



# **Giving 11 million children on the streets of India a home**

## **A Research Brief**

# A. Introduction

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## Sustain Labs Paris

Sustain Labs Paris is a private enterprise based in India, France, and New Zealand that partners with organisations to make them more environmentally and socially responsible as well as profitable. We act upon the conviction that every organization must be a social entrepreneur such that its business model itself must ensure long term financial stability and social good. Sustain Labs applies a research driven approach, bringing in a rich community of academic experts and research-oriented industry experts to every organization in its portfolio. Sustain Labs' not for profit arm SLP Stargazers Foundation leverages public-private partnerships for sheltering 11 million children who live on the streets of India.

## Thematic Background

Homeless children are among the most vulnerable populations in India who suffer from denials and vulnerabilities— ranging from the deprivation of protection and care, inadequate nutrition, unhealthy working conditions, physical abuse and sexual exploitation to psycho-social stresses and exposure to drug and substance abuse— on a daily basis. Despite the lack of national data, it is estimated that between 11-18 million children live on the streets in India. Around 80% of them lack any form of legal identity, leaving them unable to access social benefits by the government, such as free and compulsory education and health insurance. Deprived of their basic human rights, street children were easily the worst affected by COVID-19, which aggravated their already precarious situation. Furthermore,

issues as preventable as unclean water, harsh environment, poor sanitation and hygiene constitute the most common risks for death among children aged 5 to 14 years of age in India, according to data gathered by Global Burden of Disease 2020.

To fight these injustices, the Indian government has shown great dedication to the cause: On the international level, India ratified the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and committed to the Sustainable Development Goals. Nationally, the Indian constitution affirms the basic rights of every child. The government further introduced several policies and schemes such as the Juvenile Justice Act, the Integrated Child Protection Scheme, the National Policy for Children, the Right to Education Act as well as the Scheme of Shelter for the Urban Homeless to protect vulnerable children and guarantee their rights to education, safe shelter, protective environments and physical integrity.

While the legal provisions by the Government of India are promising, not enough is being implemented to help children on the streets. Grave inequalities and violations of their rights persist. The plight of those children seems to always be overshadowed by problems that are perceived to be bigger. To change that, immediate action is required.

We at Sustain Labs, are seeking to implement a sustainable systematic solution for this problem which will improve the status quo of children who are forced to live on the streets.

## B. Objective

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For the government of India to initiate a national level policy intervention that will protect the most vulnerable children in India and guarantee their rights to safe shelter, education, protective environment, and physical integrity.

# C. Proposal

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Our research suggests a practical public-private partnership solution to shelter children who live on the streets in India. While Aspect 1 proposes a new and sustainable way to raise funds, the remaining aspects of our solution leverage already existing policies and schemes.



## **Aspect 1 A Public Private Partnership for Funds:**

It is proposed that GOI introduces a law for all educational trusts in India, earning above Rs. 5,00,00,000 in annual revenue for the past 3 consecutive years, to contribute 2% of their revenue to provide education and shelter for street children.



## **Aspect 2 Refurbish vacant government schools into boarding facilities:**

There are several thousands of the total 10.8 lakh government schools lying entirely or partially unused in India. In the state of Maharashtra alone, according to a survey by the Maharashtra state government in 2007, 5002 primary and secondary schools had fewer than 10 students. Following this survey, the students of 4,093 of these schools were moved to other schools, while the vacant school buildings remain unused even today. It is proposed that GOI permits vacant government schools to be refurbished to cater as attractive 'children's boarding' for temporary and long-term purposes. The boarding facilities will be managed in partnership between GOI and NGOs using the funds raised by Solution Aspect 1.



## **Aspect 3 Evoke RTE for afternoon classes in surrounding schools:**

Willing private and government schools located within a 20 kilometer radius of the boarding facilities, will hold afternoon classes, with special emphasis on vocational skills, for children. This is in line with mandatory provisions of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act. A framework for teacher training in the participating schools can be prepared by Sustain Labs and the Psychoanalytic Therapy and Research Centre Mumbai, to build pedagogical capacity within schools to support children who have lived on the streets.



## **Aspect 4 Build trust with children on the street via successful NGOs:**

It is proposed that GOI brings on board NGOs who have provided day and/or night shelter to at least 150 children at a time in the past 5 consecutive years, with annual average child retention rate of no less than 95%, for outreach to homeless children and bring them to refurbished boarding facilities.

## D. Importance of Attractive Shelters

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Life on the streets makes children independent- both socially and financially- at a very early age. In practice, this often means that they enjoy their perceived freedom and therefore tend to run away from institutions, not least because they do not feel comfortable in them. This is why the refurbished government schools need to be attractive and cater to the children's individual needs in order for them to want to stay.

Therefore, we believe that, to create a sense of ownership and desire to stay in the refurbished facilities, street children should be involved in designing and creating their own spaces according to their preferences: Former classrooms will be dissected by half walls and converted into cubicles (to satisfy the children's need for privacy as opposed to common practice of dormitory style accommodation that our research showed is less effective in child retention). Each cubicle will contain a bed with in-built drawers (see Annexe 2). Everything else will be left to the child's imagination. The skills needed for designing and creating their own cubicles will be taught in vocational classes which are part of Aspect 3 of our proposed solution.

# E. Annexe

## Annexe 1: Architectural layout of a vacant government school

Transforming already existing vacant schools as opposed to building boarding facilities from scratch is the most affordable, economical and sustainable solution to shelter children living on the streets.

The full transformation of a vacant government school into a refurbished boarding facility for street children will take up to 3 months - considerably less than the estimated 12-30 months it would take to build a boarding facility from scratch. The costs for transformation is approximately 1/20th per square feet as compared to building new facilities.

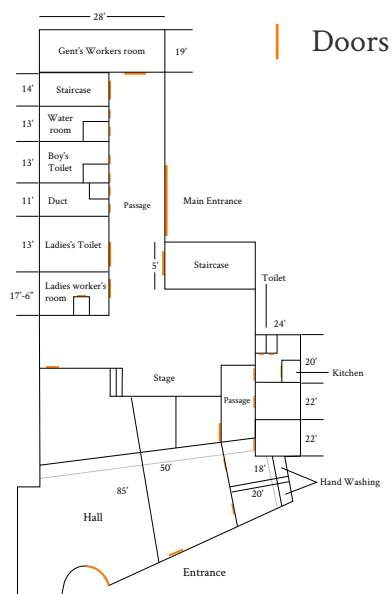
We are thankful to Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation in Mumbai and MLA Shri Amin Patel for providing us access to the Kamathipura BMC Municipal School located in 5th Ln,

Dalal Estate, Kamathipura, Mumbai, Maharashtra 400008. Kamathipura BMC Municipal School is an example of a semi vacant school such that 75% of the classrooms are locked up and unused. We have based our design, resource needs, time, and cost estimates of the transformation of a vacant school into a boarding facility for street children based on the Kamathipura BMC Municipal School school.

The following designs are intended to serve as a blueprint and should be adapted according to the measures, capacity and space available in each vacant school.

Our blueprint of a vacant government school can shelter between 180-210 children. The school will host both girls and boys.

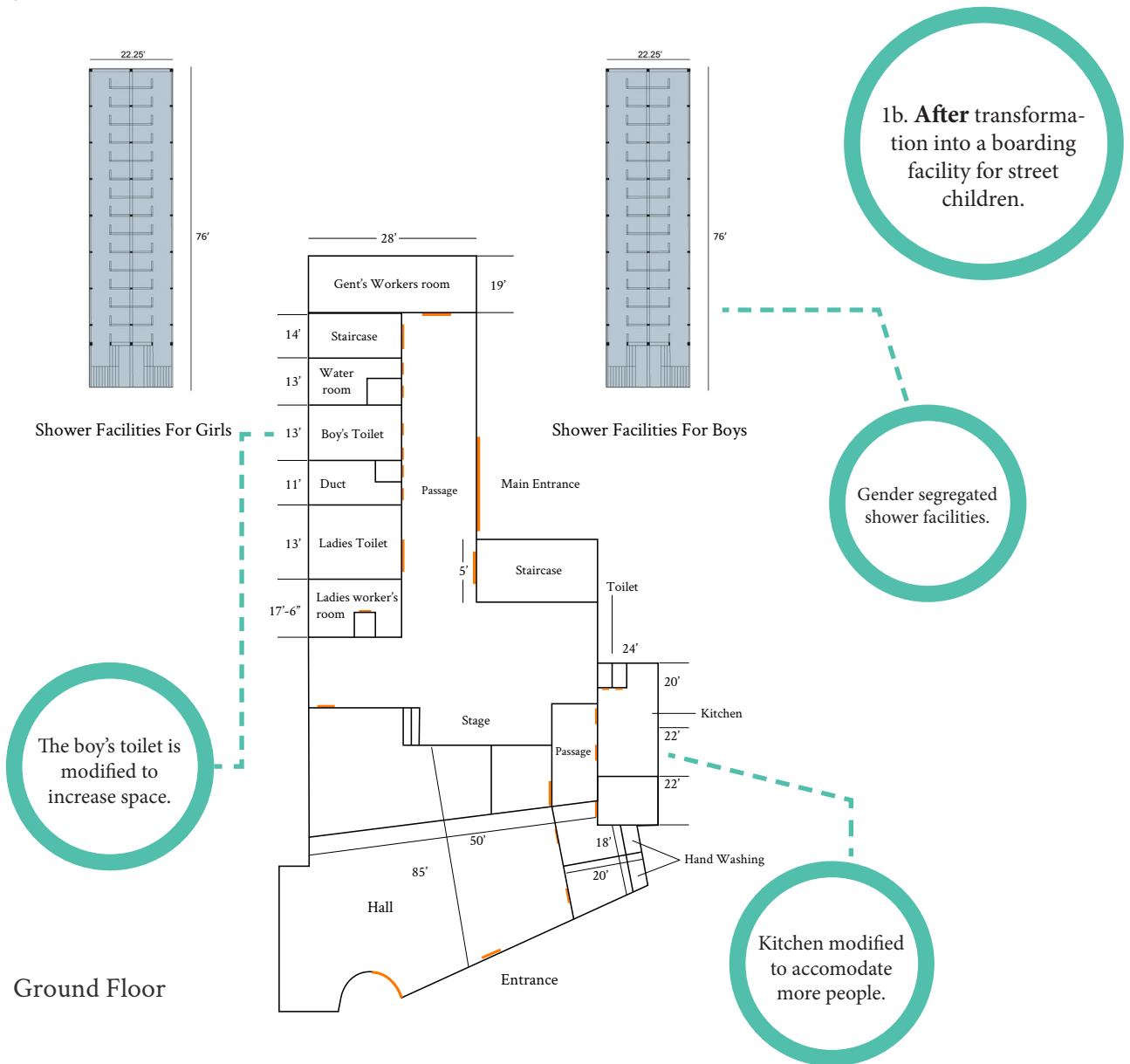
The blueprint is broken into 3 sections, each covering a different aspect of the refurbished boarding facility - 1) ground floor and outside area, 2) first floor, 3) second, third and fourth floor.



Ground Floor



## Doors



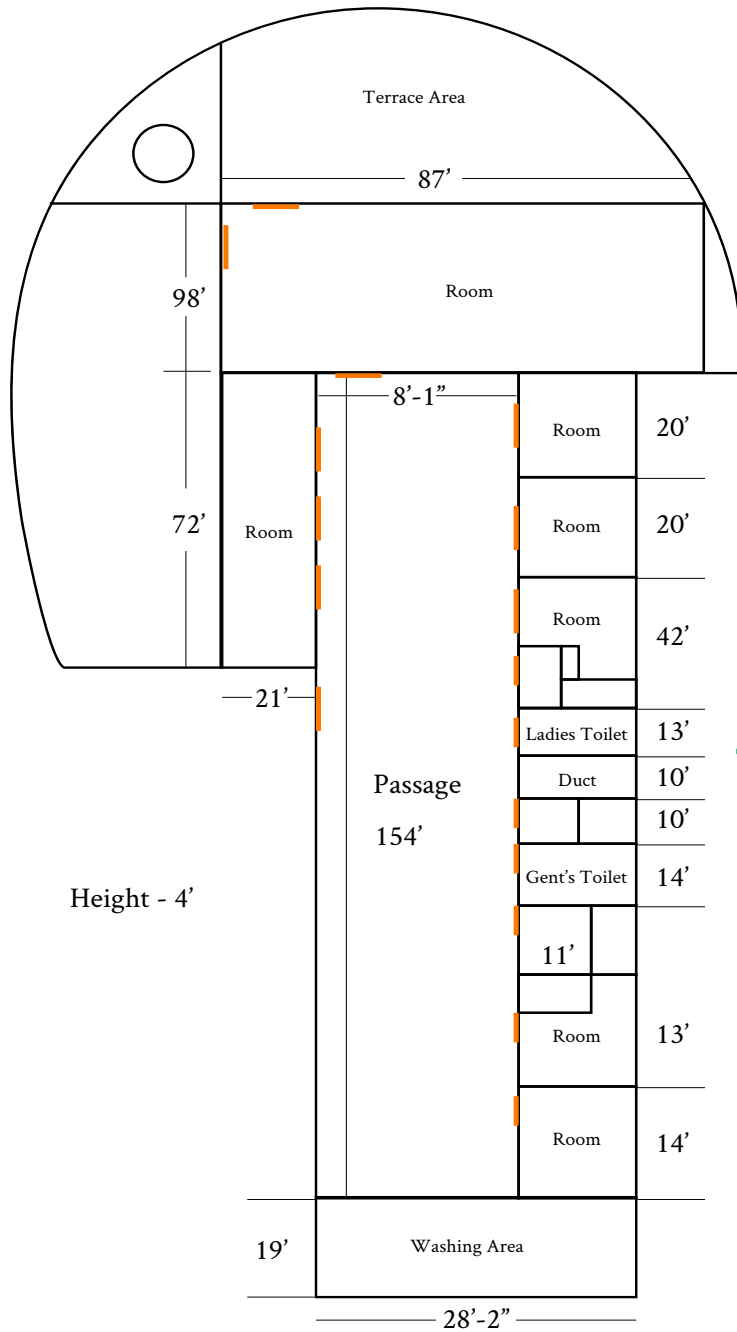
Ground Floor

**Outside area:** In order to optimize space and provide shelter to as many children as possible, it is recommended that showers are built outside of the building in 2 rows of 25 cubicles each that are accessible from the front and back. In total, 50 showers on each side of the building are suitable to meet adequate hygiene standards. The gender-responsive design provides children with an added sense of privacy as shower facilities will be

gender-segregated. In case of a smaller outside area and different dimensions of vacant schools, multiple smaller rows may be more appropriate.

**Ground floor:** The ground floor is dedicated to common activities such as breakfast, lunch and dinner as well as for assemblies and events in the meeting hall. Sufficient handwashing facilities are incorporated in the design of the boarding facility to ensure compliance with hygiene and safety requirements.

Doors

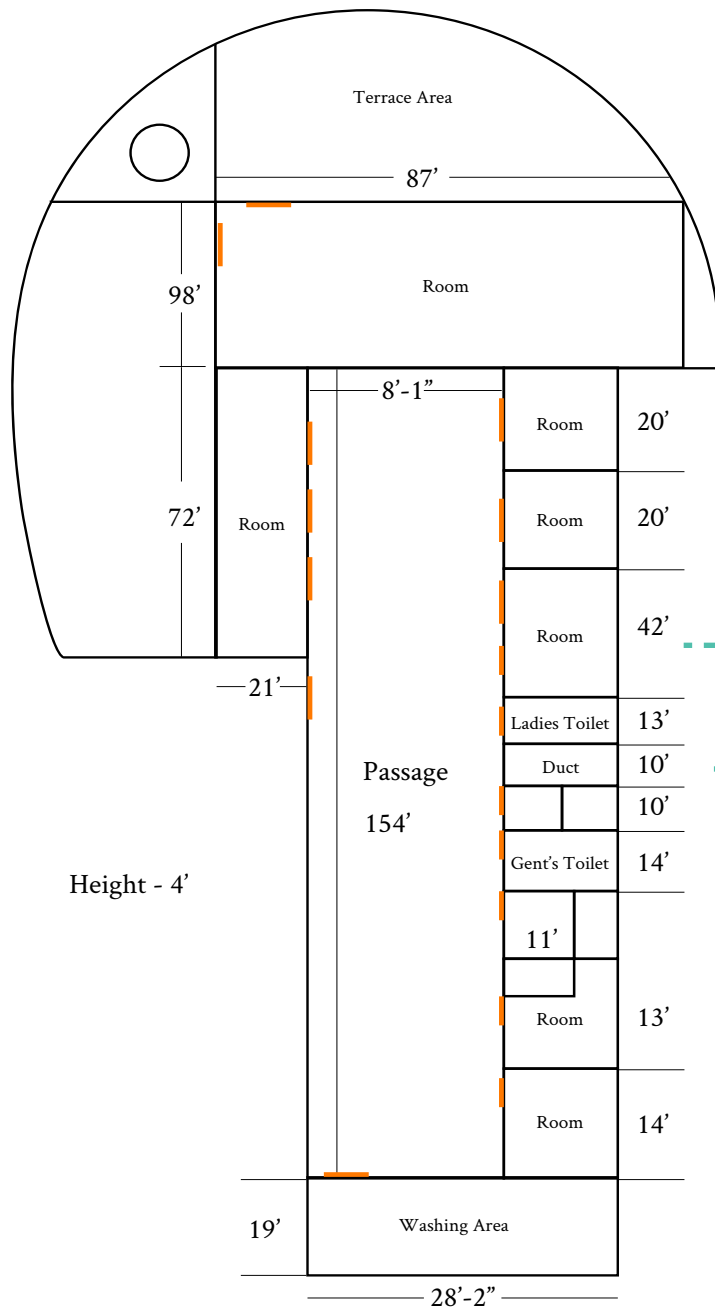


2a. **Before** transformation into a boarding facility for street children.

First Floor



| Doors

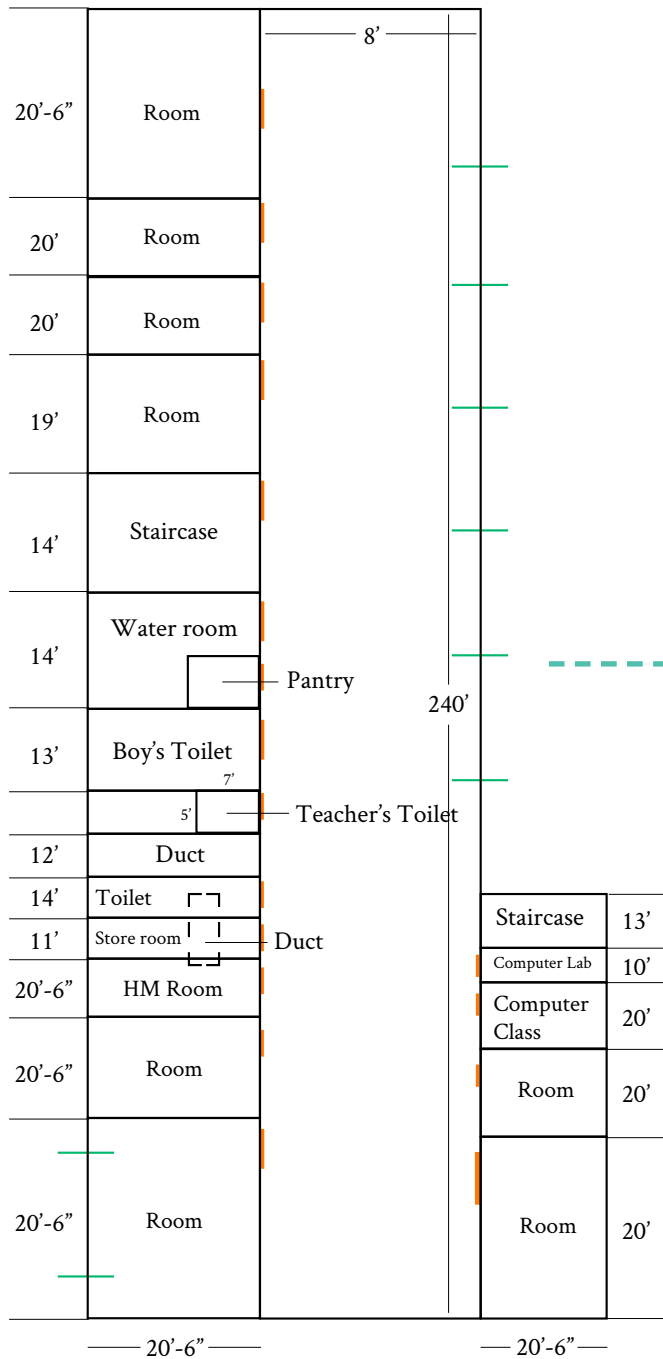


Classroom interior is modified for more space.

2b. **After** transformation into a boarding facility for street children.

First Floor

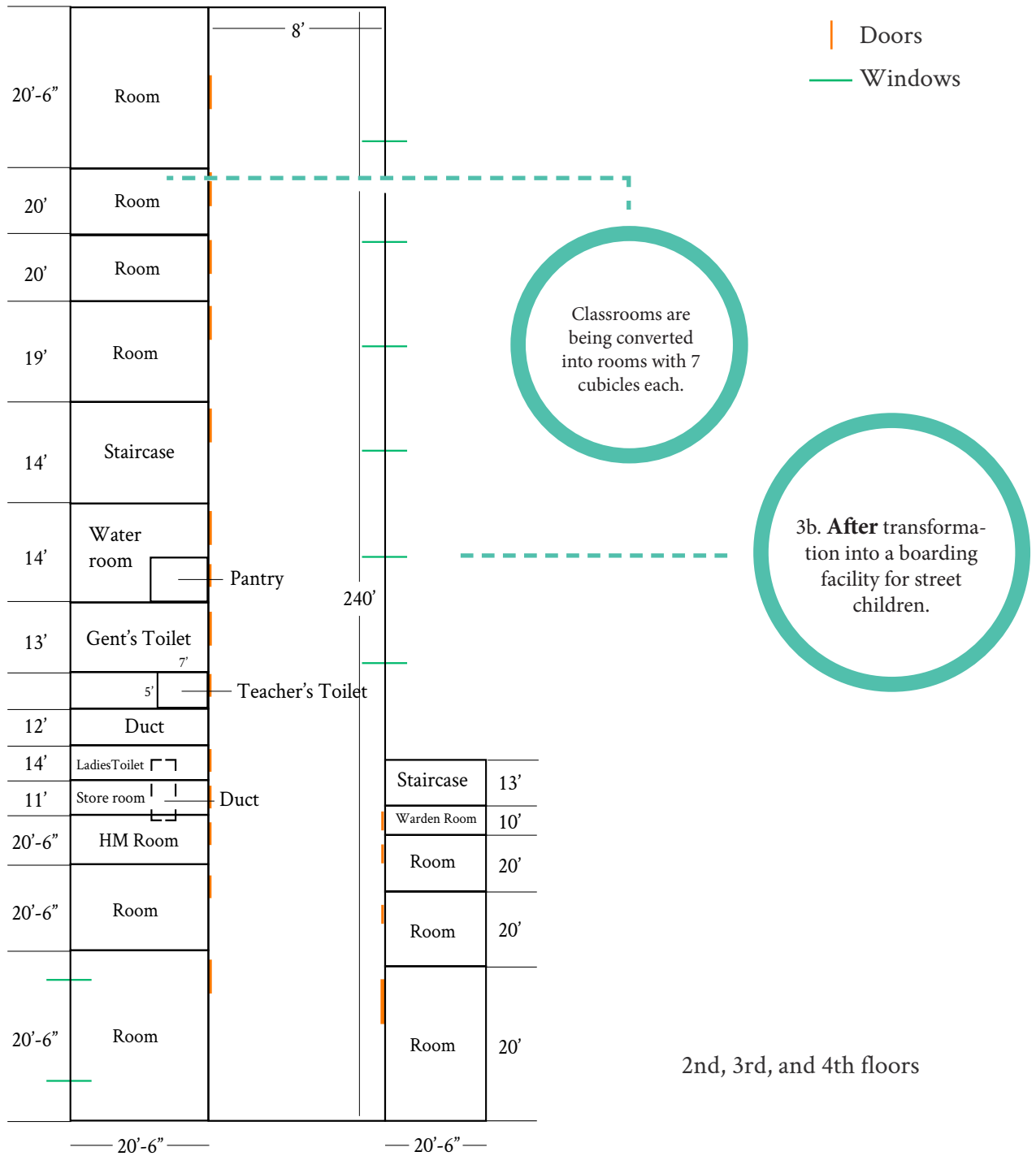
The first floor is dedicated for all educational purposes and contains classrooms for the vocational classes.



| Doors  
— Windows

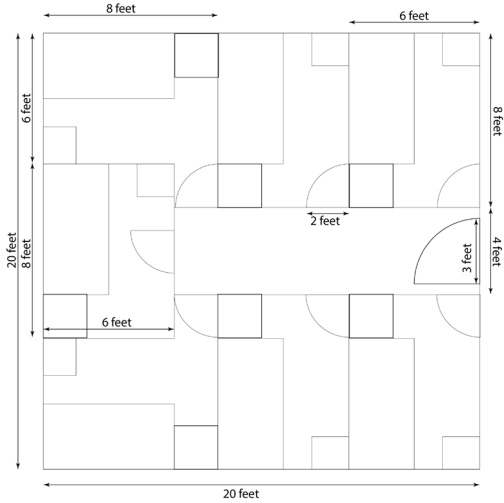
3a. **Before** transformation into a boarding facility for street children.

2nd, 3rd, and 4th floors



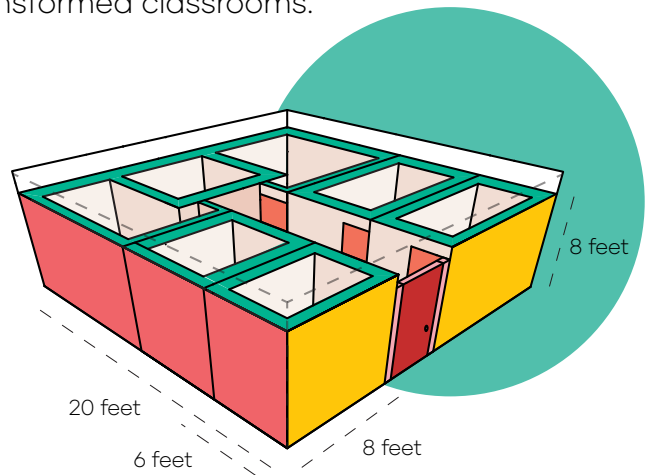
The remaining floors are used for residential purposes. It is estimated that each floor accommodates between 60-70 children as each classroom can be transformed into 7 rooms/cubicles.

## Annexe 2: Interior Designs of a vacant government school transformed into a boarding facility



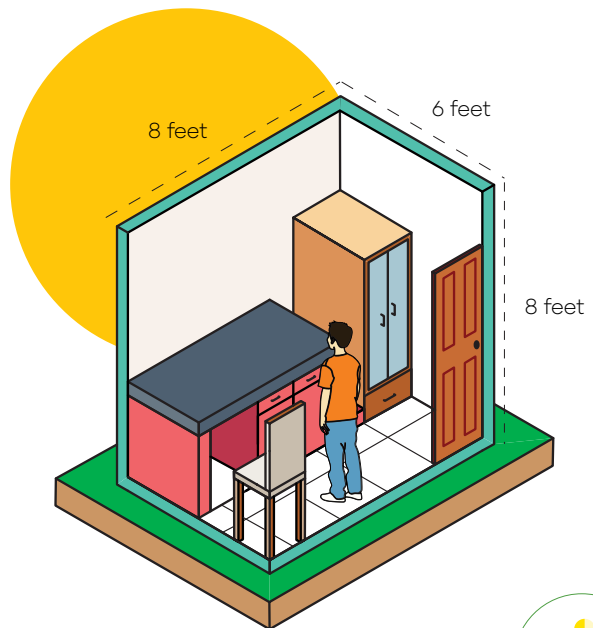
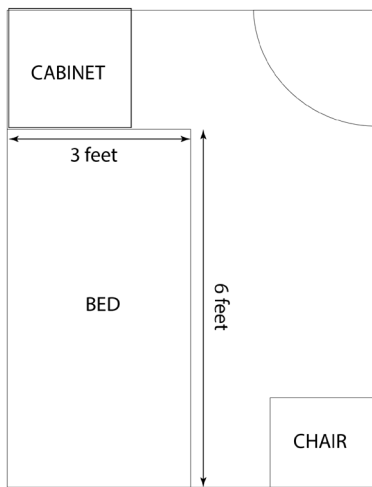
### Room Layout

The average size of classroom was 20\*20. It can be converted into 7 rooms by dividing them into cubicles. We recommend block wood (i.e. plywood made of chips) for the panels in the transformed classrooms.



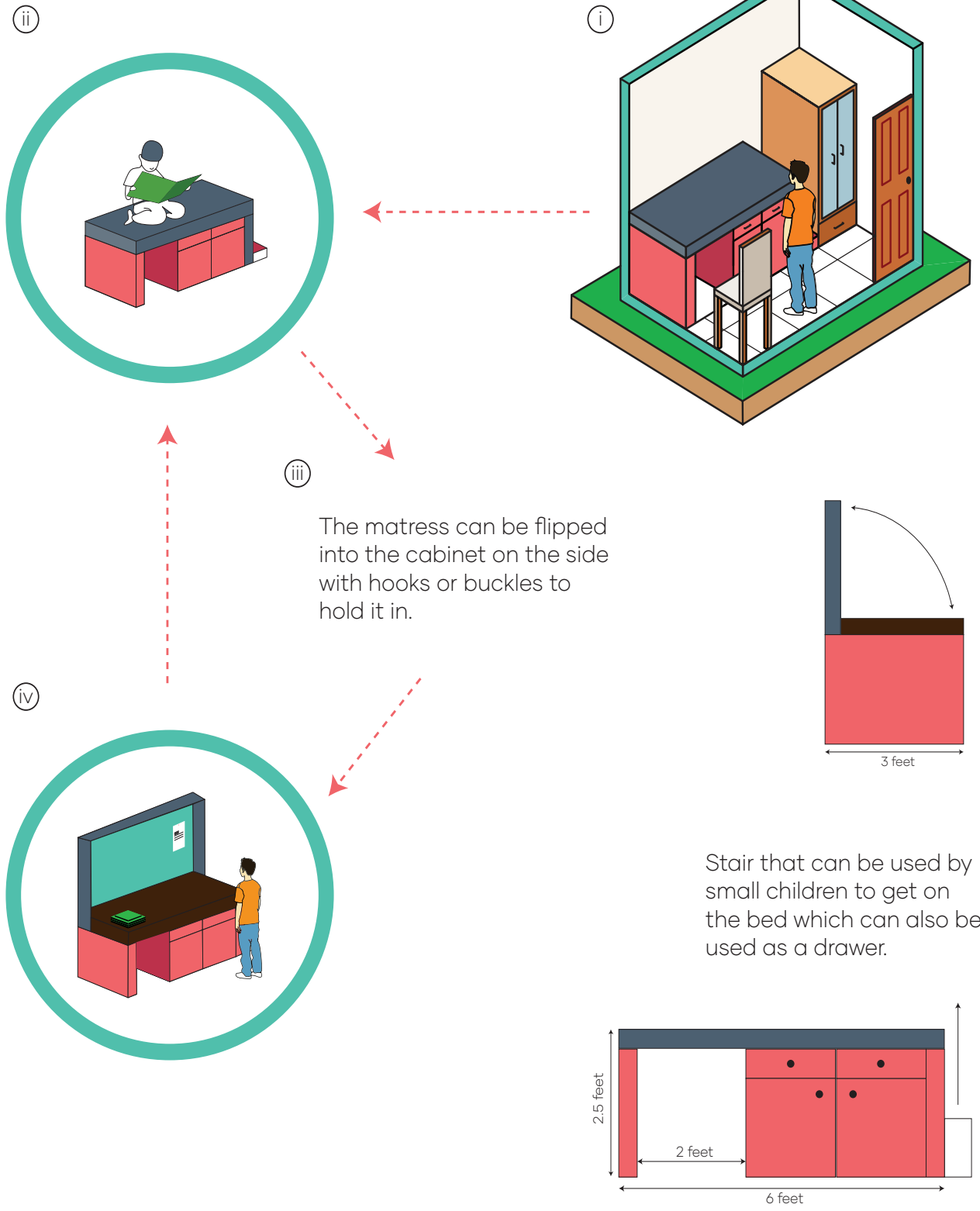
### Cubicle Layout

Each cubicle (8\*6) contains 1 convertible bed, 1 cabinet and 1 chair. We recommend plywood with slotted angles for the beds.



b - Convertible Bed With Drawers

# Convertible Bed - Table



Stair that can be used by small children to get on the bed which can also be used as a drawer.

