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Understanding the right to adequate food through children's voices: A qualitative study with street-connected children in ethiopia

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Abstract

The right to adequate food is a fundamental human right; however, it remains largely unmet for street-connected children, who represent one of the most marginalised and vulnerable population groups in urban settings. Despite increasing global attention to food systems transformation and nutrition, limited research has explored how this right is experienced, negotiated, and often denied in the everyday lives of children living and working on the streets, particularly in rapidly urbanizing contexts in the Global South.

This study examines the lived experiences of street-connected children in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, with a particular focus on their access to and perceptions of adequate food. A qualitative research design was employed, combining focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and visual participatory methods. As part of the visual action research component, children were actively engaged in drawing activities, through which they illustrated and explained their food experiences and daily realities. This approach enabled a deeper, more child-centered understanding and created space for children to express complex experiences that may not easily emerge through conventional verbal methods alone.

The data were analysed using qualitative content analysis, allowing for the identification of key themes related to food access, agency, coping strategies, and structural constraints. The findings reveal a complex interplay between children's agency and systemic barriers, including poverty, social exclusion, precarious livelihoods, and limited institutional support, all of which shape their ability to realise their right to adequate food.

By centering children's voices and experiences, this study contributes to ongoing debates on inclusive food systems and rights-based approaches to food security. It highlights the urgent need for context-sensitive, participatory, and rights-based interventions that address both immediate needs and the broader structural inequalities affecting vulnerable population groups.

Keywords: Food access, inclusive food system, qualitative study, right to adequate food, street-connected children, vulnerable population groups

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