Non-Governmental Organisations and the Management of Street Children in Abuja, Nigeria: A Review of Roles, Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

The phenomenon of street children remains one of the most visible markers of social dislocation in rapidly urbanising societies, and Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, is no exception. While government agencies bear primary statutory responsibility for child welfare, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have increasingly assumed complementary roles in identifying, rescuing, rehabilitating and resettling the children who live and work on the streets. This paper undertakes a narrative synthesis of theoretical and empirical literature on NGO involvement in street children management, with reference to Abuja FCT. Anchored on Social Network Theory and Social Capital Theory, the paper examines the factors that sustain the production of street children, the recruitment and rescue strategies adopted by NGOs, the rehabilitation and resettlement pathways available to rescued children, the sources and adequacy of NGO financing, and the achievements and constraints that characterise NGO interventions. The review shows that although NGOs play an indispensable bridging role between vulnerable children and formal welfare systems, their work in Nigeria, and in Abuja FCT in particular, is hampered by definitional ambiguity, donor dependence, weak inter-agency coordination, and the persistence of structural drivers such as poverty, family breakdown and the largely unregulated Almajiri system. The paper concludes with recommendations for strengthening NGO-government collaboration, diversifying funding sources, and prioritising family-based reintegration over purely custodial approaches to street children management.

Keywords*:*
Non-Governmental Organisations, street children, child welfare, social capital, rehabilitation

1. Introduction

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) constitute a distinct category of voluntary, non-profit and civil-society-based institutions that operate independently of government to pursue broadly defined social objectives (Clarke, 1998). Although the term originated within the United Nations system to distinguish citizen-led associations from state agencies and commercial enterprises, NGOs have since evolved into specialised actors performing functions that range from humanitarian relief and advocacy to policy monitoring, conflict resolution and service delivery (Lewis, 2010). By the mid-2000s, the sector had grown to the point where commentators described it as comparable in scale to a major national economy, employing millions of paid staff in addition to an even larger volunteer base (Reimann, 2006). More recent assessments, however, point to a contraction in the resources available to the sector: Official Development Assistance from the major donor countries fell in real terms in 2024 and 2025, with projections of further cuts of up to seventeen per cent in some donor portfolios (Global Governance Reimagined, 2025; United Nations, 2024). This shifting funding landscape has direct implications for the NGOs that have historically filled service gaps left by under-resourced governments in the global South, including those working with vulnerable children.

Among the populations that NGOs have come to serve are children who live and/or work on the streets of urban centres. Globally, UNICEF has long estimated that tens of millions of children spend a substantial part of their lives on the street, and more recent regional assessments suggest that

as many as one in ten children in the cities of low- and middle-income African countries can be classified as 'children on the street' (Obimakinde & Shabir, 2023, drawing on UNICEF, 2021). In Nigeria, the phenomenon is closely intertwined with the Almajiri system of itinerant Qur'anic education, which, in its contemporary distorted form, leaves large numbers of children dependent on street begging for survival (Idowu, Nwhator & Afolabi, 2020). The scale of the problem in the Federal Capital Territory was thrown into sharp relief in November 2024, when the National Commission for Almajiri and Out-of-School Children's Education (NCAOOSCE) reported gathering more than 22,000 out-of-school children from the streets of Abuja for enrolment in formal schools (TheCable, 2024). Within weeks of the high-profile handover ceremony, however, investigative reporting found many of the same children back on the streets, attributable to the absence of sustained family support, shelter and follow-up services after the initial rescue (The Whistler, 2026).

This pattern, a visible, government-led rescue exercise that is not matched by the rehabilitative and reintegrative infrastructure required to keep children off the street, underscores the continuing relevance of NGOs as complementary actors in street children management. Government projects in this area have historically been described as few, short-term and narrowly focused on immediate needs rather than holistic rehabilitation, leaving NGOs and faith-based organisations to fill the resulting gap (Duci & Tahsini, 2016; Niboye, 2013). Yet, as Aransiola (2013, 2023) has repeatedly observed, surprisingly little systematic documentation exists of how NGOs in Nigeria identify, recruit, rehabilitate, resettle and fund their work with street children, particularly outside the commonly studied cities of Lagos, Kaduna and Port Harcourt. Abuja FCT, as the seat of political power and a magnet for rural-urban migration, presents an especially urgent but under-researched case.

Against this background, this paper sets out to (a) clarify the key concepts of street children, NGOs and the management of street children; (b) review the factors that sustain the production of street children, with attention to the Nigerian and Abuja-specific context; (c) synthesise the literature on NGO roles in the recruitment, rescue, rehabilitation and resettlement of street children; (d) examine the sources, adequacy and sustainability of NGO financing for this work; (e) situate these themes within Social Network Theory and Social Capital Theory; and (f) draw out the implications of this synthesis for policy, practice and future empirical research on NGOs and street children management in Abuja FCT.

Conceptual Clarifications

Street Children: The term 'street children' resists a single, universally accepted definition. The United Nations has used it broadly to describe any boy or girl for whom the street, in the widest sense, has become a habitual abode and/or source of livelihood, and who lacks adequate protection, supervision or direction from a responsible adult. UNICEF has preferred the less stigmatising label 'children in difficult circumstances' and has distinguished between children 'of the street', who have severed or weak family ties and depend on the street for shelter and survival, and children 'on the street', who work in public spaces by day but return to a family home at night (UNICEF, 2012). A third, smaller category comprises children with no traceable family at all, including orphans and unaccompanied migrants (UNHCR, 2012). These categories are not rigid; children move between them depending on circumstance, and several scholars caution that the labels can obscure as much as they reveal, since the way a child is categorised often reflects whether the state treats the child as a 'problem' to be policed or NGOs treat the child as a 'cause' to be supported. For the purposes of this review, the term street children is used inclusively, but particular attention is given to 'children of the street,' who are generally without capable guardians and are therefore the primary clients of NGO rehabilitation and resettlement programmes.

Non-Governmental Organisations: NGOs are organisations independent of government, typically non-profit in orientation, and reliant on a mix of donations, grants and self-generated income, although some operate primarily through volunteer labour with little formal funding (Lewis, 2010). They are distinguished from

purely member-serving associations by their outward-facing, service- and advocacy-oriented mandates (Clarke, 1998). In the context of child welfare, NGOs in many countries operate alongside, and sometimes ahead of, statutory child-protection agencies, particularly where state capacity is limited (Aufseeser, 2012).

Management of Street Children: In this paper, 'management' of street children refers to the full range of interventions through which NGOs (often in partnership with government and faith-based actors) attempt to move a child from a street-based existence toward a more protected and developmentally supportive situation. This includes outreach and identification, rescue or recruitment into a programme, the provision of basic needs (food, clothing, shelter), healthcare, counselling, formal and non-formal education, vocational training, family tracing, and eventual reunification or, where this is not possible, longer-term residential care (WHO, 2019).

The Street Children Phenomenon: Scale and Drivers

Global and African Context: Street children are a well-documented feature of urban life across Africa, Asia and Latin America, with poverty consistently identified as the underlying driver (de La Barra, 1999). In Ghana, family disintegration has been singled out as the principal proximate cause of the phenomenon (Consortium for Street Children, 2003), while across the region, the combination of rapid urbanisation, weak social safety nets and the erosion of extended-family support systems has been linked to a steady inflow of children onto the streets of major cities (Amantana, 2012).

Nigeria and the Abuja FCT Context: In Nigeria, the street children phenomenon cannot be discussed in isolation from the Almajiri system, in which children, predominantly from the northern states, are sent away from their families to study under itinerant Qur'anic teachers (mallams) and, in practice, are frequently left to fend for themselves through begging. A recent analysis describes the contemporary Almajiri system as a nexus of public-health failure, legal paralysis and security risk, noting that despite the enactment of the National Commission for Almajiri and Out-of-School Children's Education Act in 2023, reform efforts have made limited headway against entrenched poverty, weak governance and the absence of community-owned alternatives. UNICEF estimates that Nigeria has close to 19 million out-of-school children, the largest such population in the world, a substantial proportion of whom are functionally street children (TheCable, 2024).

Abuja FCT, as Nigeria's administrative capital, attracts both rural-urban migrants and displaced families from conflict-affected northern states, swelling the population of children visible at markets, motor parks and traffic intersections. The NCAOOSCE mop-up exercise of late 2024, which removed more than 22,000 children from Abuja's streets across the six area councils for handover to the FCT education secretariat, illustrates both the scale of the problem and the limitations of episodic, government-led responses: follow-up investigation found that many children had drifted back to begging within two weeks because no sustained family-support, feeding or shelter arrangements had been put in place to accompany school enrolment (The Whistler, 2026). This experience is consistent with earlier observations that government interventions in this area tend to be short-term, narrowly focused and poorly coordinated with the NGOs and community structures best placed to sustain reintegration.

Health-related studies of Nigerian street children reinforce the urgency of the problem. Research on the oral health of street children, including Almajiri children, has documented a persistent disparity in access to dental care that has changed little over successive studies (Idowu, Nwhator & Afolabi, 2020). A qualitative study of the family dynamics of children on the streets of Ibadan found that broken homes, large family size and unresolved tensions around polygamous households were recurrent features of the households from which these children came, even where the children still returned home at night (Obimakinde & Shabir, 2023). These findings are broadly consistent with the family-level explanations advanced for the phenomenon in other Nigerian contexts (Aransiola, 2013, 2023).

3.3 Factors Sustaining the Production of Street Children: A consistent thread across the literature is that no single factor explains why children end up on the street; rather, poverty interacts with family-level stressors, an unsupportive policy environment and, in some contexts, the children's own agency. Studies from Kenya, for example, found that the great majority of street children attributed their situation to conditions imposed by their families, ranging from outright neglect and abuse to economic desperation, while a smaller proportion reported choosing street life of their own volition (Kipyegon, Nyachwaya, Okirigiti & Kipchirchir, 2015). Ngaku (2015) traced these family-level pressures to wider structural failures, including the absence of school feeding programmes and free basic education, which leave poor households unable to retain children in school. Similar dynamics, marital breakdown, parental substance abuse, child abuse and the absence of state-provided safety nets, recur in the broader literature on factors driving children onto the street.

In the Nigerian setting, these structural drivers intersect with localised geographies of vulnerability. Mapping exercises that identify specific 'hotspot' locations, such as major markets, motor parks and informal settlements, where street children congregate provide NGOs and researchers with a practical entry point for outreach (as illustrated by the identification of seventeen such hotspot communities across Abuja FCT in earlier fieldwork on this topic). Understanding why children remain in, return to, or avoid these hotspots, and what role NGOs play in that trajectory, remains an important and under-explored empirical question for the FCT.

The Role of NGOs in Street Children Management

Identification, Recruitment and Rescue: NGOs and faith-based charities have historically been the primary, if less formally accountable, providers of services to street children, often filling gaps left by the state (Aufseeser, 2012). The first practical challenge they face is definitional: because there is no single agreed description of who counts as a 'street child', NGOs in different settings adopt locally meaningful terms. Field research in Egypt found that NGO staff generally avoided the term 'street children' altogether, preferring descriptions such as 'children at risk' because of the stigma attached to the former (ElMenshawy, 2015). Once a working definition is in place, identification typically proceeds through repeated head counts, trend studies and triangulated peer-review methods designed to build a reliable picture of the child population in each city (UNICEF, 2012).

Recruitment into NGO programmes generally depends on staff who are trained to work in known hotspot locations, such as bus stations and markets, building rapport with children over time until trust is established and an individual action plan, often beginning with access to a drop-in centre, can be agreed (Martini, 2019). In Tanzania, NGOs combined interviews, transfer to drop-in centres, medical screening and counselling as sequential steps in the recruitment process (Niboye, 2013). Word-of-mouth among peers has also been found to be an important channel through which street children learn of available services, particularly where formal outreach has not reached them directly (Niboye, 2013). In Nigeria, however, the most comprehensive available study of the 'network of support' for street children, covering Kaduna, Lagos and Port Harcourt, found that of 1,500 street children sampled, 43.1 per cent were children 'of' the street with severed family ties, yet documentation of how NGOs specifically identify and recruit such children into care remains thin (Aransiola, 2023). No comparable empirical mapping appears to exist for Abuja FCT.

Rehabilitation and Resettlement: International recognition of the rights of street children, reflected in United Nations General Assembly resolutions of 1993 and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, has prompted the establishment of rehabilitation interventions in numerous countries. Long-running examples include the 'Bridge over Troubled Waters' programme for adolescents in Boston (Morangi, 2013), Rwanda's Gitagata, Diocesan Caritas and Gatenga Salesian centres, which were established in the mid-1980s and later repurposed to address

the aftermath of the 1990s genocide, and Kenya's 'Home for the Fatherless', which reported an increase in enrolled rehabilitees following an outreach campaign launched in 2005 (Ngaku, 2015).

The World Health Organization frames rehabilitation broadly as a set of interventions designed to help a person overcome limitations in everyday functioning, restoring or maintaining the capacity to fulfil meaningful life roles (WHO, 2019). For street children, this typically translates into a bundle of services: shelter, food, medical care, formal and non-formal education (including vocational and life-skills training), counselling, and recreational activities, alongside efforts at family tracing and reunification (Niboye, 2013). A South African study catalogued the range of programme types of NGOs deploy, including advocacy, preventive programmes, institutional or full-residential care, and street-based outreach involving feeding, medical and legal assistance, drop-in centres and night shelters. The case of one India-based NGO illustrates how these elements come together in practice: alongside a shelter providing basic needs, the organisation runs formal schooling, non-formal life-skills education covering topics such as health, hygiene and substance-abuse awareness, recreational programmes, regular health camps, individual counselling, home-visit-based family reconciliation, and advocacy with employers and law enforcement to reduce child labour.

A significant shift in the more recent literature is the growing emphasis on family reintegration as the preferred long-term outcome, rather than prolonged institutional care. Studies from Zimbabwe argue that reintegration into the original family, where it can be made safe, offers better psychological and developmental outcomes than residential alternatives, but that this requires sustained intervention, including dispute resolution, poverty-alleviation support for the receiving family, and follow-up after the child returns home (Kudenga, Heeralal & Ndwandwe, 2024, 2025). This finding is directly relevant to the Abuja experience described above, in which children handed over to schools after a mop-up exercise drifted back to the street within weeks, most plausibly because no equivalent family-level support accompanied their removal from the street (The Whistler, 2026).

Achievements and Challenges: Where NGO-led rehabilitation has been sustained, the outcomes reported in the literature are often encouraging. In Tanzania, NGO staff were able to trace the family origins of rescued children and, where reunification was feasible, arranged for the child to return home; where it was not, children remained within the organisation until adulthood (Niboye, 2013). In Salvador, Brazil, the 'Project Axê' initiative reported that 768 of 823 adolescents reached through its outreach programme returned to live with their families (Volpi, 2002). At the same time, the literature documents are recurring constraints. A rapid assessment of NGO and government interventions in Cairo and Alexandria found that, despite generally promising programming, competition over scarce funds discouraged cooperation and led to overlapping services that might have achieved more if delivered jointly (Kudenga et al., 2025). In Kenya, government-led rehabilitation measures were found to have limited success because no agency took clear responsibility for resettlement, leaving rescued children to drift back to the street, compounded by the stigma former street children faced when attempting to reintegrate into their communities (Kipyegon et al., 2015).

For Nigeria specifically, Aransiola (2013) found that NGOs working on child rights and welfare in Kaduna, Lagos and Port Harcourt were few in number and constrained by inadequate finance and a largely untrained workforce, with many staff lacking the specialised skills needed to work with children who have experienced trauma or delinquency. The subsequent, more extensive network-of-support study confirmed that street children's access to care remains uneven across these cities and that their own preferences for the type of support they receive are rarely incorporated into programme design (Aransiola, 2023). No directly comparable assessment of NGO achievements and challenges has been published for Abuja FCT, despite its status as the federal capital and a focal point for both rural-urban migration and high-profile government interventions such as the 2024 Almajiri mop-up.

Financing of NGO Interventions: Sustainable funding widely stands as the precondition for NGOs fulfilling their mandates. Yet the literature consistently points to chronic financial insecurity across the sector (Kapyepye, 2013). Three broad sources of NGO income appear in the literature. These are public-sector grants and contracts, internally generated revenue, and private-sector or philanthropic giving (Sera, 2010). Comparative work on local NGOs found that government support and public-sector payments accounted for roughly 43 per cent of funding on average. Private fees and service income contributed around 47 per cent. Private charitable giving made up the remaining 10 per cent, though the balance varies considerably between organisations (Barr, Gareth, Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen, 2005). Beyond cash income, NGOs also mobilise resources in kind. Volunteer labour, donated equipment, and facilities form a significant part of this non-cash base. Membership fees add to a further layer alongside formal grants.

In the Nigerian context, a study of NGOs engaged in poverty alleviation in Gombe State found that 45 per cent had access to funding from international development partners, 30 per cent received grants from companies operating in the state, and 25 per cent relied on contributions from public-spirited individuals, with additional income generated through fee-based services such as proposal-writing consultancy and training (Yusuf, Abbas, Husain & Yusuf, 2017). This heavy reliance on external and corporate sources mirrors the wider pattern in which local NGOs that succeed in attracting donor funding often differ structurally from those that rely on voluntary domestic contributions.

This dependence on donor funding is increasingly precarious. Globally, several major bilateral donors have announced substantial reductions to official development assistance for 2025, with the OECD projecting cuts of between nine and seventeen per cent compared with 2024, equivalent to as much as USD 35 billion, alongside a deprioritisation of areas such as education and child welfare in favour of other commitments (Global Governance Reimagined, 2025). Recent comparative research on NGO fundraising in resource-constrained settings similarly found that competition among organisations for a shrinking pool of donor funds is now the single strongest predictor of fundraising success, ahead of an organisation's internal financial management or fundraising capacity. Smaller, locally rooted NGOs, the kind most likely to be embedded in specific Abuja neighbourhoods, are disproportionately exposed to this volatility because they typically lack the institutional track record that larger international NGOs use to secure multi-year grants. For Abuja-based NGOs working with street children, this combination of donor dependence and a contracting global aid envelope represents one of the most significant constraints on the scale and continuity of their interventions.

Theoretical Framework

Social Network Theory: Social Network Theory, associated with the work of Barnes in the 1950s, analyses social structures in terms of 'nodes' (individual actors, groups or organisations) and 'ties' (the relationships connecting them) (Kadushin, 2004). A key distinction is between strong ties, characterised by frequent interaction, intimacy and reciprocal trust, typically found within families and close friendship groups, and weak ties, which connect more loosely affiliated acquaintances but can provide access to information and resources unavailable within one's immediate circle (White & Houseman, 2002). Applied to street children, the theory suggests that a child's vulnerability to street migration increases as the strong ties that would normally bind them to a protective family network weaken or break, leaving the child to form new, often weaker and less protective, ties with peers already living on the street.

Social Capital Theory: Social Capital Theory, most closely associated with Coleman (1988), conceives of social capital as residing not in individuals but in the structure of relationships between them, relationships that make possible outcomes that would not otherwise be achievable. Coleman distinguished between family social capital, the time, attention and resources parents invest in children, and community social capital, the supportive relationships a family has with surrounding institutions such as schools, religious bodies and neighbours. Where a family possesses

limited social capital of either kind, a child's access to the benefits that capital would normally confer, educational support, supervision, and a sense of belonging, is correspondingly diminished. Hagan and McCarthy (1997) extended this reasoning to explain youth homelessness and delinquency, arguing that a deficit of family social capital is closely linked to children leaving home and, once on the street, to involvement in delinquent activity. Wright, Cullen and Miller (2001) similarly framed parental investment in children as an attempt to build the kind of mutual trust and obligation that keeps young people anchored to conventional institutions such as school.

Synthesis and Application: Read together, the two theories offer a coherent account of both the production of street children and the potential contribution of NGOs to their management. A child who migrates to the street can be understood as a node whose strong ties to family, representing accumulated social capital, have weakened or broken, while weak ties to peers already on the street provide the immediate (if precarious) support that enables survival away from home. Government and non-governmental organisations constitute additional nodes in this network. Where they function effectively, NGOs can re-establish forms of social capital for the child, through formal ties (structured programmes and reporting relationships), communication ties (information and advice flowing to families and communities), and, ultimately, the restoration of strong ties through family tracing and reunification. Conversely, where NGOs and government agencies operate as isolated, poorly connected nodes, duplicating effort or failing to follow through after an initial rescue, as appears to have occurred following the 2024 Abuja mop-up, the network fails to generate the social capital needed to keep children off the street on a sustained basis. This synthesis provides the conceptual scaffolding for the discussion that follows and for any future empirical investigation of NGO-street children dynamics in Abuja FCT.

Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative, desk-based narrative review methodology. Literature was drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, theses, institutional reports (including UNICEF, WHO and UNHCR publications) and recent investigative reporting (2020-2026) on NGOs, street children and related child-welfare themes in Nigeria, sub-Saharan Africa and comparable global contexts. Sources were selected for their relevance to the five thematic areas identified in the introduction: conceptualisation of street children and NGOs, factors sustaining street children, NGO recruitment and rescue practices, rehabilitation and resettlement approaches, and NGO financing. Material was synthesised thematically rather than systematically coded, consistent with the exploratory and conceptual aims of the paper.

Because the empirical literature specific to NGOs and street children in Abuja FCT remains sparse, this review also draws on the design of a previously proposed qualitative field study for the FCT, which identified seventeen street-children 'hotspot' communities across the territory (including major markets and motor-park areas) and outlined a multi-stage purposive sampling strategy combining in-depth interviews with NGO staff and community leaders, key-informant interviews with officials of the FCT Social Work/Children Welfare Department, the Nigeria Police Force and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, and focus group discussions with street children themselves. This design, grounded in ethnographic analysis of transcribed interview and discussion data, offers a practical template for the empirical validation of the synthesis presented here and is recommended as the basis for future fieldwork.

Discussion

Several implications follow from this synthesis for the management of street children in Abuja FCT. First, the gap between high-visibility, government-led rescue exercises and the sustained, family-focused rehabilitation that the literature identifies as necessary for lasting reintegration is stark. The 2024 NCAOOSCE mop-up demonstrates that the state retains the capacity to remove large numbers of children from the streets. Yet the rapid return of these children within weeks (The Whistler, 2026) suggests that the rehabilitative back end was largely absent from this exercise. Family tracing, household-level support, and follow-up monitoring are precisely the interventions that NGOs elsewhere have shown to be effective

(Niboye, 2013; Volpi, 2002; Kudenga et al., 2024). NGOs operating in Abuja are therefore well placed to advocate for, and deliver, exactly this kind of follow-through. That potential can only be realised, though, if they are systematically incorporated into government-led initiatives from the outset rather than left to respond to the fact.

Research from Egypt, Kenya, and elsewhere consistently shows that overlapping NGO programmes and inter-agency competition for funding undermine collective impact (Kudenga et al., 2024; Kipyegon et al., 2015). This risk is plausible in Abuja, where a relatively large number of faith-based and secular organisations operate within a geographically concentrated set of hotspot communities. One practical response would be a shared database of NGOs active in street-children's work, covering their catchment areas and the services each organisation provides. Coordinated through the FCT Social Work and Children Welfare Department, such a database could reduce duplication. It would also make it easier to identify communities that remain underserved despite the volume of organisations present.

Third, the financing picture is genuinely precarious. Nigerian NGOs working on poverty and child welfare already depend heavily on international development partners and corporate donors (Yusuf et al., 2017). This dependence carries growing risk. Major bilateral donors are reducing official development assistance and reprioritising away from education and child protection (Global Governance Reimagined, 2025). Abuja-based NGOs working with street children should therefore diversify their income streams. Local philanthropy, fee-based consultancy services, and partnerships with FCT-based corporations all offer viable alternatives. Relying predominantly on the kinds of grants whose availability is now contracting leaves these organisations dangerously exposed.

Finally, the theoretical synthesis offered here suggests that interventions strengthening family and community social capital tend to produce more durable effects. These include family mediation, parenting support, and community sensitisation campaigns. Addressing only a child's immediate material needs, without rebuilding the social fabric around them, falls short of genuine resolution. This reframes what 'success' means in street children management. Rather than counting how many children are removed from the street, success should measure whether the social ties that ordinarily protect a child have been restored. Family relationships, school enrolment, and community belonging are the real indicators worth tracking.

.Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has reviewed the literature on Non-Governmental Organisations and street children management, situating the discussion within the specific, and currently under-researched, context of Abuja FCT, Nigeria. The evidence suggests that NGOs perform an indispensable role across the identification, rescue, rehabilitation, resettlement and advocacy continuum, but that their effectiveness is constrained by definitional ambiguity around who counts as a street child, by weak coordination with government and among NGOs themselves, by chronic and increasingly volatile financing, and by the persistence of the structural drivers, poverty, family breakdown and the unreformed Almajiri system, that continue to push children onto the street faster than current interventions can address. Social Network Theory and Social Capital Theory together provide a useful lens for understanding both why children end up on the street and what kinds of NGO intervention are likely to keep them from returning. Based on this review, the following recommendations are advanced:

1. The FCT Social Work/Children Welfare Department should establish a coordination mechanism, such as a shared registry of NGOs, faith-based organisations and government agencies active in street-children work, mapped against known hotspot communities, to reduce duplication and identify coverage gaps.

2. Government-led rescue or mop-up exercises should be designed jointly with NGOs from the outset, with explicit budgeting for the family-tracing, household support and follow-up monitoring components that the literature identifies as necessary for sustained reintegration.

3. NGOs and donors should prioritise family- and community-based reintegration models over purely residential or custodial approaches, while recognising that some children, particularly those with no traceable family, will continue to require longer-term residential care.

4. Given the documented decline in traditional donor funding, Abuja-based NGOs should be supported, through training and seed grants, to develop diversified and locally rooted income streams, including domestic philanthropy, fee-based services and partnerships with private-sector actors based in the FCT.

5. NGO staff working directly with street children should receive structured training in trauma-informed care, family mediation and case management, areas repeatedly identified as under-resourced in the Nigerian NGO sector.

.6. Future empirical research should adopt the multi-stage, multi-stakeholder qualitative design outlined in Section 6, combining interviews with NGO and government officials, key-informant interviews with security and welfare agencies, and focus group discussions with street children themselves, to generate the Abuja-specific evidence base that is currently lacking.

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