

Churchill Fellowship Report
Developing Links Between Young People
in Cambridge and Africa by
John Wroe



**Creating Lasting Links: From Cambridge to Africa through the
Street Child World Cup**

Introduction & Fellowship Context

When I embarked on my Churchill Fellowship in 2007 under the theme "Developing links between young people in Cambridge and Africa," I could not have anticipated how profoundly that vision would unfold over the following decades. Today, through the work of Street Child United (SCU), those early ambitions have become a sustained global movement—linking communities across continents, empowering young people, and driving structural change through sport, art, and advocacy.

The South Africa Turning Point

I was the executive director of Momentum Arts, a Cambridge-based arts organisation that, among other things, worked with young people who were on the margins, who were not in education, training, or employment. And we used the arts to bring them closer to the centre. This work was extremely successful in providing young people with increased aspirations, increased opportunities, and appropriate support for them to seize those opportunities and change the course of their lives.

At the time, I had no idea that, through my Winston Churchill Fellowship, it would allow a model to be developed that could be translated for children that live on the streets globally and to have impact on the most marginalised children in the world.

I travelled initially to Tanzania and Kenya and then on to South Africa, where I was joined by my family and three other families. In Kenya and Tanzania, one of our board members at Momentum Arts, Nim Jugana, who was also chair of the Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum, showed me the ropes and introduced me to many organisations and people that had links with Cambridge. But it was really in South Africa that the connections and the possibilities came to life.

It was a real privilege to visit this project that we'd supported for a number of years with children of our own that were a similar age to the children that the project supported, but who had had very different life opportunities. This particular visit changed us all forever.

We cooked. We played games. We talked. We walked. We did surf. And we played football. We were all football fans. And one boy said to us,

“when people see me on the streets, they say I am a street child. But when they see me playing football, they say I am a person. I am a person like you.”

This gave us the idea that we could use football to change the way that children like Andile saw themselves. We could also use football to change the way that the world saw children like Andile. And if we could change the way that people saw street children, we could begin to change the way that people treated street children.

Part of the Winston Churchill Fellowship experience is sharing your findings with audiences back home. And I had the privilege to speak at a number of events, including school assemblies. And it was at one of these where a young girl put her hand up and said, “the next World Cup in Africa is happening in 2010. Why can't street children have a World Cup?” And as a lifelong fan of Swansea City, I thought, well, this is a great idea to give issues that were important to the young people we met in the public spotlight, particularly around identity, access to education, protection from violence and gender equality.



We organised the first ever World Cup for Street Children in March 2010. We invited eight organisations from across the world, the very best organisations that were working with street children, to come to Durban to play a tournament on the Steve Biko campus of the Durban University of Technology on South African Human Rights Day, March 21st, but also to have congress sessions on children's rights and to undertake arts activities. We used the international languages of both football and the arts to change the way that street children were seen and then treated.

Having the established brand of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust was a real asset in reaching out to particularly British institutions in South Africa, like the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the British Ambassador, the British Council, all of whom responded with generosity. And I quickly realised that the whole world was conspiring with us to make first Street Child World Cup possible. And that spirit has continued right up until 2026.

I will say that a key to our success is to give the Street Child World Cup away. To make sure that people realise this is their Street Child World Cup. Not to hold it tightly, but to give it away with our brand. And for people to understand that you only get to be part of a host country for a Street Child World Cup once in your lifetime. And to cherish that, and to throw everything you've got at it. And that has been a tremendous lesson for me, I suppose, in receiving generosity.

Whether that was in South Africa in 2010, or Brazil 2014, even in Moscow in 2018, or Qatar 2022, and now Mexico in 2026. Even when a challenge seems incredibly difficult, I can step back and I'm reassured that nobody disagrees with what we're trying to do. And everyone is willing to help, if we can ask them in the right way. Whether that is Prince William, or David Beckham, or Alex Scott, or Desmond Tutu or Pope Francis. In their own way, to show their commitment to this organisation. And to make an influence on the lives of street connected children.

We've developed a model, so that we don't just do Football World Cups but also Cricket World Cup at Lords in 2019, and again in India in 2023. And we're delighted to be delivering the third Street Child Cricket World Cup in 2027, in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. Along with future events coinciding with the Women's World Cup in Brazil in 2027, and in North America in 2031. And events alongside the Olympic Games and Paralympics.

"Every child must have a legal identity — we're not asking for favours. It's our human right." - Chennai Congress Declaration, 2023



Highlights of Impact Across Africa (2010-2025)

- **2010 – Durban, South Africa:**
 - Ended police round-ups of street children; Tanzanian team launched awareness campaign; South Africa's national street child policy reform.
- **2014 – Rio, Brazil:**
 - Teams from 7 African countries; Burundi's reconciliation campaign; Tanzania celebrated in Parliament.
- **2016 – Street Child Games:**
 - Burundi youth inspired national ID reforms; Rio Resolution shaped UN General Comment.
- **2018 – Moscow, Russia:**
 - 100+ young people received passports; Burundi placed 3rd and met their President; Tanzania girls' team celebrated nationally.
- **2019 – Cricket World Cup, UK:**
 - Tanzania & Mauritius participated; grassroots cricket programmes launched.
- **2022 – Doha, Qatar:**
 - African girls and boys teams participated; strong partner NGO presence; highlighted in global forums.
- **2023 – Cricket World Cup, India:**
 - Uganda won the tournament; Zimbabwe team met with Bulawayo Mayor post-event; Voices of the Chennai Congress featured African advocacy; Zimbabwe announced as 2027 host.





Beyond Events: Year-Round Programmes and Leadership

- **Change 10 (2020–2021):**
 - Included Sadock (Tanzania) and Abdallah (Egypt); focused on soft skills, English, and advocacy. 100% of participants reported improved confidence and clarity in their goals.
- **Sheroes and Heroes:**
 - Girls from Mauritius (SAFIRE) participated in gender equality workshops, boosting confidence and public speaking skills.
- **Sports Journalism Workshop (2021):**
 - African Young Leaders from Tanzania and Egypt trained in storytelling and media advocacy in partnership with UNESCO and Al Jazeera.
- **Eco-Schools Programme:**
 - Engaged African teams in environmental education and sustainability leadership during SCWC events.
- **Advocacy Working Groups:**
 - African partners contributed to thematic forums on education, identity, and protection—feeding into SCU's UN-aligned advocacy.
- **Virtual Bridges:**
 - African girls joined a global creative programme to explore identity and representation through art.
- **Young Leader Programme:**
 - 18 African participants were onboarded on a 2-year long programme, working on leadership skills and advocacy.
- **University Scholarships:**
 - The first ever scorer of the Street Child World Cup was awarded a scholarship at the University of the West of England.
- **Curriculum:**
 - In partnership with Rawbank, SCU has delivered the Curriculum to two organisations in DRC.



African Partnerships and Event Participation (2010–2025)

Country	Partner Organisation(s)	Event Participation
South Africa 	Sporting Chance	SCWC 2010, 2014, 2023
Tanzania 	Caretakers of the Environment and Cheka Sana	SCWC 2010, 2014, 2018, 2022
Kenya 	Glad's House Kenya	SCWC 2010, 2014
Uganda 	Youth Sport Uganda	SCWC 2018, 2022, SCCWC 2023
Zimbabwe 	Young Achievement Sports for Development and Grassroots Cricket	SCWC 2014, 2022, SCCWC 2023
Burundi 	New Generation Burundi	SCWC 2010, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2022, SCCWC 2023
Egypt 	NAFAS (formerly Hope Village Society)	SCWC 2014, 2016, 2018, 2022
Mauritius 	SAFIRE	SCWC 2018, 2022, SCCWC 2023
Rwanda 	Uyisenga ni Imanzi	SCCWC 2023
Mozambique 	Organisation not named (participated in 2014 and 2016)	SCWC 2014, 2016





Challenges, Risks and Failures

Organising international events on the scale of the Street Child World Cup comes with significant financial, operational, and logistical challenges—particularly as a start-up initiative evolving into a global movement.

Financial Uncertainty:

Funding events years in advance of global tournaments like the FIFA or ICC World Cups has always been a leap of faith. For both our first two events in South Africa and Brazil, approximately three-quarters of the funding was raised in the final three months. Twelve months out, there was little financial certainty—just belief, determination, and trust in the vision. That pressure, though motivating, has also taken a toll. Some board members with extensive financial expertise have stepped back from direct fundraising roles, citing the emotional and reputational strain of navigating unmitigated financial risks. Fortunately, many have stayed within the SCU family as committed volunteers.

Organisational Growth Pains:

Building an organisation from a simple idea to an internationally recognised entity comes with inevitable growing pains. We've faced challenges in developing systems and structures that meet legal, charitable, and operational requirements while staying nimble and mission-focused. We've evolved from a five-person team to a larger delivery operation during events—enabled by a deep pool of committed volunteers.

Brand and Communications Clarity:

Despite producing award-winning documentaries and being supported by major influencers like MrBeast, SCU remains less well-known than it should be. The brand is sometimes confused with the Homeless World Cup, despite our different missions. Our core identity—as a platform for street-connected children's voices—still needs broader recognition.

Travel, Safety, and Access Risks:

Bringing young people to global events involves tremendous logistical complexity. Securing birth certificates, passports, and visas is often a multi-country journey, especially from nations without direct consular access. For example, participants from the DRC may need to travel to Nairobi to obtain a Mexican visa, followed by securing transit visas for onward travel. We mitigate this through strong pro bono legal partnerships and volunteer support, but it remains a heavy lift. Adaptability, and humility are essential for enduring impact.



Volunteer Management and Safeguarding:

Ensuring every young person and volunteer is safe is non-negotiable. We've created rigorous safeguarding and vetting systems, led by dedicated volunteer managers. As the movement grows, the scale of responsibility also increases.

Leadership Transitions:

One personal challenge has been learning when and how to step back as a founder. After a decade of giving 100% focus to SCU, I'm now exploring how to transition some operational responsibilities while focusing where I can be most effective. The board has been instrumental in supporting this evolution.

Local Partnerships and Contextual Risk:

Each event requires building new relationships from scratch in a different country. Establishing trust with ministries and local authorities takes time. In Mexico, we've secured partnerships with the Ministries of Sport, Health, and Tourism, supported by the British Embassy. But this work requires sustained in-country presence—demanding time, patience, and commitment.

Despite our many successes, this journey has not been without challenges:

- Financial uncertainty: Securing sustainable funding for each event remains a perennial challenge, especially as the scale and ambition grow.
- Local capacity limitations: Not all partner organisations have the infrastructure to manage international participation without intense support.
- Security and logistics: Several planned team trips were postponed or cancelled due to visa issues, conflict zones, or travel restrictions.
- Mental health and safeguarding: Working with young people who have experienced trauma demands long-term mental health support, which can be hard to sustain.
- Programme sustainability: Some partnerships struggled to maintain year-round engagement once the spotlight of a major event passed.

These difficulties have taught us that resilience, adaptability, and humility are essential for enduring impact.



Reflections and Lessons Learned

Reflecting on two decades of learning, we offer the following recommendations:

- Embed local ownership: Empower local partners with training, branding, and tools to own the narrative and sustain activities beyond the event.
- Invest in long-term outcomes: Prioritise educational and leadership pathways for participants to ensure lasting change.
- Diversify funding: Seek flexible core funding in addition to event sponsorship to support year-round programming.
- Elevate youth voices: Ensure children and youth shape agendas, speak in global spaces, and lead advocacy.
- Build strategic alliances: Leverage relationships with policymakers, media, and NGOs to amplify messages and influence systemic reform.
- Prioritise safeguarding and mental health: Design dedicated support structures in all programming, especially for alumni and returning leaders.

A Living Legacy – and a Full Circle Moment

In a fitting and emotional full circle, the next Street Child Cricket World Cup will take place in Zimbabwe in 2027. Zimbabwe's young people have been part of the SCU journey for years, and this event will not only showcase their potential on a global stage but also affirm Africa's role as a home for leadership, change, and hope.

From a fellowship idea rooted in curiosity and compassion, to a global movement spanning continents, I'm proud that this work has helped redefine how the world sees, supports, and stands with street-connected children—especially across Africa.



“I represent the organisation now. They are my family... It's becoming a big event – we are touching every corner of the world.” – Sadock, SCU Young Leader, Tanzania