



Effects of Child Participation in Livelihood Activities on Children's Welfare among Fishing Communities in Lake Victoria, Kenya

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Abstract

The Lake Victoria Partner States (Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda) implement various legislations as a foundation for improved child welfare. These legislations emphasize on the need to protect children's right. However, despite the implementation, children still face many challenges as a result of participating in the activities prohibited by the legislations. Therefore, this study examined welfare challenges of children participating in these activities and in particular fisheries. The study employed Key Informant Interview, observation and survey questionnaire to collect information from respondents in three fishing communities along Lake Victoria, Kenya. The findings indicate that children participation in livelihood activities pose challenges and affect welfare of children. The study identified competition for scarce resources, handling stressful activities and exposure to hazardous life activities among the key challenges which directly affect children welfare. Study findings further revealed that irregular school attendance, bad behavior resulting from influence, school dropout and exposure to abuse among others, presents explicit impacts on children's welfare. Children from Lake Victoria beaches are thus exposed to livelihood participation activities that hinder them from realizing their full potential in life. Therefore, fishing communities around Lake Victoria need to be properly sensitized on better ways of promoting child welfare.

Keywords: Children participation, Children's welfare, Livelihood activities, Fishing communities and Lake Victoria.

Introduction

Children demonstrably participate in everyday life and their participation in daily activities takes place in different ways and forms as dictated by contexts and circumstances within households (Hart, 1997). Socialization processes among children are also determined by participation in activities for household livelihood strategies. Through participation in various

activities, unique conditions of physical, cognitive and physiological immaturity mean that children can be more at risk as they participate in various activities for households' livelihood (UNICEF, 2008).

The problems of children participating in livelihood activities along Lake Beaches and its catchment area are likely to be widespread, considering the fact that children are disproportionately vulnerable and may not easily realize their full potential due to

such exposure. Goodman and Iltus (2008) noted particular characteristics of vulnerability, shaped by the changes that take place over the course of childhood resulting from child involvement in activities. They also pointed heightened sensitivity to high-impact events during the early stages of child development and general lack of agency and voice.

Alexander et al. (2011) notes that heightened child participation in certain activities might be a threat to sustainable development hindering achievement of many key development targets. Largely, children participation in livelihood activities along the beaches may jeopardize realization of full potential of children since it results to child labour and exploitation.

Lake Victoria, with a surface area of 68,800 km² is the world's second largest surface of fresh water, and the largest in the developing world. The ecosystem of the lake catchments, forms the habitat for an estimated 30 million people and a unique fauna and flora. The gross economic product of the lake catchments is in the order of US\$ 3–4 billion annually, and supports its population at incomes in the range of US\$ 90–270 per capita p.a. The lake catchments provides for the livelihood of about one third of the combined populations of the three countries, and about the same proportion of the combined gross domestic product in the three riparian states (Jonas et. al., 2004). Fishing and fisheries activities are key livelihood sources for communities around the lake. Such livelihood activities often involve children participation in activities for survival within their households.

The three countries; Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda ratified and domesticated various legislations, policies and standards not as a panacea for children's agony but as spring board for improved children welfare (Von Struensee, 1995; Lloyd, 2002; Nyaundi, 2005). These documents (The Constitution of

the United Republic of Tanzania 1977, Constitution of the Republic of Uganda 1995, Uganda Child Act 1996, Constitution of Kenya 2010 and the Children Act of 2001) emphasize child participation among other three pillars of rights to facilitate evaluation of changes needed to effectively accommodate rights for promoting child protection and avert child abuse. Despite legislative enforcements by the riparian countries of Lake Victoria, children still face problems resulting from participating in various activities as family livelihood strategies. Therefore, the current study aims at identifying challenges on children's welfare and find out the impact on children's welfare as they participate in livelihoods activities among fishing communities in Lake Victoria, Kenya.

Methodology

Study Area

The study was conducted along Lake Victoria beaches in Migori County, Kenya. Three beaches from Nyatike sub-county were used as specific study area and these were Lwanda Konyango, Matoso and Sori beaches. According to the various Beach Management Units (BMUs) which are legally recognized units for fisheries management purposes, these beaches had a population of 726, 870 and 3,228 respectively with the number of households being 146, 174 and 646 respectively. The beaches are as shown in the Figure 1.

Data collection

The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data and information. The qualitative method employed the use of Key Informant Interview (KIIs) with six BMU leaders and three chiefs being interviewed. This group was sampled based on their knowledge, or experience in the study topic. Survey questionnaire was used to collect quantitative information. This

included information on livelihood activities among children in the study area.



Figure 1: The Study Area

Observation was also made in regard to the general wellbeing conditions in the sampled households. The study examined challenges on children welfare as a result of children participation in livelihood activities. Specifically, the study explored the challenges of children participation in livelihood activities as a form of socialization process. Descriptive survey design was adopted by the study where 140 household heads were randomly sampled and 9 key informants sampled purposively were interviewed along the selected beaches. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. A questionnaire on challenges of children participation in livelihood activities under category of: socio-economic status, religious factors, cultural norms, educational status and involvement of parents, was developed. The questionnaire was validated and tested for reliability using a test retest method, and it was observed that the reliability coefficient level was obtained ($R =$

0.89), which indicated that the instrument was reliable.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done by editing and checking of gathered raw data for accuracy, usefulness and completeness. Coding then followed and it involved collaborating findings from the questionnaires, Observations and Key Informant Interviews. Data from field were analyzed by the use of descriptive statistics. The analyzed data had both qualitative and quantitative features and was presented by the use of narrative reports and tables.

Results and Discussions

The study revealed that 69% of the respondents accepted that children are faced many challenges and are at the same time get affected while participating in livelihood activities. The challenges common to these children included competition for scarce

resources during fishing with adults in unlevelled playing ground. This was mentioned by 23% of respondents as a challenge. In their observation, Goodman and Iltus (2008) noted disproportionate vulnerability of children. This may be linked to changes that take place over the course of childhood, heightened sensitivity to high-impact events during the early stages of development, cultural orientation allowing lack of agency and voice resulting to unique properties in relation to children's capacity to adapt.

Table 1: Challenges to participation in livelihood activities

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Competition for scarce resources in unequal set up	59	42
Handling stressful activities for survival	46	33
Exposure to hazardous activities	39	28
Role conflict	31	22
Begging for survival	22	16
Meeting needs of vulnerable Household members	14	10

The study also found out the challenge of role conflict which resulted to child labour at 22%, exposure to hazardous life experiences and activities at 28%, and meeting the needs of vulnerable household members at 10% (Table 1). Role conflict and exposure to hazardous activities instigated by children participation in livelihood activities may lead to abandoning key responsibilities like going to school which in turn hinders realization of key development targets. In their study, Alexander et al. (2011), noticed the dual relationship between children participation in livelihood activities and development. Therefore, controlled children participation in livelihood activities may lead to the realization of development targets for sustainable development goals since children are likely to realize their full potential in life.

Child participation in livelihood activities also affects access to education. Participation in livelihood activities by children is quite often associated to limited schools attendance. Children are often removed from school to support the households along Lake Victoria. This sometimes has a gender dimension as, in some contexts; boys are prioritized and given better opportunities over girls. Girls are pulled out of school more promptly, either to provide additional productive work or for cultural concerns such as early marriage after excellent participation in livelihood activities. The added burden of disease, food and water insecurity can also reduce the time available for education when the household work is restructured to cope with illness. In any case, ill or malnourished children lack the energy to be active learners after participating in various livelihood activities (Bartlett, 2008).

Table 2: Impacts of child participation in livelihood activities on welfare of children

Effect	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Irregular school attendance	54	37
Bad behaviour resulting from influence	40	29
School drop out	36	27
Children are exposed to abuse	23	16
Some activities are risky and leads to death	16	11
Depression as a result of stress	14	10
Improved household support	13	9
Migration to places of safety	10	7
Acquiring skills	3	2
Contact with new people	2	1

The study also sought to establish impacts of children participation in livelihood activities. The study revealed that an average 80% of respondents pointed that children were affected as a result of participating in livelihood activities while 20% were either not sure of any impact or felt that children were not affected by participation in

livelihood activities. Findings from the study further revealed effects such as school dropout and bad influences that may lead to bad behavior. Participation in livelihood activities allow children to access money which leads to difficulty handling them, failure to observe norms, irregular school attendance, depression as a result of stress and trauma (Table 2). As a result of this some children don't come back home, they are detached from their original homes and are often exposed to abuse.

According to Bartlett, (2008) participation in livelihood activities may increase exposure of children to higher risks of abuse and exploitation. Mocellin et al. (1991) on the other hand observed that children participation in livelihood activities may lead to aggression and truancy resulting from stressful situation and activities children are exposed to. In the study, 8% of the respondents identified stress as a possible effect on child welfare resulting from participation in livelihood activities.

Osbahe et al. (2010) observed temporary migration of households to take part in labour exchange work which promote children participation in livelihood activities that may interfere with the child's welfare. A study by UNICEF (2011), found that children, particularly older boys, also migrate in search for alternative livelihood opportunities. Adolescent boys may as a result of such migration be exposed to myriads of effects that interfere with their welfare. In the study area, 7% of respondents interviewed confirmed that migration to places of safety for livelihood support to households is practiced in along the beaches of Lake Victoria. These findings conformed to the observation of Key informants interviewed in the study area who associated migration of children to household demands for family sustenance.

According to Motsisi (1993), children are affected more severely by the disruption of

social relations due to their dependent status in most societies, and their limited control of resources. This may trigger children to participate in livelihood activities for self-satisfaction and household support.

Households along Lake Victoria often migrate to other places to provide proper support to their family members. The direct consequences posed by the inadequacy of basic services for those who have migrated, means that many children in rural areas do not live with their biological parents, who have relocated. Weaker care systems, when children are left with friends or families, can negatively affect children's emotional well-being and, in some cases, lead to child protection violations by host families (UNICEF, 2011). The study found out that effects associated with migration of household members quite often promote children participation in livelihood activities which in turn interfere with their welfare.

Malnutrition is a leading cause of infant and child mortality and has significant effects on child development. The likelihood of a child becoming chronically malnourished increases with repeated participation in livelihood activities. The study found out that child participation in livelihood activities exposes children to higher risks of abuse and exploitation. Various child participation activities may therefore have severe social and psychological effects on child development. Additionally, separation from family members and displacement or relocation (migration) can have a profound effect on children's emotional well-being.

Conclusion

The study shows that there are various challenges with regard to children participation in livelihood activities in Lake Victoria, resulting in a number of effects on child welfare. The challenges children face interfere with their productive future life. Competition for scarce resources, handling

stressful activities and exposure to hazardous life are the key challenges children face as they participate in livelihood activities. These challenges results to overt influences on children welfare such as irregular school attendance, bad behavior resulting from influence, school dropout and exposure to child abuse among others impacts. Thus, children from Lake Victoria participating in livelihood activities are unlikely to realize their life's full potential. The community around Lake Victoria needs to be properly sensitized on better ways of promoting child welfare. Generally, the findings portray a lapse in child protection system and calls for implementation of child friendly policies and activities by the government, stakeholders and community at large.

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