



The Street Child World Cup: From Durban to Rio

The story of the inaugural Street Child World Cup in Durban South Africa, a tournament that proved to be a great success and helped changed perceptions and practices in several countries. Planning is well under way for the next tournament, which will be hosted by Brazil in 2014.



Chris Rose

Chris Rose is Director of Amos Trust and a founder of the Street Child World Cup, January 2012.

'When they see us play football, they will say that we are not the street boys. They will say that we are people like them.' (Andile, South African team)¹

*'We, the children of the Street Child World Cup say: Listen to us: we have the right to be heard. Listen to us: home means family. We do not want to stay on the streets. Listen to us: when we say we are abused. We have the right to be protected. Listen to us: so that we can have a future.'*²

On 14 March 2010 in Durban, South Africa, former England international Gary Mabbutt made the draw for the inaugural Street Child World Cup (SCWC). The following day 2,000 people attended the opening ceremony and watched teams of street children (seven boys and two girls per team) from South Africa, Tanzania, Brazil, Nicaragua, Philippines, India, Ukraine and the UK parade onto the pitch carrying their national flags. For some of these players, their participation had only been guaranteed days before as they waited for birth certificates and passports.

For the next week the crowds at the matches created a fantastic South African atmosphere. Ten film crews followed the children's every move, and press from around the world covered the event, with the Philippines defeat of Brazil making front-page news across the Philippines. The tournament ended in a tightly fought final in which India beat Tanzania 1–0.

We are now firmly on the Road to the Rio 2014 SCWC, which will be launched in London by members of the

South African and Brazilian street child teams in April 2012.

Background

Across the world millions of vulnerable and marginalised children today are left with no option but to live on the streets. The SCWC is a global campaign that seeks to give these children a voice through the universal languages of football and art. It is a campaign that challenges the negative perceptions and treatment of street children and pushes for their right to shelter, protection from violence, and access to health care and education.

An initiative of the UK-based Christian human rights organisation, Amos Trust, the idea for the SCWC was inspired by the work of co-organisers and hosts Umthombo, a charity in Durban run by street child activists, social workers and former street children, who campaigned against the harsh treatment of street children in the city.

Prior to the 2010 FIFA World Cup tournament, the authorities in Durban would round up street children in police vans and ship them out of the city when there were major conferences and festivals. The authorities wanted to 'clean up' the city and reduce crime.³

The idea behind the SCWC was to amplify Umthombo's call. The event had four main aims:

1. To affirm the worth of these children as created in the image of God, as opposed to the view held by many

around the world that they are worthless, naughty children.

2. To showcase their potential (which is so evident in the former street children who run Umthombo) and demonstrate that these children were able to articulate the responses that are required to transform their lives.

3. To educate policymakers and the public as to the realities of street life and why these children are on the street. Most have fled abuse and extreme poverty. For example, a recent study showed that of 53.6% of Durban's street children had lost a mother and 44.5% a father, most through AIDS-related illness.⁴ Many of these children are traumatised and need greater care and empathy.

4. To show that this is a global issue which has local, national and international solutions which we all need to be involved in realising.

Thankfully, the horrific practice of round ups in Durban stopped just before the FIFA tournament began and the city has entered a new era in how it engages with its street children.

In order to get the project off the ground the organisers had to overcome a number of problems. None of the children who came to South Africa were still on the streets; each was living in some form of children's centre. However, would they be allowed to travel? Most of the participating street children had no birth certificates, ID's or passports and did not technically exist. Some countries might not let teams participate. One Central Asian country told a potential partner NGO they could not take part as there were no street children and any street children would be denied travel permission. Also, many of the children had no idea of their date of birth; it turned out that the anticipated captain of the Philippines' team was four years older than he or any of his key workers realised.

The organisers also had to address the risks of the of the children being arrested, mugged or running away. They had to find suitable accommodation for the teams and workers, and convince the Durban municipality to let them run the event. This would not be easy given the attitudes to street children at the time, outlined above.

The key to solving these problems was finding the right partners to move the project forward.

Partners

Support from Alvor Trust and Compassion UK allowed the project to employ a fantastic project manager, Jenny Dawkins. Her first week was spent in South Africa with myself and co-founder John Wroe of Momentum Arts. During this visit we had our first experiences of what John called the serendipity, which would follow us:

1. Durban University of Technology offered us an indoor arena and sports facilities free of charge, and promised to draw in local government support.

2. Star Seaside Homes, a local residential setting for children's groups, loved the idea, changed their age restrictions and reserved the whole of March 2010 for us. This was ideal accommodation on the Durban beachfront.

3. The Durban Art Gallery offered to host an exhibition for five months from SCWC to the FIFA World Cup to tell the children's stories. The children then worked with a team of artists from Momentum Arts in Cambridge to convey their stories in ways that transcended language barriers and their art was exhibited on the opening evening.⁵

4. The British Council offered a network of eight local South African schools to host teams. As a result of SCWC they went on to establish a new online course on street children for use in schools in 140 countries.

5. We found seven fantastic street children's projects from around the world, which secured visas, passports, birth certificates and the ID's that the children lacked, without any promise of any financial support from us. They overcame immense barriers and deserve all the credit not only for the support they provided to the children before, during and after the event but also for the fantastic work they do everyday often with little or no recognition.

6. Desmond Tutu was the first to endorse SCWC and from this point onwards more and more footballers and other well-known figures got involved. David Beckham, Alex Ferguson and Gordon Brown endorsed the project, while Gary Lineker, Jamie Redknapp, David Seaman, Alistair Campbell, Simon Mayo, Jason Isaacs, and Alastair and Maggie Darling all helped promote the event.

7. Deloitte caught the vision and came on board as the main sponsors, providing essential funds contacts and 200 South African volunteers who organised the local entertainment. Their support was vital in ensuring that the Municipality allowed the event to move forward and in showing that people do care about the well-being of these children.

8. Individuals and companies pledged support, churches, schools and other community groups ran fundraising events and BMS sponsored the Nicaraguan team and created a whole new resource pack. Fifty volunteers from the UK raised the funds necessary to fund themselves and others to take part. They were astounding and it could not have run without them.

Changing perceptions and practices

The inaugural SCWC's aim was to challenge the negative perceptions and treatment of street children and also allow the participants to recognise their potential and see themselves as agents of change. To see the children walk out in their national strips, to laugh and sing together yet having no shared languages, was so powerful and captured so much of the theology of ubuntu.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise stated, this and all other quotes in this article are taken from C Rose & J Dawkins, *More than a Game: The Story of the first Street Child World Cup* (London: Amos Trust, 2011). Go to www.amostrust.org for further details.

2. The Durban Street Child Declaration, presented to the UN Committee on Human Rights, 9 March, 2011.

3. As one poster in a Durban police station put it: *Beach cleaning operation – Vagrants/ Street kids/ Beggars/ Debris*. Photographed by a Sun photographer covering the inaugural SCWC. He had been detained for taking pictures of street children.

4. Including Street Children Report by Street Action, SOAS (School of Oriental & African Studies), Umthombo and University of KwaZulu-Natal.

5. The exhibition was then shown in September 2010 at London's Foundling museum, a museum that chronicles London's response to its own eighteenth-century street children.

Ubuntu is an African philosophy that focuses on people's allegiances and relations with each other – the very essence of what it means to be human. Archbishop Desmond Tutu explains: 'In South Africa recognition of our interdependence is called ubuntu. I am human because I belong. A person with ubuntu ... knows that they are diminished when others are humiliated, diminished when others are oppressed, diminished when others are treated as if they were less than who they are. The quality of ubuntu gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanize them. It has to do with what it means to be truly human, to know that you are bound up with others in the bundle of life.'⁶

Sadly, while we celebrated, the opposite of ubuntu was

presented to an international conference for 70 street child practitioners in London and to the UN committee on human rights in March 2011 as part of a special session on street children's rights.

Impact

'Sometimes its hell on the streets – but when I play football I feel as if I am in heaven. Coming here and listening to the stories of other street children has made me realise that I'm not alone in struggling.' (Thamires, Brazilian team)

The 2010 SCWC tournament proved hugely successful in amplifying Umthombo's message and work. It has also transformed attitudes to street children in several countries.⁷ In Ukraine, for example, children used to flee the highly authoritarian children's centres, preferring to live underground in heating pipes and vents. There has now been a major shift in Ukrainian policies with adoption being heavily promoted. All the children who took part in the tournament have now been adopted. In Nicaragua all of the children were successfully reintergrated with their families and the profile generated by participation led to new links with national government and an increase in the profile of street children in Nicaragua. In the Philippines a new street child project has been established and the children have been involved in a wide variety of awareness raising activities and recently met David Beckham at one such event. Three of the Tanzanian team are in a football academy in Uganda and the others have been reintergrated into homes. The impact on the partner project has been enormous and they plan to run a national tournament and campaign in the run up to 2014 event. Two of the Tanzanian players and one Indian player have even gone on to represent their countries.

Road to Rio 2014

The Road to Rio 2014 was launched in London in April 2012. To take SCWC forward to Rio in 2014 a new organisation has now been formed called Street Child United. This is a joint venture between Amos Trust, Action for Brazil's children (who brought the Brazilian team to South Africa) and Momentum Art.

The 2014 Rio Street Child World Cup will be larger – 15–20 countries will participate. Teams will be chosen according to their ability to use participation to initiate change and, of course, it will be street children themselves who set the agenda. Negotiations are ongoing in Brazil where world-famous footballers are getting involved and major venues are being offered for use.

To find out how you can be involved and the resources available for use in churches and schools visit www.streetchildworldcup.org. To find out more about Amos Trust and our commitment to promoting justice and hope in fresh and vibrant ways visit www.amostrust.org

I lived in a cardboard box. Often I would just survive on scraps of food. This tournament has helped me to believe in the world again and to believe in myself (Lorelyn, Philippine team)

also shown. A police round-up took place in Durban half way through the SCWC. Film footage of street girls in the back of a police van made international news and triggered negotiations between the Municipality and Umthombo about ongoing strategies for work with street children. The Municipality made a firm commitment to end the practice of round-ups. There were no round-ups throughout the FIFA period and the Municipality are now partnering with Umthombo as opposed to being in conflict with them.

The Mayor of Durban held a reception for the teams at the new World Cup stadium. The final was attended by the South African Minister responsible for children, numerous other dignitaries and corporate supporters. It was a very fitting end that India received the trophy from Mandi Hewitt, founder of Umthombo and a former street child.

The SCWC conference

The inaugural SCWC also included the first international street child conference. This gave the children the chance to state the issues that affected them most. 'The highlight for me was the conference. I got to hear that other children around the world had gone through what I'd gone through and to think that together we can make a difference' (Anton, Ukrainian team). The outcome of the conference was a series of country manifestos: the Street Girls' Manifesto and the Durban Street Child Declaration.

The Street Girls' Manifesto, created with Plan International, featured in their annual report, and was presented to an All-Party Parliamentary Group on street children. The full Durban Street Child Declaration was

6. D Tutu, *God has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time* (London: Rider, 2004); used by kind permission of Random House Group Ltd.

7. Visit www.streetchild.org to hear about the change it has brought in Tanzania.