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**Soha O. A. Eltai**

**Street Girls in Khartoum, Sudan**

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## Editorial

The enro + biz studies series is intended to elaborate on positions in development policies. It aims at supplying backgrounds on development issues to a critical and committed public. Most of the papers published in this series are theses of students in *Development Policy with Focus on Non-Governmental Organisations* (enro/dengo). All of the authors have been working in NGOs and, in addition to the examination in a previous study of a broad spectrum of disciplines, they have passed the final exam in the post-graduate programme of *enro*. The publications focus on the juncture of practice and theory of development policy. They are meant to provide ideas and theory-guided assistance in arguing for organisations and institutions in the area of development.

Soha Eltai's study deals with a social phenomenon that is theoretically impossible in a strictly Islamic society as the Northern Sudan defines itself. "Street Girls" should not exist in Khartoum since custom demands that girls stay at home and never move around unsupervised until they are given into marriage. In fact, up to the present day, girls who loose their virginity may in some families risk being murdered by their brothers for infringing on the family honor.

Yet there are according to one statistical source at least 700 street girls in Khartoum and there could be more. Soha Eltai was able to interview only 36 of them since the government does not want them investigated and the girls are afraid of repression if they explain how they live and what they do.

Street children according to UNICEF definitions include those who only earn a living on the street as well as those who do not even have a home to go to during the night. About half of the girls interviewed belonged to the latter category. The age of the girls interviewed ranged from 7 to 18 years in line with the official Sudanese definition, which puts the age limit where a child should be under the supervision of and supported by his or her parents at 20 years.

Where do these girls come from? On the one hand they are the product of social disintegration among immigrants forced into the city by civil war, floods, droughts and famine and generally deteriorating conditions in the countryside, on the other hand they are a product of hypocrisy: since girls are not supposed to provide for themselves, they have no access to training except in household skills and no access to any ordinary employment except in the household where they can be heavily exploited. So the only alternative is the street where they support themselves by begging, occasional labor, selling of snacks and, in some cases, theft and prostitution.

They are subject to various abuses, with rape being a constant danger. If they are lucky they are protected by a group of children with whom they move around together or by a boy within such a group. Their health is generally poor and access to medical treatment often not available.

To make matters worse, the few NGOs that try to improve the situation of street children often do not deal with street girls also because the government looks at this field of work with disfavor. The government itself offers facilities where treatment and food is so bad that the girls try to run away as soon as possible.

There are many other details in the study worth noting and the situation which Soha Eltai describes is by no means limited to the Sudan but can be found in a number of other Islamic societies, for instance Pakistan, as well: a strict patriarchal moral code may not only be a burden for those women who adhere to it, it is a much more serious menace for those who do no longer have the socio-economic possibility of living accordingly. The situation of girls and women without families to sustain and protect them deserves particular attention in these societies.

## **German summary**

Mädchen, die auf der Straße leben, sind höheren Risiken ausgesetzt als Straßenjungen. Darüber hinaus sehen sie sich besonderen Schwierigkeiten gegenüber, wenn es um institutionalisierte Hilfe durch Regierungsbehörden oder Nichtregierungsorganisationen geht: Zum einen liegt dies an den besonderen Lebensbedingungen von Mädchen, zum andern aber auch an unzureichenden Ressourcen, schlecht angepassten Strukturen, ungeeigneten Arbeitsgrundsätzen und Programmen der Institutionen, die sich mit Straßenkindern befassen. Weitere Probleme entstehen durch die politischen Bedingungen, Einschränkungen der Arbeit von Nichtregierungsorganisationen sowie durch Verhaltensweisen und Einstellungen der Öffentlichkeit.

Anhand einer Untersuchung in Khartum, der Hauptstadt des Sudan, legt Soha Eltai ein genaues Profil weiblicher Straßenkinder vor, geht darauf ein, wie sie für ihren Lebensunterhalt sorgen, stellt ihre Probleme und ihre Problemlösungsversuche dar. Sie analysiert die Gründe für den eingeschränkten Zugang zu staatlicher Hilfe und berücksichtigt dabei besonders, wie sich die verschlechterten Beziehungen zwischen der Regierung und den Nichtregierungsorganisationen auf den Schutz und die Versorgung der Straßenkinder auswirken. Die Studie endet mit einer Analyse der Einstellung von MitarbeiterInnen von Nichtregierungsorganisationen gegenüber weiblichen Straßenkindern. Diese spiegeln die vorherrschenden geschlechtsbezogenen Vorurteile in der sudanesischen Gesellschaft wider und führen zu fortgesetzter Diskriminierung der Mädchen auf den Straßen von Khartum.



# Contents

Editorial

German summary

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Street children: Dimensions of a social problem</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Socio-economic background</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1	The economic framework	9
3.2	Recent political changes	11
3.3	Gender relations in Sudan	12
3.4	Status of children in Sudan	15
3.4.1	Access to education	16
3.4.2	Child labor	17
3.4.3	Child health	17
<b>4</b>	<b>Profile of the street girls in Khartoum</b>	<b>19</b>
4.1	Age distribution	19
4.2	Marital status	20
4.3	Educational status	20
4.4	Place of birth and original residence of the family	22
4.5	Family background and reasons for leaving home	23
4.6	Kind and period of vagrancy	25
4.7	The group	27
4.8	Way of earning money	29
4.9	Drug use and delinquency	30
4.10	Diseases and health problems	32
<b>5</b>	<b>Relations between government and NGOs and the difficult access of street girls to institutional assistance</b>	<b>35</b>
5.1	Government efforts and policies towards national NGOs	35
5.1.1	Outline of the government policy and programs	35
5.1.2	Views of street girls on the governmental efforts for assistance	40
5.1.3	Shortcomings in the government program for street children	41
5.1.4	Positive shift in the policy - but still only for street boys	43
5.2	Efforts of the national NGOs	44
5.2.1	Identification of the national NGOs and their programs	44
5.2.2	The poor NGO involvement with street girls	47
5.2.3	Street girls' views on NGOs	49
5.3	Implications of the shortage in institutions assisting street girls	52

<b>6</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>54</b>
	Abbreviations	56
	Bibliography	57
	Appendix: Questionnaire for street girls	60