

There is Need For Care Reforms to Embrace African Cultural Values

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Sr. Jecinter Antoinette Okoth, FSSA

Children’s institutions whether managed publicly or privately can never substitute family values and community-based approaches on holistic care of children, an aspect that Africans embraced over the years.

“A child did not belong to the family alone but was considered an asset of the community,” Very Rev. Fr. Stephen Mbugua Ngari the Vice-Chancellor (VC) of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) shared his thoughts emphasizing on the need to embrace African cultural values in promoting care reforms which is currently a need in the society.



Follow up visit after a Child was reintegrated with the family.

African cultural values were intertwined on commitment to social life and the common good of the community, caring for others, solidarity, hospitality, respect, truth and sharing of a common social life among others. These values as the VC expounded, were meant for protection of children from extraneous physical harm and strengthening interpersonal relationship in the community.

In the African society the Kenyan cleric said, “Children always stayed with their family net-

works of uncles, grandparents and the extended family where they were taught through stories and proverbs to shape their behaviour as they were advised by their next of kin on how to obey their parents, how to be good children, how to uphold the values of respect and the fear of God.”

He narrated further that the African values were upheld and respected since for Africans, anything done contrary to the expected norms was something forbidden or something that would incur a curse or a taboo that made one unhealthy hence acting differently “was a no-go zone.”

With the aforementioned, Prof. Mbugua underscored, “the African taboos, curses, the value system, the forbidden actions and the repercussions were very well defined from childhood up to adulthood.”

Even though people held seriously the African values and promoted holistic care of children through families and community-based approaches, Fr. Mbugua acknowledges that Africans have lost some of these cultural values when it comes to care of children and have instead embraced institutionalized care for orphans and the vulnerable.

“I think one of the reasons Africans have in some way lost values such as communitarianism is because of socio-economic factors, the mobility of societies,” the VC of the Catholic University said adding “Nowadays people are not living together, the social cohesion is lost and the principle of subsidiarity and common responsibility has been overtaken by law in the society.”

According to the cleric in his sharing on how the law has overtaken the social cohesion, he gives an example that, “Currently if a child misbehaves in school and is sent out of class, the parent comes with a lawyer to solve the prob-

lem, a clear sign that the whole social fibre already broke down and the community has no say as it used to be in the past.”

He therefore emphasizes on the need for a paradigm shift and that people should understand the dynamics of a child, both the psychological and physical response to the disciplinary actions and to the care, “as care means providing children with the environment that is conducive to their growth, to their learning, to health, to good diet, and to emotional and social support as they grow and have good approaches to behaviour modification.”

He expounded further, “We must be brutal to ourselves and accept that we are not doing things the right way either as a church or as a society. We need to stop and start afresh not that we will improve but to stop and start.”

Even though abuse of children including child labour, physical abuse, psychological abuse or

even social neglect, occur even in some families, Fr. Mbugua who teaches a course on children and trauma at the university said, “the best environment for the growth of a child is in the family or community.”

As a way forward, Fr. Mbugua asks the Church and the community to collaborate in disseminating the right information to the people on the importance of holistic care of children through families and community-based approaches and to promote African culture so that the lost values, can once again be instilled in the society.

“I think we need to disseminate the right information with the proper statistics to the people, since statistics talk to the mind,” the Vice Chancellor said adding that the family systems should also be strengthened by educating people on how children suffer when they are brought up in institutions.



Catholic Care for Children Malawi Organizes a Startup Workshop

Sr Rebecca Mathole SBVM

The CCCM program seeks to enhance its working relationship together with other stakeholders in Malawi to share experiences on child reforms and reintegration to their families and communities. As spoken by Pope Francis “Children are the joy of the family of the society... Each is unique and unrepeatable”. To achieve this, the Association of Women in Religious Institutes in Malawi finds it necessary to hold hands with its key stakeholders so as to ensure collaboration and networking while the CCCM desk plays the role of coordination.

In this line, the CCCM organized and conducted a startup workshop, from 13th -15th of June, 2023 whose objectives were:

- to inform the participants to understand the CCCM program and its rationale,
- to create an understanding of institutional based care versus family-based care for vulnerable children,

- to acquaint the ownership of the CCIs with knowledge on legal and policy frameworks regarding establishing and operating of children care institutions in Malawi and,
- to allow the participants familiarize with child reforms and reintegration tools.

The workshop attracted participants from various sectors such as the Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM), Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Catholic supported child care institutions (CCIs).

On the part of government, the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare was represented by the District Social Welfare Officers).

During the workshop, all input presentations and discussions sought to provide knowledge on coordination, networking, and collaboration regarding child reforms and reintegration in Malawi.

