The Department of Social Welfare invited many NGO's, including church affiliated groups to the meetings. Some groups distributed food or clothing to destitute, whilst the core NGO's opposed these practices. The result was, only a few NGO's remained.



In the Catholic Church we formed the coalition CASAS. Members were organizations who were working for marginalized people. We met quarterly. The first part of the meeting was a reflection on what we were trying to achieve, and the second part was to discuss practical issues. These meetings continued for many years until the Diocese decided that, The Social group should merge with the medical group. Unfortunately, this could not work well because the medical group over-shadowed the social group.

Another coalition emerged when RICERCA 'e cooperazione, an Italian donor assisted the Department of Social Welfare to start a data base on street children.

Workshops were organized together with the Assembly men and officers were trained in recognizing street children so that a census and head count could take off as planned.

The main challenge during the headcount was to convince all stake-holders involved (over one hundred) that we were interested in obtaining information on children below the age of eighteen years of age. This became a stumbling block because it was easier to interview a group of prostitutes or head porters (kayayee) than children who are scattered in the city. Another problem was the terminology.

Children who said they came to Accra in the search for money, was translated like, “they came to Accra because of poverty”. Or, “I want to go to school but my parents have no money”, into “all children want to go to school”.

Not knowing that this child was a truant at school and the teachers were happy he disappeared. Or, the child had stolen money from his/her parents and ran away. The opinions of the children were regarded well than that of their parents, teachers or guardians. These were few distortions addressed before the census started.

CAS took also part in coalition meetings abroad. I attended a workshop organized by Plan International in India, a workshop organized by MISEREOR in Germany as well as some organized by Street Child Africa in England. A workshop organized in Norway was centered on the work of students as volunteers at CAS.

Conclusion: Coalitions can only succeed when its members have the same aim and objectives and stay determined to the goals in both theory and practice.

The ‘Get off the street for a better life’ project is in line with the project 100% for Children, CISU and CAS are currently organizing in some districts of Accra.

This project is called “CAS on the Move”. Both projects have the same elements in place: Capacity Building, District involvement, advocacy, lobbying, campaigning and dialogue, data collection and establishment of a data base and engaging the duty bearers (government) in finding solutions of street children issues.

We have to learn how to merge both projects so that no duplications and interferences take place.

CAS started its own database in 1994 using the Microsoft Access program. Thousands of children are recorded and we have published our findings in various newsletters. We have learnt that you have to be consistent in entering data in the same manner so that you can obtain results as planned.



For instant; the spelling of the name should be agreed upon. Enter first the surname before the first name and write the name not as it is pronounced but use the official spelling, etc.

The database can easily get corrupted. It is better that the program is run on one computer which is not connected to the internet. A simple update can disturb the program.

We also should keep in mind that situations change over time. For instance, years ago we strictly worked with migrant children. Later, those born on street were added and of late, urban poor children were recorded as well. To enter all in one database will produce corrupted results. Some children get support of parents, others not.

Some have been in school before and others have never seen an inside of a classroom. So, it is very important to know what information you want from the database.

Sponsorship program:

The main sponsorship program which was financed by MISEREOR has been completed in March 2018. A few children are still in the scheme because they did not complete their training or are financed by other donors. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of June we hope to be able to start a new contract. In the meantime, CAS is writing the closing report of the MISEREOR project and we are preparing children for the new scheme.

At the Refuge, all children follow the functional literacy program. It starts in fact, in the street where the children receive street corner education. The literacy has to be improved and we have asked the workers to keep detailed records on the children.



Many have behavioral problems or certain habits traits which they have to stop before enrolling on the sponsorship program. But to change behavior takes time. Averagely, one year is needed for each child. However, some visit the Refuge for years before being allowed to start training. In general, the majority of the children do not fit into a regular school. Often they are too old or their behavior is a major problem.

Before choosing a skill or trade, the children visit to take part in all demonstration skill-training workshops. Finally, when they have decided what they want to learn they are registered as an apprentice in a particular workshop.

The “preparation committee” assesses the children once a month. Some children are invited to go to Hopeland center where the preparation continues. In order to improve the services, we have decided that workers could be asked to rotate schedules.

Some travel to Hopeland for certain activities such as counseling, street corner education or sports, while workers from Hopeland could join the street corner program in other districts.

Although the traveling costs of workers increases, the continuity of the program is better guaranteed.

Plans are in place to improve the services at Hopeland and applications have been written. These include the settlement workshops which have been established at the end of 2017. The young entrepreneurs are slowly learning how to do business. While some are doing well, others have still to improve.

Happy Baby project.

In this project Baby carriers are produced, introduced to young mothers and sold at reasonable prices. We have decided to produce these carriers by two separate teams.

Five workers work at Hopeland, while another five will work at the House of Refuge. The ten workers had already followed a training workshop organized at Hopeland in 2016.

We have decided on the production costs, the workers fee and selling costs. The workplaces have to be improved, but that can be done later. The work can start. The marketing of the products have to be learned because it involves education to the public of the use of baby carriers.



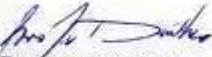
On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March we said farewell to Madam Eunice Baah our nurse who worked for us for 20 good years. Many thanks and have a good retirement.

Photographs of the send-off are on our website: [www.casghana.org](http://www.casghana.org) and facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/www.casghana.org/>

We also started rebuilding the fence wall of the refuge compound.



Thank You, we will keep you informed.

  
Bro. Jos van Dinther  
(Director CAS)