



Christian Perspectives and Research on Child Development in the African Context



**School of Human & Social Sciences
and
The Institute for Child Development**

Editors: Prof. Susan Greener - (Chief Editor)
Dr. Rebecca Oladipo - (Chief Editor)
Dr. Alice Munene
Dr. Harrahs Malinda
Mr. Solomon Nzyuko
Prof. Faith Nguru
Prof. Bernard Boyo
Prof. Peter Mageto
Dr. Michael Bowen

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A compilation of papers presented during the
Our Children, Our Being
Child Development Symposium
9th – 11th November 2011, Nairobi-Kenya

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Cover design by **Don Awene**

Printed in Kenya by **STARBRIGHT SERVICES LTD**

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Acknowledgements

The successful completion of the process of putting this book together was a concerted effort of diverse players and contributors across the globe. It began with the birth of the idea to have a regional symposium on “the African Christian Scholar and the plight of the African child” held in Nairobi on 9th to 11th November 2011. We are therefore indebted to the sponsors and hosts of the symposium: Compassion International, Global Alliance, and Daystar University, the School of Human and Social Sciences, the Institute of Child Development, faculty and other members of staff constituting the symposium planning committee, and the secretariat that tirelessly went through every motion of planning the symposium and executing every detail counted crucial for a successful conference. To all these esteemed institutions and individuals, we say ‘thank you’.

We acknowledge the resilience and commitment of the paper presenters who included the keynote address, the plenary sessions and the respective tracks presenters. With their dedication and patience, especially with the paper reviewers who occasionally might have seemed overbearing, they all put in their very best and produced solid scholarly works of faith and science, which are the main focus of this publication. We salute them all for moving a step further and ensuring that all the recommendations made by the participants, reviewers and editors were addressed and the papers assumed the excellent poise presented in this book. We acknowledge the immense work of the external chief editor of this book, Prof. Susan Greener, the internal chief editor, Dr. Rebecca Oladipo, the editorial team comprising: Dr. Alice Munene, Dr. Malinda Harrahs Esther, Mr. Solomon Nzyuko, Prof. Bernard Boyo, Prof. Peter Mageto, Prof. Faith Nguru, and Dr. Michael Bowen. Our further gratitude goes to the entire team of the symposium rapporteurs led by Wambui Wamunyu.

Other heartfelt recognition of sacrifice and selfless contribution go to the following individuals and institutions: symposium chief guest, Honourable William Kipkorir – Assistant Minister for Justice, Cohesion and Constitutional Affairs who represented the Minister, Honourable Mutula Kilonzo; Compassion International directors who attended the symposium: Dr. Ole Ronkei, Jonas Sawadogo and Joel Macharia; Daystar leadership: The Chancellor, Dr. Florence Musiime; the Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Timothy Wachira; DVC Academic Affairs, Prof. James Kombo; DVC Administration and Finance, Dr. Philip Kitui; Daystar Management Board; Paper Respondents; Session Chairs; Pastor Karita Mbagara who facilitated the morning devotion on day two and day three; the singing groups: Men’s Choral of Christ is the Answer Ministries (CITAM), Glory Voices, pupils from Mlango Kubwa, and the Mathare Community Church, for their great performance in entertaining the participants. To all those who contributed both to the success of the symposium and the production of this book, mentioned and not mentioned, we extend our sincere appreciation. To God be all the glory for His marvellous doing.

Dr. Alice Munene
Dr. Malinda Harrahs Esther
Mr. Solomon Nzyuko

Foreword

Daystar University, through the Institute for Child Development in the School of Human and Social Sciences, hosted an international academic conference from 9th to 11th November 2011. The symposium on Child Development focused on the role and potential of academic institutions, child-focused organizations and the church in meeting emerging challenges facing children at risk in Africa. The symposium, themed: “*African Christian Scholars & the Plight of the African Child*,” brought together more than 120 local and international scholars, policy experts and child development workers in a discourse to identify the role and potential of academic institutions, child-focused organizations and the church in meeting emerging challenges facing the African child. The government of Kenya was represented by Hon. Mutula Kilonzo, Minister for Justice and National Cohesion; an indication of the great importance the government attaches to children. Hon. Mutula Kilonzo officially opened the symposium.

During the symposium, a keynote address was delivered by an Educationist, Dr. Barbara Garner Koech, who stressed the need to re-conceptualize education programs to focus more on action-oriented research. A total of 19 papers were presented in three days, which included three plenary presentations on child, church and family psychotherapy. The other 16 papers were presented under two tracks, namely; “*Building Empirical Evidence: State of Children at Risk in Africa, Challenges & Opportunities*,” and “*Promoting Effective Policies: Empowerment & Rights Realization for Children at Risk*.”

The tracks deliberated on various issues including, early childhood development; roles of caregivers in the development of interpersonal relationships; an African feminist theological ethics of care; gender equity in public education; child participation strategy to curb child abuse and neglect; family empowerment; integration of children with disabilities, and faith development in the context of the African child.

The papers in this volume are therefore proceedings of the Symposium. They cover a wide range of topics on children’s issues. The compilation is arranged thematically in the following order: the keynote address, the plenary papers, Track A papers: ‘Building Empirical Evidence,’ Track B papers: ‘Promoting Effective Policies.’ and Summary Papers. The coverage is diverse spanning topics on the plight of the African child at risk, social research and the child, policy and programming. The papers in Track B are on the theme ‘Promoting Effective Policies’. It is the view of this book that policy formulation is necessary to ensure that children’s issues receive the attention they deserve. It is, however, not just mere policy formulation; rather it is well-formulated policies accompanied by sound implementation programmes which have the interest of the child at the centre.

We therefore present to our esteemed contributors, sponsors, child-focused organizations and ministries, as well those who attended the symposium and contributed in any way, the book *Our Children, Our Being*. This book would be of interest not only to academicians in the fields of child development, child theology, psychology, communication and language, but it also speaks to government agencies and policy makers, faith-based organizations and the Church, and it also excites the interest of the general public where issues related to the child are largely unresolved.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'J. Kombo', with a long horizontal line extending to the right and a small crossbar at the end.

Rev. Prof. James Kombo
Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic Affairs,
Daystar University

SUMMARY OF PAPERS

Dr. Rebecca Oladipo

Children constitute two billion of the world's population, 52% of which are in Sub-Saharan Africa. Several reports have observed that children and adolescents the world over face an uncertain world, as millions are denied their basic rights to quality education, health care, and protection. But despite the efforts being made by world bodies such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and Child Rights Organizations, children are still exposed to deprivation, flagrant abuse and exploitation. The decision to hold this conference was the brainchild of the Institute of Child Development of Daystar University in collaboration with Compassion International. The aim was to bring Christian academics together to add their voices to the global debate on the plight of children. This, the organizers reckoned, would engage Christian scholars actively in researching into children's issues and help to chart the way forward in working out practical and enduring solutions to the problems children are facing in our world.

To this end, the first Child Development Symposium was held in Nairobi, Kenya, from 9th to 11th November 2011. The conference drew participants from different parts of the world, representing academic institutions, Church alliances, professions, children-related NGOs, networks and ministries, and church and para-church organizations.

The papers in this volume are proceedings of the conference. They cover a wide range of topics on children's issues. The compilation is arranged thematically in the following order: the keynote address, the plenary papers, Track A papers: Building Empirical Evidence, and Track B papers: Promoting Effective Policies and summary papers.

The keynote address focuses on the importance of research in addressing children's issues. Based on the extensive research survey that she has undertaken, Dr. Barbara Koech notes the weaknesses in research studies on children available in Kenya and the continent of Africa, and suggests a paradigm shift which for her means 'thinking outside the box', which invariably translates, among other things, to taking a new perspective, being innovative and doing research for effective advocacy for children.

The next three papers were plenary papers. Dr. Patrice Penny underscores the importance of the attachment theory as a framework for addressing the psychological needs of orphans and vulnerable children in the African context. Such children, she argues, require adult caregivers who can offer them nurturing care that would provide them 'the support necessary for grieving, healing and regaining a normal developmental path'. This explains her passion for giving training to caregivers which would help foster normal social and emotional development that the parents would give the children if they were there.

Writing from the backdrop of his experience garnered from working with children at risk, Dr. Bill Prevette suggests that in order to carry out God's mission, there is the need to extend our focus beyond the spiritual to holistic transformation through scholastic engagement. The temptation to see the children we are ministering to as objects or instruments of mission is ever present, but our response should rather be openness to God's prompting and sensitivity to those

we are trying to help. Holistic mission is therefore mission to the whole persons and communities that is grounded in local context.

The same theme of holistic approach by the church reverberates in Prof. Bernard Boyo's paper. According to Prof. Boyo, the cohesiveness of the African society of the past which ensured that every child was taken care of communally is fast waning. This has led to the disruption of societal values which has dented the African societal equilibrium. Children are no longer the pride of the society, and present-day Africa does not make things better for the child either. The challenge is therefore to the Church not to neglect the child, but using a scripturally-based framework, to treat the child as God's created being on account of the *imago dei* (God's image) intrinsic in the child, and fulfill its divine mandate of addressing not only the spiritual, but also the physical and material (holistic) needs of the African child.

The rest of the papers are arranged thematically into two tracks. Track A begins with Prof. Faith Nguru's paper in which she argues that context, especially social-economic context, often influences trends in research. From her assessment of diploma students' projects, she finds that rural poverty in which they are located has influenced their research projects. The result is that most of the projects concentrate on the physiological needs of children at the expense of higher-level needs. Students' projects, therefore, need to include higher psycho-social level needs of the children.

Students with disabilities have aspirations just as students without. But they need to understand themselves in order to make wise career choices. Ciriaka Gitonga's research clearly demonstrates that disabilities can be a hindrance to the educational and career progress of disabled students where guidance and counseling is not available to them.

The paper by Byrant, Bryant, Williams, Nduku, and Erwin is a report of a community-based trainer-of-trainers' project on the lifelong benefits of caregiver-child attachment. In the community studied, poverty and the harsh reality of the impact of rural-urban movement have led to child neglect. The research, however, holds prospects for children who are in the care of mothers and caregivers who undergo the caregiver-child attachment training.

It is unfortunate that in this fast-paced technological age, millions of children are outside the periphery of the information society in which they live. This social exclusion, according to Dr. Jan Grobbelaar, is largely due to poverty, child mortality, lack of access to education and health care, among other reasons. The challenge is therefore to the church to respond through adequate information (research) on the plight of children and the development of a theological anthropology of children.

There is no doubt that the Church has a central role to play in children's lives. As Dr. Jan Grobbelaar and Rev. Dirk Coetsee argue, the Church should be an all-inclusive Trinitarian community where children are welcome and given the opportunity to realize their potential. For this purpose, the two writers have embarked on a project for training pastors in South Sudan in order to equip such pastors with skills that would transform the children in their churches from being passive objects to being active participants in church ministry.

The increase in institutional care and mushrooming of children's homes may be due to war, displacement, poverty, and family conflicts. These factors should, however, not be the

justification for the abuse, neglect and mistreatment that children in such homes are subjected to. Japheth Muthomi and Dr. Michael Bowen's study reveals that in the children's homes in Nairobi which they studied, there was very little compliance with the regulations contained in the Children's Act (2001). According to them, the level of communication which children in institutional care desired with the outside world fell short of what the caregivers felt was adequate. For them, as for several presenters in the symposium, holistic development context of children in care is crucial. The writers suggest that children in institutional care should have more contact with people they love, such as relatives and friends.

Prof. Peter Mageto takes issues with the complacency of the Church to the types and level of child abuse within the church. He notes the reluctance of the Church to acknowledge the vice and punish the culprits even when the abusers are known. The Church may be sitting precariously on a time bomb. According to him, the Church to wake up to its responsibility in protecting the children entrusted to its care by parents and the society at large.

The papers in Track B are on the theme 'Promoting Effective Policies'. Policy formulations are necessary to ensure that children's issues receive the attention they deserve. It has, however, emerged that policy formulation without implementation is depriving children of achieving their potential. For instance, the return-to-school policy by the Kenyan Ministry of Education which is meant to enable teenage mothers to go back to their studies after the delivery of their babies appears to exist only on paper. According to Mary Mogute, however, the implementation of the policy is the only way to address the existing gender inequality in education, a situation which has been created by teenage pregnancy. This will ensure that teenage mothers complete their education and this would invariably translate to more girls getting access to education.

Dr. Malinda Harrahs Esther turns the flashlight on the negative effects of the policy of segregating children with disabilities into so-called 'special schools'. Due to the detrimental effects of such a policy, the paper advocates for the establishment of inclusive education and training approach called 'small homes' where children with disabilities learn side-by-side their physically non-disabled counterparts in mainstream education. This radical departure from the norm would yield increased understanding and acceptance of disability by non-disabled children, and by teachers and the society at large. It would also give confidence, enhanced self-worth and dignity to children with disabilities.

The need for a policy that promotes fostering of children is the main thrust of Mabel Odima's paper. The paper examines foster care as an alternative to institutional care. The paper considers a foster home with a father-mother-sibling structure as a safe haven where children in care would receive the support and nurturance that they require for healthy growth.

Dr. Alice Munene presents child-caregivers' attachment as an African concept because of the way communities rally round children. As she puts it, attachment is the 'glue that binds interpersonal relationships at all levels of development.' For a child to grow mentally and interpersonally healthy, it must experience 'a warm, intimate and continuous relationship with a mother or mother substitute who can provide the child with satisfaction and enjoyment.' Children who lack attachment are likely to exhibit high anxiety levels, low avoidance, an

exaggerated desire for closeness and dependence, and fear of being rejected, among others. To this end, Dr. Munene suggests that Christian scholars should engage in research and advocacy on child-caregiver attachment to ensure the wholesome growth of children.

In Kenya, the government has set up a toll-free helpline service to report cases of abuse with the aim of preventing child abuse and neglect. Irene Nyamu and Martha Sunda report that the Child Helpline 116 has helped to raise public awareness and has improved the benefits of child participation in finding solutions to their own problems and in advocating their own rights for protection from abuse and neglect.

Culture is a people's way of life. But some aspects of it, such as rites of passage, may need to be examined critically to ensure they don't stand in the way of children embracing the Christian faith. It is in the light of this observation that Roseline Olumbe appeals to African Christian scholars to study different aspects of African culture that might be in contradistinction to the Christian faith, so as to know how to help the African child embrace faith in Jesus.

On the whole, the symposium papers elicited animated discussions and proposed a wide range of recommendations that would ensure that Christian scholars and stakeholders are actively engaged in generating knowledge that would ensure a better world for our children.