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**Conducting Research with Children:
Capturing the Voices of Orphaned Children Heading Households
in Tanzania**

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ABSTRACT

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the ‘CRC’) provides a child with the right to express his or her opinion on matters concerning his or her welfare. As a result a methodological shift in research with children is occurring and children are now regarded as capable of reporting their own experiences. Taking this on board, researchers are trying to establish appropriate methods to provide opportunities for children to express themselves. This article discusses experiences in research with Orphaned Children Heading Households (OCHH) in Tanzania and points out the challenges in getting the children who are vulnerable to express themselves given the practical and ethical issues involved. The main argument of the article is that there is a need to take the provision of the CRC, on the rights of the child to self expression, further in the development of methods which can capture the voice of a child. Lastly, the article considers the lessons learned in using a blend of methods in capturing children’s voices and specifically vulnerable children and makes proposals for repositioning methodology in researching such children.

KEYWORDS

Orphan Child Headed Households, Children, CRC, Expression, Voice, Research Methods

1. INTRODUCTION

This article outlines some practical and ethical challenges in researching with children and especially when a researcher seeks to get the children's consent and views. The experience in a study with Orphaned Children Heading Households (OCHH)² in Tanzania is used to portray the issues under discussion. OCHH is a phenomenon that is growing in Sub-Saharan Africa attributable to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which has affected the demographic patterns by increasing the number of orphans (Otieno, *et al.*, 2003: 301). This group of children, the OCHH, is increasing and needs to be studied to uncover their realities and situation. Given the tendency in children studies which give preference to adults' assumptions about how children feel and what they need (Ennew, 2003), the study aimed at securing children's voices. This has ignited practical and ethical dilemmas which this article aims to portray. It is asserted that it is not enough to have the idea and provisions to solicit children's voices. This needs to be accompanied by a strategy which charts out a process in research in terms of methods of securing the child's consent and views. The article is informed by the developments in the area of research with children and the specific articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which call for the child's rights to expression.

Researching with children is now informed by the framework provided by the CRC (Ennew, 2000:179). Researchers are obliged under Articles 12 and 13 to solicit the views of children and to let children express themselves in a manner fit for them. The CRC does not expressly mention research. However, the clarification on the right of the child to express her views as provided by General Comment Number 12 of the Committee on the CRC (2009) impliedly includes research when elaborating the requirements in all processes in which a child or children are heard or participate (Part D, Section 134). Specifically section 134 (i) of the General Comment mentions 'research' as an example of processes in which a child can exercise the right to express her/his views. This highlights the place of researchers in the implementation of articles 12 and 13 which will be discussed later in the article.

Generally there has been a development in the area of research with children which calls for the voices of children to be taken into account as a necessary condition, if the children (and therefore the OCHH) are to move from the vulnerable and marginal position they occupy in their society (Hill *et al.*, 2004:84). At the same time, it has been noted that children are sometimes not ready to, or are unable to, participate in conventional research procedures (Aldridge, 2008:261). This then leads to the need to search for more pertinent methods which children can participate effectively, expressing themselves in a way that their voices can be heard. The research being represented here used more than one method to engage the OCHH in the research as a way of leading the children to self expression regarding their situation and how they perceive the multiple levels of structures developed to support and protect them. While the use of multiple methods was useful in hearing the children's voices and minimizing stress and harm on their part, it was also ethically and practically challenging to both the researcher and the OCHH.

This article intends to share the positive use of multiple methods in the methodology for conducting research with children, as well as teasing out the practical dilemmas in the implementation of the right of a child to self-expression in research. Following this introduction, the article is divided into three subsequent parts. Part Two provides the background to the study by describing the context in which it was undertaken. In this part, Tanzania and the two districts where the field study was undertaken will be described and how the children in the study are situated. Part Three provides, in brief, the theoretical framework of the methodology used, while part Four part covers the experience of

researching with children and specifically the OCHH. In this part, the discussion is on the design and how it was negotiated and carried out in practice. In conclusion, the article considers the lessons learned in using a blend of methods in capturing children's opinions and specifically vulnerable children and makes proposals for repositioning methodology in researching such children.

2. THE CONTEXT

Tanzania is one of the Sub-Saharan countries that have been affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This pandemic has not only posed a threat to the economic and social development of the country but it has also worsened the vulnerability of children due to the increase in number of orphaned children. About 2.5 million children have been orphaned by AIDS (De Waal *et al.*, 2004:2) thus leading to a major burden in caring for these children. One of the manifestations of this situation is orphaned children between the age of nine and eighteen years taking care of their households and their siblings. This trend has been further complicated by the profound shift in the socio-economic patterns of the country brought about by the liberalisation and privatisation of the economy throughout the 1980s to date (Rusimbi and Mbilinyi, 2005:287). The majority of Tanzanians, especially in the low and middle-income groups, found themselves out of the labour market and so unable to access quality social services. These realities have led to the inability of extended families to care for orphaned children. This is the setting in which the orphaned children heading households in Tanzania find themselves. The OCHH are found in the communities within the villages and some of them participated in the research under discussion. It has been noted by the CRC Committee that in most societies around the world the issue of children's rights to self expression is still under-implemented (CRC, General Comment Number 12:2009, I:4)). This situation is not different in Tanzanian societies and especially in the villages where the research was undertaken. Children's views are not necessarily considered, and where they are, they might not be used effectively. This was evident during the research with the OCHH as explained under section four. This then leads us to the discussion of the nature of the right to self expression.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The CRC positions a child as an active subject of rights entitled to full respect and dignity (Hammad, 2004:3). Further, the CRC has set some standards regarding the rights of children to express themselves. This standard can be said to be a guide to researchers since Article 12³ and 13⁴ make it mandatory to get children's views relative to their lives (Ennew, 2000:178). The CRC's concern is for the child to be able to assert her or his viewpoint without interference on all matters relevant to her or him. It provides for the child's freedom of expression to include the way a child can seek, receive and impart information and ideas. The trend in researching or gaining information about children has been for adults to think and express thoughts on behalf of children. In some cases, children are invited into adults' meetings or spaces and the children's presence is taken to be the children's participation or expression. In some other scenarios, an adult will enter a child's space and assume to understand the children's expression without letting the children express themselves. The developments in the CRC have increased the demand for children's voices to be heard especially in countries where the Convention has been ratified (Morrow and Richards, 1996:91). The right to children's self expression as provided by the CRC is vital in changing the trend in which rights continue to be ethically grounded in the experiences and perspectives of adults (Wall, 2008:523). What this article suggests is the need to change the way information is solicited from children by adults; in this case adult researchers. Ethically, children have been viewed differently at different times in history. There is a great tendency

of regarding children as vulnerable and thus in need of provision and protection (in this case from exploitative researchers) (Morrow and Richards 1996:96) which affect the way children can take part in research or other activities which affect them. Today, the international human rights agreements, and specifically the CRC, provide the opportunity through its language for another way of conceptualizing children. A new possibility is through the 'participation' rights for the children which provide for the child's voice to be heard through self expression. Under this avenue 'a child holds rights which has an influence on her or his life and not derived from her or his vulnerability (CRC General Comment Number 12, Section 18). When a child is given such an opportunity the children's point of view on matters related to their lives can be captured and at the same time the children may enjoy the right to self expression.

This is therefore the reason for undertaking children's research from the point of view of children as human beings. Children have something to offer irrespective of their age. Adults, and in this context, researchers have to observe and listen to children and take their views seriously. Ethical discussions have been useful in deciding the methodology used for the study with OCHH in Tanzania taking into consideration the developments in the area of children as human beings. The OCHH have not in this case been conceptualised as weak, passive and open to abuse (Morrow and Richards, 1996:97) but as individuals who understand the situation they are in and are the experts on how they perceive such a situation. Methodological debates in this regard give the children space by building on their knowledge (Hinton, 2008:296) while changing the adult-centred understanding of the issues (Wall, 2008:541).

It has been claimed that research based on children's accounts of their everyday lives and experiences are few and sociologists and anthropologists acknowledge the fact that (sociological) research with children is underdeveloped while there has been little discussion of ethical dilemmas raised in researching with children (Morrow and Richards, 1996:91). This has then raised the need to look at children from the perspective of children (Armstrong, 1995:3) which challenges studies of children's rights that rely only on the views of adults (Armstrong, 1995:33). I have therefore taken this view in relation to the wider argument that the child should be central and the child's social relationship and culture be acknowledged as deserving of study in their own right (James and Prout, 1997:4). The idea is to take serious consideration when researching with children by having research strategies based on their views and to have children in mind when the strategies are being designed. This can prove difficult especially with adult researchers who think as adults, and therefore particular care must be taken to plan from the child's point of view in allowing the child to remain a child and the adult researcher to remain an adult while in the child's space throughout the research process.

4. THE RESEARCH PROCESS: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

A grounded theory approach to research was adopted as it was found to be suitable in the ethnographic investigation of the OCHH's perception of their situation and how they make sense of what is happening on them and their environment (Mitchel & McCusker, 2008). The research involved children and adults but this article focuses on the experience with the children. In total, 63 children participated in the research, 30 female and 33 male, 28 were from Makete district and 33 from Karagwe district.⁵ Both districts are rural based. This was specifically planned so as to get the voices of the children from rural settings because many studies are usually conducted in urban areas. Out of the group, 8 were OCHH. There were other categories of children whose involvement helped to understand further what it means to be an orphan and the whole concept of Child Headed Households. These included 6 children

living in OCHH, 4 former OCHH, 41 orphaned children who have guardians and 3 children with parents but heading households and one child who was not orphaned. Central to the study are the OCHH but the other categories bring in very rich analysis regarding the situation of the OCHH.

Researching with children involves dealing with the ethical issues of power relations between the adult researcher and children in ways which give children greater control over the information they provide as well as minimize stress (Evans and Becker, 2009:75; Robson, 2001:138).⁶ A variety of methods have been used by researchers in child centred research in other countries as well as with Tanzanian children: Greene and Hogan (2005); Mhoja, (2006, drawing), Evans & Becker, (2009, diary), Aldridge, 2008, Evans & Becker (2009, participation photography), Francis-Chizororo, (2008, focus group discussion), Veale (2005: Role Play and Drawing). These specific approaches provided excellent precedents for an integrated approach with the aim of obtaining rich self-expression from the children.⁷ The methods used included semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and a blend of other methods which were found necessary for prompting the children to participate by expressing themselves, such as photography, drawing pictures, preparing a diary, focus group discussion, drama, role play and songs. In each case, due account was taken of the different ages of children. I also observed the children by participating when performing some chores and activities with the OCHH. Some observation techniques included staying for a day in the household and performing duties which included weeding, fetching firewood, picking fruit, going to the market and cooking.

4.1 CONSENT: BASIS AND MANOEUVRE

Consent and confidentiality are vital but quite complex when researching children and even more so when dealing with children with no adult guardianship. There are some developments in the debate concerning children's consent that has been clarified by article 12 of the CRC, which implies obligation on the part of a researcher to seek the views of children related to their lives and not adult's views only (Ennew, 2000: 178). The Committee of the CRC in its General Comment Number 12, paragraph 12, has also emphasised 'the right of a child to express her or his view without pressure, manipulation or subjection to undue influence'. The Committee points to the fact that the child has a choice to express her views, and that she or he is not obliged to (CRC/GC 12: Section 16). The landmark case of *Gillick v West Norfolk and Wisbech Area Health Authority*⁸ is yet another development in the area of children's consent as it provides for the 'competence' of a child when she or he has achieved sufficient understanding and intelligence to enable him or her to understand fully what is proposed and with enough discretion to enable him/her to make 'a wise choice in his/her own interest'. Within such circumstances older children may consent to participate in research without parental permission (Morrow and Richards, 1996:94). Both the CRC and the *Gillick* case were considered when approaching the children in the study for their consent.

The children in this study are orphans between the ages of 9 and 18 years. The orphaned children who head households do not have direct adult guardians, so the question of getting an adult to consent was tricky. I had to devise two levels of consent beginning with an adult and then getting consent from the child. Following research practice, ethical consent included a range of adult gate keepers (Morrow and Richards, 1996:94) such as the village leadership, teachers and those adults who associated with the children. The use of the adults who were not the direct legal guardians was taken as an alternative to guardians or parents as there was no other way to show protection to the child. In Makete, for example, some children were in the care of assigned 'mothers' known as *Mama Mkubwa (MM)*. *MM* is an initiative for care

and support of orphaned children and other needy children in Makete District introduced in 1999 (Mwaipopo,2005).The initiative came as a way to respond to the psychosocial needs of orphaned children who were increasing in great numbers with no adult support. I began with the *MM* as she is an adult who at least is close to the child. The *MM* were not in all cases the first people to be asked for consent to research on OCHH since there was not always an assigned *MM* for each child. In Karagwe where there is no such arrangement of *MM*, the village authorities at the hamlet level, some members of the Most Vulnerable Committee (MVCC), church leaders or NGO leaders were in a position to provide advice and in most cases took the role, although again not all children were associated with such people. For children I met in schools, the teachers gave the initial consent after they were informed about the research and its objectives. This did not work all the time, especially where the OCHH is not known to the authorities or the authorities do not know of the child. Most adults consulted did not see the reason for the consent process. They had the idea that a child has to follow what an adult tells him or her. Notwithstanding this view, the children's own consent was sought.

When seeking child consent, I ensured that each child participant understood the purpose of the research and the need to consent. This I repeated several times by asking questions to assess understanding and why they wanted to participate. After I was assured that they understood the purpose of the research, I went on with the official process of getting their consent. I had prepared an introductory letter which explained the objective of the research, the need to be a participant and the rights of a participant to decide to continue or not after the start of the research. The children who could read were given the introductory letter before our first meeting. Those who agreed met me later and we discussed the letter. Following the discussion, I asked if they would sign a consent form. Most of them signed a separate consent form to participate and also to have their voices recorded. This process was useful as it helped to identify children who were unable to read or write. For those who did not know how to read or were not able to understand the introductory letter properly, I read it out for them and then asked some questions to see if they understood it. I then sought their verbal consent which I recorded.

All children who participated in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) had given consent before participating. However, before the FGD began, I made sure each child was ready to proceed. For 'fun' I asked the children to propose a way in which I would be sure that everyone was ready to proceed. The children were innovative and one group decided that they would stand up and hold hands and they would say three times that they were ready to proceed with the research. If there was one person who was not sure then he or she would not hold hands. And if there is one who felt he or she was not ready to proceed he or she would step aside or run out. So this of course might not have meant that all the children had consented in this way as peer pressure could have played a role. I relied mainly on the individual process and the fact that they volunteered to come to the venue on that day. I took the 'group consent' to be another way in which children made a choice of how to consent.

Cultural factors also play a part. In the Tanzanian context, I had to be very cautious because it could be taken as impolite for a child to refuse to take part after being approached by an adult, such as a village elder, *MM* or myself. I tried to explain to the children that if they had any reason not to participate they should feel free to opt out and it will not be taken to be rude. The major issue in this area was to be convinced that the children understood the objectives of the research and the implications of participating. The consent process is the first stage for a child's self expression prior to having the child participate in the research.

4.2 ESTABLISHING RAPPORT AND ENABLING CHILDREN TO TELL THEIR STORIES

The CRC has provided for the expression of a child in their own voice which means there has to be ways in which such voice is being listened to. Since the voice and expression of a child is very important when looking for ways to change situations affecting children, it is vital for researchers to find ways and means for children to express themselves. The research developed several ways to reach the children and get their voices, feelings and perspectives while guarding ethical related issues. The main method employed was semi-structured interviews. Corbin and Strauss (2008: 27) have demonstrated that semi-structured interviews provide the 'most dense' data. It was not very easy to get the children to express themselves through the interviews, so various methods before and after the interviews had to be devised. Free expressions from the OCHH were mostly from the activities before or after the interviews. I had to visit all the OCHH more than once before I could interview them. This was necessary in order to minimise interview distress (Robson, 2001:138) given the emotional nature of the topic and the need to build rapport; it became a very successful way of getting the children to express their views freely and to say what they wanted to say. When meeting a child for the first time it was very difficult to begin an interview related to his/her life as OCHH. The difficulty was not on the part of the child only. I noted this difficulty during a pilot with an OCHH in Dar-es-salaam. There are questions which I could not bring myself to ask before I was familiar with the child. Even after being familiar there were questions which were still difficult to ask some of the children.

Pre-interview visits⁹ were used to organise sites where we could have the interviews and plan the appropriate time for such interviews; this is also a good way to establish rapport (Robison, 2001:138). The post-interview visits were used to follow-up previous interviews or to undertake observations while working with the children. The children were given the opportunity to decide time, place and activity to share while in observation. I found out when I visited for the first time, some neighbours would come to see the 'visitor' or some other children would also come inquisitively. The pre-interview visits enabled neighbours or the children not to be so inquisitive on the day set for the interview session, as they had already seen me and had made the courtesy greeting to a visitor. It was the preference of a child which was taken into account when it came to where the interview was to take place within the household. For example, in one household in Karagwe one child participant wanted the interview to take place in the house while the other wanted it outside. Since each was being interviewed separately both wishes were accommodated. The environment for the interview is vital in putting the participant at ease. Allowing the children to choose or decide where to sit and when to have the session helped them to be more confident and open.

Since the participants were children I had to make the interviews short so we had two to three rounds of interviews over a period of time, the duration of each interview being one hour or less. This might seem to be time consuming and may cause disturbance to the child but it was very useful since it raised confidence and enhanced rapport. It also reduced tension as we normally stopped when the child seemed to be emotional or showing signs of unease. Every time the interview was begun a child would be more open and relaxed as he/she had become used to the sessions. Flexibility in session time and length helped to make the children comfortable to undergo the next round of interview.

Most of the interviews were recorded with the exception of a few where the children were too soft-spoken or looked worried when the tape recorder was being used. To make the children more relaxed when using the tape recorder, I made sure they agreed to be taped and we tested the recorder together by listening to a recording of their voice. During the tape recorder

testing, some children looked happy to hear their own voice. The same exercise showed how other children were not that comfortable and looked suspicious, even after they had heard their voices on the tape recorder. When the latter happened, I stopped recording and informed the participant that we would not use the tape recorder and I put the device away. After that some of the children opened up and began to talk. The pre- and post-interview visits did not only set the stage but produced much data from the children relative to how they perceive their situation and how they fit into the governance structures in their situation.

The main challenge in interviewing children was to begin the session. Some children had very short answers which did not provide the full information needed from them. Even where they were asked to just narrate their life stories some did not have much to say. I tried to use more specific and accurate questions but this did not work. There was a need for change of methods if more expression was to come from a child. I did not take this as a negative aspect of the interview but I noted that children and especially the younger ones needed some activity-oriented methods (Evans & Becker, 2009:73). Some children broke into tears in between sessions. At this point I let the child cry and I took the tears as a form of 'voice' (Robson, 2001:137), but a very difficult way of listening to a child's expression. Some children offered explanations for their tears:

Do not misunderstand me; I am not crying because of this discussion. This has been my habit since Zawadi¹⁰ was taken away to an orphanage. It is painful that he never came home during holidays; the people who took him think they are helping him but it is not good. He will forget all of us (Kahoo, female, 2009).

The voice I was receiving from the OCHH's tears indicates that the separation from siblings was painful. Although the use of semi-structured interviews is said to be a good way to get dense data (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) it is challenging when researching with children and there is a need to work between silence or tears. This can be difficult. The use of different methods is vital. It is not easy to begin a discussion regarding sensitive matters such as death of parents and living with no guardians. The main method devised to make it easy to begin a discussion was through use of photo taking or drawing of pictures. A child would be asked to take a photo of anything he/she wanted. After taking the photo we discussed what is in the photo, why that photo, etc. Many issues emerged from the photo taking and drawing exercises. Explaining about the photo was so natural, the children kept talking about it in a very relaxed manner. For example, I learnt that an orphaned child was being discriminated against because her father did not originate from that area when she took a photo of her mother's grave. I also learned about a mother who had 'abandoned' her children after the death of her husband only when the child took a photo of her father's grave. Many children took photos of the things they are proud of, such as a radio bought from money one has worked for, a garden well kept, a banana farm, pets and livestock owned by the children. The discussion of the photos revealed the children's initiative and creativity on how they are negotiating their lives as OCHH. Kimako, for example, looked with pride at a photo he had taken of a banana farm he had created from scratch which is now feeding the household. He also admired his old house, which he said that although it was small and made of mud, it was the work of his own hands and it gave them refuge before they were found and got moved into a new house. Although in the interviews Kimako mentioned the planting of the banana and the building of the hut, he did not express it in the same manner of pride as when he was explaining about it from the photo he had taken. Younger children drew pictures and explained what they meant in their pictures. The drawing of pictures brought about expressions which might not have been easy in the interviews. The use of visual participative

activities which are initiated by the children reached the children's confines and brought out issues which were otherwise hidden.

All the different methods had some success in getting the children to discuss their views. However the over-arching method of success was the 'work walk' method; the moments with the children in the participatory observation. It was when we were collecting firewood that a child would narrate an ordeal of abuse which had never been mentioned before. It would be when we were on our way to the market that a child will give information of how she or he had changed his living place after the death of parents and the decision to live in as a child head of a household. When cooking, a child would come up with information related to the difficulties in getting food and how they nearly starved while surrounded by people. The participant's observation in this case included different activities depending on the different setting and agreement with the OCHH. In some households we weeded in the household's vegetable/banana garden, while in other households we fetched firewood or pounded wheat, while in others we made tea or cooked food. Some children wanted an English lesson and they invited friends around. In the sessions, I observed the way the children value education and how they relate to other children of their own age and neighbourhood. It was also during the observation that I could see how the children perceived the different structures in the village such as the village council; the Hamlet head or the *MM*. Participant observation gave the children control and provided information which they had expressed.

4.3. KINDLING CHILDREN'S EXPRESSION: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

FGD is a form of group interview which is social and combines different perspectives. This method was used with groups of orphaned children in the two districts following the semi-structured interviews as a way of triangulating data, but also as a way of getting more information on the situation and perspectives of the OCHH. FGD in Makete was carried out in a classroom but in Karagwe one FGD was carried out in a hall at the hostel I was staying in and another in a garden of orphaned children who are organised in a group. The FGD gave the children a chance to meet and for me to record further comments through their interaction. Some were meeting for the first time, others knew each other or they were in the same school. The familiarization session before the commencement of a FGD made the children active and they began to talk and tease each other. It was during the FGD session that some of the very quiet OCHH showed their feelings and expressed sentiments which had not been mentioned during more structured interviews. Kili for example exclaimed when one member of the FGD said Kili was one of the lucky children in the village as he has been assisted, 'that was not an assistance; it was only torture on my part.'¹¹(FGD, Ndulamo; 2009)

I had to give the children enough time to discuss this issue and Kili made elaborate claims why he called the assistance torture. This expression was not brought out during the one to one interview so the FGD provided space for a full discussion and flow of debate. There were several other expressions made by other children during the FGD sessions. Kechee for example did not tell me the reason for refusing to stay with his relatives after the death of his parents, but he talked about it when the group was giving reasons why children head households. This was not the only case; other OCHH mentioned some horrible things which they experienced, but which they could not raise individually as they were afraid it could go back to their relatives and bring more trouble. They claimed that when they discuss in a group it will not be known who exactly has said what, but the issue can then be handled by the village authorities or the NGOs. One such issue is the trend of relatives appropriating material given to the children such as mattresses, blankets, exercise books or even uniforms.

However, kindling the children's expression in a focus group discussion has to go beyond mere discussion! Therefore *role plays* and *songs* were used to help the children express their feelings and talk of issues they had not mentioned during the interviews. The children used songs to narrate the story of HIV/AIDS and how it has affected them and made them '*children in adult robes*.' During the interviews the OCHH interviewed neither related their situation with HIV/AIDS nor did they mention the cause of parents' death. Most of the children said they did not know the cause of death while others said it was witch-craft and a few mentioned specific illnesses such as headache or fever. The role play and songs made it easy for the children to pronounce upon issues which were not mentioned during the semi-structured interviews.

One of the challenges in the FGD was group dynamics where it was necessary to try to balance the discussion as some participants were outspoken while others needed to be encouraged to talk. There also were times when the entire group would seem to run out of steam, especially when the discussion was touching sensitive issues. At these times "wake up" techniques were used such as playing. In one of the FGD the children became very quiet when they were discussing their roles and how it affects their day as children. At this point I asked them to think of a play which could cheer us up. They all stood up and one made a proposal of a play in which we all participated. After this everyone was so happy and the discussion flowed. Although it has been argued that FGD cannot be relied upon to ascertain an individual's genuine point of view, the experience with the children indicated that FGD can provoke inner feelings and hence promote self expression.

5. CHALLENGES AND DILEMMAS

Although the use of different methods provides the space to ensure OCHH express their views on matters affecting them, how they understand and perceive their situation and the environment that surrounds them, it was not an easy undertaking. To help a child to express her/himself not only needs time, patience and a variety of techniques but there is another challenge of overcoming adult misunderstanding and suspicions. First, the consent process showed how many adults still consider children to be incapable of making decisions in matters of concern to them. Many adults questioned the idea of getting a child's consent or even for them to consent on behalf of the child. It was vital to try and explain why the consent process is ethically important.

While the pre-visits and post-visits were very useful they frequently raised tensions with the village leadership, who were often surprised that I was visiting the children so many times. One of the village leaders made a comment that he was not used to researchers taking such a long time in the field, researchers normally go for just one day to collect data (statistics). I had to explain again the methodology I was using. Not only were the leaders and *MM* suspicious but some villagers and even relatives appeared curious and at times followed me to the interview site. For example, when I was with Kashighwa in his banana garden his elder brother, who had not visited him for a long time, came and sat beside him. Kashighwa stopped talking immediately and introduced his brother who asked me some questions. Kashighwa had to tell him to leave. Another scenario of adult intervention was when a group of orphaned children invited me to have a FGD in their vegetable garden. Immediately after I arrived, adult members of the village came to the site in large numbers without being invited. We tried to continue the discussions but the children became guarded about what they said. For example, one child was explaining the challenges they have as a group of orphaned children. He began to say there is lack of adult support, but immediately he looked in the direction of the adults gathered around he changed his statement and said 'not that they do

not support us but their support is limited.’ This might have been the truth but later, when the adults had left, the children gave a detailed account about the lack of adults’ support.

The various methods used raised ethical issues which needed care. OCHH have double roles as children who were taking care of their households while attending school. I was invading the scarce time they needed to balance their school and home activities, especially by using different methods which needed different times and dates. This was a cost for the OCHH and I had to evaluate whether it was worth doing and what the children would gain from the research. I adopted the suggestions advocated by Robson (2001), in her study with young carers of the South to justify any discomfort caused in the process of research in order to enable the OCHH to exercise their right to self-expression. I needed to ensure their voices were used to benefit them and other marginalised children and to further challenge the notion that OCHH are just vulnerable victims of their circumstances with no creativity or initiative on their part.

6. CONCLUSION

The more recent developments on how children are perceived in society and the opening availed by the CRC provides an opportunity for children’s expression to be considered in research. The CRC framework is a step which researchers have to undertake as an obligation to solicit the views of children and to let children express themselves in a manner fit for them. The CRC Committee has put forward some elaborations in its General Comment Number 12 which can be of use to researchers when seeking the child’s expression.

Children’s voices and specifically the voice of OCHH are vital in understanding of the situation facing children and the way they perceive it. Researchers are therefore challenged to put into practice the new developments and the obligations raised by the CRC. What is proposed in this article is that each researcher needs to develop appropriate innovations and strategies according to the situation on the ground. Children need to be given space to exercise their right to self expression as a way of understanding more their situation. Seeking children’s own views is a novel undertaking which has to be taken cautiously by researchers balancing the ethical and the practical issues arising in the course of the research. Using a wide variety of methods can be one way of soliciting the children’s own expression, but the methods have to be properly administered to minimise any harm or distress on the part of the children. As noted by the CRC committee, ‘the hearing of a child is a difficult process’ (CRC/GC 12:24). The benefits can be assessed by listening to the children’s own perceptions and creativity, which must change the way children are understood or perceived in society. The possibility of entering the child’s space as an adult and working with the children from their point of view is one way in which the voice of children can be captured by an adult researcher.

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ENDNOTES

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2 The term OCHH is used in two different ways; first it is used to mean the child who is orphaned and heads a household: Orphaned children heading households, secondly it means the household in which the head is an orphaned child: Orphaned children headed households.

3 Article 12 of the CRC provides for the rights of a child to express their views freely in all matters affecting the child and that the views of the child to be given due weight.

4 Article 13 of the CRC (1989) provides for the right of a child to have freedom of expression, which shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds.

5 Although the field work was mainly in Makete and Karagwe districts, two children in the Dar-es-salaam city participated; one during a pilot and another during a reunion of the child with her brother, she was living in a OCHH in Makete and was taken to an Institution in Dar-es-salaam.

6 What has been so significant in relation to stress is the fact that out of the 63 children participating in the research only three children were stressed to the extent of shedding tears and all the children who shed tears were able to express the reasons for their tears which was not out of their bereavement or their role as head of households but the separation from siblings as shown by the one example below.

7 A good example is the use of songs and role plays which led to very intense discussions of very sensitive subjects such as HIV/AIDS and mistreatment, abuse and property grabbing by near relatives, which were not a points for discussion or mention in the other methods used prior but were discussed in very heated debates and with great openness.

8 [1986] A.C.112

9 Pre-interview visit is the visit made to the participant prior to the interview and it can be once or several times before the actual interview takes place and post-interview visits is when the participant is visited after the interview which is another way of extending the researcher –p articipant relationship.

10 ‘Zawadi’ is a pseudonym for Kahoo’s young brother who was taken by a Priest to an orphanage in another town and has not been coming for holidays for six years and he was brought for one day only. Kahoo is also a Pseudonym of one of the OCHH.

11 Kili had been heading a household with three siblings for three years after the death of his parents who died the same year 2005. In 2008 the children were taken away to be supported with education and care. He did not know where they were taken to; he was not consulted before they were taken. Everyone in the village is happy because Kili has been assisted with the burden of caring three children but for him it was not so.