

SHAPING THE FUTURE

Through the voices
of African parents



International
Child Support[®]



The African Child
Policy Forum

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Through the voices
of African parents

Published by:
International Child Support
Gate 40, David Osieli Road, Westlands
P. O. Box 13892-00800 Nairobi, Kenya
Tel.: +254 20 44 45048, 47129, 52335
Fax: +254 20 44 52336
Email icsro@icsafrica.org
Website: www.icsafrica.org

and

The African Child Policy Forum
P. O. Box 1179 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Telephone: +251-11-662 8192 / 96
Fax: +251-11-662 8200
E-mail: info@africanchildforum.org
Website: www.africanchildforum.org
www.africanchild.info

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Coordinators:
Beatrice Ogutu, Makda Tafesse, Stefan van der Swaluw, David Mugawe

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Foreword

In the cobweb of social relations, the family assumes a central place as an agent of change. It is within the family that a child receives sustenance, is exposed to the notion of what is right and what is wrong, and learns what is acceptable and not acceptable in society. At the family level, a child is inculcated with work ethics, the concept of time, punctuality, the notion of excellence and how to do things right and in an acceptable and timely manner. It is here that various forms of socialisation including gender roles are defined.

The family has no substitute as the premier institution for socialisation, personal growth and development. It must therefore be provided with the support it deserves to fulfill this important function. Families must be equipped with good child rearing practices and principles that will enable them carry out their mandate of raising children to acceptable standards. The family should be made aware of existing child rights that are beneficial to the development of children such as; the right to an identity, the right to differing opinions and to voice them, the right to be treated with dignity, and the right to a life free from violence. This calls for extensive public education and information programmes aimed at bringing about behavioural change and enhancing the capacity of families to raise and care for their children. It is towards achieving this goal that The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) and International Child Support (ICS) came up with this publication.

This publication documents real life stories of selected African parents, shedding light on the multifaceted challenges parents are faced with and the kind of support they need.

Most of the available literature on parenting in Africa lack contextual relevance to most African parents. Therefore, we hope that the realities of the African parents shared in this book will contribute towards filling this gap, as their stories not only describe the challenges faced during child rearing and upbringing, but also highlight best parenting practices that are relevant to all African parents.

Assefa Bequele, PhD
Executive Director
The African Child Policy Forum

Stefan van der Swaluw
Regional Director
International Child Support

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We want to gratefully acknowledge the individuals who contributed their personal experiences which have provided useful insights and lessons on parenting. Specific mention in this regard must be made to: Mama Sara Obama, Mariamu Hamisi Marashi, Grace Atieno (Kenya); Haile Gebreselassie, Makda Tafesse, Helina Legesse (Ethiopia); Nanseera Goretti, (Uganda) and Luka Martin Ndalima (Tanzania).

We acknowledge all the organizations and supporters who made it possible for us to document the parenting experiences. Also we would like to thank in advance all those organizations who have joined us in developing a comprehensive programme to support parents in the region.

Finally, International Child Support and The African Child Policy Forum would like to express their gratitude to the Dutch Foreign Affairs Ministry for their generous financial support.

Preface

The family forms the basic protective and learning unit for children. Children need to feel secure, loved and protected within the family setup and it is here that children are taught inherent values and skills that enable them go through life responsibly. Parents and/or guardians therefore play a key role in the physical, social, spiritual and mental development of their children.

In many African societies, parenting was traditionally a communal affair and parents received support and guidance from the extended family system. These support systems have weakened considerably over the years and, as a result, parents and guardians silently feel paralyzed and at times stumble in supporting their children adequately through to adulthood.

The changing social, cultural and economic situations in Africa also gave rise to different categories of parents who are less prepared and ill equipped to shoulder parental responsibilities. It is therefore common to find grandparents raising their grandchildren, children their siblings, guardians/foster parents their adopted/fostered children and teenagers having babies. Parents from all socio-economic classes in urban, peri-urban and rural societies continue to experience problems which they dare not expose because society expects them to know how to bring up their children.

Lack of preparedness and insecurity experienced by the above categories of parents, together with mounting evidence of the rising cases of child abuse, neglect, exploitation and discrimination, prompted The African Child Policy Forum and International Child Support in 2008 to conduct various desk reviews and consultations with various organizations implementing parenting support programmes in Africa.

The reviews and consultations revealed and confirmed that parenting support, though largely invisible, is an area that needs to be urgently

addressed. Based on this realization and inspired by the United Nations Convention on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on Rights and Welfare of the Child, Articles 18 and 20 respectively, both organizations started to think on relevant interventions that would lay emphasis on providing education and support to parents in the region.

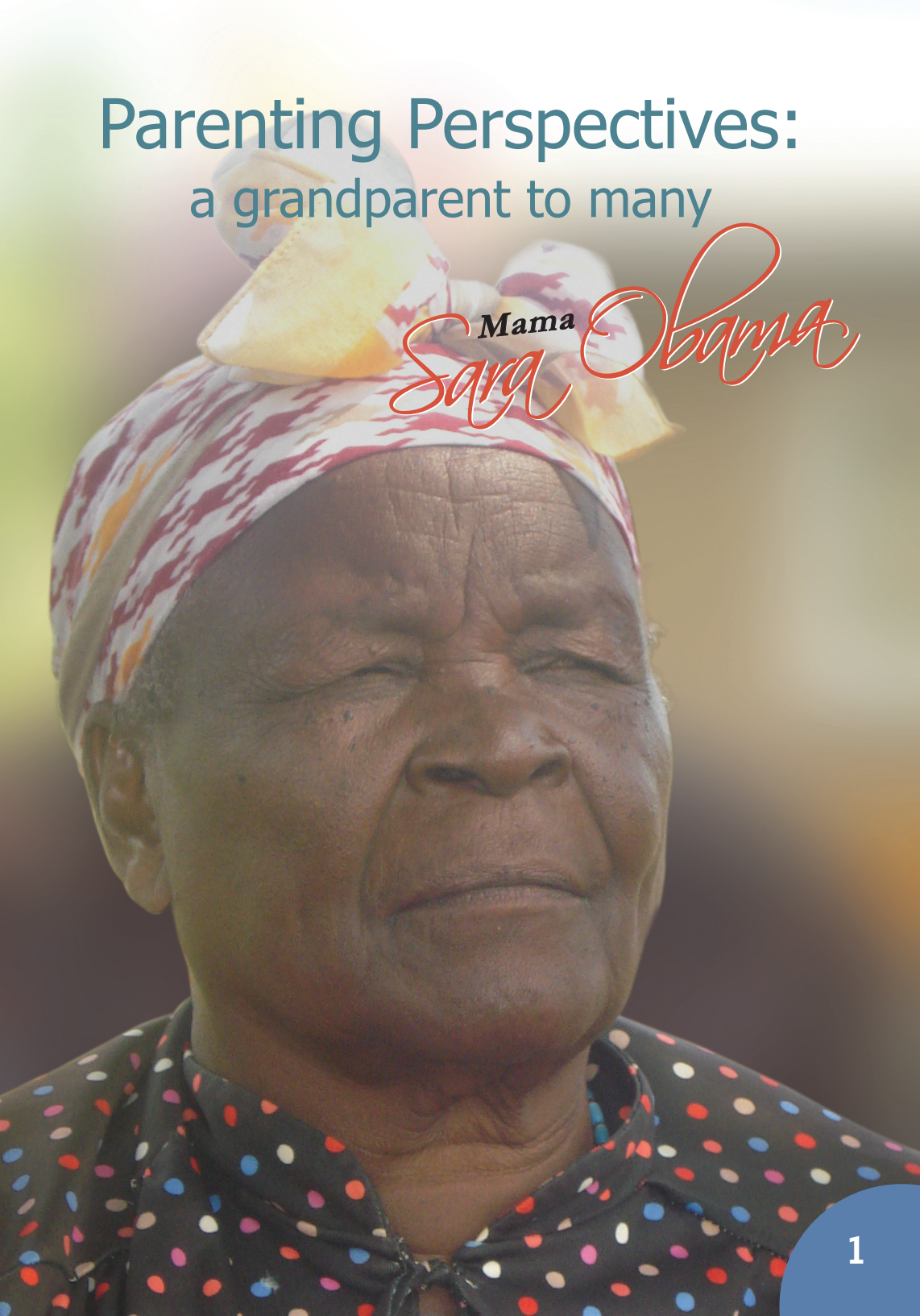
In order for interventions in parenting to be relevant, it became necessary that we had to learn from the experiences of various organizations supporting parents as well as individual categories of parents living in various contexts in Africa. The idea of compiling this book was therefore born out of this realization.

This book brings together actual personal experiences of various known and unknown individuals from Africa. Their real life experiences are not meant to present a position of what good and bad parenting is, but rather to reinforce the fact that there are certain realities that need to be taken into account. These include challenges to be considered as well as successes to be celebrated and shared when developing interventions meant to support parents .

The individuals who shared their experiences in this book come from diverse backgrounds. Each experience is therefore unique and extremely valuable as it provides important insights and life lessons that could be borrowed by practitioners who are involved in the challenge of developing and implementing parent education and support programmes. These stories are equally valuable to parents and guardians because of the advice and encouragement which they need as they raise their children

Parenting Perspectives: a grandparent to many

Mama
Sara Obama





My name is Sara Obama, but people call me Mama Sara Obama because of my age and position in the community. I was born in 1922 (the year when the second set of aeroplanes flew in Kenya) and because of this I was nick-named Nya Gach Polo (Daughter of the air bus). I got married in 1941 and was blessed with eight children. I had the opportunity to raise my co-wife's children - two girls and one boy. The boy, Barack Obama Senior, was left under my care at the age of nine months. He was later to become the father of Barack Obama, The President of the USA.

I have lived through different generations of parenting; beginning with my own upbringing, then how I parented my children and presently when I am parenting afresh. I have many children and grandchildren that I take care of now. Comparing with the old days, things are very different now from what they used to be.

Modern living especially in towns, is very complicated and expensive. Parents live in and share small rooms even with their adolescent children. In the African traditional context, this is not right. During our days, children slept with their grandparents. Girls were advised by their grandmothers and were taught on how to take care of themselves, their in-laws, visitors, and even their husbands. Also, they were trained on how to undertake household chores as well as farm work so that they would be able to take care of their families. Boys, on the other hand, ate with their grandfathers from whom they got counsel. It was easy for one to identify a child who was brought up by grandparents from one who never was.

During our time marriages were arranged and they lasted. Aunts, uncles or other close relatives would identify a partner since they knew one's character and they would match up a person with a suitable and compatible spouse. Arranged marriage systems thus encouraged parents to raise obedient and responsible children because every family yearned for good marriage partners for their daughters or sons. It is different these days because couples simply decide to marry without taking time to understand each other's character or background. This has resulted in many marital problems.

During our time, girls who met their husbands away from home were seen as tough-headed spouses who did not even respect their husbands.

Long ago, polygamy was a common and normal practice. The co-wives coexisted and treated each other with respect. It was difficult to differentiate children of different mothers because they were treated equally. Now, family norms have changed with the nuclear family becoming more prominent. Also, people have become self-centered and pay little attention to their extended families. There is no peace in polygamous families. There is a lot of quarreling and discrimination among children of different wives because they are not treated equally. It was common for the first wife to invite her sister or even her cousin to be her co-wife. Despite their relations, there were no problems in the home and family structures were conducive. Each wife had her own house and the husband knew how to programme and share his time with his various wives.

Family planning was not practised and mothers conceived the way they wanted. The reason being that among the many children born, some would be responsible while others would not. Children were seen as a blessing from God and there was the belief that some of them would care for their parents when they were aged. This encouraged parents to have as many children as they wished. Today, families plan for only two or three children. This may be attributed to economic factors. However, given the opportunity, people should have many children so long as they are able to care for them.

Long ago, instilling discipline in children was a communal affair. Uncles, aunts, other relatives and even neighbours would discipline or correct a child when he misbehaved and his parents would not complain about it. Today, as an outsider, one cannot touch someone else's child. The child may report to his/her parents who may not take it kindly. Such parents may tell the person to go look after and discipline his/her own children and to stop bothering theirs. What these parents do not understand is that an outsider can provide discipline that the child needs and which might actually correct his/her wayward behaviour.



Children those days were tactfully disciplined and there was no direct confrontation as such. A child could be talked to by family members, or other relatives, over an issue from different points of view and this actually led to improved behaviour. Parents approached other family members to help them deal with challenging situations their children faced. Nowadays, things have changed and parents have become bad examples. They confront each other openly in front of their children. Spouses gang up their children against each other and the children slowly pick up and learn these behaviours from them. Both parents should be able to discipline their children and should agree on the best way to do this. Communal discipline can also be practised so that children grow up well behaved. However, things are now tricky because a child who is not yours can make a report to the police!

Children must also learn to undertake various responsibilities in the home. While we did these chores easily without being reminded, during my time, children are now pampered and not prepared well for life. At that time, all children of the same age group used to undertake chores collectively. Girls would fetch water and firewood together. Cooking was done communally during which time, girls shared and learnt a lot from each other. They also learnt other values such as sharing, common responsibilities and caring for one another. But, the world has now changed and parents worry even when their children are with another family. Maybe their worries are justified because of the many rising cases of child abuse being reported.

During our days, there were dances too and children would be allowed to attend, yet some of them would be performed far away. These children would however return home without any problems. This is attributed to the way the children were brought up.

Those days, a mother would not worry about death. She was content that her children, however young, would be taken care of by her co-wife without any problems.

Children are nowadays confined in their homes, hence they are not allowed to interact with or know their relatives. Many others are now growing up not knowing their rural homes. They

acquire this state of affairs mainly from their parents who no longer associate with or even help their extended families especially those who are less fortunate. There is no harmony and sharing among relatives today. A good deed to an in-law or relative, for example, could be misconstrued or misunderstood by one's spouse. People are also self-centred as they ask themselves "Why should I bother to help anyway?"

Naming of children after relatives and grandparents was a common cultural practice during our time. Children were often named after their relatives with good character or behaviour. These children were in turn expected to live up to those particular attributes when they grew up. Things are now different although parents still name their children after the grandparents. The principles behind child naming are however not being observed like they were before.

The role of the father was to ensure that the family basic needs were met. Food and education were crucial. Fathers, together with their wives would till and prepare farmlands. Wives were however, more responsible for the production of food in the home. I did farming in order to take care of my children. I grew sweet potatoes and grains and kept chicken and ducks for food, but would at times sell them for cash. I used the money I got from selling farm products to educate my children. To date, I still farm and keep poultry.

My husband was very strict. He emphasized on the importance of education and its value to the individual and the community. All the children had to go to school and would only be allowed to engage in household chores in the evening or during weekends.





Though I was farming to get money for my children's school fees, doing business those days was quite a struggle. You would only get some money on market days (Mondays and Fridays). I therefore used to engage in different business activities such as selling *mandazi*¹ to get an extra income. Sometimes I had to travel long distances to sell my grains to Indian traders at *Ndere Shopping Center*² for a better price. Primary school fees then was not so high compared to the fees for secondary school.

My son, Obama Senior, was lucky to join Maseno High School (a national school). Although the fee per term was US 0.70 cents, I could manage to pay through engaging in various businesses. My husband was working in Nairobi then and he could at times send fees. But he had said that he would fully commit himself to paying fees for tertiary education only. This meant that the children had to work hard to get beyond secondary school level for their father to pay. It also meant that I had to find ways of educating them myself until they reached tertiary level.

Obama was a very friendly boy who cheerfully assisted in household work after school. His favourite work was collecting termites to feed the chicken. He was also very honest and obedient and he loved me very much. He always referred to me as 'mother' and strangers never realised that he was not my biological child. He also treated his siblings well. At times, my husband used to send school fees directly to his school. But whenever Obama found out that, he would return the money that I had given him for school fees so that I could use it for other purposes.

When he completed his schooling at Maseno, Obama Senior, joined a tertiary college. This time, as promised, his father gladly paid his fees. When he completed, his college education he got a job. He would return home occasionally to visit and he supported us financially and in many other ways. He was the one who built this house we live in today. My husband later passed on and left me with the responsibility of taking care of

1 A type of Swahili pastry made from dough which is deep fried.

2 A rural trading center in Siaya District, Kenya that consisted of an open air market and several Indian-owned retail shops.

the children fell on me. Now, God has blessed me with grandchildren and some of them are under my care. I still do farming.

What is important in parenting is teaching one's children values such as respect, caring, sharing as well as training them to undertake household responsibilities. Remember, children are judged based on the reputation of the family they come from. This is also important because one is not certain about who his/her children will remain with when he/she dies. Children are therefore to be taught to be responsible so that in case they are left alone, they are able to look after themselves.

What is also important, from my experience, is that taking care of children even if they are not biologically one's own is good. It is important for a person who finds herself in such circumstances to take up that role. There are many blessings that come with it. It is important that one should learn to give than to receive all the time. Cheerful giving comes with a lot of blessings. But nowadays I do not understand what is happening. Even the so called educated people are self-centred. They focus only on themselves and caring for others is not as common as it used to be.

I have had the opportunity to travel outside Africa. In Europe and America, children are different and, one could say, more challenging to deal with. I sometimes wonder how their parents cope with them. The campaign against caning of children has really caused a lot of problems. It is not the severe caning to hurt a person but to instil discipline that is necessary. To date, I still cane children when they misbehave. With my children though, it was easier because their father was a strict disciplinarian. Children would listen to him without arguing.

Children born in urban centres should have the opportunity to visit their rural homes often for them to meet, interact and share with their extended family members. This gives them the opportunity to stay with their grandparents from whom they

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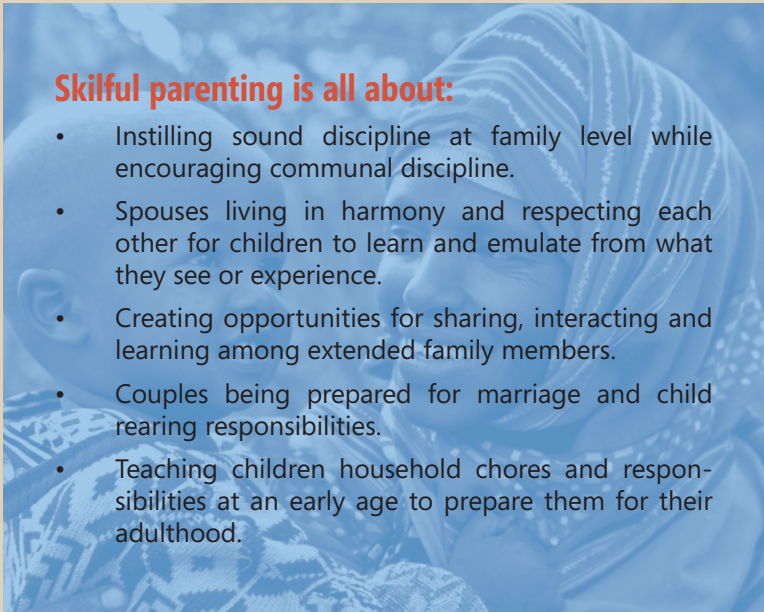


can get a lot of counsel and advice for various life situations. Children should also be in a position to learn and be taught their local languages and positive cultural practices. This fosters a sense of belonging and it makes them appreciate themselves.

It is not proper for families to confine themselves in towns or cities as they struggle to make ends meet. Living in single rooms with grown-up children is not good for parents either. People are better off at their rural homes where they can lead more dignified lives in a clean environment. They can also engage in farming or small businesses to feed their families.

Life in rural areas is affordable but those living in towns may spend a bigger percentage of income to pay house rent. This money can be put to better use in the rural areas.

Men should also improve living conditions in their rural homes so that their families are encouraged to frequently visit and feel comfortable there. If the wife is unemployed in town, she can feel at home staying at her rural residence. This is important because it also guarantees a person a comfortable home when he finally retires or loses his employment.



Skilful parenting is all about:

- Instilling sound discipline at family level while encouraging communal discipline.
- Spouses living in harmony and respecting each other for children to learn and emulate from what they see or experience.
- Creating opportunities for sharing, interacting and learning among extended family members.
- Couples being prepared for marriage and child rearing responsibilities.
- Teaching children household chores and responsibilities at an early age to prepare them for their adulthood.

Parenting Perspectives: Cultural coastal context

Mariam Hamisi Marashi





My name is Mariamu Hamisi Marashi. I am thirty years old and married with three children. I come from Msambweni, Kwale District in the coastal region of Kenya. I am a nursery school teacher.

I am a teacher at a local community nursery school and my husband is a casual labourer. I had to take up the teaching job in order to make some money to complement his earnings. It is not always that he gets something to do even though he leaves the house for work everyday. Sometimes, it is difficult for me to know when Hassan has money and when he does not. So, when I have money it really helps because then I do not get desperate.

I do not earn a lot of money from my teaching job and I would have preferred to engage in something else like farming in order to subsidize what I earn. The good thing about farming is that, one can tend to her farm as she looks after her children.

We have a neighbour who is like our mother here in the village (due to her age). She says tales that I enjoy listening to. She tells us that life in the olden days was not as difficult as it is today. Family farms were close by homes so the children would accompany their mothers to the farms. Farm work, was more or less self-employment.

I remember seeing my mother going to the farm but most of the time I stayed at home to take care of my younger siblings. Being the first born in the family meant that I had to shoulder many responsibilities. Now, the situation is different since we no longer own the farm. Our fate was sealed when the government took our family farm away.

If I were to choose between owning a farm and keeping my current job, I would go for the farm. Owning a farm empowers a woman. The farm produces the food she needs, be it cassava, rice or maize and this minimizes her dependence on her husband

for money. But, for most of us living in Msambweni, owning a farm is a dream. One has to look for alternative means of putting food on the table. That is why I go for paid employment, although balancing family life and full time work is not easy. Every morning, I prepare the baby's food as well as his spare clothes and leave him with a relative before I go to work.

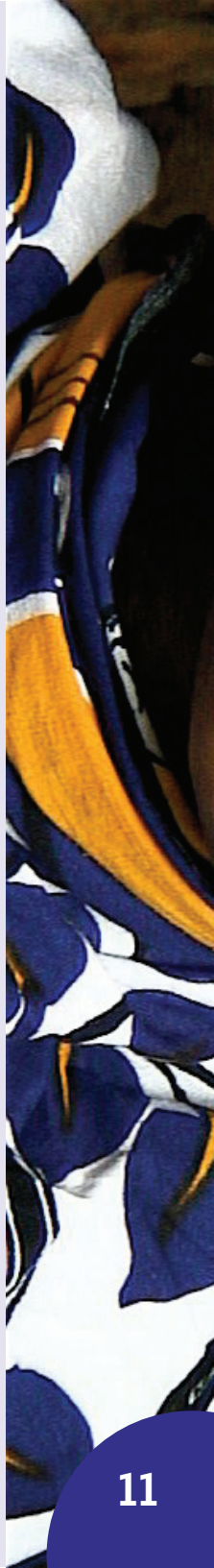
But, it is not the same when a baby is under someone else's care. The baby minder may, for example, forget to change the napkins when the baby has soiled them. This would however be different if the baby was cared for by his own mother. A baby needs to be as close to his mother as possible. I console myself that at least I have time in the afternoon to be with my children. It is not the same as being away from them the whole day.

A prominent village elder and his wife in Msambweni were once teachers and had to leave their child with a minder. One day, upon returning from school, they found their child vomiting and suffering from a bout of diarrhoea. They sought to know from the minder what the child could have eaten, but the response they got was not satisfactory. The following day, the child passed away. That was really sad and, to date, the elder declares that given another chance, he and his wife would leave their children under the care of a more responsible person. This experience reaffirms the importance of taking care of one's own child.

Nevertheless, some social changes are inevitable. For instance, my mother never had the benefits of attending ante-natal care whenever she was pregnant. But, in my case, it was different. I attended ante-natal care and I was advised to breastfeed exclusively for six months. Breastfeeding is best for the child, I was told.

My mother weaned her children early in life. In fact, after a child was born, she fed him/her cassava porridge mixed with milk which is locally known as *uji wa bada*¹. This, according to her, was

1 **Uji wa bada** is porridge made from dried and ground cassava tubers.





necessary so as to supplement her breastfeeding because she did not have enough breast milk. However, every woman who gave birth in the village, including those with enough breast milk, weaned their children using that porridge. During those days, herbal medicine was used for treatment. A child suffering from colic, for example, was given a certain herb which cured the disease effectively... even better than 'Gripe Water'.

Concerning bonding, there is a special bond between our children and myself and they are all very close to me. My husband, however, does not bond well with them. Most of the time, he comes home late and too tired. Even while staying at home, he rarely sits with the children. Life now is different compared to the old days when a family would sit together in the evening and tell stories. This togetherness encouraged communication within families. This helped a lot.

There is a young high school student in our village. She is the seventh in a family of eight children. Her relationship with her parents is not quite cordial and she is not close to them. She fears her father so much that she would not dare tell him anything lest he beats her up. Though she is still young, she deserves to be heard as well. Therefore parents should not be unduly harsh. The student is also not happy with her father's drinking habits and wishes that he could stop. She yearns for some form of stability and harmony in the family.

The student narrated to us a story about a young girl who was being forced into early marriage and how the girl managed to run away from home. She also told us that should a man approach her, she would not dare tell her parents but keep it to herself instead. This situation is serious because it is crucial for children, especially young girls, to talk to their parents. There are all kinds of dangers lurking out there and because a girl can be vulnerable, she should be in a position to share her thoughts with her parents.

Boys too have their issues with their parents. Another young neighbour of ours, complained about this situation when he said that fathers are not serious when it comes to parenting. He jokingly suggested that they should all be assembled into one room and forced to explain why this is so.

In fact, I was taken aback when he told us that sometimes he leaves their house and stays away for days but when he returns nobody cares to ask him where he has been. Though this could be an isolated case, I agree with him that families should get together. He made us laugh when he said that the only time families get together these days is either during funerals or weddings and even then, people are too busy to talk to one another.

This is the reason why I would like my husband to change his attitude towards our children. He is very harsh towards them and this makes them become so scared of him that as soon as they come home from school, they start preparing for the next day. He hates to see the children looking for their school uniforms or books in the morning.





There is a boy whose father is also too harsh and does not listen to him, but the boy is closer to his mother with whom he discusses many things including relationships. She has been present in his life and has done everything for him, from taking him to hospital to attending school functions. The boy hopes to be a better father when he gets a family of his own. He also hopes that one day things will be different.

We also have a neighbour who is a different kind of father. He is a hard-working man and although his wife also works, he takes full responsibility of feeding, clothing and providing shelter for his family. Being a university graduate, he is able to take full responsibility of his family. His proper upbringing also contributed to his good discipline. Both his parents were strict, but he was close to his mother since the father was not so present in his life. However, he is close to his own children.

Concerning discipline, he says that the cane helps but it should not be overused. Together with his wife, they ensure that their four children are informed of their mistakes before they are punished, and that is commendable. Occasionally, he and his children sit together to talk. He is however concerned that once the children get to upper primary, they become reserved and unwilling to talk openly to their parents as a result of peer pressure.

His father, a respected village elder, feels strongly about the issue of discipline. He believes that children were more disciplined in the past than they are today because discipline then was a community concern. A child making a mistake could be punished by any elderly person who happened to be around.

This situation is different these days. In trying to discipline somebody else's child, for example, a person could find himself in a lot of trouble. The parents of the child would further ask him whether he ever contributed, in any way, in helping them feed or clothe their child to warrant disciplining him.

However, our neighbour knows too well that it has not been easy for him and his wife. For some time, they left their children

under the grandmother's care. Yet, as he says, the children became more stubborn. They were spoilt because the grandmother was too lenient with them. This attitude was to be expected though, for grandmothers are usually soft, especially to their grandchildren. By ignoring to punish the errant children, they assume that they are being nice to them whereas they encourage the children to become undisciplined and lazy. He also feels that parents should stay with their children until they are about two years old. That way, they will instil in their children the values they believe are important.

This situation is different these days. In trying to discipline somebody else's child, for example, one could land himself into a lot of trouble.

An expert in early childhood talked about the structure of our society and how it has changed. In the olden days, the extended family structure included grandparents who also had roles to play in a family set up. If, for example, a parent was too harsh on a child, there was always the grandmother or grandfather who the child could run to for help. Children found grandparents easy to approach and so were free with them. But when the parents are not approachable as it is the case with the hard working neighbour and the young high school student mentioned above, to who do the children turn to?

As a parent, I strive to be close to my children so that when they have a problem they can always come to me. According to the childhood expert, fathers should be more involved in their children's upbringing. She suggests the implementation of programmes that specifically target parents.

The childhood expert had a good upbringing. Her mother was always there for her and this made them to be very close. During her school days, she would plait her mother's hair as she narrated about her day at school. But now, there is the dilemma



of balancing work and family responsibilities which has made things difficult. Although she is passionate about her work, she also wants to be there for her family. It is good that she loves her job because, as a woman, she has to make a living. A woman has to change with the times. If she stays at home to be taken care of by the husband, the family may suffer because a single source of income is not sufficient.

It is estimated, according to her, that around 200 million children in developing countries like Kenya do not achieve their cognitive (full intellectual) potential because of poor nutrition, infectious diseases and less than optimal parenting. But, word of caution – parenting is not easy and it requires money as well. I try my best with the US\$ 27 that I earn every month. But, by end month most of this money has been consumed by debts leaving little with which I purchase home provisions. I am left with no money to save. I hope and pray that one day I will have enough money to enable me change my house, buy my children good clothes, give them proper meals and many other things. That is every mother's dream.

Skilful parenting is all about:

- Self-reliance, engaging in self employment to be able to provide for one's family as well as have quality time with one's children especially in the early stages of life.
- Accessing support services that improve one's knowledge in child development.
- Having a stable harmonious home where open communication is the norm.
- Facilitating family get-together to facilitate bonding, interaction and sharing among relatives.
- Never compromising on disciplining children and this should be a communal affair.
- Fathers getting more involved in parenting.

Parenting Perspectives:

Professional athlete, world
marathon record holder

Haile Gebreselassie



My name is Athlete Shaleka and sometimes, Honorary Doctor Haile Gebreselassie, the long-distance runner. I was born on April 1966, Ethiopian calendar¹ (April 18th 1974 Gregorian calendar) in Arsi town of Assela, Abara Woreda, 175 kilometres from Addis Ababa. I am married with four children and an athlete as well as a businessman.

I started running (as an amateur) when I was in high school in 1982 (Ethiopian calendar) after which I came to Addis Ababa and started living here. Though athletics is regarded as a profession by some people, I do not regard it as such. I can say I am a professional businessman and a part time athlete. When one starts running as an athlete he is referred to as an amateur but as he gains some experience and wins medals he is then regarded a professional. Our athletics federation was then called International Amateur Athletics Federation until two or three years ago when it changed its name to International Athletics Association. Previously, the law prohibited payments to runners, but now athletes will not run without expecting payment.



My wife, Alem Tilahun, and I got married to in 1988 (Eth. cal.) when I returned from the Atlanta Olympics. We have three daughters and one son, the eldest being eleven years old. I attribute my success to my family. My family; my wife and the children come before anything else. Despite the job a person does, if there are problems in the home he will not be successful. The saying that goes: "Behind every successful man there is a woman" is very true. I can train well, run a lot and so on, but if I come home to face a gloomy wife then my day is ruined. Although I am now a public figure, Alem is the boss in my house and the one at the forefront because my

¹ The **Ethiopian calendar** has twelve months of 30 days each plus a thirteenth month with five/six days depending on the addition of a leap day every four years. There is a difference of 7 - 8 years between Ethiopian calendar and the Western calendar. For instance, the current year according to Ethiopian calendar is 2002. Mostly you add 8 years on the Ethiopian date for the dates that are between January to August and 7 years for dates that are between September to December. For example, Haile's birthday is April 1966 in Ethiopian calendar, so we add 8 years to get the corresponding European/western calendar - which is April 1974. You can also use the following link to convert any date to Ethiopian date on line. <http://members.shaw.ca/ethiocal/>

success is determined by the support that I get from her. The family then is very important. You have probably noticed that in the USA the wives of those running for the office of the President are often asked what kind of men their husbands are.

A family structure starts from the husband, the wife and then the children. Everything else such as work comes after that. The family is the key to success and there is no question that my own success comes about because of my family.

In our family, we were thirteen children when I was growing up. Ten of us were children from the same parents and the other three from our relatives. Although both our parents wanted us to progress, my mother's views concerning progress differed from my father's. He insisted that we should support him with farm work. During that time, farmers used traditional methods because farming technology was not advanced thereby making farming labour-intensive. My father therefore wanted all family members to participate in it in order to minimize labour and maximize input for better yields. My mother, on the other hand, wanted us to go to school and be educated rather than work in the farm. This however does not suggest that farming is bad. It is respectable and profitable and can make a person successful.

After some time, my father eventually agreed with my mother's views and most of my siblings and I started going to school. Our family was therefore successful in the neighbourhood because of the education we received. There are some families whose children went to school like us but, because they did not advance further, they remained farmers. However, they learnt better farming methods and have managed to send their own children to school though they themselves missed the opportunity to advance.

Personally, I think that what matters in society is not having children but how to raise them properly and successfully. Having a large family is good though it has its challenges. Children can be of help to their parents but there should be a limit to their number depending on the parents' ability to raise them. Parents should get children within their capability to educate and take care of and those who fail to do so should be condemned by society. In our culture however, a couple having only two or three children is frowned upon. Having twenty or more children is not a problem so long as their parents are able to properly care for and educate them.

As we grew up, we were subjected to a lot of punishment and beatings. Our parents were very strict and sometimes very harsh. But for me, I take it positively because the punishment was for our own good. Raising many children in the same household as our parents did at that time must have been challenging. The punishment we received from my father was so severe that sometimes I wondered whether he was really our father. Such harsh punishment cannot correct a child. During my childhood, there were times I was beaten twice a day, but I still rebelled and did bad things all the time. Now, if I pinch my children, even gently, they cry because they are not used to it. Punishment should be emphasized but not overused.

When I was growing up, punishment was communal. If a child made a mistake, he/she could also be punished by any member of the community. If a friend of mine in the neighbourhood and I did something wrong, for example, his father was allowed to punish both of us. Failing to do so would mean that my friend's father wanted only his son to be corrected and not I and my father would complain. So, the neighbours too had a great responsibility in disciplining us.

Today, things are different. While in the olden days the community had a responsibility of protecting a child, these days one cannot touch someone else's child. Here in Addis, if I pinch a child because he did something wrong, his parents will demand an explanation wanting to know if I have contributed to feeding of their child in any way. Also in those days, communal responsibilities were extended beyond punishment. For instance, when my friend and I went out to look after cattle, my mother would prepare food for both of us. This gesture of kindness is very rare nowadays.

Our way of life, in those days, had both advantages and disadvantages. But how can we make a compromise? It would be good to see people living in towns, taking responsibility for each other and their families. But, beating children like the way it was done in the past only makes them worse and rebellious. Culture is good, but we should only adopt the beneficial aspects of it and leave behind harmful practices. For example, in Ethiopia, we are encouraged to develop our language, and our culture. But, things have changed and we have to see things in light of development and of what benefit it is to us. We should look into our beneficial cultural aspects and link these to the way we do things today

instead of only looking at the old culture and saying this is how children should be raised. A person should not beat up his children simply because he was beaten by his own parents when growing up. This kind of punishment damages, confuses and contributes to a feeling of low self esteem in a child. He will always think of the abuse and the beatings.

If my eldest daughter tells me she has a boyfriend, I would have to advise her on how best to deal with the situation although I know my father would have killed my sister if she told him anything of this sort. My advice to my daughter will help her deal with a similar issue with her own daughters in the future. My father saw my mother for the first the day they got married while I knew my wife for at least three years, as boyfriend and girlfriend, before we got married. How times have changed! We do not know how it is going to be with our children. Nowadays some couples opt to live as 'partners' for a long time without getting married. So we have to raise our children according to the times.

People believe that as long as children are getting food, clothing and shelter then all is well. But these basic needs alone are not enough. Raising children is more than this. It involves nurturing, taking them to school, paying their fees and monitoring the real learning in school. A child's attachment to the family is determined at the early stage – their success in education, self confidence, growth with love, etc. If my wife and I have to discuss serious issues, we do not do it in front of our children but discuss in privacy. Children should be loved and taught how to love. They should not be exposed to family disputes. This will enable them to understand



more about life and pursue it rather than engage in fighting and disputes. Although my father used to beat my mother, I cannot do that to Alem. Times have changed and I expect more changes in my children's lives.

Regarding bonding with my children, I make sure that I spend as much time as possible with them. We discuss about their day in school, their wellbeing, family issues, etc. For instance, children have a liking for sweet things such as candies, cakes and soft drinks, which may not be healthy if taken frequently. I take time to talk to my children about the health risks involved. I encourage them to work hard in school especially when they get low grades. With encouragement, they will perform well. I have seen this in my running. If a person discourages one who is lagging behind him then that person will not improve. But if he is encouraged, then he will double his effort. Therefore it is very important to give support to our children because it also benefits us and our work, be it in business, running, etc. This is because when the children are doing well then we also tend to do well.

Thinking about my children's future and what they will encounter after finishing school is my greatest challenge. There are other challenges such as seeing them watch television the whole day and trying to restrain them. There is nothing wrong with watching television. But when children spend hours in front of the television set instead of concentrating on their school work and they do not want to be stopped, then it becomes a challenge. Parents face different challenges. To some, the challenge is providing food to their children. For me the challenge is choosing what is best for my children, which is natural. I also get challenged when they fall sick.

Parenthood changes people. Before I became a parent I never had any feelings for children I saw in the streets. But now every child I see makes me feel something because I think of my own children. I don't like seeing children, especially girls, being abused. I get annoyed and aggressive when I see someone hitting a girl even if jokingly. This could be because I have sisters and daughters. In my household, majority are girls – four in total, including my wife, so the men are out-numbered! Women participation in the family is very crucial, although most people still do not understand the importance of this in a family setup.

Before Alem and I got married, I was a different person. I never cared much about life. But after our marriage, I now think differently. I see the difference my marriage has made in my life. When I enter the house and my wife is around then I am happy. But when she travels, I do not enjoy being in the house. I do not even make the bed, because I don't like making beds thus when she is away, the house is in disarray.

We teach our children norms and values. We teach them about etiquette and how to behave well in school. Alem's closeness to the children has greatly helped in guiding them. But I think I am better off with the discipline aspect as they seem to be afraid of my strictness. Alem sometimes lets them get away with things and this is out of love. Through discipline, they should learn different aspects of culture such as respect for elders, greeting and respecting guests. These things are very much valued in society. So, as parents, we are strict in this regard. We don't beat the children but reprimand them. This I believe is more effective than beating, although it should not be done too often since it can scare and confuse them. Also disciplining children should not be left to parents only but should remain a community affair.

Sometimes, when our children pick insulting words from school we tell them that those words are bad and even God does not approve of them. We ask them to go back and pass this message to their friends. Religion, therefore, plays a major role in instilling discipline among children and we thank God that our children are God-fearing.

The greatest poverty is not material and financial poverty but bankruptcy of the mind. If we do not deal with this type of poverty then we cannot raise our children properly. Unless we change the way we think, we cannot change our economic situation and that of our children. Some parents think that because they are poor, they cannot engage in anything else except drinking, getting drunk and beating their wives and children when they get home. The children then learn nothing else but violence. Such parents experience bankruptcy of the mind more than economic poverty. Although such parents believe that their lives are already ruined, their children should live better lives and to achieve that they should be more responsible in their thinking. What is currently rampant in Ethiopia is this bankruptcy of the mind which has

greatly affected our children, the family and the society and if we can first remove it, then economic poverty can be solved step by step.

Raising my children behind closed doors is useless because they will one day join the society. This is why I think the culture of raising children together should be introduced and encouraged even in towns. It should be a joint responsibility and I suggest that the law also be allowed to give guidelines on how to raise children. In America and Europe, a father can be accused of child abuse by his own child if he has a habit of beating him up.

Imagine a family of thirteen children living in the same house with a meagre income from a small farm! This was economic deprivation. We never wore shoes to school yet a pair then cost only 0.12 US cents! The first time I wore shoes was when I joined grade 7. Our piece of land would never have been enough for all of us as well as our families yet my father insisted that we remain at the farm. My mother's thinking and father's change of mind greatly helped us. Therefore we have to change the way we think. Bankruptcy of the mind is the greatest challenge of all and people with this type of poverty can be very dangerous. This should be rectified so that the whole country can benefit.

Skilful parenting is all about:

- Putting one's family first and spouses being able to complement each other's effort when raising children.
- Providing more than just basic necessities (food, shelter, clothing, education). Loving, disciplining and open discussions with children are equally important.
- Learning from parenting practices of the past while carefully adopting those lessons that are important in the current parenting context.
- Recognizing that it takes a village to raise a child, that is parenting goes beyond the immediate family environment.
- Parents having access to knowledge and skills that will enable them live decent lives as well as raise their children responsibly.

Parenting Perspectives: Professional mother from a child care institution

Nauseera Goretti





My name is Nanseera Goretti. I am 50 years old. I come from the central part of Uganda. I am a professional mother at SOS Children's Village in Uganda where I care for 18 children. I currently live with twelve children, two of them being my own biological daughters. I was bestowed a ring of honour in recognition of my work at the SOS Village for the past 17 years.

I am the fifth born in a family of ten children – six girls and four boys. I grew up in a monogamous Christian family. Our parents were strict and instilled in us Christian values by which we lived. There were certain rules in the home which we had to obey and if, by any chance, any of us went contrary to them, we knew that we had to expect some drastic action from our parents. Therefore, we all tried, although sometimes with difficulty, to do what was right. There were times when we erred and got punished.

When I finished my secondary education, I joined a teacher training college and was trained as a teacher. During my teaching profession, I got married and had two daughters. Later, my husband and I separated but I retained the custody of our children.

In the process of looking for a new school, I came across an advertisement for a job at SOS Children's Village. The advert mentioned that SOS was an organization which looked after abandoned and orphaned children. Deep in my heart I felt a calling to go and be with these children and from my teaching background, I knew I could handle the job. So I applied for the job and lucky enough, I got it.

When I started working at SOS, I realized it was more than just a job. In my previous work as a class-room teacher, I prepared my lessons, taught, marked pupils' exercises then went home and led a normal life. But this is a 24 hour job – not something one comes to do and goes back home to relax at the end of the day. This job is something that develops one wholly. It is something that consumes and envelopes one. It is about bonding. When one teaches children and they move on, it feels good. It feels even better, if they pass their exams. One feels proud. But, when one is an SOS 'mother' or 'aunt', she has a special bond with

the children because she is dealing directly not only with their educational needs but with their physical, emotional and other aspects of their lives as well. One becomes like a real parent to them.

I have spent the last 17 years at SOS starting off as an 'aunt'. An 'aunt' is the lady who stands in for the 'mother' when the mother is away. The 'mother' is the lady who runs a Children's home. After three years at SOS, I became a 'mother'. The youngest of the seven children I started off with was at kindergarten then. Later, three more joined – a new born baby and two others, aged 2 ½ years.

I cannot say it was smooth sailing all the way through because I had to teach these children now under my care. Luckily, before becoming a 'mother', one has to go through a three months training to be empowered with the knowledge and skills required for child development. I had some knowledge about these skills as a teacher, for I had learnt a little psychology and had the theoretical knowledge needed. I started practising this knowledge at the Village. The knowledge and skills from the training college empowers one to be able to deal with different situations as they arise. The experience from one's childhood and advice from colleagues also help. At the training, all topics are covered and these become reference points in times of difficulty. The psychology I learnt in school is more relevant here because I now can relate it to what is taking place. I have to give special attention to each of the children who come to the Village so as to make them feel loved and secure. I have to undergo the steps of bonding with each child individually and sometimes the process is slow. So in real sense, I put to practice what I acquired at the training college.

One of the babies under my care at the Village really inspired me. The baby was barely a month old when he was first brought to me. This is a child I had to bond with because I was now in charge of everything that concerned him. When I received the baby, I thought he was blind. I beamed a flashlight on his eyes to see if he would blink. Then I asked myself: "What if I have a blind baby?" But people encouraged me. The director of the Village, who is the father figure, used to visit him. The baby was younger than expected. However, he started seeing eventually.





I have to teach these children to live together as a family. Some of them are older, others younger. It is a big challenge to bond children from different backgrounds. But unless they bond and accept one another, one is likely to have a chaotic family. To bond such children, one has to go an extra mile. But the support of colleagues and the Village director make the work easier.

It is better to take in children when they are young because that way, one does not have the challenge of finding out what could be wrong with the child or what the child might have been exposed to. It is easier to notice withdrawal symptoms or when something is wrong in a young child. Big children have to be approached patiently and with a lot more care. But a person will easily understand the requirements for a baby under one's care and find ways to provide for him.

I do not mind the sex of the child that is brought to me. It depends upon the individual child because every child is unique and we handle them differently when they have problems. You may start with a girl and things move on smoothly as she goes through different stages of growth. Then, you get another girl and the exact opposite happens. You may also get a boy who is easy to handle or one who is difficult.

I grew up in a normal family set up with loving parents. Despite their love, sometimes I thought that they were not fair. However as I grew up, I kept on hearing people saying that bringing up children was not easy. That is when I realised it might not have been easy for my parents too. We were ten children in our family and closely spaced. I am the fifth born and between the first born and I there is a mere 5½ year gap. During our teenage years, we thought our parents were really tough on us and I wished that they would let us enjoy our freedom. But, I now realise whatever they did to us was for our own good and I appreciate their effort. As a professional 'mother', there are things that I do that I know are good for the development of a child. These include consulting children on issues that concern them and reminding them of what is good and what is bad. Dialogue with children is very healthy and it enhances their growth.

When a mother gives birth, she is certain that the child is hers. The child may resemble her, her husband or even her mother. Bonding with this child then is not difficult and sometimes it comes automatically because the child is her own. Here, at the children's institution, bonding is not easy because children are from different backgrounds and might have experienced various traumatic events for which one has to take time to understand. To reach out to an orphan or an abandoned child one has to be compassionate and patient. A professional 'mother' living with such children requires a lot of time to give each child the attention they need. This is because professional mothers also have their own private lives to lead. One gets the satisfaction only when the child starts bonding and behaves like any normal child.

One day, a child who had stayed with different families was brought in. I was there to witness the arrival of new children. This particular child was not to be under my care. But as I sat there, he crawled towards me and rested his head on my lap. I lifted and sat him on my lap and thought I should take him in for the night while waiting for a home to be found. As I held this boy, I had a strange feeling in my heart and I knew I had to bond with him. His act of putting his head on my lap had awoken something in me. When I took the child home, my other children became excited and were shouting "Oh mummy we have a new baby, we got a new baby!" They welcomed him. When the Village director came the following day, the children continued with the shouts of excitement. Because of this, the Village director decided not to take the child away. That child has been under my care ever since and has grown to be a responsible child.

Caring for this child at the beginning was however not very easy. In fact, it became a big challenge at first because he did not want to associate himself with the grown up children in the house. He did not talk much but would occasionally give a smile when the other small children were around. He would however, not smile to the big children or even to me and sometimes he would turn his head away on seeing me. I knew something was wrong. I beseeched God to give me the grace to make this





child smile again. I knew I had no explanation for this strange behaviour but I wanted to penetrate his heart so that he would trust me. Although it took some time, I managed in the long run. I must admit, though, that it was a gradual exercise, full of encouraging words, laced with whispers of "I love you" that managed to change him.

I teach my children norms and values such as respect, caring for others and trusting in God. These values are important in a child's growth especially in preparing him for his future life. They also empower children for questions that might arise regarding them as they interact with others. For instance, a child may ask me where I think he came from. Some of these are questions that they have been asked by other children or are originating from rumours they have heard and they want to confirm. I tell them the truth about their backgrounds but reassure them that they are safe and secure at the Village. I assure them of their future by telling them that SOS is there to provide the care and support they need. I tell them that God knew them even before they were born and that He has a purpose for each one of them, and that what is happening in their lives is part of His plan. I therefore urge them to take life positively and appreciate themselves and what they have: a home, family and education. I ask them to remain focused.

I remember the day my eldest biological daughter said she thanks God for my joining SOS. She mentioned that before, they were only two but now they are many and even have brothers. "We are now a large family", she said.

My children are free with one another and interact well especially during Christmas. They share things and play together. I see the bigger children showing the smaller ones how to do things. There is an atmosphere of joy and togetherness when they are together and I thank God for this. The difference between my biological and adopted children does not arise. For me, I know that I have 18 children because I am the only mother they have.

Both my family and the community have learnt to accept and recognize my children. To my children, my sisters are their aunts and my brothers, their uncles. They sometimes visit one another.

Though my parents passed on, I thank God for the family I now have. Recently, we had an 'Introductory party' whereby one of my daughters came to introduce her husband to be. It was a big function and all my family members attended.

Though the ideal family should have a father and a mother, sometimes this is not possible and people should learn to make best of what they have. In the Village, we have a father figure whom the children identify with. However, even in the community, there are single mothers and single fathers who are raising their children without much problem.

Parenting is however not easy and help to parents is needed. I suggest that seminars be organized for both would-be parents and those who are already parents so that they can learn about issues of parenting and child upbringing. This would help parents, especially those who go to work to deal with some challenges. Parents who leave their children with minders miss a lot. It is better for a parent to see what happens to her child when she is there than to receive secondary information. SOS children get quality care from their 'mothers' because they are always available. Information on parenting should be available everywhere: In the church, within the community, at the workplace, through the media, social work programmes, among other avenues. Every one should know how to help children so that they can grow to be better people in society.

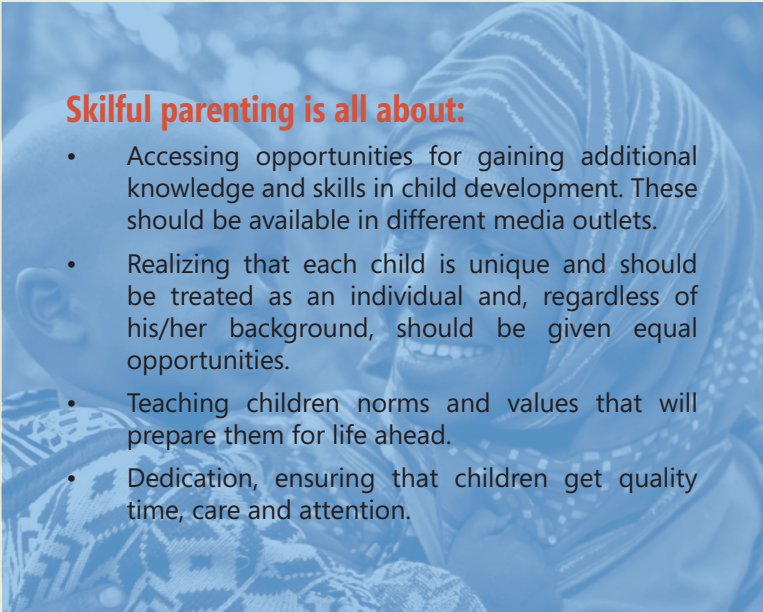
Whereas it was not easy for me, taking care of these children is very rewarding despite the challenges. One is encouraged by the success of the older children. When a person gives a child all that she has, then she wants that particular child to succeed. That is why children who take too long to bond are a challenge to their 'mothers' including me.

As an organization, we get time for ourselves. We are given a day off every week. This translates to four days a month. During these four days, I focus on my personal life. However, a 'mother' cannot forget her children completely. She has to keep on calling the Village to find out how they are doing. At the end of each year every mother is entitled to 31 days of annual leave.





As I said earlier, when I started this job I realised it was not what I envisaged it to be. But, as I continued, I found it was a ministry. What motivates me is to know that God trusted me as the best person to handle these children and entrusted me with the responsibility of being a parent to them. This motivation has helped me grow and revealed things in me which I never knew. It has taught me to let go of myself and be there for others. In fact, being a professional mother requires that in order to give, one has to let go of herself, and in so doing, she may not even realize that she is receiving back. There is also the joy one feels when a child who has done well returns from school and says "Mummy, look at my report!". Deep inside, one knows where he started from; and when the results of the national examinations come and the child has done well; or when the child excels in sports; or when one sees a child being an inspiration to others within the family, she really feels motivated. The other day, I attended a graduation ceremony at the university. One of my children came to me and said "Mummy, thank you". That appreciation gives me encouragement to struggle with the rest.



Skilful parenting is all about:

- Accessing opportunities for gaining additional knowledge and skills in child development. These should be available in different media outlets.
- Realizing that each child is unique and should be treated as an individual and, regardless of his/her background, should be given equal opportunities.
- Teaching children norms and values that will prepare them for life ahead.
- Dedication, ensuring that children get quality time, care and attention.

Parenting Perspectives:

Child headed household

Helina Legesse



My name is Helina Legesse. I am a student of Marketing Management. I live in Addis Ababa with my younger sisters and I have been the head of the household since our mother passed on in late 2007.

I live with my two younger sisters who are 16 and 12 years old respectively and both attend school; one in 8th grade while the other is in 4th grade.

We live alone in our house. Since 2007 when our mother passed away, we have been fending for ourselves. Being the eldest daughter, I assumed the role of the head of the family and took over the responsibility of running the household. Because I am unemployed, the responsibility is challenging and it sometimes overwhelms me especially when I have nothing to cook for my sisters when they come back from school.

However, there is an organization called 'CHILD' which provides us with wheat flour and cooking oil. We also receive US\$ 8 a month though we don't get it regularly. Nonetheless, we try to live with what we have. The house in which we live belongs to the *Kebele*¹, so we have no problem regarding accommodation. They do not harass us when we fail to pay rent.

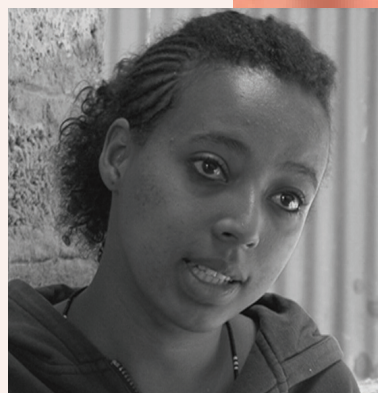
I attend classes in the evening. Since I also took hair dressing courses through an organization and can now braid well, I braid women's hair in the neighbourhood during the day. The money I get from that helps to cover some of our expenses.

Regarding our basic needs, clothing and shelter are a secondary problem for me. My main problem is getting food. I cook whatever food is available in the house for breakfast, lunch and dinner. My sisters come home for lunch after which, they go back to school and return in the evening when I too go to college.

Our neighbours have generally been helpful and I have had no problem with my sisters. But this does not rule out challenges that are faced by young girls living by themselves. Our neighbourhood is not a particularly safe area but nobody will forcefully abuse one unless that person allows them to do so. All the same, this is something that we have to deal with ourselves.

¹ **Kebele** is the smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia. A group of kebeles make up a *woreda* (which is equivalent to a district).

There is a high number of orphans in our neighbourhood. Some of these children cannot even meet their basic needs especially food. This has led others to rent out their rooms or beds to prostitutes or engage in petty trades like selling *kolo*² to raise money. Both the government and the community should give orphans enough attention and raise them to a level where they can support themselves. It is better for both the government and the community to give them the support that they need so that they do not shift to unhealthy or bad behaviour in order to survive.



In our neighbourhood, both housing and education are a major problem. I know of children who do not attend any school. Situations where public schools refuse to admit children who fail to raise the fees are quite common. Children are therefore forced to quit school especially from grade 7 onwards. Even in cases where public schools are not full, there are children who quit school to work as prostitutes in order to support themselves and their siblings. This is common with those who have to look after as many as five younger siblings. Girls, in particular, are exposed to different kinds of risks when they stay out as late as midnight selling *kolo* and nuts. I also know of children who have been evicted from their houses because they cannot afford to pay rent to the Kebele. Some neighbours have also been contributing factors to this problem. For instance, our neighbour, after discovering that we were in arrears, tried to take away our house. However, the Kebele people stopped him because of our goodwill with them.

My sisters, especially the older one, are good students and they always assist each other. Whenever the older one has difficulties regarding her studies, she seeks my assistance and I try to do my best to help her. Apart from this, we discuss other issues concerning life in general. For instance, it is my sisters who urged me to take the hair dressing course that a certain organization was offering. They were sure that through it I would be able to make some money that could help meet some of our needs. I therefore joined after this discussion.

2 **Kolo** is a snack made of roasted grain (usually barley, but can also be wheat, dried chick peas, etc).

I sometimes worry about things that can happen to my sisters. Whenever this happens I talk to them referring to similar cases in our neighbourhood. I do this in form of advice. I neither shout at them nor beat them. I simply offer advice using the role models in our community such as children who have made it despite their suffering. I also cite examples of those who have suffered because they did not listen to their elders.

The government, organizations and the community should educate orphans and provide them with other basic needs. The community should also come out to support orphans when their services are required and not shy away. People should also try to avoid benefiting from the problems faced by orphans but try instead to help and care for them.

Orphans who are raising their siblings should be empowered so that they are able to support themselves instead of just expecting handouts. Both the government and the community should therefore take up this initiative. Neighbours too should seek ways to relieve orphans of their debt burdens especially those concerning rent arrears. They should cease exploiting vulnerable children through child labour, or take away the little that they have.

Losing parents, though painful as it may be, is not the end of everything. Everybody eventually dies. So, whatever orphans are doing in school or at work, they should remain strong and support themselves.

Skilful parenting is all about:

- Providing basic necessities such as food, education, shelter and clothing without engaging in risky businesses.
- Being a good example and using role models to advice and discipline children or siblings.
- Not giving up but using available opportunities to improve ones situation regardless of how challenging the situation is.
- Having access to support services that government, development organizations and the community are providing.

Parenting Perspectives: 'Single' parent living in an urban informal settlement

Grace Afieng



My name is Grace Atieno. I am twenty eight years old and married with six children. I am a casual hair dresser living in Majengo¹ with my family. I live in a single room which is too small for my big family. During the night, my husband and I share the bed with our youngest child while the rest sleep either on the floor or on the sofa with a curtain separating them from us. There is simply no privacy, but such is life. When my relatives from the village visit us, I tell them that, this cramped room from where one can smell what the neighbour is cooking without making any effort is where I came to hide from my father's wrath. They laugh but that is the reality.

We have no running water and share a public toilet with eight other households. I get worried when my children are using the toilet because it is always very filthy. That is one of the things a person has to bear with when using communal facilities. Sometimes, I find human waste thrown about in the trench outside my house. Since I want my children to keep away from the mess, I have to clean it up. That is part of being a mother in a slum. If one wants the best for her children then she ensures that the environment around them is clean. But how much can I do on my own? People keep on running about the small corridor that connects our houses. One can easily break her back if she keeps on cleaning after them. In fact, if it were not for the nasty stench, the dry season is usually tolerable but when it rains, this place is worse. It becomes muddy with sewage and is generally dirty and worrying.

Electricity is out of question for me and I don't even think about it. We use a tin paraffin lamp for lighting which is not safe in case it accidentally falls down. So

¹ **Majengo** is an informal settlement in Nairobi Kenya.

I make sure that it is lit either by my husband or myself. The children use the lamp when they do their homework at night so I ensure there is enough paraffin in the house. However, the price of the fuel has risen so high these days.

Because of scarce employment opportunities, both my husband and I rely on casual jobs. This is not easy because there are days when no work materializes. But, I thank God that I braid women's hair and this enables me to earn extra money from my customers which boosts the family income somehow.

Feeding a large family like mine is not easy. Hence, to expect me to breastfeed exclusively for six months as we are advised to do at the clinic is too ambitious. If I had not started to feed porridge to my nine month old baby from the time he was about three weeks old, he would be much weaker than he is now. Despite all this, I try hard to give my children the best I can though there are hard times, like yesterday, when we sleep hungry. However, we thank God because a relative passed by and gave us some little money.

Although my husband is a casual labourer and tries his best to provide for the family, it is not always that



he does so. He drinks too much alcohol which ruins everything and sometimes I worry when he is out drinking. The children too are so scared of him that when he comes home they all retreat to bed out of fear. Only the last born stays awake, being too young to understand what is happening. Drinking is destructive and sometimes my husband scares me too. During my last pregnancy I fell sick and suffered stress when he claimed that the child I was carrying was not his. But I simply cannot manage on my own. The counselling I receive from the church has been very helpful. Sometimes I just do not know what to do about certain things and that is when I turn to the church. That is how I get the strength that sees me through the difficult times.

When I met my husband, I was a young girl running away from problems. All I wanted was inner peace. My father, who was very abusive and cruel towards us, would beat us and our mother as well. Things took a different turn when our mother died and our father remarried. I got fed up and ran away from home. It was the end of my education as well and that is how I ended up as a wife and mother at an early age. In other words, I did not plan anything concerning my life.

My biggest challenge now is to ensure that my children get the best. Education is very expensive considering that I have no money yet money is everything these days. I still do not know what I ought to do so that my children acquire good education. Right now, I am in hiding from one of the nursery school teachers. For sometime now, I have not been able to pay my child's US\$ 2.70 monthly fees. I had promised the teacher that I would pay up but when I got some money, I spent it on food instead. It pains me to be hiding from him just in case he meets

me and starts demanding his dues.

Inspite of all the hardships, I love my children and they all know that. I always spend time with them and therefore I am able to monitor what they are doing.

Even though I would have preferred to go to work and provide for them, being at home has also been a good thing for them.

Sometimes, I feel happy just sitting on the bed and watching the children sleeping or playing on the couch. There are also days when the situation is so bad, like when the children have to go to school without food. I thank God though for the school feeding programme that the government introduced because, through it, they are able to get their lunch.

My children are a source of so much hope and happiness for me, especially when they tell me what they will do when they grow up. One of them says, "Mummy, one day I will carry you in my plane". I just smile

For me, what matters is that I love my children very much and they know it.



and pray that he acquires a good education to realize his dream. Then, my first born always assures me that I will never suffer when he grows up. As a parent, when I listen to their aspirations I feel proud that I have been open with them and can share in their dreams.

But, it is sad that their father never gets to hear what they say. In fact, they never mention him and I wish it were different. I feel like a single² parent raising children single handed. I have a friend who is a single mother of two here in Majengo and I don't quite see the difference between her children and mine. This friend, is lucky because she manages to get odd jobs like washing clothes for people. The money she makes enables her to feed her children. I do share a lot with her because, like me, she had a sad past.

She was raped when she was in high school. On this particular day, while returning from attending sports day events, she was accosted by some young men who gang raped her and ran away. Later, she realised that she was pregnant. Her mother suggested abortion, but she refused and said it might be the only chance she had to have a baby. She gave birth to her first born and now she is happy.

At the age of 27 years, she is very strong and really an example to show how much a woman can withstand. The father of her second child took off the moment she disclosed to him that she was expectant with his child. Again, she wasn't discouraged. I draw a lot of strength from her. If a young woman like her can be strong enough to take care of her two children despite the

² She has an absentee husband who comes and goes.

circumstances, why can't I? Even the fact that she was able to continue with her education after having her first baby is an encouragement. Many women would have decided against going back to school. She is very neat and plays a lot with her children.

However, not all my friends display such strong personalities. A twenty two year old friend has a baby and is currently living with her mother after fleeing from her abusive husband and his constant beatings. At times, she would take the baby to the mother then return to her house just to see if the situation would have calmed down. One day, her husband beat her so severely that she passed out. Her mother advised her to leave the man. But where would she go to? She keeps hoping that her husband will change. Sometimes we find ourselves giving opinions about other people's lives but it is not easy. Take me as an example, if I walk out of my marriage today, where would I go and who would pay my rent?

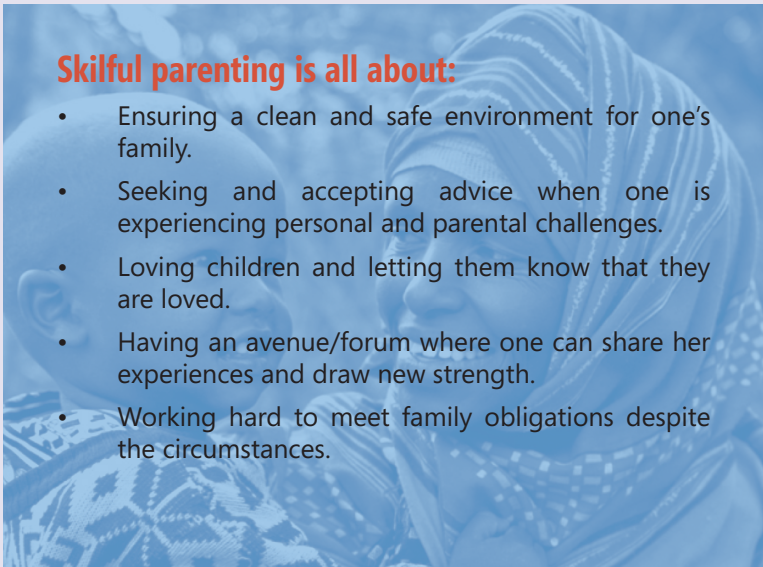
For me, what matters is that I love my children very much and they know it. There are times when I offer them a



*mandazi*³ or *chapati*⁴ to share. Then one of them tells me that I need it more than they need it because I have not eaten anything. I insist that they take it.

At one time I got to a point where I did not know what else to do. Then, I contemplated the 'stool' business. This is prostitution whereby a woman sits on a stool outside her door anticipating potential 'customers' to approach her. In the intervening time however, an NGO that has been advising women against the vice came in on time and discouraged me.

Currently, there is hope that things may change with time. The government has started a programme called *Kazi kwa Vijana*⁵ (Jobs for the Youth) which has helped me at least. I hope that with time it will be more regular. The last programme that engaged me paid US\$ 3.30 a day. I just hope that all will be well. If I can feed, clothe, educate and provide shelter for my children then that is just sufficient for me.



Skilful parenting is all about:

- Ensuring a clean and safe environment for one's family.
- Seeking and accepting advice when one is experiencing personal and parental challenges.
- Loving children and letting them know that they are loved.
- Having an avenue/forum where one can share her experiences and draw new strength.
- Working hard to meet family obligations despite the circumstances.

3 A type of Swahili pastry made from dough which is deep fried.

4 Flat round unleavened Indian bread.

5 An initiative by the government of Kenya to create jobs for the unemployed youth.

Parenting Perspectives: Professional child rights advocate

Makda Tafesse



My name is Makda Tafesse. I live in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. I became a parent about eight years ago with the birth of my first child. It was the most amazing experience for me and I think that was when I became a different person. This may sound like the usual cliché, but to those who are already parents, it is true. There is something about having a child under your responsibility that changes you completely. This, in my opinion, is of similar magnitude whether the child being taken care of is one's own biological child or otherwise. It also applies to those baby-sitting or helping to take care of children. But for me, after I had my son, the first thing was the change in my focus in life.

I have worked in an organization that was a consortium of different NGOs, with different development sectors and programme areas. As a developing country, Ethiopia has a wide range of needs that people are dealing with and I am part of that community that is trying to contribute to this ongoing process. My job was demanding but it did not focus on a specific area. Having my child had this profound impact that made me become aware of children around me. I was now more concerned about children and could not be indifferent to their suffering and exposure to danger as I was before. The sight of children in the streets disturbed me so much that I would sometimes cry. I decided to engage more in making a difference in their lives. This focus gave me the urge to get involved in children's issues and as a result changed my job to a child-focused one.

After my son, I had two daughters and now I am a mother of three beautiful children. My dream is to become the best mother. First and foremost, I am a mother then a career woman. I try to balance my career with my responsibilities as a mother every day and this is harder for a working mother. Though fulfilling all my children's needs as a working mother is very demanding, I have realized that priority should always be given to the children's wellbeing no matter how hard and difficult it is. I have learnt that in trying to balance the two, one should keep in mind that the interests and needs of the

children, and nothing else, should come first. The role of the woman in the family covers everything and everyone. That it why her absence from the house, even temporarily, is felt more than the absence of other members of the family. As a working mother, my biggest challenge is how to fill the void that is created whenever I am not around. As a mother, I deeply feel and know that there is nothing that can completely fill this void. I notice it whenever I return from work when each of my children fights so much for my attention. My job therefore is to give each child the attention they want and this sometimes turns out to be too demanding.

What worries me is the effect of this challenge in the lives of working mothers. Would they resort to something else that they think would fill it? That is what I try to avoid in my role as a mother.

The choice of being a working mother depends on whether one wants to be in a better situation economically or not. This entails being independent, capable and empowered enough to provide for one's own children as well as making changes in her own life. However, one can choose to stay at home to raise her own children and I really respect women who have decided to do that. Considering that everything the child needs will be met, it is the best choice a mother can make for her child to be raised in a constant environment that the mother is available and providing.

The decision to be a working mother was largely influenced by the way I was raised. In our family, we were two girls and one boy. Both my parents used to work and during that time a cook and a nanny took care of our needs. My mother ensured that we got the best education and we were raised the 'proper' way. Looking back now, I feel her presence in our lives more than I feel our father's. She made sure that we did our school work, taught us how to take care of ourselves, gave us the advice we needed and meted more discipline than our father did. But of all the guidance my sister and I received, I keep on thinking about what made us focus on being good girls and later good women and being aware of the things around us. My mother

constantly insisted on the importance of attaining education and standing on one's own feet. This, she said would give us the needed confidence to take care of our families. "A woman should have children that she can raise by herself if something happens in the family". "A woman should be independent and be able to stand on her own feet economically so that if faced with divorce issues, or any kind of abuse or situations forcing her to raise her own children, then she will have the needed confidence and capability to take action." "A woman should have the right educational background to work under any circumstance..." This was the advice to my sister and I when we were growing up. My brother too was advised that as the only brother, he should be able to take care of us and must therefore acquire the needed education level in order to become stable financially.

My parents were educated and worked for the government. They managed to send us to good schools and met our basic needs. The way they raised us was different from the way they themselves were raised. Both my parents were born in rural Ethiopia and raised under the typical culture-based child rearing methods of the time. Until they attained adulthood, they were not considered as important members of their families with a voice of their own and with needs that had to be met. My mother used to tell me that it was forbidden to talk in front of older people and that it was disrespectful and rude to respond to them especially when they were angry or addressing one. The disciplining methods that were practised then ranged from beatings to forcing a child to inhale smoke from burning pepper!

My mother never talked much about the whole disciplining process, but it is obvious that she had experienced some of the worst forms of disciplining methods from her parents. But this kind of punishment did not influence my parents to a point of deciding to inflict the same punishment to us. My mother knows what is good and what is bad disciplining, though with the belief that beating is still a preferred method of meting discipline to a child. During our childhood days, we were beaten whenever we did something wrong though I don't remember how many times this was done to me. However, I remember

my brother being beaten several times and I keep on wishing that my parents handled him differently. My brother was the only boy in our family and he did every thing to get attention. My sister and I were very close (only 11 months apart) and we spent almost every single minute together leaving him by himself. This is what made him want to draw attention with every action he made, and this resulted to beatings. The more he was beaten, in order to listen, the more he became worse.

My parents were very strict and we were not allowed to do many of the things that I see young children do today. Our upbringing focused more on education and how to be successful in school. So, we focused more on our studies than other activities. Although I cannot say we were well prepared for the responsibilities and milestones of growing up especially as girls, my parents had their own ways of protecting us from possible dangers and challenges that we could be faced with. One of the things that I realised later on as a protection measure was the fact that we had no guard living in our compound as was common in other homes in our neighbourhood. My mother refused to have male outsiders living in the compound "while bringing up girls who were vulnerable". Now, as a mother of three children, I sometimes wonder if I am doing the right thing allowing a guard to live in my compound despite the insecurity.

The information that we received on sexuality as teenagers growing up was mostly from books and friends who knew about the subject. My mother taught us about the menstruation cycles and what to do when we had our menses. Culturally, it was a taboo to talk about sexuality or any related topic with



children. Doing that would have been a session of confusion and uncertainty. I remember that I did not know how long menses were supposed to last and, for two consecutive months, I had them for two weeks minimum. Since no one had told me how long I was supposed to have them, I never thought that was abnormal. It was during a conversation with my mother one day that I mentioned to her that I was still in my period. She wondered why I still had it and for how long it had been. She was shocked when I told her and said that it was not normal for it to go on for weeks. She immediately took me to the hospital for a medical check up.

One of the prized traditions in the Ethiopian culture is the coffee ceremony. Ethiopia, being the origin of coffee beans, we Ethiopians pride ourselves of having the best coffee with its own unique brewing ceremony. Coffee drinking is an important socializing event where close friends and family members gather together to have three cups of coffee each. The ceremony takes time with the whole process of grinding to brewing being done in front of the guests. This gives everyone present the chance to discuss any issues that affect them as well as network among themselves. Like in other homes, this ceremony used to take place at our home. During this time, as any other time whenever we had guests around, children were not supposed to sit with the older people and were sent to their rooms or outside the house to play.

But there were times when we would be caught doing the wrong things and we would be punished by serving the guests. Hence I would be told to take the coffee pot and '*teb argesh taji*' (drop some and put it on the stove). This meant putting some water in the pot then getting it to boil and serving those gathered with their second or third round cups of coffee. My friends always laugh at me whenever I tell them this story but I like telling it because it is one of the events that I learnt from as a child. At first, whenever I was told to do that, I would take the order literally and pour a drop or two of water in the pot and place it on the stove to boil. I always thought that this was a kind of ritual that was supposed to be observed. So, after boiling, the pot would be empty or with just a drop inside and my mother

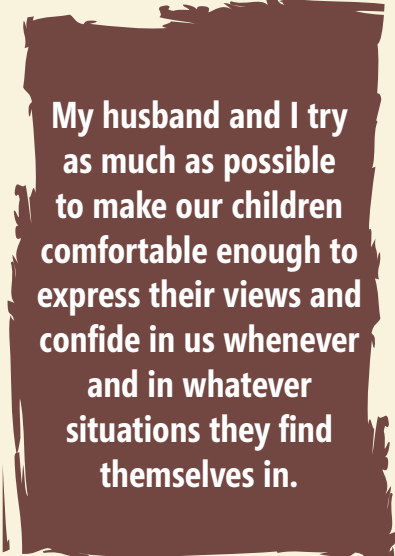
would say 'This girl's coffee is always weird!' This is because nobody explained to me what I was supposed to do and how coffee was made for that matter. They assumed I knew because every adult in the country knew what that phrase meant. It was many years later that I learnt how coffee is brewed.

There is an incident in my life that taught me one of the biggest lessons about parenting. It was an exhibition that was held somewhere in London in which children's perspectives were displayed and older people were made to actually experience the physical as well as the mental abilities of a child at different stages of development. Children are children and one must not expect them to know or understand things just because one knows them herself. What irritates me most is to see someone treating children as if they are adults who are expected to know everything. Some people even expect children to understand things beyond their developmental capability just because they informed them once or twice. This incident was one of the most brilliant events that happened to me concerning children.

When we were growing up, it was culturally unacceptable for children to talk while older people were talking or even to be present where they were gathered. My siblings and I would not be in the same room with our parents whenever there were visitors present. We were ordered to stay in our rooms or go out to play. Getting into conversation with them and trying to give comments was unacceptable upon. "Children have no business in adult talk, what do they know?" was the attitude and belief. So most of the children of that era were not allowed to have an opinion or speak up in defending themselves. A child was considered to be disciplined if he or she sat still and did not make too much noise or run about. The effect of such conditions was manifested in adulthood when children lacked confidence in giving their opinions regarding issues that affected their lives. It was more difficult getting children to ask questions freely in classrooms. This was the environment in which my siblings and I were raised. Looking back at the way things were done during those days, one would come across extreme cases where children were not even allowed to eat with parents and older people and were therefore served meals separately.

My sister and I usually got around this rule which was mostly applied whenever we visited relatives by ignoring our mother and avoiding her angry face that signaled us to stop whatever we were doing. This however, would only last until we left that particular house. We would then be scolded and sometimes be beaten slightly for not obeying and having the audacity to ignore her remarks and angry face. With

time, we somehow managed to overcome the effects of not speaking in front of people and giving our opinions through exposure we got in school and our professional lives.



My husband and I try as much as possible to make our children comfortable enough to express their views and confide in us whenever and in whatever situations they find themselves in.

My husband and I try as much as possible to make our children comfortable enough to express their views and to confide in us whenever and in whatever situations they find themselves in. We encourage them to ask questions about what they do not understand, and to be open and free to talk about issues that they think might generate heated argument with us. We make them speak their views.

My role as a working mother has been immensely supported by my committed husband who believes that our children have to get the best possible. My husband was raised in a military home. His father was a Major General in the Ethiopian army. He always tells us of how his five siblings and himself were raised up by their mother most of the time because their father was away in the fields serving his country. He felt this gap very much and the impact it had in his childhood days and promised himself never to be an 'absent father'. With this conviction, he is very

much 'present' in our children's lives. This has helped me a lot in managing my life both as a mother and a career woman. We share or take over responsibilities whenever one of us has to work longer hours, travel or needs some time to read. This sharing of responsibilities keeps things alive in the house. We work and balance our involvement in the children's activities, and that has helped us overcome being absent in their lives.

What is challenging is allowing someone else to partially take care of one's children while she is away. The challenge is how to make their norms and standards match one's own. I worry a lot about my children's safety. Ensuring that there is no abuse going on, making them learn my values and standards while spending most of their time with another person with a different background, beliefs and norms needs additional effort. I always try to orient my care givers on the basics of child rearing before giving them the responsibility. One of the things I always ensure is that we have the same understanding concerning how best to discipline a child. In my country, it is acceptable to discipline or pinch children for wrong doing, but unless you orient nannies on the methods of disciplining children, they may think it is natural to beat or pinch or even rough up children for misbehaving.

Being a working mother, however, I have missed some of the important phases of development in my children's lives. This is because sometimes I want to have vivid memories of some of the things they have done in their lives that I would have enjoyed by being present instead of hearing about them. Most of all, I don't want to miss the attachment and closeness that is created by being together most of the time. I



don't want my children not to be my friends and vice versa due to too much lapse of time between us.

Careerwise, I have developed the needed confidence and experience to acquire higher levels. By the grace of God, and together with my husband, we are able to provide for our children's needs. Most of all, the mutual respect and understanding between us has created the right environment for our children to grow in. I believe that working mothers are doing double responsibility that makes them stronger because they are managers of dual lives. What would be best in terms of supporting working mothers is providing information on how best to raise children, especially teenagers. I did not know anything about raising children when I had my first child. But then, I educated myself by reading books and talking to my mother. However, thinking of the illiterate mothers in my country who know nothing else but what culture and tradition dictate, pains me. For example, those who allow their girls to be circumcised do so thinking that it is the best for their children. That is what we, as development workers, need to focus on to protect children. Every mother wants the best for her child. But knowing what is the best is what determines the child's life. Empowering the mother economically as well as with the right knowledge will definitely make a change in a child's life.

Skilful parenting is all about:

- Making choices for the benefit of the family and creating a balance between family and career.
- Recognizing that children are children and we should not expect them to behave otherwise but rather learn the different behaviours and milestones to expect at each stage.
- Creating a conducive environment at home where there is respect and open communication between spouses as well as between parents and their children.
- Parents being proactive enough to learn how to raise their children.
- Inducting and empowering one's children's caregiver (nanny) with basic knowledge on child rearing.

Parenting Perspectives:

A foster parent

Luka Martin Ndahima



My name is Luka Martin Ndalima. I am thirty years old. I come from Mtwara region of Tanzania though I have lived in many regions before my family finally settled in Moshi. I have worked as a wood carver and I volunteered at Mkombozi¹ as a mentor and now as a foster carer. I also take care of children at Salama Centre in Moshi. I am married with two children. Major achievements in my life are independence, self reliance and being able to manage my life. I am a good and responsible parent and I support in raising vulnerable children and seeing to their welfare. Currently, I am the director of Salama Centre in Moshi.

Originally, I come from Mtwara but my family moved from one region to another for several years. We lived in six regions in Tanzania and in each of these places life was different. For example, life at the coast was different compared to other places. We then lived in Zanzibar, but not for long and found life there very different as we are Christians and Zanzibar is predominantly Islamic. From there, we moved to Tanga. Though Tanga resembles Zanzibar, culturally it is a bit different. People there live differently because there are no clubs and bars that operate late in the night. From Tanga, we came to Arusha. Again, Arusha is so different and people there are business-minded and a bit selfish. It was a challenge to get along with this type of busy lifestyle. Then, finally, we came to Moshi in the Kilimanjaro region. All this moving was necessitated by the nature of jobs my parents had. They were required to shift from one place to another in form of transfers. Because of this movement, a person tends to lose focus in their lives. But now it looks like Moshi is our home since we are settled here and live in our own house.

Despite the fact that parenting is difficult, my parents took good care of us. They wanted us to be like them and brought us up with good moral values. We also changed several schools. So, it took a lot of patience for us to cope whenever we joined a new school and sometimes it was not easy to cope. However, this contributed positively to our discipline. The standard of education also differed in the different regions in Tanzania but our parents supported us and managed to pay our fees to enable us continue with school. In Kilimanjaro, for example,

¹ **Mkombozi Center** is a child development NGO that supports, rehabilitates and re-integrates back to the community children living on the streets.

education is a priority and we had to work very hard. My parents tried to do their best so that we become good citizens.

When we settled in Moshi I was involved with Mkombozi as a mentor. But something kept urging me to foster a child. When the opportunity came and Mkombozi advertised for foster carers I took up the challenge and started caring for a thirteen year old boy.

In the beginning, it was not easy to live with the child. Both my family and the community were suspicious of him as he was a street child. This worried me for sometime. But then he was a good boy and it did not take long for my family and the community to realize that. The boy adjusted very fast and now my family accepts and treats him well and my children are happy to have someone they call a big brother in the house.

However, to bring up a foster child is very different from bringing up one's own child. This is because one always imagines that he could be doing something wrong to the child. A foster parent is always afraid because if he does something wrong the child might feel his rights are being violated. A foster parent must therefore ensure that the child under his/her care is comfortable and feels accepted. The child must also get the same treatment like the other children in the house. But the boy made my work easier by accepting his new environment fast enough. He feels accepted and appreciated and loves us very much. My wife treats him as her own child and my children take him as their elder brother.

When I took in the child from Mkombozi, I received a lot of training. As a mentor, I was particularly taught about child protection and how to read the emotions of the children under my care. I was also trained on how to treat such children as they are. Other foster parents and I also attended seminars on child development and the various stages of growth that a child undergoes. These seminars were beneficial to me as a foster carer.

My advice to other parents who want to foster children is that they should go ahead and take in a child if they are in a position

to do so. There are many children who need support. In many communities today, there are many broken families that have produced destitute children living in the streets. The community does not realize its social responsibility in caring for such children. Because of this perceived social responsibility that the community is expected to have, people are also reluctant to take up individual responsibility of caring for these children. But here in Tanzania, we are lucky because our culture allows the community to care for such children and if every individual takes up the responsibility, then caring for these children will not be difficult.

Caretakers and parents have a lot of expectations from their children and usually prepare them to live good lives morally. Both parents and caretakers need a lot of skills to care for and to instill morals in children. Poverty should not be an excuse for moral decay in the society. Although poverty is the root cause in many cases, it is not the only reason why children have bad morals. It all depends on how a person wants to take care of his or her child. Children require some basic necessities such as food, shelter, a place to play and be creative in order to grow well. In Tanzania or elsewhere in Africa, parents deny their children the opportunity to show their abilities. Parents need to change and give children a chance to bring out their talents because children have talents and capacities. If parents take the lead to tap into their children's talents, they will help them to grow to be great men and women.

It is important for children to get what they need. These are love, affection, recreation time and to be listened to. Parents will not know what their children are capable of if the children are denied the opportunity to express themselves. Children must also exercise their rights to education and good health. On the other hand, parents must build a good foundation for them by creating an enabling environment that can help the children grow to be great citizens of the nation.

Children must also follow instructions and obey their parents, elders and teachers. Parents, on the other hand, should teach children to follow what elders say and there should be good communication with children. When you look at children's games and the roles they play, they act as pastors, drunkards and so on. They take up roles played or practiced by grown ups in real life. This is because they have seen these characters somewhere. Parents therefore

need to be close to them and explain the impact of certain behaviours in their lives. Parents should be good examples and role models to children by living respectable lives. If one lies to a child, that child will also learn how to lie. If one is a fighter, the children he lives with will also learn how to fight. From my parents I learnt the importance of good communication within a family.

My goals for the children are to provide all their basic needs. Right now, the most important thing is to give them good education. We are also saving some money for their higher education and development. The problem with parents is that they do not set goals for their children yet they expect them to manage and succeed. I want my children to grow in a good and enabling environment. This way they will not let me down.

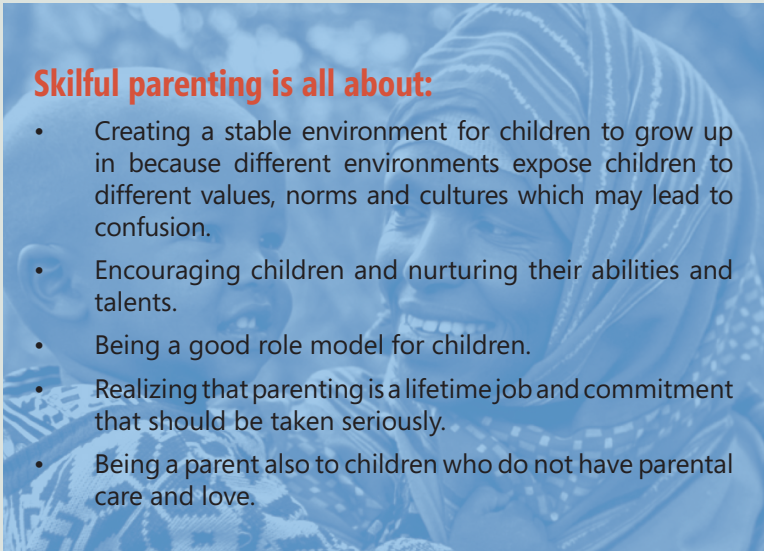
My parents moved from one place to another and us from one school to the next. This makes us different from our children who are now settled in Moshi and have a good learning environment as I bring them up differently. During our days, there was no technology. Today, my children have electricity, television and use the computer and other modern electrical gadgets.

If one is a father, the children think he is the leader of the family. It is my responsibility therefore to be their leader but also to be an example to them. I want to stay close to them and make sure that they are getting the right education. When they come back from school, they should spend some time with me. My wife and I also spend some time in the evening helping them with their homework. When they get sick, I make sure they get treatment and are in a good environment.



It is important for parents to realize that their parental responsibility is to bring up their children in a good way. Therefore, I think that parents should take this responsibility seriously. Many times they forget they are parents and let their children be brought up by teachers in school. They need to take up that responsibility and bring up children themselves. They should not abandon them. For example, if one is the boss of a company and he leaves his responsibilities to those under him then his leadership will be of no use.

In conclusion, children without their biological parents but are cared for by foster parents should be grateful. I am taking care of one. He is very helpful to me as well as being an elder brother to my children. I am happy that Mkombozi gave me this opportunity for the last four years to allow me take care of this child. A parent should never be content with taking care of only his/her own biological children but should endeavour to take care of others especially if he has the means to do so. This will help to reflect on how best to bring up children. My foster child has seriously assumed the responsibility of being my children's big brother and that is very important.



Skilful parenting is all about:

- Creating a stable environment for children to grow up in because different environments expose children to different values, norms and cultures which may lead to confusion.
- Encouraging children and nurturing their abilities and talents.
- Being a good role model for children.
- Realizing that parenting is a lifetime job and commitment that should be taken seriously.
- Being a parent also to children who do not have parental care and love.

APPENDIX

African Voices on Skilful Parenting:

Some Highlights

The following synopsis summarizes the major points that emerge from the experience, albeit limited and selected, of African parents covered in this volume.

What parents must do:

- Recognize the importance and power of love and to let their children know that they love them.
- Ensure that meeting children's basic needs, for example, for food, health care, and education, are given priority in decisions within the family.
- Realize that each child is unique and hence should be treated as an individual and be given equal opportunities.
- Treat all children equally regardless of age, sex or impairment. Boys and girls, and children with and without disabilities should be treated equally.
- Recognize that children are children and hence should be expected to behave in line with their age and developmental stage.
- Teach children norms and values, including discipline, that will prepare them for life ahead,.
- Ensure that children have a sense of responsibility right from an early age.
- Ensure that there is respect and open communication between spouses as well as between parents and their children.
- Get fathers more involved in parenting.
- Be better informed and better prepared for child rearing responsibilities by acquiring knowledge and skills for good parenting.

What society must do in support of the family:

- Create a safe, healthy and violence-free environment for children to enjoy their childhood freely.
- Recognize that it takes a village to raise a child and share the responsibility of making children responsible members of the society.
- Create opportunities for sharing good-parenting practices among community members and enhance parents' knowledge and skill in child rearing.
- Recognize and promote skilful parenting as an effective way to create productive and responsible citizens.

From the coordinators:

As the African voices in this volume confirm, skilful parenting is influenced by individual circumstances and the social, cultural and economic contexts within which parents and families are located. Even so, skilful parenting should first and foremost be based on and guided by the principle of the best interest of the child. It is equally important that parents strive to protect this principle without violating any of the rights of the child. Children must be recognized as holders of human rights; they deserve to be treated with dignity all the time, in every situation and by everybody.

Shaping the Future: Through the voices of African parents brings together real life experiences of parents and guardians from all walks of life, reflecting the many different ways of, and perspectives on child rearing in Africa. Famous and unknown fathers and mothers (both biological parents and caretakers), ranging from opinion leaders, child rights advocates, professionals, and farmers, in rural, urban and informal settlements, share their parenting realities, successes and challenges. Whatever their background, they all share a common quest to raise their children to be responsible citizens in different contexts and amidst competing priorities in life.

This book offers valuable insights and lessons for practitioners who are charged with the responsibility of developing and implementing parent education and support programmes in addition to providing advice and encouragement for parents and guardians as they bring up their children in Africa today.

