

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND SOCIO-BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE AS A MEANS OF CURBING THE MENACE OF STREET CHILDREN IN CALABAR METROPOLIS, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study reveals how effective communication and social and behavioural change strategies can be used in curbing the menace of Street Children in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State. Street children, popularly known as *Skolombo* Boys, operate with different kinds of weapons, snatching phones, money, and other valuables from people around the City of Calabar. There have also been reports of robberies, rape, and kidnapping carried out by this group of children. If this situation is not handled urgently, it may escalate to the point where these children seek to gain control of certain territories in Calabar. Therefore, effective communication is essential for implementing a strategic, participatory intervention if sustainable change is to occur in the state. The study is a survey that relies more on primary and secondary data, using existing information for analysis and to draw vital conclusions. These data sources for the study include observations, interviews, books, journal articles, unpublished papers, and web pages. The theories used here are the Socio-ecological Model and the Social Cognitive Theory. This study aims to answer specific communication questions. The study concludes that a lack of family support for children made it easier for them to end up on the streets.

Keywords: *Social, Behaviour, Communication, Street Children, Skolombo.*

Introduction

The issue of street children as a social problem has a long history in the world. Recently, the situation assumed a geometric increase in Nigeria due to various factors. Although this article deals with street children in Cross River State, it is interesting to note that the phenomenon of street children is rapidly becoming one of global epic proportions. More than a decade ago, UNICEF estimated that over 30 million children worldwide work and/or live in the streets, for situations

usually beyond their control, and often without family support.¹ Today, most scholars consider the phenomenon of street children as an increasing social problem. The poor children, with or without family, living on the streets, in train and bus stations, under bridges, and in other business centers constitute a portion of human society. Studying this phenomenon may significantly help prevent social problems. Street children are threatened by the bitter experience of being separated from their families and losing hygiene and education.² They encounter poverty and some other dangers that have calamitous effects on their health as they face hunger, malnutrition, hygiene problems, mental health deterioration, lower achievement in education, and delayed development, among other issues.³ The Select Committee on Hunger of the United States of America describes the phenomenon of street children as a problem of devastating proportions that demands the immediate attention of the United States. The committee asserts that 100 million children between the ages of 4 and 15 live and work on the streets of the developing world. Twenty-five million of these children are completely homeless. They sleep under the bridges and in dark alleys and shanty towns of the cities of the developing world. These children are often hungry and are prone to disease, drug abuse, sexual exploitation, and even murder. They are without adequate health care or education.⁴ The Committee identifies Poverty as the underlying factor or plight of these 100 million street children and says that it is a pity that the situation, which needs international attention, has not been acknowledged or adequately addressed by the international community.

Experience has shown that poverty impairs human cognitive functioning. Poverty makes it difficult for a family to support a child in accessing basic needs and services. This leads some children to resort to begging, beginning in the neighborhoods. In the course of this study, some street children ranging between the ages of 10 and 15 years responded during an interview that they hardly had a meal in their families and felt like they would die if they decided to stay in their homes. Moreover, the lack of food taught them to become beggars, begging in the neighborhoods

¹ B. Chand. "Street Children Causes, Consequences and Intervention Programmes". *International Journal of Research in Economics and Social Sciences (IJRESS)*, vol. 6 Issue 7, July 2016, p. 1. <http://euroasiapub.org/current.php?title=IJRESS>

² M. Amiri. "Street Children". 2011, pp. 1, <http://soviethistory.org/index.php?page>

³ J. Boswell. *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance*. New York, 1988, pp. 112

⁴ Select Committee on Hunger. "Street Children: A Global Disgrace" One Hundred Second Congress, First Session, Washington, Dc, November 7, 1991, pp. 1 <https://pdf.usaid.gov>

before moving out of their homes onto the streets as full-time beggars. However, there are situations where, regardless of the employment and income status of the household, some children are pushed to join the street life as a result of domestic violence, substance abuse and use by their parents and guardians, family violence, and single parenting with limited economic opportunities. Child neglect and abuse, family disintegration, and separation, which metamorphose into irresponsible behaviours, also push children to join the street life. Every family as a system that has a responsibility to ensure children's welfare is well protected and managed may contribute to child streetism if it is disintegrated and there are no proper mechanisms to unite such families.⁵ What this means is that every family plays an important role in protecting children from joining street life. If the family environment is no longer safe and secure, a child is likely to end up joining street life, as is evident in Nigeria.

From the geographical location, the economic, political, and social spheres, Calabar has attracted all sorts of people promoting either virtues or vices⁶. The children flooding the streets of Calabar are not only indigenes of Cross River State; some come from faraway states, and others from nearby, neighboring states, especially Akwa Ibom State. This is not to say that the menace of child streetism does not exist in these states. The issue of street children has generated much interest among stakeholders in the education sector. It is one of the major social problems encountered globally, including in Akwa Ibom State, where there is a large number of street children.⁷ Umoayara further points out that the presence of these street children in Akwa Ibom State has assumed an uncommon, worrisome magnitude, especially as it concerns the involvement of some of them in phone snatching, thuggery, prostitution, pickpocketing, and exposure to armed robbery, which, of course, leaves the residents of Akwa Ibom as victims. In Lagos, Kaduna, and Port Harcourt, which arguably reflect the three main cultural diversities in Nigeria, the issue of

⁵ S. Jeston, Z. Yinong and N. Adella. "Challenges Facing Street Children and Coping Strategies in Dodoma and Dar es Salaam Cities, Tanzania". *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, Vol. 06, Issue 10, October 2023, p. 3

⁶ P. O. Odey. "Urbanization and Social Vices: The *Skolombo* Phenomenon in Calabar, Cross River State" in *History, Urbanization and Development in Nigeria, 1914-2014 (Festschrift in Honour of Professor Enoch Oyedele)*, edited by Patrick I. Ukase, Emmanuel O. Akubor, and Augustine I. Onoja. (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 2016), p. 396.

⁷ M. G Umoayara, Mildred Ekot, Joseph Johnny Idungafa. "Survival Strategies of Street Children in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria". *Sapientia Foundation Journal of Education, Sciences and Gender Studies (SFJESGS)*, Vol.4, No 4, December, 2022, p. 136 <https://www.internationalscholarsjournal.com>

street children is prevalent in these cities.⁸ In the northern part of the country (Nigeria), the Almajiris, another name for street children, have traditionally constituted a menace to the people. This set of street children emerged basically as a result of the activities of the religious bandits encouraged and motivated by political manipulators.⁹ It is quite unfortunate that women and children are the victims of the activities of the evil insurgencies in the North, as they get thrown out of their homes to the streets, thereby multiplying the statistics of street children in Nigeria. In the last eight years, events in Niger Delta cities, including Calabar, have been equally instructive. Most urban terror gangs operating in these cities have street children as both active foot soldiers and surveillance teams that provide intelligence before attacks.¹⁰ These Street children assume different names, such as Area boys (including the girls among them) and *Skolombo* Boys, and are always there to be used by Politicians and mischief makers.¹¹

Today, these street children, otherwise known as *Skolombo* Boys, operate with different kinds of weapons, snatching phones, money, and other valuables from people around the city of Calabar. There have also been reports of robberies, rape, and kidnapping carried out by this group of street children. This situation, if not handled urgently, may escalate to the point where these children seek to gain control of certain territories in Calabar. This situation, which threatens the security and peaceful coexistence not only of Calabar but of the entire Cross River State, requires a proactive approach to ensure a safe environment. Intervention efforts to advocate for safety are communicative acts.¹² Therefore, communication becomes essential for invoking an intervention that is both strategic and participatory if sustainable change is indeed to occur in the state. SBCC is a process, meaning that it is participatory or interactive, research-driven, planned, and strategic.

⁸O. Aransiola, B. Olusina, A. Akanni and O. Lanre. "Proliferation of Street Children in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges". *Journal of Social Work*, vol. 9, no. 4, 4th August 2009, p.5
<http://jsw.sagepub.com/content/early/2009/08/04/1468017309342539>

⁹ A. Adewale and Babatunde Afolabi. "Street Children Phenomenon in Nigeria: The Challenges and Way Forward" SSRN Electronic *Journal January, 2013, p. 4* <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272219479>

¹⁰ E. F OWOLABI. "Street Children as Threat to National Security and Peace in Nigeria: Can the Child Rights Act serve as a Panacea?". *KIU Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 3, no.2, 2017, p. 94 <https://ijhumas.com>

¹¹ M. C A NTUI. "Street Children, Skolombo Phenomenon and National Security in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria". M.SC Thesis, October, 2019, p. 1- <https://kefi.nsuk.edu.ng>

¹² H. N Aligwe, A. N Kenneth, K. E Ohiri, F. Nwabufoe. "Communication and Public Health Promotion in Nigeria". *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research*, vol. 26, no. 7, 2018, p. 743, <https://www.researchgate.net>, accessed on 21st December, 2024

It also aims to change social conditions and individual behaviours. SBCC applies a comprehensive, socio-ecological model to identify actual tipping points for change. It does this by examining individual knowledge, motivation, and other behaviour-change communication factors, such as cultural factors, gender norms, skills, physical and economic access, and legislation, that contribute to an enabling environment.¹³ Thus, the study tries to assess the relationship between Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) and the menace of street children in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State.

Curbing the Street Children Menace: A Conceptual Overview

The study is a survey that relies more on primary and secondary data, using existing information for analysis and to draw vital conclusions. These data sources for the study include observations, interviews, books, journal articles, unpublished papers, and web pages. This research approach was employed because limited resources hindered the implementation of the intervention for the chosen research topic. So the study only intended to provide answers to specific communication questions.

The Concept of Behaviour Change Communication (BCC)

This study recognizes the modification in terminology from Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) to Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) as a recent milestone in advocacy for a safe environment in Cross River State. Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) is a strategic, evidence-based communication approach that aims to positively influence individual and community behaviours, with the primary objective of achieving specific social or health outcomes. It incorporates communication tools and techniques to promote positive, dependable, and measurable changes in attitudes, beliefs, practices, and behaviours among specific or targeted populations.

Stanislaus Iyorza asserts that Social and behavioural change Communication is an interactive, consultative, research-based, multi-pronged communication approach aimed at behaviour change

¹³ USAID. HIV/AIDS: Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) User's Guide. Abuja: National Agency for the Control of AIDS, 2013: 23.

at the individual, community, and social levels.¹⁴ SBCC addresses the role communication can play in bringing about social change, including changes in individual behaviour and norms. USAID describes SBCC as the systematic application of interactive, theory-based, and research-driven communication processes and strategies to address tipping points for change at the individual, community, and social or societal levels.¹⁵ SBCC looks at a problem from multiple sides by analyzing personal, societal, and environmental factors to find the most effective tipping points for sustainable change. While BCC can achieve individual empowerment, SBCC is also using strategies that influence the physical, socio-economic, and cultural environment to facilitate healthy norms and choices and remove barriers to them. In some situations, advocacy or social mobilization for policy change may support greater, more immediate, and more permanent change than campaigns targeting individual behaviours.¹⁶ Judging from these scholarly opinions, it would not be wrong to say then that SBCC is all-embracing. This is because it draws on theories and methodologies from across most areas of study, such as communication, the social sciences, and public health, to develop interventions that address a wide range of social issues. For instance, through SBCC, effective advocacy can be carried out to influence the social context in which these Street Children operate. SBCC entails using communication to change not only behaviours but also service utilization. It does this by positively influencing knowledge, attitudes, and social norms. The application of SBCC to the menace posed by street children is beyond doubt. The paper contends that if Social and behaviour change communication, which uses three key strategies, is used to address the problem of street children, positive change at individual and community levels can be achieved. This is because SBCC has the potential to address social and security issues through advocacy, *Social mobilization*, and *Behaviour Change Communication*.¹⁷

Advocacy: Advocacy is an SBCC strategy in which groups or individuals work to bring about social or organizational change on behalf of a particular social problem, programme, interest, or population. Media advocacy adopts a participatory approach that emphasizes the need for

¹⁴ S. Iyorza. *Social and Behavioural Change Communication: Principles, Practices and Perspective*. B2 Publication, Nigeria, ISBN 978-8073-60-3, 2015, p. 75.

¹⁵ USAID. Social Mobilization Strategy. Digital file: www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2011RH. 23.

¹⁶ J. Godswill. "Social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) strategies and the fight against drug abuse in Calabar South Local Government Area, Cross River State". *International Journal of Advanced Mass Communication and Journalism*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2020, p. 3 www.masscomjournal.com

¹⁷ USAID. C- Change Project. Web: <https://www.c-changeprogram.org/>. March 11, 2011.

communities to gain control and power to transform their environments.¹⁸ Advocacy can influence the government to develop healthy policies and legislation that impact community development and individual well-being. It can help groups and communities make healthy choices and support developmental initiatives that promote the well-being of the populace. Using advocacy to inform and motivate leaders to create a supportive environment to achieve programme objectives and development goals is one easy step toward eradicating the menace of street children in society. There are essentially three types of advocacy. They include Media, Community, and Policy advocacies.¹⁹ Advocacy is a continuous and adaptive process of gathering, organizing, and formulating information into an argument to be communicated to decision-makers through various interpersonal and media channels to influence their decisions to raise resources or to secure political and social leadership acceptance and commitment for a development programme, thereby preparing society for its acceptance.²⁰ In the context of managing street children, media advocacy may be carried out by key individuals, NGOs, organizations, ambassadors, people in national and local leadership positions, and the print and electronic media. Designing well-developed media messages and applying them to the problems associated with street children through the drivers of SBCC education Strategies will go a long way in bringing the much-desired change and encourage responsible, good parenting, family planning, skill acquisition to discourage joblessness, relentless efforts in doing genuine businesses against religious fanaticism, etc., in Cross River State.

Community/Programme Advocacy is one type of advocacy that can be used to bring an end to the issue of street children in Cross River State. Green et al. assert that programme advocacy consists of a large number of information activities, such as lobbying with decision-makers through personal contacts and direct mail; holding seminars, rallies, and news-making events; ensuring regular newspaper, magazine, television, and radio coverage; and obtaining endorsements

¹⁸ J. U Agba. "Application of Social and Behaviour Change Communication Education Strategies in the Management of Open Defecation in Cross River State, Nigeria". *Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, Vol. 24, Issue 7, 2019, p. 4, p. 5 www.iosrjournals.org

¹⁹ USAID. C- Change: A Learning Package for Social and Behaviour Change Communication. Version 2, Modules 0-5, 2012.

²⁰ USAID. C- Change: A Learning Package for Social and Behaviour Change Communication. Version 2, Modules 0-5, 2012.

from well-known people. The goal of advocacy is to make innovation a political or national priority that cannot be swept aside with a change in government.²¹

Another advocacy expedient in addressing the problem of street children is policy advocacy. Policy Advocacy uses available data and approaches to draw the attention of prominent politicians and administrators to the impact of the identified problem at the national level and the need for action to address it. “For example, the Safety Injection Global Network (SIGNS) advocacy campaign began with a survey of 198 decision-makers in 33 countries on their perceptions of the status of safe injections in their countries. Based on the data, it was possible to frame arguments that addressed their knowledge of the situation and their concerns. The results fed into the framing of future advocacy strategies.”²²

Social Mobilization: Social mobilization is a process that engages and motivates a wide range of partners and allies at national and local levels to raise awareness of and demand for a particular development objective through dialogue. It provides opportunities for members of institutions, community networks, civic and religious groups, and others to work in a coordinated way while aiming to reach specific groups of people with already planned messages for dialogue.²³ This means that social mobilization seeks to process change through a range of players engaged in interrelated and complementary efforts. Social mobilization takes into account that sustainable social and behaviour change requires collaboration at multiple levels, from the individual to the community to policy and legislative action. In other words, the essence of social mobilization is to build partnerships and coordination with the expectation of having a stronger impact than isolated efforts. Mobilization can be instituted through the use of advocacy to assemble resources and change, amplifying policies, media, and special events to raise public awareness and create public domains for debate, building and reinforcing partnership systems that encourage community participation.

²¹ J. U Agba. “Application of Social and Behaviour Change Communication Education Strategies in the Management of Open Defecation in Cross River State, Nigeria”. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, Vol. 24, Issue 7, 2019, p. 4, p. 5 www.iosrjournals.org

²² J. U Agba. “Application of Social and Behaviour Change Communication Education Strategies in the Management of Open Defecation in Cross River State, Nigeria”. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, Vol. 24, Issue 7, 2019, p. 4, p. 5 www.iosrjournals.org

²³ WHO/UNICEF. “Joint Monitoring Program for Water Supply and Sanitation”. Geneva: UNICEF, 2014

Behaviour Change Communication (BCC): Behaviour Change Communication is a process that uses communication approaches and tools to develop people's skills and capabilities, promoting and managing their development initiatives by adopting positive change that offers opportunities for growth and sustainable development.²⁴ This definition presents behaviour change communication as a process of working with individuals, groups, communities, and societies, using communication strategies to promote positive behaviour and provide a reassuring environment that enables people to replicate and sustain positive behaviours. So, to develop strategies for behaviour change in the context of this study, it is important, as part of the strategies, to identify the Parents and guardians of the children on the street because they are the drivers of the target behaviour. It is equally expedient to identify and involve the potential parents of children who are at risk of ending up on the streets. The interventionists should also note that individuals' adoption and behavioural change go through several internal stages before any behaviour changes. The wide-ranging process in which one passes through BCC stages includes unaware → aware → Concerned → knowledgeable → Motivated to change → practicing trial behavior change → sustained behavior change.²⁵ After these processes, individuals learn and become more knowledgeable; thus, they become motivated to change, try new behaviours, assess them, and decide whether or not to sustain them. However, BCC has proven to be an instructional intervention that has a close interface with education and communication. It involves the following steps: 1. the interventionists need to state the goal of the intervention or programme; 2. There should be an involvement of stakeholders; 3. they need to identify the target populations; 4. Conduct formative BCC assessments; 5. Segment target populations; 6. Define behaviour change objectives; 7. Define BCC strategy & monitoring and evaluation plan; 8. Develop communication products; 9. Carry out a Pretest; 10. Implement and monitor the strategies; 11. Evaluate the entire exercise, and 12. Analyze feedback and review the action.

Theoretical Framework

The socio-ecological model and Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory provide a relevant framework for understanding communication efforts addressing street children in Cross River

²⁴ R. Blum. *Positive Youth Development: Reducing Risk, Improving Health*. Geneva: World Health Organization, 1999, p. 16

²⁵ R. Blum. *Positive Youth Development: Reducing Risk, Improving Health*. Geneva: World Health Organization, 1999, p. 32

State within the context of SBCC. While the Socio-ecological model is an adaptation of Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human behaviour, which explains how human behaviour is influenced by multiple factors, Social Learning or Social Cognitive Theory, as succinctly put by Bandura, is a theory that explains how people learn behaviours from others through observation. The Theory posits that people learn how to behave by observing the actions of others; observing the apparent consequences of those actions; checking those consequences for their own lives; and rehearsing and trying out those actions themselves.²⁶ Social Learning Theory asserts that human behaviours are learned through observation and modelling; i.e., individuals are more likely to adopt a modelled behaviour if it leads to outcomes they value.²⁷ What this means is that people learn from observing others and modeling their behaviour. Bandura further explains that desired behaviour can be instilled in characters whose actions serve as models for others, who, in turn, are influenced by attention, retention, and motivation. Social Cognitive Theory operates at five connected levels. These levels are succinctly explained below in relation to the menace of street children in Calabar Metropolis. It is my opinion that when this theory is applied to the issue of street children in Calabar, community theatre can be a powerful channel of communication by providing a platform for the children, their parents/guidance, and the community to learn and change their behaviours.

How Social Learning Theory can be applied through Community Theatre to address the issue of street children in Calabar Metropolis

1. Modeling Positive Behaviours:

The essential role of community theatre as a tool or medium for communicating this intervention message cannot be overlooked. Through community theatre, street children, or *Skolombo* boys as they are popularly called, can be engaged in exploring scenarios in which supportive families, educational opportunities, and community interventions positively impact children's lives, including those of adults. During the presentation, other children, their parents, and community members are seated, witnessing and learning from these positive behaviours being demonstrated

²⁶ USAID. C- Change Project. Web: <https://www.c-changeprogram.org/>. March 11, 2011. 11

²⁷ A. Bandura. *Social Learning Theory*. New York: General Learning Press, 1977:22. 12 April, 2015. 22

on stage. Community theatre incorporates the trilogy of entertainment, education, and participation to curb the menace of streetism in Calabar Metropolis.

2. Reinforcement of Positive Behaviours:

Here, the community theatre's message can be designed to highlight the benefits of staying off the streets, such as access to education, support systems, and a better future. Through storytelling and role-playing, these street children can see the benefits of positive behaviour and be encouraged to replicate these behaviours in real life. However, after the presentation, the children should be engaged in beneficial physical activities, such as attending school, vocational training, or joining community programmes like the Children's Carnival Calabar. The paper argues that linking positive behaviours to rewards or recognition of this magnitude can motivate these children to make positive choices. Positive choices like embracing virtues rather than vices, education and entrepreneurial skills acquisition rather than crime/violence.

3. Social Support and Networking:

Community theatre can foster a sense of community and togetherness. So the involvement of both street children and other community members in the production and viewing of performances would amplify and strengthen social bonds. This can also go a long way toward providing street children with a network of support outside their usual environment and encouraging positive social interactions.

4. Self-Efficacy:

Bandura's concept of self-efficacy suggests that individuals' beliefs in their ability to succeed influence their behaviour. So, by helping build confidence in these street children and providing them with opportunities to experience success, they can become more motivated to pursue positive alternatives to life on the streets rather than resorting to malicious, retrogressive behaviours that are detrimental to the state. However, the role of community theatre here is crucial, as it allows children to see themselves portrayed in a powerful, positive light. This, without a doubt, has the potential to boost their self-esteem and empower them to believe they can change their circumstances.

5. Education and Awareness:

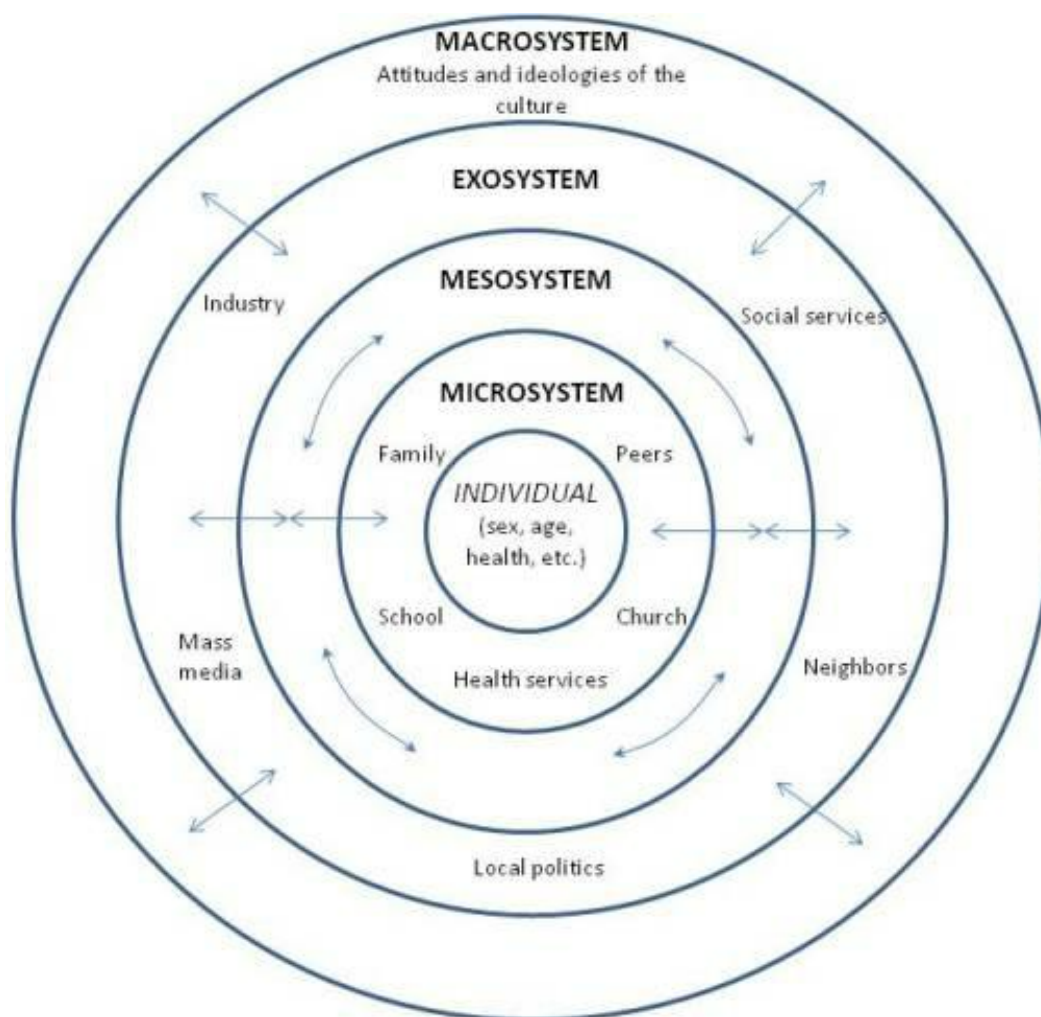
Under this element of the theory, the implementation of community theatre productions can raise awareness about the underlying issues contributing to the presence of street children in Calabar Municipality, such as poverty, broken marriages, single parenting, and lack of educational opportunities, among other problems. Educating the community through engaging performances and attitudes and behaviours towards street children may lead to some modifications. Therefore, by leveraging Bandura's Social Learning Theory through community theatre, Calabar Municipality can create a supportive environment that promotes positive behaviours and empowers street children to make better choices for themselves. Through these elements of the theory: modeling, reinforcement, social support, empowerment, and education, the community can work together to curb the menace of street children and create a safer and more inclusive environment for all its residents.

How the Socio-ecological Model can be applied to address the issue of street children in Calabar Municipality

FIGURE 1

A:

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Human Development

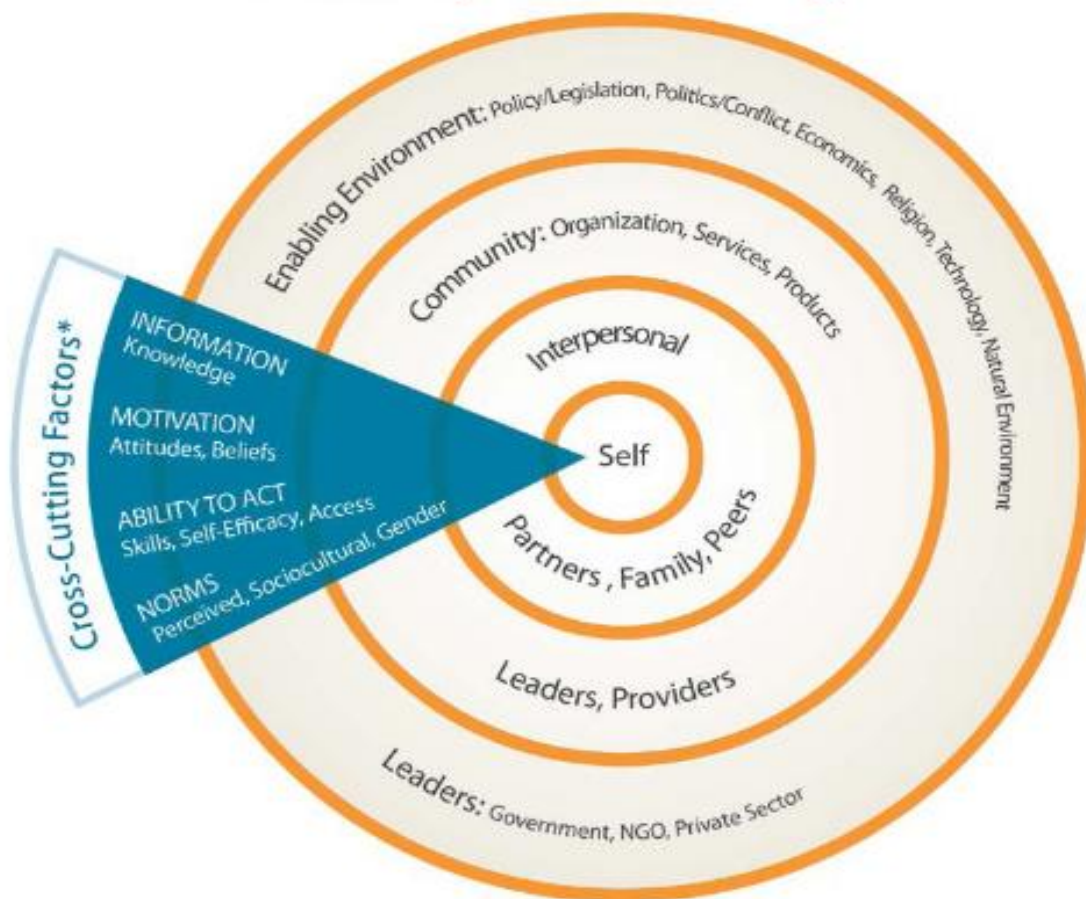


Source: Adapted from Bukatko and Daehler, 1998

FIGURE 1

B:

Socio-Ecological Model for Change



*These concepts apply to all levels (people, organizations, and institutions). They were originally developed for the individual level.

SOURCE: Adapted from McKee, Manoncourt, Chin and Carnegie (2000)

The Socio-ecological model shown in Figure B above was adapted for the SBCC Programme from Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of human development, as shown in Figure A above. In the Socio-ecological Model, human behaviour is influenced by multiple factors. These factors are identified as "cultural, norms, networks, organizational and even individual/interpersonal factors including psychological factors, etc".²⁸ The model believes that identifying these factors is a yardstick for the successful implementation of any SBCC interventions. Therefore, in this article, the socio-ecological model provides a framework or mirror that helps the study view factors that may act as barriers to the intervention.

However, the socio-ecological model shows how an individual is directly influenced by his family, peers, and community, which in turn operate within complex environments of indirect influencers such as policymakers, faith leaders, and politicians. The model shows several rings of influence, all of which affect change. For example, people need information that is timely, accessible, and relevant. With such information, such individuals, groups, or communities may be empowered to act. However, for most people, information is not enough. They need to be motivated, and this can only be achieved through strategic communication such as effective peer education, entertainment radio, and theatre performance. If done well, such communication could provoke and amplify individual attitudinal and behavioural change, as well as changes in social norms. It is also worth noting that there are instances where even motivation may not be enough, so people need the ability to act in particular circumstances. In this instance, they have to be equipped with the skills, as Bandura says in the element of reinforcement above. The ability these people need to act may come from exposing them to decision-making and creative thinking skills that help them use their faculty of consciousness to innovate for positive development, etc. The outer ring of the model represents the overall environment, showing how policies, economics, the physical environment, and the organizational environment all act to either impede or enable positive change. Actors in this ring, such as policymakers and civil society leaders, can also be targeted for advocacy and social mobilization activities for the transformation of the target population, which in this case is the street children, including their parents/guidance.

²⁸ USAID. Behavior Change Communication (Bcc) For HIV/AIDS: A Strategic Framework. Arlington, U.S.A.: USAID. 2002. 9 April, 2015. 13.

In terms of application, the Socio-Ecological Model is a framework that considers the interplay between individuals and their environments on multiple levels. Applying this model to address the issue of Street Children in Calabar Metropolis requires understanding and intervening at each level to develop comprehensive solutions. This can be done as follows:

1. Individual Level: At the individual level, interventions can focus on changing behaviours and perceptions of the street children themselves. This could involve providing vocational training, social work counseling, and mentorship to help them transition to more positive activities. For instance, programmes that offer skills training in areas like entrepreneurship, art, technology, carpentry, tailoring, or computer literacy can empower them to pursue legal and fulfilling careers.

2. Interpersonal Level: On the interpersonal level, as indicated in the model, the focus is on relationships and interactions between individuals. In this case, community-based interventions such as peer mentoring programmes, like inviting former *Skolombo* Boys who have successfully reintegrated into society to come and mentor the current members, or support groups, can be effective. By fostering positive relationships with peers, family members, and mentors, these street children can develop a sense of belonging and support outside of negative influences like armed robbery, bags, phone snatching, raping, and kidnapping.

3. Community Level: Interventions at the community level involve changing the physical and social environment in which the street children live. This could include creating safe spaces, recreational facilities, and community centers where the children can participate in sports, arts, and educational programmes under the supervision of trained mentors. This could help them engage in constructive activities. However, the organization of community policing, neighbourhood watch programmes, and partnerships with local businesses and organizations can also help deter criminal behaviour that some children might be inclined to exhibit.

4. Societal Level: This is where policies and systems come into play. It is essential at this point for the Cross River State Government and those with the political will to address systemic issues such as poverty, unemployment, lack of educational opportunities, and social exclusion that contribute to the emergence of street children. Advocacy for policies that promote social inclusion, economic empowerment, and access to education can help create a more supportive environment for all Cross River State indigenes, especially the youths.

Conclusion

The study concludes that a lack of family support for children makes it easier for them to end up on the streets. Lack of family support for a child to access basic needs and services, regardless of the employment and income status of the household, pushed children to join the street life. Likewise, substance abuse and use by the parents and guardians, family violence, single parenting with limited economic opportunities, poverty, child neglect, and abuse were also the reasons that pushed some of the children to join the street life. There were cases of family disintegration or separation resulting from irresponsible behaviours and practices of parents and guardians. All these family issues acted as underlying agents of the promotion of street children's existence in Calabar. Hence, implementing a multifaceted intervention using various SBCC strategies, including the application of the two chosen theories (Socio-ecological Model and Social Cognitive Theory), would go a long way toward providing a safe environment for Cross River State Inhabitants.

The paper recommends the following: first, a sustainable collaboration among the Cross River State Government, relevant civil society groups, faith-based organisations like the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), and traditional institutions towards designing implementable BCC to educate parents, caregivers, and the public on the causes, dangers, and prevention of child streetism. Second, social security measures that alleviate poverty, reduce unemployment, improve access to quality and affordable maternal and child healthcare services, and expand realistic access to compulsory, free, and quality basic education are critical to curbing streetism in Calabar Metropolis. Third, family-based conflict can be resolved through effective communication channels. This way, parents and guardians are encouraged to maintain open, supportive, and consistent communication with their children to reduce family conflict, neglect, and abuse, which are major contributors to children living on the streets. Fourth, effective and efficient enforcement of existing child protection laws, including provisions of the Child Rights Act, to prevent child abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and neglect. Also, rehabilitation and reintegration of victims into society/family are critical in restoring the dignity of children.

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