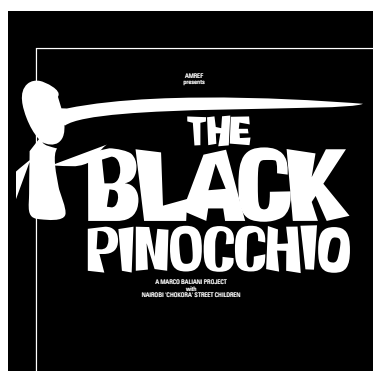




DISCUSSION PAPER  
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# Child Participation IN Awareness Raising Through Theatre





## Introduction

AMREF's mission is to improve the health of disadvantaged people in Africa so that they can escape poverty and live better lives on their own resources without needing future aid. We invest in people.

We focus on six major areas:

HIV, Water and Sanitation, Family Health (eg maternal and child health), Training, Malaria and Outreach (the Flying Doctors).

AMREF has almost 50 years experience in health development. In 1957 three surgeons founded the Flying Doctors Service of East Africa, a foundation that would later become the continent's leading health research organisation. AMREF has offices in 6 Eastern and Southern African countries and large projects in Sudan and Somalia. Its headquarters are in Nairobi, Kenya, and it is proud that 97% of its 600 staff are African.

As mentioned above, one of our key areas of focus is Family Health. Under this area of focus falls the 'Dagoretti Children in Need' Project.

## The Project

Over the last four years AMREF Kenya has been working with Orphans and Vulnerable Children from Dagoretti, a slum area of Nairobi, placing special attention and preference to children living and working in the streets. The project has put in place a rehabilitation programme that has enhanced the community's capacity to respond to the needs of their children. This project aims to:

"Improve the physical and psychological health and living conditions, potential and skills of children and adolescents in vulnerable circumstances thus contributing to the development of the community as a whole."

The Dagoretti Child in Need Project has in the last four years worked with the community in establishing a system for rescuing, rehabilitating, re-socialising and reintegrating children in the community. A partnership has been established with the City Council of Nairobi for accessing children to basic health services through the Waithaka dispensary and education through City Council of Nairobi supported schools. So far, over 280 children are once more living with their families and are back in school.

The project has piloted interventions that engage and empower the children, for example street football, which encourages street children to engage in recreational activities. During sporting activities (which attract many children) project leaders can spot any physical or psychological problems, and during informal group sessions after the activity they can talk more openly within a trusted group about their concerns. In this way they are able to access medical care and be referred on to other organisations.

Other interesting recreational yet educational activities include film making. The children have now made a series of films, one of which, 'TV-Slum', has achieved international awards, including the prestigious UN Habitat Best practices award.

Almost 500 children are reached through recreation activities every week.

## Project Impact

1. Abandoned and vulnerable children are rescued, rehabilitated, re-socialised and reintegrated back into the family and the community.
2. A centre has been set up to function as a point of reference for development, training and social programmes within the Dagoretti community by the end of year.
3. Improved access to education and vocational training opportunities for self-reliance and community development.
4. Increased access to health services and health information for children and adolescents.

## Using Theatre For Rehabilitation – AMREF's 'Theatre-like-home' Concept

AMREF uses several different methods to reach out to the children: sports, recreation, music, dance and media, approaches that are non-exclusive, engaging, attractive and fun for the children to get involved in. Among the approaches the project has incorporated is the 'theatre-like home'. The idea behind this is to build on the artistic capabilities of the children to encourage and enable them to communicate their pressing need for education, health and family.

The Theatre-Like-Home creates a family-like environment which encourages a group sense of belonging and spirit whilst giving each individual sufficient space to express his or her character, and encourage personal identity and self-respect. The concept gives life to a theatre without barriers, where word, music, dance and image melt in to one of great fascination and magic.

It is an innovative rehabilitation strategy, where theatre is seen as both a home and a family for the children participating in the programme. Theatre is used as an innovative and useful instrument of recovery, training and re-socialisation of the street children. The idea is to trigger a process of collective healing for the street children – through theatre the children will recover their dignity and sense of belonging to a community. This is vitally important for a person who has endured suppression, violence, loneliness, poor living conditions and had lost all hope of ever being a productive human being.

The children, in the short term and also in the long term, will in turn actively participate in educating their community, communicating sensitive issues affecting the community and in advocating for practice and policy change in favour of children and marginalised people.

### Theatre Intervention Impact

Through theatre, the children have become whole again. They regain their self identity, their confidence, and their sense of belonging.

All participants in the theatre group have learnt the importance of relying on others, and being relied upon. This has served to give them a sense of team spirit, and encourage a sense of self discipline formerly lacking.

The success of Black Pinocchio has undoubtedly given them a sense of collective and individual achievement, and the experience of self worth and personal ability.

The children have lead by example to other street children, and advocated to decision makers the potential of street children.

As well as the personal benefit to the participants, the following has also been achieved:

- Children provided with challenging, innovative, high-quality arts education opportunities.
- Young artists developed and motivated through performances as means encouraging youth involvement in community development
- Awareness raised on key issues such as environmental protection, crime prevention, prevention of domestic and child abuse, community participation, and HIV/AIDS.
- 20 children are actively involved in educational activities-12 in primary schools in Dagoretti, while the other 8 are training with local artisans in various fields including mechanics, tailoring and metal work.

- 5 shows performed for Kenyan audience that included policy makers, donors, the community, development practitioners and children.
- Partnership formed with Bricole theatre, Parma, for training and capacity building.
- 4 shows performed for an international audience composed of donors, policy makers and supporters in Palermo and Rome.

### The Black Pinocchio

In its pilot phase the theatre project produced 'The Black Pinocchio'. The first show in Kenya was held for policy makers, child and health practitioners, street children and the corporate sector. The corporate sector was invited because of their potential ability to play a key role in changing both the situation, and people's attitudes. Over 3000 people attended the show staged at the Bomas of Kenya in Nairobi; this was followed by another three shows including a show organized specifically for the United Nations personnel at Gigiri.

The Kenyan shows were concluded by a tour of Italy that took the boys to Rome and Palermo. The Mayor of Rome Mr. Walter Veltroni hosted while the Mayor of Palermo assisted by the chamber of commerce hosted the children in Palermo.

The shows have played a significant role in dispelling the long held belief that street children are criminals, drug users and idlers. The boys demonstrated that in children, lies immense potential, which if harnessed has the capability of changing the World and promoting peace and development.

### Children And The Law

Children and Child Participation are well protected by the Kenyan Legal System. In particular the Children's Act contains provisions that facilitate the access to development, survival, participation and protection opportunities by children. The Act broadly provides for the best interest of the child in matters of education, health, parental care and involvement of children in activities that affect them.

In particular it defines who a child is, the circumstances under which a child may be involved in various activities – both educational and cultural – that are in the best interest of the child. The Children's Act includes provisions drawn from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international conventions committed to the well-being of children. AMREF operates within the provisions of this Act in working with the children and the parents/guardians.



### Safeguarding Our Children

AMREF commits itself to continue working with the local communities and observing the laws of the land in promoting and protecting the welfare of the child:

- AMREF commits itself to the safety and well-being of the children as provided for under the provisions of the law and in line with AMREF's mission and values in respect to working with the communities.

- At all times, during situations where children are involved in shows, AMREF ensures they have a proper working environment, adherence to working hours and a safe environment.

- AMREF acts in loco parentis while the group is touring. AMREF is committed to ensure that no abuse of any kind occurs.

- AMREF provides full insurance cover for the children when travelling outside the Country.

- AMREF informs the parents/guardians on the progress of the children on a regular basis. This is done through meetings that will be organised by AMREF

- AMREF keeps the children's department of the Ministry of Home Affairs informed on the progress the children are making and especially in respect to shows and trips outside the country.

- AMREF ensures that any funds generated by the theatre group go into the further and continuing welfare of children in need and the improvement of the well being of other marginalised members of society.

- The Ministry of Home Affairs children's Department constantly monitors AMREF's relationship with the children with a view of ensuring adherence to the commitments made by AMREF in protecting the rights of the children and facilitating them to access educational opportunities.

