DO I COUNT IF YOU COUNT ME?
This paper is for practitioners, donors and policy-makers who want information on different counting methodologies and to better understand the challenges of counting street-connected children. This paper describes the main four current methodologies to counting children in street situations, with the strengths and limitations of each. One method, observational headcounts, is highlighted as the most favoured by CSC’s members to inform their programme design, national advocacy and reports to donors.

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In November 2014 CSC held its Research Conference on counting street-connected children. The Conference brought together practitioners and researchers to address the evidence for and challenges faced when counting street-connected children through a combination of keynote speeches, a panel session, presentations, workshops and written papers addressing challenges and developments in the sector.1

In 1989, UNICEF estimated there were 100 million street children in the world.2 This figure was repeated in 2002, ‘the latest estimates put the numbers of these children as high as 100 million’3 and again in 2005, ‘the exact number of street children is impossible to quantify, but the figure almost certainly runs into tens of millions across the world’.4 The 100 million figure has been widely criticised, and as early as 1994 Judith Ennew argued that numbers of street children are rarely referenced to counting methods and usually had ‘no validity or basis in fact’.5 She further argued that numbers of street children were often manipulated, inflated and even fabricated by NGOs and donors to attract funding. 100 million is such a huge number that it creates a sense of inability to effectively address the needs of street children at policy-making levels.6

Despite this, a strong desire to determine numbers of street children remains within the sector: practitioners want numbers of street children to better design their programmes; donors want numbers so they can target and evaluate their funding streams; and governments want numbers to collect data on street children and target both their programmes and policies.

In 2014, CSC’s Research Conference analysed different methodologies of counting. Professor Lewis Aptekar and Professor Irene Rizzini delivered key-note speeches and set out the main academic critiques of counting street-connected children, in particular:

• Definitional inconsistencies of street children create problems of who to include when counting
  » In the 1970s UNICEF described street children as ‘on’ or ‘of’ the street. Children on the street are considered those who work on the street and return home at night, children of the street are considered homeless and both live and work on the street. This definition has since evolved into ‘street-involved children’, ‘children working and/or living on the street’, ‘children in street situations’7 and ‘street-connected children’8 at international policy levels to capture the multiple ways that children connect with the street and the transient nature of these connections. The street connections definition includes children who would not be included in the other definitions. The ‘on/of’ categories, however, remain prevalent within the international non-governmental community.
  » Such definitional differences are significant when counting street-connected children as the definition used determines the criteria for the count itself. Researchers can show that they are aware of these definitional inconsistencies and indicate what criteria they use and why in their reports.

• The street children sector needs to use a uniform methodology for consistency to obtain accurate numbers of street children
  » Given the evolving nature of research methods and tools, and that street children are not a homogenous group, researchers should use culturally appropriate methods. These should be defined locally and researchers should detail their use to ensure that further knowledge generated is contextually relevant.

• Counting studies referenced in academic work are often out of date

• Researchers need to be mindful of how their work influences the public’s and policy-makers’ opinions of street children

• There is a need to combine qualitative and quantitative data on street children to gain a realistic representation of their numbers

1 A full list of presentations and posters displayed at the Conference appears at the end of this paper
5 J. Ennew, (1994), Street and working children – A guide to planning, London: Save the Children, p.32
7 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009
8 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009

2. OVERVIEW OF COUNTING METHODOLOGIES

The fundamental challenge when counting street-connected children is that the count provides a figure of children in street situations, i.e., of children present in the street at the time of the count. This snapshot does not capture those children who are perhaps at home or at work, but who still connect with the street. Street-connected children are a difficult population to count since they live mobile and transient lives. Numbers of children counted in the street can fluctuate either with seasonal change or during big events such as the FIFA World Cup. Some groups of children can be less visible on the streets, for example street girls.

Furthermore, street-connected children often wish to remain below the radar; they experience high levels of stigma from the communities in which they live and are often subjected to harassment and threats by the State, or State bodies such as the police, including ‘street clearing’ operations. Often street-connected children fear negative consequences as a result of being counted.

As such there is no systematic or consistent way of counting street-connected children. Below are descriptions of four of the methodologies that are used to count children in street situations. It is imperative that each methodology contains clear criteria for identifying the children, in line with the difficulties expressed above in relation to definitions of street children. In some situations children may look like street-connected children on account of their dress or location, but not actually have street connections.

SUMMARY OF METHODOLOGIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>METHODOLOGY</th>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Capture-recapture</td>
<td>• Can estimate numbers in an elusive population</td>
<td>• Results alter with change</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Generates some qualitative data</td>
<td>• Morally problematic to use a wildlife method to count street children</td>
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<td>Involves headcount and creating a list</td>
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<td>2. Respondent-driving sampling</td>
<td>• Useful way to recruit participants from an elusive population</td>
<td>• Does not generate accurate numbers of street children</td>
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<td>Peer recruitment to a study</td>
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<td>3. Census</td>
<td>• Generates qualitative and quantitative data</td>
<td>• Only includes street children already known to an NGO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Involves interviewing children</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Problematic for outsiders to formulate the questions</td>
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<td>4. Observational Headcounts – most favoured by CSC members</td>
<td>• Accounts for the mobility of street-connected children’s lives</td>
<td>• Need to be repeated periodically</td>
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<tr>
<td>A headcount</td>
<td>• Provides actual figures, not estimates</td>
<td>• No qualitative data gathered</td>
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3. METHODS OF COUNTING STREET-CONNECTED CHILDREN

**METHOD 1: CAPTURE-RECAPTURE**

The capture-recapture method was designed to count elusive wildlife populations and has been applied to homeless populations since the 1990s. When used for children in street situations, the basic method is to count how many street children are in a particular location and then repeat this, taking note of who has been counted. Hence a list is created of each child that has been counted at the same time as the actual count is conducted. The entire population size, beyond the particular location(s), is estimated by comparing the count figures and the list. Sometimes this method is used with respondent-driven sampling to determine the characteristics of street-connected children as well.

**STRENGTHS OF THIS METHOD**
- It is specifically designed for hard to count, elusive populations
- It generates some qualitative data about the children counted

**LIMITATIONS TO THIS METHOD**
- Street-connected children live mobile and transient lives; it is therefore not accurate to assume that the population size remains the same over time. Over a short time period, mobility would not alter capture-recapture results. Over a longer time period, however, this could significantly affect the results. For instance, numbers of children in street situations can vary with seasonal change and if counting during the rainy season, figures could vary dramatically in the dry season.
- It is morally problematic to transfer biological techniques for wildlife populations to street-connected children and conceptualise them in this way

Capture-recapture has been used to count children in street situations in the following instances:

**RESEARCHERS**
- Hatloy and Huser in Ghana (2005)
- Southon et al in Nepal (2005)
- Guarcello and Koseleci in Egypt (2009)
- Odell in El Salvador and Guatemala (2011)

**NGOS AND DONORS**
- Retrak in Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia (2012)
- UNICEF in multiple countries
- ILO and World Bank in Egypt (2009)

**METHOD 2: RESPONDENT-DRIVEN SAMPLING**

Respondent-driven sampling is not a counting method, but a form of sampling, i.e., a way in which to determine the population that will be counted. It is popular in the street children sector.

Respondent-driven sampling is a form of sampling where the initial participants recruit their peers or friends to take part in the study and thus make up the population for the study. This is a useful recruitment technique for mobile populations like street-connected children. For researchers, it avoids difficulties of finding members of the population as the participants have better access to other members through their social networks. Respondent-driven sampling is based on a dual incentive structure where participants are rewarded for being interviewed and for recruiting new participants.

Respondent-driven sampling identifies characteristics and behaviours of the group, and although numbers of street-connected children have been estimated from respondent-driven sampling, it is generally acknowledged that this is not an accurate way to count street-connected children. Respondent-driven sampling is therefore often used in conjunction with other counting methodologies.

**STRENGTHS OF THIS SAMPLING TECHNIQUE**
- A useful method to recruit street-connected children as participants to a study

**LIMITATIONS TO THIS SAMPLING TECHNIQUE**
- Respondent-driven sampling does not provide numbers of street-connected children
- The technique does not provide a true reflection of the entire street-connected children population but rather of those who have been recruited to the study
- Those recruited to the study are usually those with connections to an NGO and therefore not necessarily the most vulnerable children
- The dual incentive structure can be problematic because of the implied value it places on children’s involvement in the study. Payment could also distort results as it influences who responds and how

Respondent-driven sampling has been used to complement counting studies of children in street situations in the following instances:

**RESEARCHERS**
- Hatloy and Huser in Ghana (2005)
- Johnston et al in Albania (2010)

**NGOS AND DONORS**
- Retrak in Uganda and Ethiopia (2012)

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9 This section is based on Anne Hatloy and Anne Huser, (2005) Identification of street children: Characteristics of street children in Bamako and Acora, (Fafio)
11 This section is based on Anne Hatloy and Anne Huser, (2005) Identification of street children: Characteristics of street children in Bamako and Acora, (Fafio)
12 Ibid p.31
STRENGTHS OF THIS METHOD

• Gain both qualitative and quantitative data on street-connected children

LIMITATIONS TO THIS METHOD

• Children selected for the study are already known to those conducting the study and hence it is already a biased sample of street-connected children and potentially misses others not currently engaged with an NGO
• Interviews and questionnaires are not necessarily reliable tools for research with street-connected children as the researchers, external to the children’s lives, set the questions

Censuses have been used to gather data on street-connected children in the following instances:

RESEARCHERS
• Aptekar et al. in Kenya (1999)
• Veale and Dona in Rwanda (2003)
• Javangwe and Chitsiku in Zimbabwe (2009)

NGOS
• GOAL Ireland in Sierra Leone
• Street Kids Direct in Guatemala
• Streets Ahead Zimbabwe (2009)
• Save the Children in India (2011)
• Action for Children in Conflict in Kenya (2011)
• Street Action in South Africa (2011)

STRENGTHS OF THIS METHOD

• Headcounts account for the mobility of street-connected children’s lives as they are repeated
• A purely observational method with fewer biases associated with it
• Offers a truer reflection of numbers of street-connected children; accounting for other categories of children that street children also fall into, for instance, working children, street girls etc.
• Provides accurate figures rather than estimates
LIMITATIONS TO THIS METHOD
• It is based on observation and hence provides a snapshot of children in street situations. Figures may fluctuate with change.
• Headcounts need to be repeated at regular periods to remain accurate and up-to-date.
• No qualitative data is gathered.

Headcounts have been used to count children in street situations in the following instances:

RESEARCHERS
• Rosemberg in Brazil (2000)

NGOS AND DONORS
• StreetInvest in multiple countries
• UNICEF and Save the Children Albania (2014)
• Railway Children in Tanzania (2012)
• Retrak in Ethiopia
• Street Child in Sierra Leone (2011)
• Catholic Action for Street Children in Ghana (1990s)

4. WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON COUNTS THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE:
CSC’s Global Resource Centre
www.streetchildrenresources.org

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON TRAINING OR SUPPORT WITH OBSERVATIONAL HEADCOUNTS:
StreetInvest:
www.streetinvest.org

TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK ON THE USE OF A COUNTING METHOD – ITS PROS, CONS AND SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS:
Shared Learning Hub of CSC’s Global Resource Centre accessed via:
www.streetchildrenresources.org
Natalie Turgut, Advocacy and Research Officer at CSC,
Natalie@streetchildren.org
WHERE: BRAZIL  
WHO: ROSEMBERG  
WHEN: 2000

WHERE: SIERRA LEONE  
WHO: STREETINVEST AND STREET CHILD  
WHEN: 2012

WHERE: GHANA  
WHO: CATHOLIC ACTION FOR STREET CHILDREN AND STREETINVEST  
WHEN: 1990S; 2013
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• Ennew J, (1994), Street and working children – A guide to planning, London: Save the Children
• Fisher et al., (1994) ‘Estimated number of homeless and homeless mentally ill people in north east Westminster by using capture-recapture analysis’ in British Medical Journal 308
• Odel C, (2011) Public policy options for addressing street youth in Guatemala City and San Salvador, UCLA School of Public Affairs

• Retrak, Enumerating street children - (2012) The Situation of Street Girls in Kampala and Addis Ababa
• Save the Children India, (2011) Surviving the Streets: A Census of Street Children in Delhi by the Institute for Human Development and Save the Children
• Street Action, (2011) Including Street Children: A Situational Analysis of Street Children in Durban, South Africa
• StreetInvest, So what do we mean by ‘Head counting’?
• UN OHCHR, (2012) Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Children Working and or Living on the Street (AHROC/19/35)

PRESENTATIONS AND POSTERS AT THE RESEARCH CONFERENCE

• Sally Atkinson-Shippeard, Kings College London: ‘The Bengali mafia hire street children as labourers: exploring the market for protection, gangs and social agency in Dhaka
• Sophie Bray-Watkins, University of London: ‘Just a Street Kid’: Stigma and Street Children’s Perceptions of Public Perceptions
• Jade Catterton, University of Dundee: The Relational Networks of Street-Connected Young People in Disaster Prone Areas of Jamaica
• Su Corcoran, University of Manchester: Challenging a deficit model of street-connectedness in Kenyan schools
• Esther Coren and Rosa Hossain, Canterbury University: Interventions for promoting reintegration and reducing harmful behaviour and lifestyles in street-connected children and young people
• Sarah di Giglio, Independent Consultant: National Study on Children in Street Situation in Albania
• Eleanor Harrison, Global Giving and Su Corcoran, University of Manchester: Systematic data collection with street children in Thika, Kenya over a 7 year period
• Dr Tim Malcolmson, GOAL Ireland: Learning focused organisational (participatory) action research (AR) with street-connected young people
• Moroccan Children’s Trust: Qualitative Participatory Research with Street-connected children in Taroudannt, Morocco
• Jeanette Olson, Goteborg University: Leaving the street – a study of children returned home from the streets in Bukoba, Tanzania
• Michele Poretti, University Institute Kurt Bösch and CSC REF Member: The Missing Link: Runaways, streets and the politics of definitions
• Railway Children: Survey of Street Involved Children and Youth in Mwanza who Reside in ‘Ghettos’, Camps and Guest Houses
• Abdellah Soussi, Fondation Amare pour la Protection de l’Enfance and Moroccan Children’s Trust: Headcount of children on the street in Taroudannt, Morocco
• Street Child Africa: Research, Consultation and Planning Grant – Comic Relief Impact Network for Street Children in Senegal
The Consortium for Street Children (CSC) is a global network that raises street children’s voices, promotes their rights and improves their lives. We do this through our focus on advocacy, research and network development.

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