



# Opening the door

The story of youth-led empowerment of child domestic workers



In October I went to Tanzania to find out more about a youth-led organisation of child domestic workers called WoteSawa. This presentation explains how a youth-led organisation comes about and what it looks like. It highlights the particular difficulties but also the deep impact child and youth-led organisations can have in empowering children, who by the nature of their work, are very difficult to reach.



Helen Veitch is Director of Children Unite, which works with organisations to protect child domestic workers from abuse and exploitation and promote their rights world-wide.

# + The Tanzanian context



It is mainly girls that go into domestic work in Tanzania.

- Many girls come from families of single parents, often their fathers had died, had left the family or were unsupportive.

*“My father ran away and left everything to my mother, but my mother failed to take care of me so I thought - I can meet my basic needs through domestic work” Agnes.*

- As a result, it is often poverty that pushes children into work.

*“We only had one meal a day, experiencing such a situation made me look for a job as a domestic worker” Veronica.*

- Another push factor in Tanzania is the cost of secondary education.

*“I passed the exam for secondary school but we had no money for tuition fees so I had to stay at home. I decided to go to town to work and pay for my schooling. But now I am taking care of my two sisters, paying for them to go to school so I have missed my opportunity of secondary school.” Jennipher*



- Domestic work for children can be a very abusive environment, most children are not able to attend school and are 'on call' 24 hours a day. Child domestic workers are very dependent on their employers for their welfare...



“At the age of ten I worked for an employer who abused me so much by not paying me, beating me, insulting me and by overworking me. I decided to leave that employer. Unfortunately my second employer was also abusive. I was not paid my salary and was accused of stealing a banana and water bucket from their house. They cut off my salary and fired me.”

Angelina

“I started to work for a big family. The father of the house asked to have a sexual relationship with me and I refused. But he forced me to have intercourse with him and I became pregnant as a result. Because of what happened I was chased away from that family.”

Sarah



# Key issue: reaching child domestic workers



Child domestic workers are notoriously difficult for Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to reach, this is because...

- Children are working in 'normal' homes but are quite isolated there and are not often allowed to go out.

“My employer has told me not to leave the house until the baby, who is two weeks, starts walking.”  
Mary

- Many children, their parents and their employers do not consider domestic 'help' to be **real work**. It is considered safe and particularly appropriate for girls who will go on to become wives and mothers.
- Therefore, working **with** not **against** employers is key to success.
- As is mobilising the local community to 'look out for' these hidden children and take action when a child is being abused.



# Key issue: decent working conditions



The International Labour Organization's (ILO) Domestic Workers Convention, recognises that adolescents (children aged 15+) are legally entitled to work in domestic work and that, given the right conditions, domestic work is not always exploitative.

- This reveals a shift in emphasis from the ILO – away from encouraging blanket bans towards more nuanced efforts to protect young domestic workers who are entitled to work.
- This creates space for those working with child domestic workers to review their approaches to these vulnerable children, and has the potential to generate new programmatic and funding opportunities.

*“Child domestic workers in Tanzania and the world at large have been recognised in the ILO Convention which has given us the lobbying and advocacy mandate for our rights as we need more protection for abuse and exploitation than adults”*



*Angel Benedicto, Director of WoteSawa*



# How does a **youth-led** organisation come about?



- WoteSawa started as an ‘advisory group’ of 25 child domestic workers who worked locally and were elected by their peers as ‘leaders’.
- This advisory group was supported by a local NGO working on domestic violence which wanted to introduce a more structured way of listening to children in their work.
- The group met every Saturday to discuss the issues they faced. Group members took part in training on their rights and responsibilities as ‘children’ and as ‘domestic workers’.
- And also received skills training on leadership, entrepreneurship (income generation) and finance management (saving schemes).



- Together Street Leaders children went door-to-door in their community to identify other children working in domestic service
- The group co-delivered (with adults) the skills training they received to other child domestic workers and are now referring cases of abuse to the authorities.
- The group became known as 'WoteSawa' (all are equal) and was registered as a local NGO.
- The leaders of the group have subsequently become involved at all levels of the organisation:
  - **Two leaders have become staff and co-facilitate trainings to other children and adults,**
  - **The Chair of the group, Angel Benedicto, has become the Director of Wotesawa,**
  - **One young person is a Board Member**
  - **The four child domestic workers who founded the organisation are company directors.**





## What does youth-led empowerment look like?



- WoteSawa works with local government officials, known as ‘street leaders’ who are responsible for a number of ‘streets’ in their community.
- Street leaders are approached by WoteSawa staff and offered training on children’s rights which is co-delivered by children and adults from the WoteSawa team.
- Street Leaders and a member of WoteSawa’s team undertake door-to-door discussions with families in the local community to identify child domestic workers and engage employers.
- Employers are offered informal training on entrepreneurship skills and children’s rights.

***“For all employers it was initially very difficult to understand child domestic workers’ situations, but slowly...foot by foot, door by door, it has happened. Even the local MP has become engaged in the issue.” Employer***



- Training is delivered by children and adults and enables child domestic workers to start negotiating their rights with employers.

*“Through training we have slowly and in a friendly way educated our employers, they are starting to hear us”*

*Veronica, child domestic worker*

- Children are engaged in an empowerment programme and offered training on their rights, on leadership skills, entrepreneurship skills the chance to set up their own small businesses.

*“Wotesawa has empowered me to understand my rights and responsibilities, build my confidence – I am doing my (domestic) duties in a good way. Now I understand the law that protects me, now I am involved with other child domestic workers.”*

*Paskazia, WoteSawa Advisory Group Leader*

- Through Street Leaders, the community is encouraged to identify cases of abuse of child domestic workers and an informal referral system is used.
- WoteSawa refer children to the police or other NGOs depending on the child’s needs.





# The impact of being youth-led...



WoteSawa's youth-led approach has had a significant impact on the empowerment of child domestic workers, helping to transform their lives.

- The inclusion of child domestic workers in the staff team makes the organisation particularly **credible and attractive** to other child domestic workers (beneficiaries).
- Empowerment activities enable children to develop new skills and give children **new experiences of power** that result in a significant increase in children's self-confidence. This confidence, in turn, enables children to **represent other child domestic workers** – particularly in cases of abuse.

*“Just looking at them and seeing how they articulate issues you can see how much work we have done...I saw a lot of energy among the children and I saw children coming up and saying ‘I will be a leader, I will be a spokesperson for the rights of child domestic workers’”*

Maimuna, adult trainer



- The **synergy between three areas of work**:
  - a) training and empowerment with child domestic workers;
  - b) community mobilisation on the abuse of child domestic workers and;
  - c) income generating activities with children;has a significant **impact on empowering children** and has resulted in **increased protection** of child domestic workers from abuse and exploitation.

*“I have been empowered to speak publicly, have increased my confidence, I know my rights and have the skills to negotiate them with my employer. I feel respected by others and through income generating activities I have a future that is not only as a domestic worker. I have dreams I could not have had before.”*

Ndalawa, male child domestic worker



# The future: building the capacity of youth-led organisations



- Children Unite is working with WoteSawa to build their capacity to empower more child domestic workers in Tanzania.
- Children Unite also runs a consultancy and advice service offering tailor-made consultancy to NGOs to set-up or improve their interventions for child domestic workers. Our consultancy and advice build the capacity of organisations to develop specific programs, advocacy projects and services for child domestic workers that are based on the needs expressed by children themselves.

↪ Click on the door (to WoteSawa's office) to find out more or email me: [helen@childrenunite.org.uk](mailto:helen@childrenunite.org.uk)

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