

MEDIA RELEASE

Ethiopia's children share their dreams in new campaigning book

Ethiopia's orphans and vulnerable children today got a chance to share their dreams in a new book – published at the start of a ground-breaking campaign to raise support and funding for the country's young people.

Hundreds of street children, orphans and other vulnerable youngsters were asked to describe their hopes for the future in words and pictures for the book entitled "We Have A Dream".

Their hard-hitting contributions will now be used as the basis of a campaign to persuade Ethiopian politicians to put the rights of vulnerable children closer to the top of the political agenda and to increase state funding for youth-related schemes.

The book is the first section of a three-part campaign organized by the National Orphans and Vulnerable Children Task Force, an umbrella organization chaired by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs that includes UNICEF, HAPCO, UNAIDS, USAID, Save the Children among other NGOs and government departments..

"The voices of vulnerable children are too often overlooked or ignored in Ethiopia and many other countries," said Bjorn Ljungqvist, Country Representative for UNICEF in Ethiopia.

"This book gives a voice to hundreds of those voiceless children. It contains many strong messages for Ethiopia's politicians and everyone else who lives alongside Ethiopia's vulnerable children.

"One of the main things that has stuck out is the huge appetite these children have for education. They are desperate to go to school. They see education as the main way of achieving their dreams.

"Lots of us have also been struck by the many articulate descriptions of the experience of living as a child in Ethiopia – particularly the intense grief felt by orphans."

The editors of "We Have A Dream" went out of their way to collect contributions from street children and orphans from every corner of the country – from Gambella to Tigray and the Somali region.

The book ends with a call on the Ethiopian government to implement the full terms of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a human rights treaty signed by 192 governments including Ethiopia.

"'We Have a Dream' highlights the ways that Ethiopia's children are still not enjoying their full rights as drawn up under the Convention, particularly in terms of access to education and protection against abuse and discrimination," said Mr Ljungqvist.

The book "We Have A Dream" is the first of a three-part campaign to raise the profile of Ethiopia's most vulnerable children. The second – "Run For Their Dreams" – has recruited hundreds of participants in this weekend's Great Ethiopian Run to raise sponsorship money for vulnerable children projects.

The third part entitled "Listen to their Dreams" sets out to persuade local and national politicians in Ethiopia to raise support and funding for orphans and vulnerable children. Parliamentarians will be asked to increase budget support for vulnerable children through all state avenues, including the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Candidates in next year's woreda elections will be asked to sign up to a list of commitments on children's rights, based on the findings of the 'We Have A Dream' book.

In the long run, the Dream campaign aims to set up a permanent Alliance For Orphans and Vulnerable Children, made up of government bodies, UN agencies, NGOs, religious organizations, civil society groups and interested members of the public.

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