

INDABA POST CONFERENCE REPORT

The Theology and Practice
of **Child Protection In Africa**
in Times of Pandemics

"Let the little children come to me..."
(Matthew 19:14)



HERMOSA HOTEL
NAIROBI, KENYA

23RD - 24TH MAY 2022



AMECEA	Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of East and Central Africa
AOSK	Association of Sisterhoods of Kenya
ARU	Association of Religious in Uganda
BPE	Bhakita Partnership for Education
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FBO	Faith-Based Organizations
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
IGA	Income Generating Activities
JCAM	Jesuits Conference of Africa and Madagascar
JENA	Jesuit Justice and Ecology Network Africa
JRS	Jesuit Relief Service
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
TOT	Training of Trainers
VAC	Violence Against Children
ZAS	Zambia Association of Sisterhoods



EVENT SUMMARY



CONFERENCE ORGANISERS

The Jesuit Justice and Ecology Network-Africa (JENA) and Africa Task Force of the Vatican COVID-19 Commission in collaboration with the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences East Africa (AMECEA).



FUNDING SUPPORT

The event was supported by funding from the:

- GHR Foundation
- FADICA
- Hilton Foundation



VENUE

Hermosa Hotel, 73 Mbagathi Ridge, Karen, Nairobi



NUMBER OF ATTENDEES

121 attendees registered for the conference. These included practitioners in the child protection field, academics, government officials and Church leaders.

OVERVIEW

Over the two days of May 23-24, 2022, the Jesuit Justice and Ecology Network – Africa (JENA) and the Africa Task Force of the Vatican COVID-19 Commission brought together practitioners and specialists for a critical examination of the Theology and Practice of Child Protection in Africa.

The objective of this conference was threefold:

To listen to God and to one another in order to discern the best ways to carry out the work of child protection in Africa.

To develop proposals and interdisciplinary discussion papers that will be used to contribute to taking forward the theme and key outcomes of the Indaba

To coproduce policy relevant knowledge products, including research papers and policy briefs from the outcomes of the Indaba.

CONFERENCE FORMAT

The two-day conference comprised 7 plenary sessions with 2-3 speakers per session. Each speaker was given 15 minutes to present, followed by 5-10 minutes of questions and comments. The conference was structured to foster discussion between participants around the core themes of child protection in Africa. This was achieved by the breakout group discussions, white papers, and plenary group discussions issues arising following each session.

Each day of the conference also allotted one and a half hours for lunch, and 30 minutes for morning and afternoon tea to allow participants to continue their discussions after each session. Time was allocated at the end of each day for a group reflection on the day's discussions.

CONFERENCE THEMES

Each conference session related to core themes of child protection with particular focus on the situation of children in Africa in the wake of COVID-19. The Program of the Indaba was developed by a good team. The programme was centred on seven themes, namely:

- *Integrated Approaches to Child Protection in times of the pandemic*
- *Climate Change, Conflict and Children*
- *The Church and Child Labour*
- *Protection of the Girl Child*
- *Protection of Migrant and Refugee Children*
- *The Church and Residential Care of Children*
- *Children's mental health and COVID-19*

REGISTRATION

Registration for the conference was open to practitioners, academics, and government officials working on child protection. However, the nature of the conference meant that it was unsuitable for the event to be advertised or open to registration by the general public. Instead, invitations were sent directly to contacts in relevant fields, who were also asked to promote the event to other potentially interested parties within their organization. In total, 103 people registered for the conference.

Attendees also included eminent personalities and international participants notably three Catholic Bishops from Kenya, Malawi and Zambia respectively, some African government representatives, USAID and State Department Officials. One of the Bishops present is the Chairperson of the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of East and Africa (covering eastern and some southern African countries, which was the region of focus for the Indaba.



Indaba:

Prepare the Future

The Indaba on the Theology and Practice of Child Protection was a roundtable dialogue action building on Pope Francis' call to unite leaders and people from all sectors to fully participate in the mission of safeguarding children and ensuring their wellbeing post-COVID-19. Pope Francis has stated several times that the COVID-19 pandemic is the defining crisis of this generation, from which we can either emerge for better or for worse.

As we move through recovery, we must ensure the cures for the immediate crises are steppingstones to a more just, inclusive, and integrated set of systems and that a global, regenerative healing takes place to transform societies and our planet so that we can prepare the future we want. Imagining and creating the future we want through good child protection interventions is good economics, but it is fundamentally an ethical imperative.

Indaba:

A Spiritual Conversation

If what we are doing is an ethical imperative, it calls us to deep heart-listening that can help us make good choices that protect our children and our future. Thus, deep listening was the bedrock of the conversation built around the concept of "spiritual conversation." In this sense, the convening was a conversation among participants and God, whose objective was to articulate a theory and practice of child protection in the ministry of the Church in Africa faithful to God's self-revelation through tradition, Scripture, and various forms of human experience. It used insights from theology in dialogue with culture and extra-biblical materials, mainly from indigenous knowledge and human and social sciences, to formulate a theological perspective on child protection in contemporary Africa in the wake of COVID-19.

Indaba:

A Synodality in Action

This spirit of coming together, sharing, and learning is one of the core values of our Church as a faith community that comes to listen to God and one another, and hence, the best choice of the name 'Indaba' for our convening whose objective was to listen to God and one another in regard to how we can carry out the mission of child protection in times of global pandemics. Therefore, in the spirit of synodality, this convening for the African Church of East and Southern Africa, bringing together church leaders and the lay faithful, faith and non-faith actors, will be adapted and used as a transformative resource for the church, interfaith, faith, and civic organizations to use alongside other processes for developing a mission of child protection in Africa.

Thus, as a synodal space, another aim of the Indaba was to meet, share life, insights, hopes, and joys & to connect. The Indaba involved on-site meetings that were actively facilitated at the highest and lateral levels in the space of deep serious, yet friendly, and fraternal conversation. A place to passionately share ideas, solutions, and examples. A place to inspire and learn!

The Indaba was guided by the See-Judge-Act methodology commonly used in the Catholic Church for analysis of the social issues:

See

The **See** focused on the what: what are the issues or problems and in which ways do they manifest themselves? This was handled in the first plenary presentations. Experts and practitioners led the thematic presentations on the selected topics about child protection issues.

Judge

The **Judge** step took the form of breakout expert breakout group discussion sessions, which we call "barazas" that focused on the same sub-themes, with the opportunity to deepen analysis of the issues. This Judge-aspect of the methodology focused on the why: why are things the way they are?

Act:

The **Act** part engaged participants in their expert groups, in raising recommendations on what can be done and how. They presented both general recommendations for concrete action and advocacy by the various stakeholders, reflecting clear and practical next steps informed by deep analysis, reflection and listening. Each group is also developed particular strategies and next steps for concrete action by the Church, the states and other relevant actors, which we called the Church's Integrated Response, to be used by the Church to lead action and advocacy and also mobilise more stakeholders.

Isimemezelo

Isimemezelo (declaration room) was a physical location open to all for the whole event. It integrated all the output of the specialized theme tracks into a final Declaration of the Indaba. It became a commitment on the part of the Church of East and Southern Africa, and a call from the Church to other stakeholders to continue the proposed recommendations for action and advocacy.



Opening: _____ The conference began with a devotion led by Bryan Galligan, S.J. The reflection moment allowed the participants to connect with what was alive in them and bring their intention to the shared space. The moderator, Ms. Carine Umutoniwase, welcomed participants to the Indaba. She highlighted the magnitude of the child protection crisis in Africa by citing evidence-based research on COVID-19 impacts on children in Africa. In addition, she made a call to action on the need to provide solutions. After that she laid out the programme and highlighted the six main themes of the Indaba.

Welcoming Note _____ Fr. Charles Chilufya, S.J., the main convenor and JENA director and coordinator of the Africa Task Force of the Vatican COVID-19 Commission, welcomed the participants on behalf of the conference convenors. Father Chilufya noted that the Holy Father, Pope Francis, through the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (DIHD), created a COVID-19 Commission, in collaboration with other Dicasteries of the Roman Curia (Vatican Administration) and various organisations, to express the Church's solicitude and care for the whole human family facing the COVID-19 pandemic. The Vatican invited the Church in Africa to participate in the work of the Vatican COVID-19 Commission through the African Task Force whose work is to propose relevant and creative approaches to "prepare the future" through four interconnected Task Forces: Ecology, Economics, Health, and Security.

The Indaba on child protection aligns with the call by Pope Francis for re-imagining and building a healthy and just world in the post-COVID-19 global order. Notably, he reminded the participants that protecting children is an ethical imperative as children needed protection to live with human dignity.

Some of the key Indaba partners were invited to make some opening remarks.

Opening Remarks _____

USAID – Mr. Adam Phillips

Mr. Adam Phillips, who is the Executive Director for the USAID Local, Faith and Transformative Partnerships Hub, Bureau for Development, Democracy and Innovation from Washington DC appreciated the Indaba convenors and lauded the work of faith-based organisations (FBOs) in addressing the COVID-19 challenge. He noted that USAID was committed to providing vaccina-

tions to many people quickly. "USAID has set aside \$10 billion in response to the pandemic to strengthen health systems" he said. He highlighted the importance of vaccination to curb the spread of the virus in the USA and beyond. Mr Phillips further noted that the USAID had donated 540 million vaccines in 115 countries in the least developed countries and middle-income coun-

tries. He underlined the need to share best practices through partnerships in the pandemic response and recovery. For example, the USAID partnerships in Tanzania helped develop a toolkit for local messaging, including religious messages, training, and support for the clergy to advocate for vaccination. Collaborations in Rwanda

have also accelerated faith-based responses. He noted that such examples highlight the role and contribution of faith-based leaders in curbing the pandemic. Mr Phillips affirmed USAID's commitment to child protection through support for families as a gate pass to peace and development and peace.

US State Department – Mr. James Alexander

Mr. Alexander, who is the Senior Policy Advisor Strategic Religious Engagement J/IRF/SRE - U.S. Department of State attended the Indaba in person and offered some inspiring opening remarks. He emphasised the need to find and provide opportunities for partnerships to address global challenges like health, climate change, and conflict. He reminded the participants about some of the COVID-19 impacts on children. Mr Alexander stated that the solutions to the child protection challenges have to be multi-sectoral since COVID-19 exacerbated already pre-existing challenges that children faced before COVID-19, especially marginalised children.

He offered the possibility of partnerships through listening to shared ideas and taking the views back to the State Department. Specifically, he stated that the need to work with and listen to civil society organisations (CSOs) and faith-based organisations (FBOs). He urged the FBOs to create synergies for amplified impact. In addition, he lauded the efforts of the African governments to provide COVID-19 vaccination despite the challenges they faced in accessing vaccines. Finally, he underscored the power of FBOs to promote the uptake of COVID-19 vaccines given that communities trust them and their message.

Catholic Sisterhood Associations Representative – Sr. Lydia Apili Bwor, ARU

Sr. Lydia represented the association of sisterhoods from Kenya (AOSK), Uganda (ARU) and Zambia (ARU). She appreciated the consecrated men and women in the Catholic church for their generous response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. She stated that in the spirit of synodality, consecrated men and women, the Catholic church, and other like-minded groups are all called upon to be prophetic witnesses and give hope to humanity in difficult times such as the one we went through that was caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Sr.

Lydia emphasised that all of us were called upon to encounter and listen to children's and the youth's cries and provide safe spaces for them to share their fears, dreams, and aspirations. She expressed her hope that the voices of the children and youth would be echoed in the much-needed hope, solidarity, and the transformation that the rest of humanity would want to see. She emphasised the need to marry contemplation and action stating that "it is good to pray but also to move our feet (African Proverb)."

Jesuit Conference of African and Madagascar (JCAM) - Fr. John Anyeh-Zamcho, S.J

Fr. John Anyeh-Zamcho represented Rev. Fr. Abonkhanmeghe Orobator, Jesuit Conference of African and Madagascar (JCAM) President. He recognised the efforts of the JCAM and the JENA team in collaboration with other Catholic institutions to convene the Indaba. He noted that Jesuits continue to advance the mission of reconciliation and promote a faith that does justice. This

mission is a decisive choice by the Society of Jesus and an integrating factor of all their ministries.

Fr. John reminded the participants about the global challenges precipitate by the pandemic. He highlighted the importance of safeguarding children both corporately in society and individu-

ally at a personal level by all adults by providing solutions to their needs. He stated that the Society of Jesus in Africa is engaging various efforts to promote a culture of safeguarding and to work with those who offer solutions to the crises facing children in Africa. Fr Zamcho wished that the deliberations of the Indaba bear fruit and lead to concrete action. He highlighted three ways for advancing the work of the Indaba

First, to bring the conversation of safeguarding and protecting minors across all levels of the Church and society.

Archbishop Thomas Luke Msusa

The Archbishop stressed the need for key stakeholders in Africa to listen, discuss and find solutions to the crises facing children in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. He noted that Malawi, the country where he came from, was facing the same challenges just like most African countries. He expressed his openness to listening and collaborating as compelling reasons for him to participate in the Child Protection Indaba.

Second, to tease proposals that can guide policy development and ensure policy makers are present during discussions.

Third, to continue to leverage the church's role to convene diverse people and organisations to seek solutions to the crises facing children and to support the healing of our community, society, and the world.



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Highlights of the Keynote Address by Archbishop Charles Kasonde, Chairman of AMECEA:

- The Indaba, called in response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children, is an opportunity for the Church to make a unique and important contribution to child protection in Africa.

- In reference to Pope Francis' concept of integral ecology in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Archbishop Charles Kasonde reminded the participants that "everything is closely interrelated" and that the current "problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis ...further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic." Thus, he proposed that in order to help meet the immediate needs and aspirations of children, we should carry the broad, ambitious, comprehensive, integral- ecology thinking that the pope calls for and think and act "outside the box."

- He highlighted various challenges that children face like vulnerabilities created by poverty, conflict and displacement, violence, exploitation, harm, and abuse which can be physical, emotional or sexual. Again, quoting Pope Francis, he

observed that the plight of children was a global problem tragically present almost everywhere, and affecting everyone. This also happens in those places where children should be most protected, like their homes, schools, and even churches, and worsened through cultural practices.

- According to the Archbishop, thinking of strategies, systems, and processes for child protection, requires us turn to Jesus as our guide with his caring and compassionate heart by reflecting on these words of Jesus: "Let the little children come to me" (Matthew 19:14). He therefore emphasised that we, too, need to open our hearts to greater growth and compassion to welcome and protect children.

- Thus, he stressed that alongside systems and institutions for child protection, children needed parents, guardians, priests, religious leaders, and politicians that nurture them with their love and affection.

THEMATIC EXPERT PRESENTATIONS

AN OVERVIEW OF IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON CHILDREN

Presentation by
Philip Goldman –
Maestro

Introducing his presentation, Mr. Philip Goldman likened the children's crisis in the wake of COVID-19 to a global storm. He noted that hundreds of millions of children have been left behind in terms of social and cognitive development.

He observed that even before the global pandemic, children faced pre-existing challenges resulting from the nexus of conflicts, poverty, and violence. Mr Goldman noted that children found themselves at the centre of many intersecting macro crises of migration, climate change, and COVID-19.

In highlighting the COVID-19 Impacts on children, Mr. Goldman laid out the full spectrum of children's needs that should be addressed during the pandemic and beyond as the basis for integral human development.

- *Health*
- *Education*
- *Nutrition, and early childhood development*
- *Parental and other forms and types of care for children*
- *Child Protection*

Finally, he made the following recommendations in responding to crises children are facing in the wake of COVID-19:

- *Promote equitable vaccine access*
- *Intervene rapidly when COVID-19 strikes a family with serious illness*
- *Augment cash social protection with non-cash forms of care*
- *Promote family-based care, not orphanages or children's home*
- *Work to change and address violence against children*
- *Build strong partnerships among Caritas Africa, CRS, JRS, JENA, and relevant secular organisations*
- *Devote particular attention to children in the first 1,000 days*
- *Advocate for increased budgetary allocation for children*

CHURCH AND CHILDREN'S HUMAN RIGHTS:

Presentation by
Dr Christine Jeanguy
– Vatican Dicastery for the
Promotion of Integral Human
Development (DHID)

In her presentation, Dr Christine Jeanguy observed that the topic was particularly important for the Holy Father. She quoted Pope Francis in his address to the participants of the international conference on "Eradicating Child Labour, Building a Better Future" during which the pope noted that "[t]he way we relate to children, the extent to which we respect their innate human dignity and fundamental rights, expresses what kind of adults we are and want to be, and what kind of society we want to build."

Dr Jeanguy further observed that the respect for and the promotion of the dignity of children is one of the main concerns of the Holy See international diplomacy and is as a subject of public international law. She noted that the Holy See ratified the main international agreements aiming at recognising, protecting, and promoting the rights of the child, such as the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child – which was ratified by almost all the countries of the international community, with the sad exception of the US, the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.

Dr Jeanguy bemoaned the fact that despite a robust international legal framework protecting children's rights, too often, children are deprived of their basic human rights, such as the right to life and physical integrity, food, water, education, healthcare, and social protection. She further stated that the COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions adopted by most countries in the world have exacerbated the existing violations of the rights of children and, sometimes, led to new ones. She noted that many children have been direct or indirect victims of domestic violence, which has increased dramatically during lockdowns. Dr Jeanguy added that many countries witnessed an exponential increase in psychological and psychiatric diseases including suicides, suicide attempts, and suicidal thoughts among pre-pubertal children and adolescents due to excessive isolation.

Dr Jeanguy further highlighted new threats to children's wellbeing that have further exacerbated the manifold ancient violations of the dignity of children enslaved or exploited in child labour especially in sectors such as agriculture, and manufacturing, mining or household services. Such children, she observed, are often deprived of adequate food, primary health care, decent housing, and education. Dr Jeanguy empathised with all the unaccompanied migrant minors, some of whom lose their lives in the migration process, while others, upon arrival to their destination, are detained in inhumane conditions after a gruelling journey marked by fear and insecurity. She also singled out the shameful exploitation of minors in prostitution, pornography, and the production and sale of narcotics, not to mention the forced recruitment of children, from an early age, with a view to use them in armed conflict. She noted that the physical, psychological and moral wounds of these children, who hold in their hands not toys or books but weapons, are a shame for humanity and constantly remind us of the horror of violence and war. In conclusion, Dr Jeanguy observed that no one should remain indifferent in the face of the violations of the dignity of children, wherever they happen, and whatever form they may take.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND CONFLICT IMPACTS ON CHILDREN IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19

Presentation by
Ms Alice Anukur
- Child Fund

Director of the ChildFund in Kenya, Ms. Alice Anukur began by providing a background of her organisation, ChildFund describing it as a child-cantered development and humanitarian organisation. It is a member of the ChildFund Alliance, a global network of 12 child-focused development organisations working to create opportunities for children and youth, their families and communities. She then highlighted some of direct and indirect impacts of climate change on children resulting in children's lack of access to essential services, especially children who live in areas prone to drought and flooding and conflict.

She noted that children were physically more vulnerable and less able to withstand and survive shocks such as floods, droughts, severe weather, and heatwaves. These shocks and impacts often lead to death and displacement of children, increased disease incidences, food insecurity leading to high rates of child malnutrition, stress, food insecurity, violence, displacements, disruption of education systems, and loss of lives for Children (See also UNICEF Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI), August 2021 report). Ms Anukur reiterated that the climate crisis creates a child's rights crisis. It creates a water crisis, a health crisis, an education crisis, a protection crisis, and a participation crisis for children.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE GIRL CHILD –EVIDENCE FROM ZAMBIA, UGANDA, KENYA

Presentation by
Mr. Javilla Guma
– Independent research consultant

Mr. Javilla Guma, a consultant researcher, presented a summary of the findings of three baseline studies done in Kenya, Uganda and Zambia designed to inform a joint programme by the JENA and three sister associations from Kenya, Uganda and Zambia responding to the impacts of COVID-19 on girls. Mr Guma stated the study showed that 94.4% of those surveyed knew a girl in their community who should be in school but was out of school. The surveys in the three countries showed that in the wake of COVID-19 a significant number of girls fell out of school on account of financial difficulties, early marriage, teenage pregnancies, hunger, disinterest in learning and several other factors. The reports also noted that there was a marked increase in sexual abuse of girls in the surveyed communities leading to an increase in teenage pregnancies during the lockdowns.

IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN

Ms Dawn Dungy
Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS)
East Africa

Ms Dawn Dungy from the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) East Africa made a presentation on the impact of COVID-19 on refugee and migrant children with a focus on the education and health risks that the pandemic presented. In terms of education risks she pointed out missed learning time, inequality in the continuity of learning as responses to facilitate continued learning like online learning worked against refugee children who had no access to digital equipment and internet services. In terms of health risks, Ms. Dungy pointed out the likelihood of refugee and migrant children and youth transmitting the virus among themselves and their families due to their lack of access to personal protective equipment and to health/nutrition support they were getting before the closures (e.g., school meals, immunisations, hygiene kits, etc.)

Ms Dungy further alerted the conference participants to other child protection challenges such as loss of access to alternative mechanisms to report and/or seek support for violence, abuse, neglect, or exploitation of children and youth. She added that the psychosocial risks in form of lack of support services available to promote refugee and migrant children's mental health and psychosocial wellbeing.

THE CHURCH AND RESIDENTIAL CARE OF CHILDREN

Presentation by
Sr. Delvin Mukhwana
– AOSK

Another important theme that the Indaba treated is that of residential care of children. In treating the topic, Sr Delphine Mukhwana whose organisation, the Association of Sisterhoods of Kenya (AOSK) promotes the reintegration of children into families, revealed that eight million children lived in institutions of care globally and that the number could even be larger as many institutions of child care are not registered. She observed that this trend has seen an upsurge of global concern over the number of children who live outside of parental care or are at risk of being separated from their families.

Sister Delphine noted that according to the Propaganda Fide 2021 report, globally, there are 9,374 orphanages run by the Catholic Church, serving 5,500,000 children. She noted that animated by the gospel, the Catholic Church has cared for children and vulnerable adults for centuries where they are placed in institutions of care for care and protection. But Sr. Mukhwana proposed the need to rethink institutionalised care of children. She pointed out that institutionalised care of children has been shown to cause a wide range of problems for their development, well-being and longer-term outcomes. She observed that

institutional care does not adequately provide the level of positive individual attention from consistent caregivers which is essential for the successful emotional, physical, mental, and social development of children. This is profoundly relevant for children under 3 years of age for whom institutional care has been shown to be especially damaging. Sr Mukhwana stressed that there was need for societies to progressively phase out institutional care and promote reintegration of children in their biological families or in foster families.

BREAK OUT SESSIONS

During the breakout sessions, participants were organised into seven breakout groups called "barazas" which were formed in line with conference's seven thematic areas of focus. Each participant was assigned a baraza according to their areas of interest or expertise. Each group was facilitated by a key expert and tasked to analyse the reasons behind children's vulnerability and prepare a presentation.

The following are the key highlights from the breakout groups' reports:

Baraza 1: Overall Child Vulnerability and Impacts of COVID-19 on Children in Africa

Reasons for increased vulnerability:

- The wrong perception that children were immune to the COVID-19
- Insufficient resources for child protection and safety in homes compared to schools that were closed during the lockdowns
- Poverty
- Idleness during school closures exposing children to abuse
- Increased poverty and malnutrition due to parental loss of livelihood
- Lack of spiritual nourishment/support to deal with psychosocial challenges as churches and other related services remained closed
- Increase burden for childcare on parents as children stayed home longer hours during lockdowns
- Poor economic structures even before the COVID-19 pandemic
- Lack of safeguarding policies within schools and institutions to manage post-COVID-19 trauma
- Weak legal justice systems
- Media propaganda and misinformation on the COVID-19 pandemic
- Disproportionate vaccine distribution between the Global North and South
- Less funding for child programs on the COVID-19
- Dysfunctional families lead to increased orphaned and vulnerable children
- Weak linkages between the government, FBOs, and CSOs
- Inadequate funding from donors to the Church and other civil society groups to respond to COVID-19 impacts

Baraza 2: Child Labour Perspectives and Why Should we be Concerned?

Reasons for increased vulnerability:

- Poverty
- Disparate perceptions of child labour in African societies
- Nonexistence of children's facilities for recreation and play and therefore denial of children's right to leisure and play
- Children's exploitation for financial gains
- Weak enforcement of children's rights by police officers
- Increased transactional sex
- Rising cases of child marriage

Baraza 3: Climate Change and Conflict Impacts Perspectives

Reasons for increased vulnerability:

- Physical and social vulnerability
- Children easily become the forgotten lot
- Low levels of school re-entry, especially after pregnancies
- Lack of child protection policies
- Inadequate child protection skills
- Insufficient guidelines for child safety in digital space
- Lack of essentials due to lost livelihoods
- Poor parenting awareness
- Lack of alternative disciplining strategies leading to increased school conflicts
- Increased child labour due to effects of climate change
- Low awareness of climate change
- Long-term environmental pollution or the children
- Poor waste management mechanisms
- Inadequate financing for climate change and DRR efforts
- Limited bench marking on climate actions

Baraza 4: COVID-19 on the Girl Child

Reasons for increased vulnerability:

- The fear of reporting perpetrators, e.g., caregivers and relatives
- Inadequate protection, parenting and monitoring
- Inhibited maturation due to excessive emphasis on rights rather than the responsibilities of girl child
- Negative cultural practices
- Girls have more needs than boys amid limited resources
- The perception of girls as women rather than children leads to exploitation
- Weak protection structures for victims in family dispute resolution mechanisms
- The changing cultural perception that the child belongs to the family, not the society

Baraza 5: COVID-19 and Refugee and Migrant Children

Reasons for increased vulnerability:

- Emphasis on needs-based rather than rights-based approach
- Food insecurities among the refugee communities
- Low media visibility on refugee and migrant issues
- Lack of inclusive language that limits the ability to speak out
- Lack of refugee employment opportunities due to the legal limits to work and move
- Lack of quality education and healthcare due to poverty
- Limited social integration since refugees are victims of conflict and violence
- Extremely weak legal protection and reporting mechanisms and frameworks to track the impacts

Baraza 6: Children and Institutionalized Care: Why Should we be Concerned?

Reasons for increased vulnerability:

- The ease of entry rather than exit from institutionalised care
- Lack of a sustainable transition model such as family reintegration
- Criticism for family reintegration due to increased GBV in the family context
- The high cost of child adoption
- The poor social-economic ability of families to care for children
- Poor collaboration with the government limiting policy adoption for family-based care
- Few schools in some communities reduce the space for school transfer

Baraza 7: Covid-19 and Children Mental Health

Reasons for increased vulnerability:

- Parental trauma limits the ability to deal with children's trauma
- COVID-19 limited opportunities for peer support
- Children's response to COVID-19 impacts through self-blame
- Little connection and belonging as children are protective factors
- High level of stress, depression, anxiety
- Racial and ethnic disparities
- Fear of asking for mental health support among children
- Emphasis on COVID-19 social distancing instead of physical distancing
- Lack of safety for children at home compared to schools
- Loss of control, hopelessness, and helplessness among caregivers
- Limited trauma-informed pastoral programs

INDABA DAY 2

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON DAY 1

By
Sr Veronica Rop,
*Catholic University of Eastern
Africa*

At the beginning of the second day of the Indaba, Sr Veronica Rop, led the Indaba through a theological reflection on day one's presentations and discussions which was meant to invite the Indaba participants to deeper listening paying attention to ethical and justice considerations in doing any analysis on and developing any credible response to the crises facing children. Sr Rop, who is a professor of theological ethics at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, drew the Indaba participants to the Christian scriptures, the social teaching of the church and to the African philosophy of Ubuntu as useful frameworks for articulating a credible response to the dire situation of children in Africa. She proposed that the beginning place is to re-establish or strengthen our relationship with the divine, with children, with others, and our mother earth. Sr Rop then presented the overall framework of catholic social teaching highlighting the main principles that undergird it with specific focus on:

- The dignity of the human person,
- The common good
- Solidarity
- Preferential option for the poor
- Rights and Responsibilities and
- Subsidiarity and the role of Government

She then explained how such principles related to the theme of child protection. She referred to several encyclicals and papal addresses related to the theme of child protection including Pope Francis' message on the World Day Against Child Labour on 11th June 2014 during his general audience at the Vatican:

"We all need to renew our commitment, especially families, to protect the dignity of every boy and girl and to offer them the opportunity to grow in a healthy environment. A peaceful childhood allows children to look at life and the future with confidence."

She concluded her beautiful presentation by pointing to the African Ubuntu philosophy as another useful framework that we could engage highlighting the key tenets of Ubuntu, namely, hospitality, generosity, moral formation, community, interrelatedness, interdependence and the value of marriage and family life. Sr Rop noted that there are several resources found in local, cultural and faith traditions that political and legal systems may not have that could be employed in the promotion of child welfare and child protection.

BREAK OUT SESSIONS

With such an enriching ethical framework to shape responses to the situation of children in Africa, immediately the Indaba divided into breakout expert groups to discuss the concrete steps for advancing child protection in Africa. As on day 1, participants were organised into seven barazas (breakout groups) according to the Indaba's 7 thematic areas, their interests and areas of expertise. Each group was facilitated by a key expert and tasked to develop concrete strategies for child protection based on their thematic focus.

The following is a summary of the groups' reports:

Baraza 1: Integrated Approaches for Child Protection

Strategies to reduce vulnerability:

- Change minds and hearts by addressing attitudes towards child protection
- The Church, as a trusted institution, should localise the conversation at the grassroots
- Change lives through social support services for at-risk families and OVCs, e.g., offering family support measures and day-care services
- Organize ToT's at all church levels by leveraging expertise and knowledge
- Enhance child participation to encompass children's perspectives in the response
- Localize the Child Indaba conversation at all church levels

Baraza 2: Church and Child Labour

Strategies to reduce vulnerability:

- Transform how people think about child labour by making it a moral and justice issue
- Enhance church participation in advocacy by leveraging the expertise of the congregation
- Make education affordable and accessible for children to keep them at school, e.g., offer bursaries
- Engage in community sensitisation and outreach activities
- Utilise the church safeguarding policy as a teaching tool to create safe schools
- The Church can enhance public awareness of child protection for effective policy enforcement
- Implement poverty reduction strategies and promote creativity for sustainable livelihoods
- Use community radios to sensitise the communities on child labour
- Introduce child safeguarding in pastoral training

Baraza 3: Climate Change, Conflict and Children

Strategies to reduce vulnerability:

- Increase advocacy using Pope Francis' second encyclical, the Laudato Si'
- Enhance collaborations with the government and CSOs
- Leverage local government resources
- Promote the African culture and values like Ubuntu
- Build children's capacity through the church children's ministries

Baraza 4: Protection of the Girl Child

Strategies to reduce vulnerability:

- Use advocacy to empower teen girls to speak for themselves and become cause champions
- Advocacy for safe schools
- Engage communities in every response for girl child protection
- Advocate for requisite policy responses to the situation of girls
- Provide financial literacy skills on IGA's to the family to have sustainable livelihoods
- Advocate for safe re-entry for girls who dropped out of school to avoid the stigma while accommodating the unique needs of teen mothers, e.g., create linkages with community social workers, provide parenting coaching and mentorship
- Advocate for the development of child protection policies that address the girl-child challenges and policy enforcement strategies like referral mechanisms
- Use and strengthen existing church structures like the Small Christian Communities and Associations for social support and children mentorship
- Adopt and reinforce the integral ecology framework advanced by the *Laudato Si'*

Baraza 5: Protection of Refugee and Migrant Children

Strategies to reduce vulnerability:

- The Church should play its role in planning, advocacy, and implementation by leveraging its strong voice and decentralized structures
- The government should enact policies to protect immigrant and refugee children, open up borders for the vulnerable groups and provide opportunities for gainful work

Baraza 6: The Church and Residential Care of Children

Strategies to reduce vulnerability:

- Provide training on income-generating activities to reduce poverty
- Embark on family counselling through ToT's
- Strengthen family bonding
- Provide positive parenting coaching
- Organise sensitisation on the COVID-19 baby boom
- Journey with the children to have self-awareness
- Provide training for the children who are being reintegrated into their families
- Have a community-based follow-up mechanism for reintegrated children, e.g., use the local authorities for monitoring
- Strengthen the child and family apostolic within the Church
- Train the Church leaders on child protection
- Develop an effective advocacy plan and strategy to lobby the government resource allocation to child protection
- Empower child protection CSOs and FBOs with advocacy and lobbying skills
- Research and policy analysis on the gaps in government policy and program commitments

- Propose a change in government approach to the child reintegration process
- Do comparative studies and use a data-driven advocacy approach with cost-benefit analysis
- Rethink our fundraising strategies and look for nexus between child protection and donor priority like climate change and sustainable development
- Build structures for synergy and strategic engagement, primarily through coalition building

Baraza 7: The Church and Children's Mental Health

Strategies to reduce vulnerability:

- Listening to traditional African voices, e.g., using African literature that builds on values of community, peace, unity
- Provide psychosocial help for the caregivers to overcome personal trauma and build the capacity to support children on mental wellness
- Conduct research for an evidence-based response on the Covid-19 impacts on children
- Strengthen existing church structures and support families
- Leverage on church trust and safe space to speak about child trauma
- Train church stakeholders on psychosocial and spiritual support to reinforce positive thinking and act on children's mental health
- Incorporate the voice of children in the process
- Conduct research for evidence-based practice
- Develop strategies to counter cyberbullying

Theological Perspectives on Child Protection

A presentation by
Rev. Prof. Nicholus Segeja
and Sr. Dr. Leonida Katunge

After two days of deep analysis and conversation about the situation of children in Africa in the wake of COVID-19, Prof. Nicholus Segeja and Dr. Leonida Katunge offered some powerful theological perspectives that could be used in developing strategies and actions for child protection in the wake of the pandemic. They started with the critical question: "If Jesus came today, where will he find the little children?" The two experts proposed that the question, "Where are the children today?" should be our daily preoccupation and we must find them where they are:

- In refugee camps
- In the streets begging
- They are immigrants
- During the Covid-19 pandemic, no one cared for their spiritual needs (No online Mass, No online Sunday School for children)
- They are suffering from mental health issues
- They are in hostile environment experiencing sexual abuse, exploitation, early marriages
- They are in prison (with mothers)
- They are silenced
- They are not part of policies, not part of the Synodal process
- They are not recognised by politicians and policy makers
- In boarding schools so that they do not to disturb parents

In the light of the Indaba discussions, prof Segeja and Dr Katunge, proposed some theological perspectives on child protection emphasising the role of family, the model of church as a family and evangelisation.

- Theology of indaba/shikome (baraza) - a family rooted conversation in solidarity with the world characterised by values like respect, lived experience, openness to transformation and relatedness to the other realities of creation - cosmotheandric reality.
- Theology and ecclesiology of Church as a family - with the features like listening to all people of God, including children and the Holy Spirit, ministry of discernment - management and leadership
- New evangelisation that is present to the new worlds to be evangelised - education, health care (holistic), information technology, and the political, economic, and cultural spheres - Lay apostolate and ministries.

The two experts observed that effective child protection strategies and actions needed to be inclusive, collaborative, integral and comprehensive. They stressed that child protection was not an isolated effort and therefore had to be considered as being integral to the life and mission of the Church permeated by and manifested through its basic pastoral activities, including evangelisation, catechesis, sacramental life and liturgy and the spirituality of the faithful.

In conclusion the two experts emphasised that child protection required communal conversion, which is about visioning together toward a common human destiny free from exploitation and all forms of injustice. They stated that practically this required entering into a journey of reformation, formation, missionary and pastoral renewal, engrained in reading the signs of the times supported by prayer, and the wisdom of the Word of God - that springs forth from creation, our lives, and culture. It calls for walking together in life, especially in Africa, characterised by African values of togetherness, compassion, generosity, charity, hospitality, fraternity (ubuntu), and co-responsibility rooted in reverential dialogue.

CLOSING STATEMENTS

GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVE

Ms Beatrice Elachi, the outgoing Chief Administrative Secretary (CAS) Public Service and Gender in Kenya noted that most African countries had laws and policies on child protection but implementation is what remains a significant challenge. She was conscious of the disconnect between the government and the church on values around child protection.

She noted that children, especially in marginalised communities, continue to suffer from poverty, hunger, violence, and exploitation. As a place to begin from, she highlighted the need to

promote good parental care and to evoke the responsibility for parents to take up their parenting responsibilities.

Ms Elachi implored the church to play a leading role in addressing the challenge of dysfunctional families and gender-based violence. In conclusion, she pointed out the need to build synergies between the church and the government and committed to presenting the conference outcomes to the Cabinet Secretary for Public Service and Gender in Kenya.

US STATE DEPARTMENT

Mr James Alexander from the US State Department appreciated the quality, diversity, and depth of the deliberations during the Indaba. He committed to taking the Indaba inspirational stories, experiences, and messages globally, starting with the Vatican. Notably, he called upon the delegates to make child protection a local

issue requiring local solutions, especially regarding African values and contexts. Lastly, he highlighted the important role of the Catholic Church and other faith-based organisations in changing the situation of children for the better in times of pandemics.

USAID

The USAID affirmed its commitment to interfaith action and acknowledged the role of faith-based groups in social transformation. USAID pledged it's continued to support for interventions that will emanate from the Indaba. In particular, the USAID

representative highlighted the importance of listening to African voices and perspectives for sustainable solutions. Lastly, he underlined the need to continue the conversation and include children in the discussion.

CHILD REPRESENTATIVE

The statement on behalf of Africa's children, given by Tapela Banda from Zambia, affirmed that the change required passion and calling. Also, it emphasized the position of "nothing for children without them," highlighting the need for children's voices at the discussion tables. It called upon the

church and the actors to create pathways for children to speak for themselves. Lastly, the statement appreciated all those who were involved in the work of child protection especially the protection of vulnerable children.

NEXT STEPS

The statement on behalf of Africa's children, given by Tapela Banda from Zambia, affirmed that the change required passion and calling. Also, it emphasized the position of "nothing for children without them," highlighting the need for children's voices at the discussion tables. It called upon the church and the actors to create pathways for children to speak for themselves. Lastly, the statement appreciated all those who were involved in the work of child protection especially the protection of vulnerable children.

Following the insightful dialogue, listening, and reflection, the following next steps to consolidate and advance the gains of the conference were proposed:

- **Create an Indaba implementation team to provide leadership for advancing the outcomes of the Indaba**
- **Develop a common framework to provide guidelines for child protection response**
- **Develop a conference report**
- **Strengthen the capacity for child protection leads in each conference and dioceses**
- **Undertake an inventory of local-level interventions in dioceses, and parishes, then create thematic categories to promote collaboration**
- **Develop a strategy for advocacy on a local and international level**
- **Develop a plan for international collaboration and resource mobilisation**

INDABA DECLARATION

Delivered by

Rt. Rev. Bishop Charles Kasonde
(Chairperson, AMECEA) for conference partners and participants

The Africa Task Force of the Vatican COVID-19 Commission, the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of East and Central Africa (AMECEA), the Jesuit Justice and Ecology Network-Africa (JENA), and partners, meeting at the Indaba on the Theology and Practice of Child Protection in Africa in Times of the Pandemic from 23-24 May 2022, urge all governments and international decision-makers and local communities to ensure that children have access to good food and nutrition, receive protection against abuse and neglect, have continued access to child physical and mental health services and fight child poverty.

Gathering in May 2022, two years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa, we can now see more clearly the social, economic, and health impact this pandemic has had on our children and our population. As the COVID-19 crisis spread across the continent, it transformed children's day-to-day lives. The pandemic and the associated policy responses of confinement and social distancing touched almost every part of children's worlds. COVID-19 directly affected formal care arrangements, education, and leisure services offered by early childhood services, schools, and other organizations as they were interrupted, in some cases, permanently.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen an increase in poverty in Africa, with more than 40 million more Africans being added to the 470 million already living in abject poverty before the pandemic. Abject poverty in Africa is even more widespread among children as they constitute more than 50 percent of the poor in Africa. On average, one in two children grows up in pov-

erty across Sub-Saharan African countries. Poverty and income inequality have a large bearing on the extent to which children are exposed to COVID risks.

Poorer families are less financially resilient and were more exposed to jobs- and earnings losses, while their children were disproportionately disadvantaged by school closures. Growing up in poorer neighbourhoods increased the risk of catching the virus and be a carrier, experience underlying health issues, and reduced the prevalence of vaccination among children. It also affected access to a range of necessities such as good nutrition, quality housing, sanitation services, space to play or study, and opportunities to engage in online schooling. COVID-19 reduced opportunities for children to come in contact with supportive adults at school and the community and to access the justice system and child protection services.

We have further learnt the COVID19 pandemic and its economic and social consequences hurt some children more than others. Recognizing that the impacts of COVID-19 hit some groups of children harder than others is critical. These groups of vulnerable children include children living in poverty, children in conflict situations, those in places of harsh climate events, children with disabilities, children in out-home care, refugee children, especially those living in confined camps, and children at risk of child labour. Furthermore, the pandemic has created new vulnerable children, and countries and communities must prepare to respond to growing needs for support.

The immediate focus of any policy to address the challenges faced by children during the COVID-19 pandemic must be focused on:

- Minimizing risks to children's health and psychological wellbeing with a strong focus on promoting mental health;
- Ensuring access to good food and nutrition and educational support; and
- Providing assistance and protection to vulnerable children in need.

As we have noted already, the concentration of COVID-associated risks falls on children living in low-income households and those with additional needs or vulnerable situations. Addressing these challenges quickly, especially eradicating poverty, is key to avoiding a rise in inequality – among the current generation of children and the next – and ensuring inclusive growth.

The response can only be effective if all levels of policy action are involved – governments, local authorities, the Church, and non-governmental organizations working directly with the populations affected in a coordinated and widely publicized manner. Governments play an important role in providing food and cash assistance, re-deploying staff, especially social workers, from public services and child protection systems to cope with emergencies, as well as setting up nationwide alert and information systems; local authorities and communities are key to complementing national assistance and tailor support to local needs.

Family service providers play a crucial role in connecting measures with children and families who need them, identifying the needs of the populations concerned, communicating about available assistance and giving practical advice, and fostering exchanges between families, professionals, and experts to develop the most appropriate responses.

The demand for support services has been very high during the COVID-19 crisis. It is essential that community needs are identified quickly and efficiently to mitigate social disruption and reduce pressure on the essential health and care systems. A resource directory or systems mapping provides an outline of the ecosystem of services in a community or even in the Church community and can help identify gaps in services and funding. Technically adaptable and agile platforms can provide policymakers with a framework for prioritizing resource allocation and service delivery. Civil society partnerships established with non-profits, charities, businesses, volunteers, faith sectors, and social enterprises are also key in communicating with the community about supports and identifying needs.

No one shall remain indifferent in the face of the violations of the dignity of the child. Wherever they happen, and whatever form they may take, we are all interconnected and interdependent because we are all members of the same human family. As Pope Francis put it, "we are on the same boat, all of us important and needed, all of us called to row together" because "no one reaches salvation by themselves." Let's then engage at different levels to contribute in a joint effort to build a society where no child is abused, no family is in need, and all children equally and fully enjoy all human rights.



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