

# MY WORLD, MY VISION



May 2013

**Consultations with children on their priorities for the post-2015 framework**

This report was written by Gillian Mann, Family for Every Child's Research Advisor. Family for Every Child is a global network of hands-on national organisations working to ensure that more children can grow up in secure families and access temporary, quality alternative care when needed. Several of Family for Every Child's member agencies took part in the consultations that form the basis of this report, and particular thanks go to:

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- Partnership for Every Child in Russia

The report is based on regional and country level reports which can be found on our website: <http://www.familyforeverychild.org/knowledge-centre>

The country level report for Brazil was written by Fernanda Haikal Moreira. The country level report for India was written by Meena Pai. All other country and regional level reports were written by the author.

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## Summary

We spoke with almost 600 children in Brazil, Ghana, Guyana, India, Kenya, Malawi and Russia about their priorities for the post-2015 framework. We focused on vulnerable and excluded groups including children living in institutional or foster care, on the streets, in detention, or in extended families. Children told us that they want the following:

### 1. To be safe and protected in families

*“Everybody wants to go home to live with their parents so they can give you love and attention”* (10-year-old girl living in residential care in Guyana)

*“I want to find a foster family and leave. I want to go away from the children’s home”* (boy, 13-17 years old, with developmental disabilities, in Russia)

### 2. To live a life free from violence in homes, schools, workplaces and communities

*“Children want parents not to beat their children”* (12-year-old boy in detention in Kenya)

### 3. To be treated equally, with dignity, respect and tolerance

*“Children need more people to love and appreciate them”* (child, 13-17 years, living in residential care in Russia)

*“I like staying with supportive and caring guardians who do not look down on me because I am an orphan.”* (Boy, 15, living in extended family care in Malawi)

### 4. Good friends and time to play and rest

*“Hanging out with friends makes me happy”* (boy, 15, living in extended family care in Guyana)

### 5. To go to good schools with good teachers

*“Every child needs to go to school, and know how to read and write. The adults also”* (girl, nine years old, in Brazil)

### 6. Enough food to eat and decent homes

*“All children [should] get enough food ... have parents or caregivers ... be provided with good clothing ... safe water ... have better places for sleeping and reading.”* (boys aged 13-17, living in residential care in Kenya)

## 7. To be free from child labour and exploitation

*“Children are not supposed to be employed. They need to attend school”* (girl aged 13-17 years, living in residential care in Kenya)

We are calling for a post-2015 framework which reflects children’s priorities for change. This framework should revitalise efforts to address the issues already laid out in the Millennium Development Goals, asserting the need to eradicate hunger, and to provide all children and families with access to clean drinking water, good health care and decent shelter and living environments. The new framework should move beyond material concerns and the provision of basic services to also include goals and targets in the following key areas.

- **Child protection:** All boys and girls should live a life free from all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse and be supported in safe and caring family environments. Specifically, children want to end harmful child labour and violence in homes, schools and communities, to grow up within safe families, and to avoid institutional care.
- **Accessible, safe, quality and relevant schooling:** Current goals should be expanded to ensure that all children have equal access to good schools, staffed by trained teachers who support children’s learning and do not physically or verbally abuse them.
- **Safe opportunities for leisure and play:** All boys and girls should have the opportunity to play and rest.

Our consultations with children further suggest the importance of changes to the way that the post-2015 development framework is developed, implemented and monitored. The following findings are crucial.

- Children want to be treated equally, with dignity and respect. Ensure that gains from the new framework reach all sections of the community and that services and support do not discriminate, and respect children’s rights.
- Children, including commonly excluded groups, have strong views and clear insights into their lives. Enable children to participate in shaping, implementing and monitoring the new framework.

## Introduction

*“Children are not really understood. Adults think children know nothing.” (boy, 12, Brazil)*

Around the world, discussions are currently taking place on the framework that will replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) when they come to an end in 2015. Commitments have been made to ensuring that the process of developing this new framework is inclusive and consultative. Children’s participation is crucial to these discussions. Not only do boys and girls constitute nearly half of the world’s population, they are the majority demographic affected by poverty. Just as many of the issues outlined in the current MDGs have a major impact on children’s lives, so too will those included in the post-2015 framework. Boys’ and girls’ experiences of deprivation and inequality are different to those of adults, as are their experiences of their impacts. Children have important perspectives to share, and a right to have their voices heard.

Between July 2012 and March 2013, members of Family for Every Child consulted with children living in seven different countries. This report summarises the main findings that emerged from these consultations and incorporates the views of almost 600 children between the ages of 8 and 17 in Brazil, Ghana, Guyana, India, Kenya, Malawi and Russia. In all, 89 workshops were held, with 293 boys and 297 girls participating.

These consultations involved highly vulnerable groups of children, who are commonly marginalised and excluded from policy debates. In order for a new framework to effectively address those in greatest need, the views and experiences of these boys and girls cannot be ignored. These children were living in numerous different arrangements, including:

- within their extended family (kinship care)
- with unrelated individuals or families (formal foster care)
- in residential care, including short-term shelters for children removed from forced labour or the streets, and special residential care facilities for those with disabilities
- in detention
- in child-only households
- on the streets
- with employers or previously with employers.

In all of the settings where the consultations took place, children identified and prioritised a series of changes that they believe would improve their own lives and those of other children. While most boys and girls recognised the importance of many of the goals outlined in the MDGs, they felt that a broader set of changes was required in order to address the issues of greatest concern to them and their well-being. Their priorities for change were not only material in nature – in terms of wanting potable water and enough food to eat, for example. Boys and girls also highlighted the importance of love, respect, care and protection, of being with friends, of going to school and of living without fear of violence and abuse. In so doing, they drew attention to the multi-dimensional nature of well-being and the fundamental importance of relationships to the experience of everyday life.



Girls in India sharing their views on priorities for a post-2015 framework

## Methods

The purpose of these consultations was to explore with boys and girls their priorities for a framework to replace the current MDGs. A workshop-based approach was used, in which younger and older children participated in a series of activities designed to enable them to share their views and experiences in a fun and engaging manner. On average, workshops had six participants and were approximately two hours each in duration.

Broadly, the focus of these workshops was on learning from children about:

- the things that make them feel happy and safe in their families and communities
- the things that make them feel unhappy and unsafe in their families and communities
- the things that they would like to change about their lives and the lives of other children in their communities and elsewhere.

These discussions were placed in the context of the current MDGs and the development of the post-2015 agenda. The policy framework and the political process for its implementation were communicated and explained to participating boys and girls in simple and accessible ways, including using stickers, drawings and discussion.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> More details on the precise methods used are available in the downloadable Consultation Toolkit: <http://www.familyforeverychild.org/knowledge-centre/post-mdg-consultations-children-toolkit>.





Children in Kenya sharing their views on what governments' priorities should be

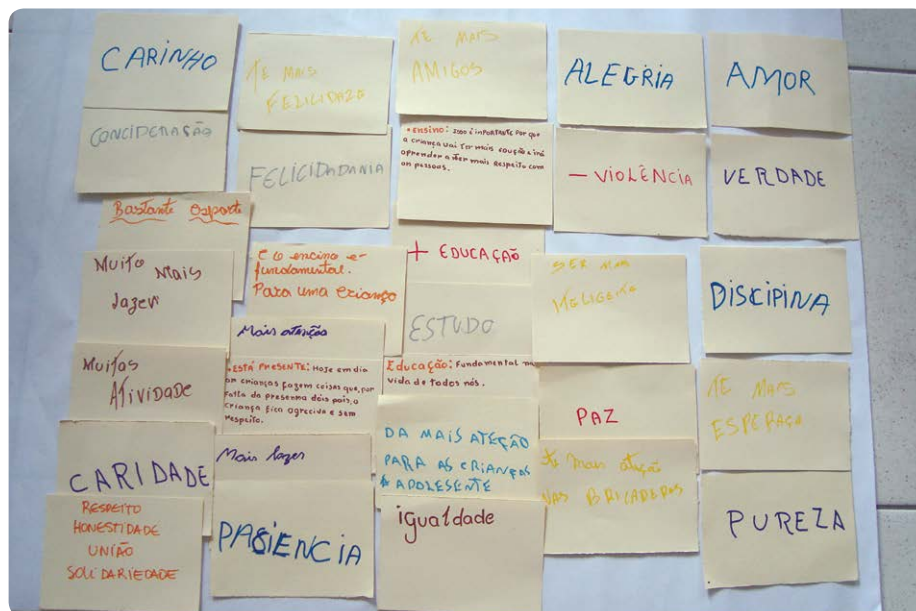
Consultation workshops involved both individual and collective activities – drawings, writing, discussions and ‘gallery walks’ in which children looked at one another’s creations and discussed them as a group (see Box 1 for an example of an exercise used with children living in residential care in Brazil). Participating boys and girls also enjoyed games, informal play time and snacks. After the workshops were completed in each country, the findings were analysed and a provisional child-friendly summary report was produced and shared with participating children for their reflections and insights. This feedback was then incorporated into individual country or regional level reports, and is reflected in the findings included in this paper.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For national and regional reports see: Brazil: <http://www.familyforeverychild.org/knowledge-centre/post-mdg-consultations-children-brazil>; Guyana: <http://www.familyforeverychild.org/knowledge-centre/post-mdg-consultations-children-guyana>; India: <http://www.familyforeverychild.org/knowledge-centre/post-mdg-consultations-children-india>; Russia: <http://www.familyforeverychild.org/knowledge-centre/post-mdg-consultations-children-russia>; Africa (forthcoming).



### Box 1: Children's priorities in Brazil



This collage shows the various suggestions given by children living in a residential care facility in Brazil on what is needed to improve their lives. Boys and girls wrote on cards and then were asked to prioritise the issues raised with the most important in the middle, lowest priorities at the edges and medium priorities between the two. Important issues included love, truth, violence, discipline, education, equality, peace, care, play, joy and purity.

## Findings

In each of the 89 workshops held, children worked together to share their opinions and experiences. Regardless of the age of participating boys and girls, their gender, or the country or residential context in which they lived, very similar issues were discussed and prioritised. All children, including those with disabilities, were able to articulate their concerns in clear and straightforward ways. Although there were differences between what girls and boys, and children in different settings, said, there was also a great deal of convergence in their views, suggesting a clear set of priorities for those determining the post-2015 development framework.

The fact that there were few issues that appeared unique to particular groups of boys or girls in particular country contexts is a major finding in itself. It suggests that while there are complexities and differences within the experiences and priorities of the vulnerable children we spoke with, there is also a series of primary concerns that are shared by all of these boys and girls. These thematic foci form the main findings of this report. Some of these relate to the provision of basic, material needs while others reflect the importance children place on the non-material aspects of their lives.

## Theme 1: Children want to be safe and protected within families

Boys and girls of all ages stressed their desire to be loved, cared for and protected, and to be treated fairly and with understanding and kindness. The emotional closeness they valued was closely associated with physical proximity: living together with parents, siblings and other family members was an important means of feeling safe, happy and protected. Children of all ages referred to living apart from their siblings – both younger and older – when they spoke of the things that made them unhappy. In general, supportive relationships with adults and children were understood to strengthen children's resilience to the numerous risks and challenges that they themselves identified, such as abuse and exploitation. While boys and girls of different ages in different contexts had different risks that they wanted to be protected from – for example, dangerous fishing practices in Ghana, or police harassment of street children in India, Malawi and Kenya – all asserted the fundamental role of loving families in supporting and nurturing child well-being.

*"When your parents are with you, you feel happy. You know that they love you"* (girl, 8-12 years old, living in residential care in Russia)

*"Everybody wants to go home to live with their parents so they can give you love and attention"* (10-year-old girl living in residential care in Guyana)

*"Family members make me happy. They keep me lively. When you are with your family, nobody can molest you in the community"* (15-year-old-boy living in residential care in Guyana)

*"Being isolated from your parents means that your life will not be good. Children should not be isolated from their parents at all if they are alive"* (girl, 8-12 years old, living in extended family care in Kenya)

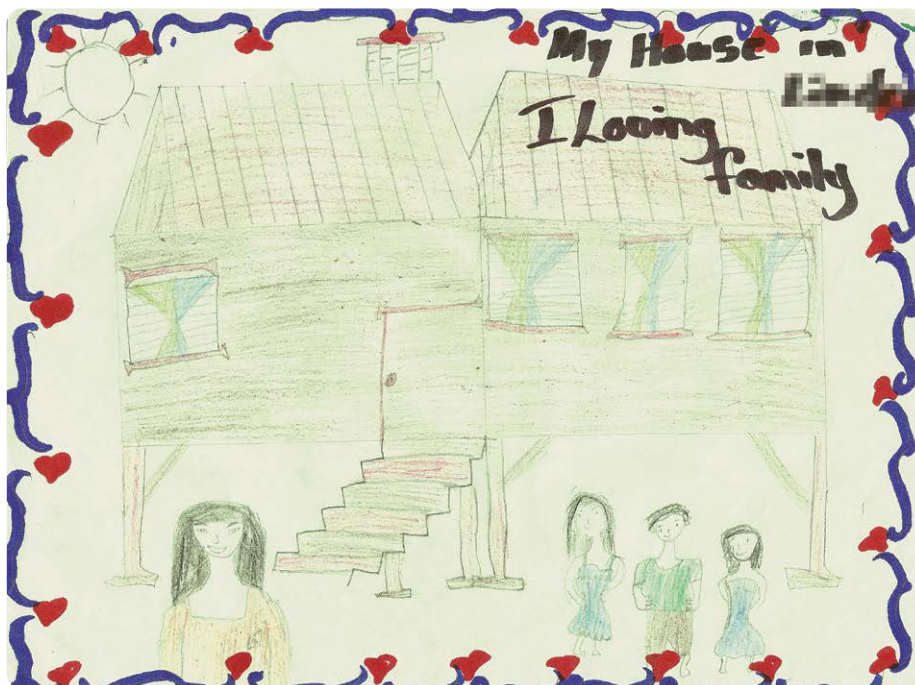
*"I'm scared of losing my sense of joy if I stay in the residential care centre for too long"* (girl, 12, Brazil)

*"My security comes from having everyone I love at my side"* (girl, 15, Brazil)

Я хочу найти  
себе, приёмную  
семью и уехать.

И хочу уехать с  
детского дома.

*"I want to find a foster family and leave. I want to go away from the children's home"* (boy, 13-17 years old, with developmental disabilities in Russia)



*'By drawing the picture of my home, I am trying to say that this is the only place that I feel welcome to live. I miss my home and my family. I always feel free when I am at home'. (girl, 16, living in residential care in Guyana)*

## **Theme 2: Children want to live free from violence in their homes, schools, workplaces and communities**

Boys and girls of all ages drew attention to the omnipresence of physical violence in their everyday lives, including between children, between adults and children, and between adults themselves. Beatings at the hands of parents, teachers, caregivers, classmates, strangers on the street and others were very common experiences in all contexts. Both boys and girls also spoke frequently of sexual violence as well as intimidation, ostracism, verbal abuse and bullying. Workshops with girls and boys highlighted the specific risks that girls face of sexual assault and harassment, and that children with disabilities experience at the hands of their parents, families, caregivers, communities and peers. While context shaped the specific manifestations of violence in children's everyday lives outside the home – for example gang violence in Brazil and communal violence in India – the experience of violence was pervasive.

*"I hate it when people fight and have hatred in their hearts for others" (girl, 11 years old, India)*

*"Those who abuse children should be punished" (girls 8-12 years old, living on the street in Kenya)*

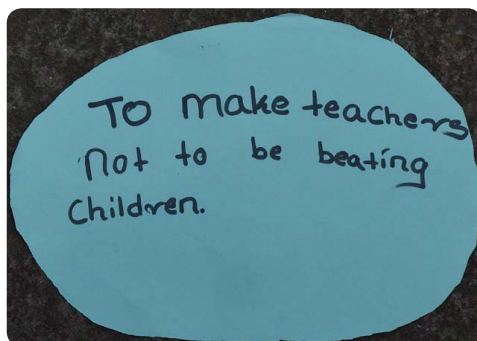
*"Government needs to help us because some parents rape their children" (boy, 14, in detention in Kenya)*

*"Children want parents not to beat their children" (12-year-old boy in detention in Kenya)*

*"Some of the big men take little boys in a corner and have sex with them" (boy, 15, in residential care in Guyana)*

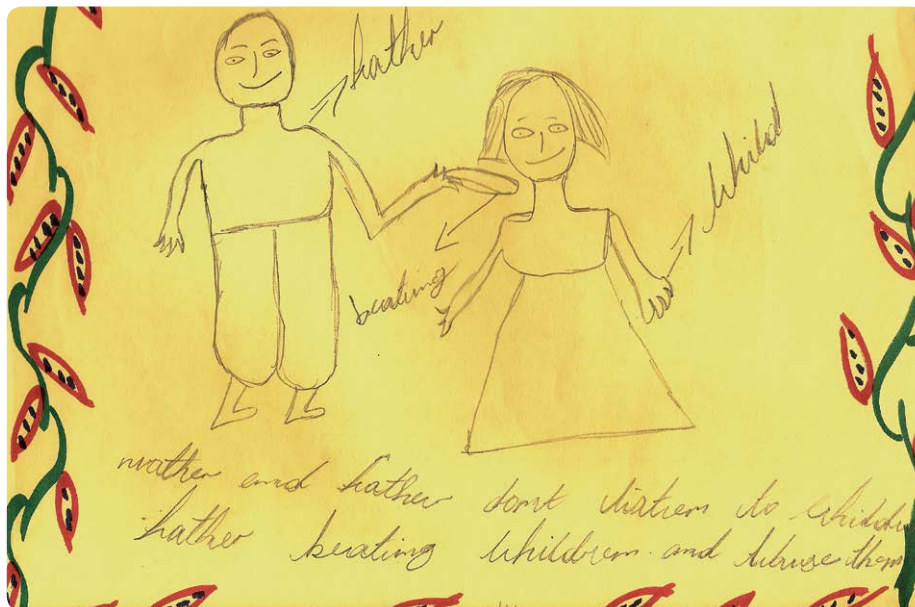


*"This man is holding a girl's hand, saying: 'I will rape you today.' The girl is shouting for help" (boy, 15, living in extended family care in Malawi)*



One priority listed by an 11-year-old girl, living in extended family care in Kenya





*"This drawing is of a father beating his daughter for no reason" (girl, 14, living in residential care in Guyana)*

### Theme 3: Children want to be treated equally and with dignity, respect and tolerance

Boys and girls of all ages, including those with special physical, learning or developmental needs, asserted their desire to be treated kindly by others and to be accepted for who they are. They stressed the importance of treating all children equally and prioritised the need for government and others to work with families and communities to better understand the needs of children so that boys and girls can be cared for in supportive and loving homes. Doing so, they argued, would reduce the numbers of children living in institutional care, on the street, in detention and in other environments which are inappropriate for children. Children expressed their desire to feel at ease with themselves and one another, to feel connected to not only the people who are known or related to them, but also to the larger social and environmental setting in which they live. They were clear in their desire to not feel 'hated' and 'abandoned', but instead to receive love, acceptance, care and protection. Girls sought equal treatment and opportunities vis-à-vis boys.

*"I like staying with supportive and caring guardians who do not look down on me because I am an orphan" (boy, 15, living in extended family care in Malawi)*

*"Children like to hear good things. It helps them to have good self-esteem" (boy, 15, living in residential care in Guyana)*

*"Talk to community leaders to make them understand the challenges of being deaf and to advocate for the rights [of children who are deaf]" (boy with hearing impairments, aged 13-17 years, living in residential care in Kenya)*

*“Parents and guardians should not accuse children of things which they have not done and children should be given opportunities to air out their concerns on particular issues in society.”*  
(girl, 10, living in extended family care in Malawi)

*“Children need more people to love and appreciate them”* (child, 13-17 years, living in residential care in Russia)



Some changes that 8-12-year-old girls in Kenya would like to see

#### **Theme 4: Children want good friends and time to play and rest**

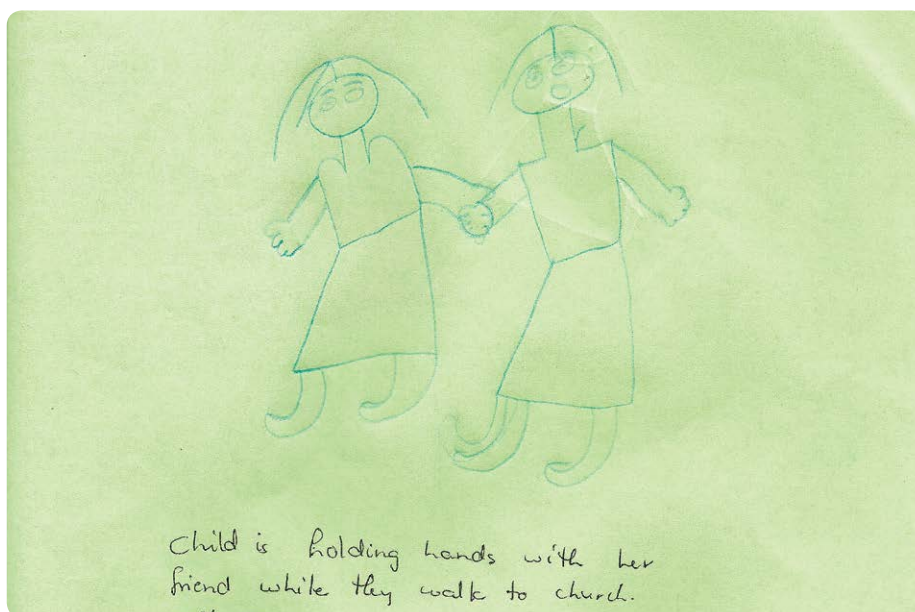
Friendship was universally identified as crucial to child well-being. Friends were understood to provide children with much-needed companionship, security and protection in the form of social, emotional, physical and material support. These bonds were considered to be of great importance to all children, but especially to those who had little to no contact with family. This point was underscored by the frequent mention of its corollary: all groups mentioned fighting, teasing, mockery and the isolation and mistreatment of children by other children as something that made them feel unhappy and unsafe. Children's desire to have time to play and rest was also an expression of the priority they placed on laughter, talking and sharing time together with friends. How they wanted to spend their leisure time depended on age, gender and context – playing football for boys in Malawi, for example, or talking and sharing for girls in Guyana – yet the importance children placed on friendship and play was consistent across all settings.

*“Having many friends who can stand up for you and share with you”* (boy, 8-12 years old, living in residential care in Russia)



*"Hanging out with friends makes me happy"* (boy, 15, living in extended family care in Guyana)

*"When I am frightened at night I stay with my friends"* (boy, 9, living in residential care in Brazil)



*"Friends make me feel safe and happy"* (girl, 11, living in residential care in Guyana)

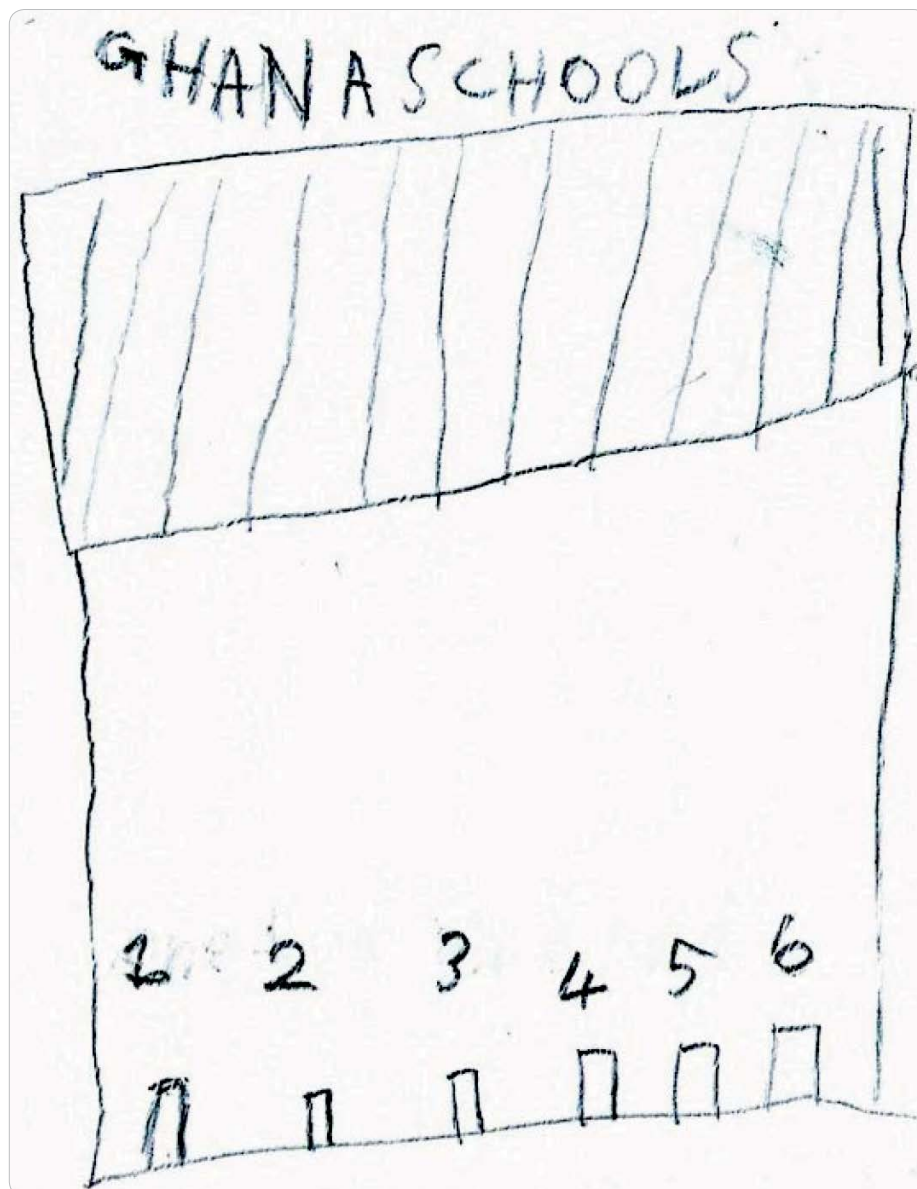
## **Theme 5: Children want to go to good schools with good teachers**

Schooling was understood by children to serve many functions, including learning new skills and knowledge, opening doors to better futures, providing opportunities to be with friends, and protecting children from otherwise having to work for money or on unpaid domestic tasks, and from being 'on the street' where they can experience abuse and harassment, and be exposed to 'negative habits' such as drug use and begging. Boys and girls of all ages and all levels of ability, in all living circumstances, in all countries, stressed the need for governments to support children to go to school, to have access to materials and uniforms, to be provided with decent, trained teachers who support children's learning and do not physically or verbally abuse them. In Africa and India particularly, they asked that governments support parents to send children to school by providing parents with jobs (so that they can pay the fees and other costs) and by informing them of the importance of children's schooling, so that children no longer have to do chores that make them late for class and can be given time and space in the evenings to study.

*"I want to study as much as possible, I should know about the world"* (girl, 17 years old, India)

*"Government should provide more schools ... government should ensure that children are taken to school"* (boys, 10 and 12, living in residential care in Ghana, previously with employers)

*"Every child needs to go to school, and know how to read and write. The adults also"* (girl, 9 years old, in Brazil)



*"School makes me happy"* (boy, 11, living in residential care in Ghana, previously with employer)

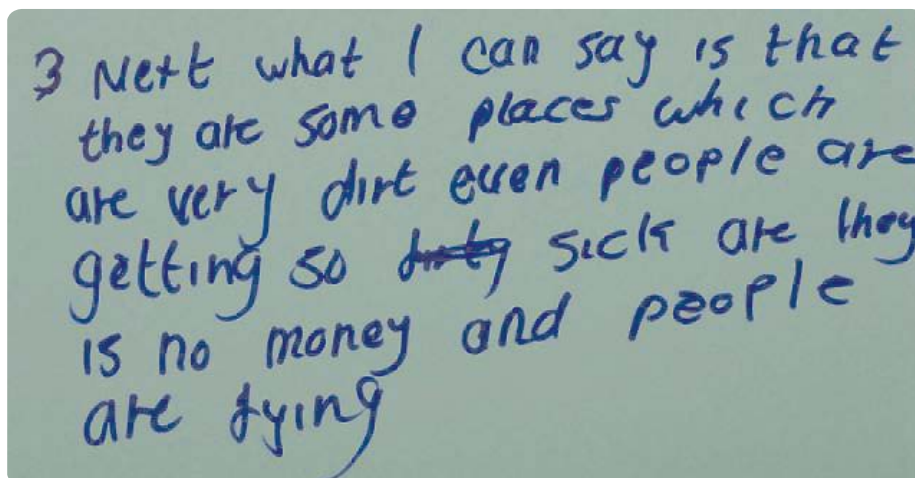
## Theme 6: Children want enough food to eat, decent living environments, amenities and infrastructure

Food, shelter, bedding, clothing, and medical care were identified in all contexts as priority areas for government and community intervention and support. When boys and girls spoke of the things that made them feel happy and safe, or sad and unsafe, they frequently mentioned their experiences of hunger and their need for good-quality food in order to function well at school. They also referred to how having a protected place to sleep helped them to feel safe from the threats they face on the street and in particular domestic arrangements, for example when living with unrelated caregivers or employers. They stressed the need for clean water and better amenities. Likewise, knowing that they and their loved ones could access decent medical care when they needed it helped them to feel that their health and well-being were not in constant jeopardy. They asked that governments prioritise affordable and accessible medical care for all, and stressed that every effort should be made to eradicate corruption within hospitals so that people can get appropriate and timely care when it is needed. These concerns were widely shared and there were no discernible differences based on age or gender in the emphasis that children placed on these issues.

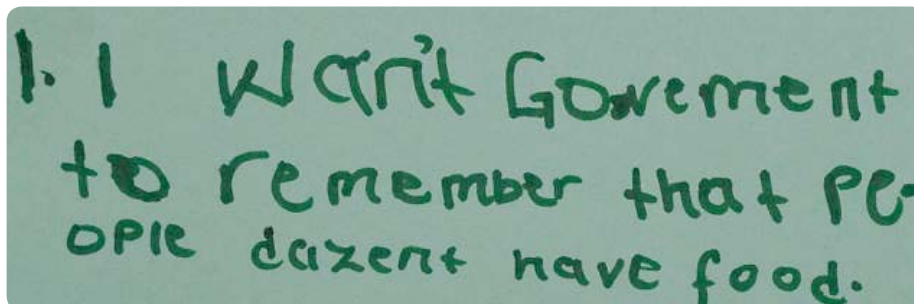
*"We are poor, so we get to eat very little at home"* (boy, 15, in India)

*"All children [should] get enough food ... have parents or caregivers ... be provided with good clothing ... safe water ... have better places for sleeping and reading"* (boys aged 13-17, living in residential care in Kenya)

*"Government should ensure that prices of basic commodities are reduced so as to improve the cost of living for many people, more especially the poorest in our community"* (boy, 16, living in extended family care in Malawi)



Priorities of girls, 13-17 years old, living in residential care in Kenya



Priorities of girls, 13-17 years old, living in residential care in Kenya

### Theme 7: Children want to be free from child labour and exploitation

Many boys and girls conveyed a sense of the challenges they face as a result of the often overwhelming need to contribute money and labour to the household, and for their own personal survival. Few begrudged their families or caregivers the burden of these responsibilities; most were more focused on the risks they were exposed to as a result of performing particular jobs, including physical pain and exhaustion, sexual and physical abuse, exploitation, illness and separation from family. It was recognised that parents' difficulties in finding decent means of earning income had significant implications for children's everyday lives, both in the present, for example in terms of their inability to attend school or to live with their parents, or their heightened exposure to various risks; and in the future, because of diminished opportunities in the workforce, difficulties in relationships, and poorer health. These issues were considered especially high priorities for boys and girls in India, Malawi, Kenya and Ghana.

*"Children are not supposed to be employed. They need to attend school" (girl aged 13-17, living in residential care in Kenya)*

*"We don't own any land, so poverty forces us to work and I am also forced to work" (14-year-old boy in India)*

*"Child labour is due to poverty so my mother should work, government should provide jobs for all parents" (boy, 15, living with extended family in Ghana, previously with employers)*

*"Child labour, which is common on tobacco estates, should be stopped because any child who is involved in child labour cannot have time to go to school and they end up being uneducated" (17-year-old boy in extended family care in Malawi)*



"In my picture are a girl and boy. The girl is carrying a bucket of water while the boy is sweeping in the house. Children should not be given too much work before going to school because that delays them; I am happy to assist with various household chores but only after coming back from school" (girl, 10, living with extended family in Malawi)



## Conclusion

The boys and girls who participated in these consultations had strong ideas and informed opinions about what should be included in the post-2015 development framework. Many of the issues and concerns that they highlighted are interconnected and cross-cutting in nature.

Many of the priority areas identified by children are clearly articulated in the existing MDGs. Boys and girls deemed poverty reduction, hunger, schooling, gender equality, child health and environmental protection as important areas for policy and government intervention. Basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, water and sanitation and decent, affordable and accessible health care were also priorities. Equitable access to services and amenities underlay these concerns.

In addition, children identified other, as yet unarticulated, priorities for inclusion in a new global development framework. The majority of these concerned improvements to the non-material aspects of their well-being, including the need to reduce violence, abuse and maltreatment; to support children and families to live together in safe and caring environments; to be treated as equal to other children and to be recognised by adults as fellow human beings; and to be granted time for friendship, rest and leisure. While some groups placed greater emphasis on certain issues than others, these priorities were shared by all children in all contexts. They represent a critical dimension of development which must be accounted for.

These findings suggest that a post-2015 global development framework should revitalise efforts to address the issues already laid out in the MDGs, asserting the need to eradicate hunger, and to provide all children and families with access to clean drinking water, good health care and decent shelter and living environments. The new framework should also include goals and targets in the following key areas.

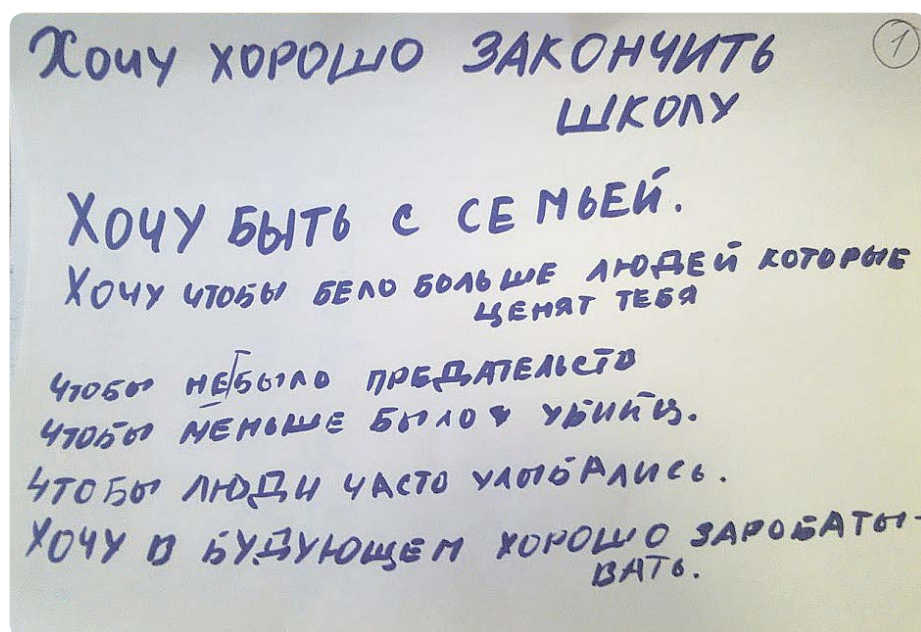
1. **Child protection:** All boys and girls should live a life free from all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse and be supported in safe and caring family environments. Specifically, children want to end harmful child labour and violence in homes, schools and communities, to grow up within safe families, and to avoid institutional care.
2. **Accessible, safe, quality and relevant schooling:** Current goals should be expanded to ensure that all children have equal access to good schools, staffed by trained teachers who support children's learning and do not physically or verbally abuse them.
3. **Safe opportunities for leisure and play:** All boys and girls should have the opportunity to play and rest.

Finally, many of the comments from girls and boys suggest changes in the way that the post-2015 development framework should be implemented and monitored. For example, children expressed a strong desire for greater equality and to be treated with dignity and respect. To address these concerns, efforts must be made to ensure that any gains from a new framework reach all sections of the community, including the most vulnerable. Indicators should be put in place to measure progress towards the reduction of disparities between people. Services and support should be delivered in appropriate ways and efforts should be made to monitor the quality of service provision, including the



ways in which users are treated by service providers. Accountability, universality, participation and non-discrimination should be the fundamental principles underlying a new development framework. These principles and ethics must inform the policy choices that governments make.

The findings from these consultations clearly demonstrate that children have meaningful insights and experiences and that their views must be listened to and incorporated into the elaboration of a new development agenda. Boys and girls have a clear sense of what they need and want, and they have an important role in shaping the present and future world in which they live. Their participation in the development, monitoring and implementation of a post-2015 framework is critical to its success.



*"I want to finish school successfully; I want to be with my family; I want there to be more people that love and appreciate you; no betrayal; less murderers; people smiling more; I want to earn enough money in the future" (girl, 15, living in residential care in Russia)*





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