Belonging, Identity and Everyday Life for Vulnerable Children in Harare

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Synopsis: **Belonging is about having an attachment or an inclusive relationship with a particular group of people, be they families, friends, peers, or communities, giving one an identity. These continuous relationships build trust, emotional strength, an ability to deal with challenges and difficulties as well as giving children an important foundation for learning and development. This paper defines a family as a group of people related by blood, marriage or adoption and argues that the family is a fundamental social unit which must be protected for the creation of an enabling environment to grant children their developmental rights, and other rights in general. When the family is broken, children become vulnerable, losing confidence, trust, safeguarding and protection, which inevitably affect their potentialities and abilities at school and later on as adults in life. However, even some children within families may face the same challenges, thus the main argument is that the problems will be worse for orphans and street children with no one to take care of them unless some very effective measures are taken by the duty bearers. Through the use of interviews with children from the streets and child care givers from two orphanages in Harare, it was establishes that there are many vulnerable children without that sense of belonging every child longs for. Due to shortage of identity documents and parental care and guidance, some vulnerable children cannot reach their full potential in education, sporting activities, or prospects for better jobs and good livelihoods in future. Recommendations are made by the paper that the state as the greatest duty bearer of child rights should always put strict legislation to ensure the family remains intact, the extended family takes their role in case of deaths, and orphanages get full support from communities and other stakeholders to create a favourable environment for the vulnerable children in terms of identity and belonging.**

Key Terms: **Belonging, Identity, Child Rights, Vulnerability, Duty Bearers**

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

A child in this writing will refer to any human being below their 18th birthday, in agreement with The African Charter on the Rights of the Child (ACRC 1990: article 2), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989: article 1) and the Zimbabwe constitution 2013(section 81:1). A right in this paper refers to something that one deserves, that which is morally or legally correct for one to do or have. Bitterberg (2013) avers that belonging is a relational sense of personal identity, that psychological feeling of a tension between the need to belong to a group and the need to be unique. Children, and adults alike, feel a sense of belonging when their unique selves are welcomed and valued, thus there is an intricate relationship between belonging and identity. A lot of children world-wide are affected by challenges of belonging and identity, irrespective of their geographical locations, gender, nationality, race, ethnicity, religion or background. For the sake of this paper, the family is contextualised as the ideal set up where children belong and they are identified with the family name, and reference is made to all kinds of socially acceptable families, ranging from nucleus family, traditional extended family, female headed households, child-headed households adoption and foster families in orphanages. If a child does not belong to a family, then that child is found on the streets or in an orphanage which has taken the place of the broken family in the 21st century. Due to various factors affecting the family and marriage institution like divorce, rape, incest, domestic violence and many more, some children are not found in their families and their chances of affirming their belonging and identity rights are threatened, thus such children are classified as vulnerable. Article 7 and 8 of UNCRC and article 6 of ACRC for example, emphasises the right of the child to registration at birth and an identity, and in concurrence is section 81:1(b) and c (ii) of the constitution of Zimbabwe. However, many vulnerable children's care and protection leaves a lot to be desired, despite the existence of international, regional and national blueprints advocating for child rights. If a child does not have a personal identity, then it is difficult to have that sense of belonging or to have that pride in themselves or in a certain group, a feeling which can push them to be better people in future (McLeod 2008). While the assumption is that the greater percentage of these children may be single and double orphans in orphanages or on the streets, there is also a chance that a significant percentage of children with both parents surviving also remain unregistered. It is therefore the responsibility of many stakeholders in child safeguarding, protection and care, who shall be referred to as duty bearers in this paper, to improve the situation through effective formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies for the benefit of vulnerable children so that they have an identity and a belonging in order to maximise their potential in education and other essential areas of developing 'the self' as well as other overarching elements of sustainable development. A duty bearer in this paper will mean any responsible adult individuals, groups or organisations that care safeguard and protect children. The four main principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child which are: non-discrimination, devotion to the best interests of the child, the

right to life, survival and development, and respect for the views of the child; will be used as the background and basis of the arguments in this paper because it appears some vulnerable children are being left out to be affected by circumstances beyond their control as they end up without proper belonging and identity in their everyday life.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This writing largely borrows from the Social identity theory proposed and developed by Tafjel and Turner in 1979.The theory proposes that a person's sense of who they are depends on the groups to which they belong. Social identity is the individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership to social groups, which can be distinguished from the notion of personal identity which refers to the self-knowledge that derives from the individual's unique attributes. As expressed by McLeod (2008) and Vinney (2018), the Social identity theory has three key concepts: categorisation, social identification and social Comparison. In categorisation we cluster ourselves into groups according to similarities while in social identification we tend to behave in a way that group members are supposed to behave. In social comparison we tend to compare our group with others and we develop a sense of 'us' versus 'them, indicating that when an individual identifies themselves with a group, they have a sense of belonging which gives them some confidence, resilience and resistance against life challenges.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Belonging is a contested and multidimensional concept which must be located on different analytical levels (Christensen 2009). (a) At the macro level belonging refers to support for larger 'imagined' communities, for example national or religious communities, often associated with strong feelings of community. Such communities often have a flip side – by signalling the strong 'we' they simultaneously exclude 'the others'. Imagined communities are therefore important in constructing the border between 'us and them' (Anderson 1983; Butler & Spivak 2007; Yuval-Davis 2007). At the meso level belonging refers to the association of social and political actors with collective organizations, e.g. political parties or social movements. It can be membership of collective organizations of people with similar values, ideas or common interests. The association may also take the form of construction of collective identities, for example as in the workers' or the women's movement (Castells 1998; Tilly 2002). At the micro level belonging refers to relations in everyday life and local communities. At this level, belonging refers to identities of individuals, social groups and is based mainly on face-to-face relations, which construct social distinctions in relation to whom you identify with. Such belongings can be reflexive and deliberate; they can be oriented towards integration in local communities, but society on the one hand and belonging, local citizenship, everyday life and identities in relation to gender, class and ethnicity on the other.

Boston and Warren (2017), bring in the school set up dimension and avers that students' sense of belonging affects their performance. Those with a strong sense of belongingness perform better than those who do not have that attachment and sense of being loved and supported by others, thus causing anxiety, depression and loneliness, leading to poor grades as shown by most studies. This shows that belonging is a very critical issue in children, lack of which will affect their growth and cognitive development. It is therefore a cause of concern for many children who do not belong into schools or families due to different reasons. There is need then for stakeholders in the rights of the child to try all efforts to have children enrolled effectively into schools and homes. However it may also be worth noting that today's society is not always made up of perfect families and the rise of breaking families is leading to the increase of street children and school dropouts, while poverty has exposed some children in schools to feel out of place due to lack of provisions like food security, good uniforms and pocket money, an inevitable situation due to inequality in capitalist societies. Burns, Jobson and Zuma (2015), posit that a family is the first site of belonging for most individuals – an institution that potentially supports secure attachment and positive self-identity. However, with high rates of orphan hood and physically absent parents, many young people may experience a lack of belonging in the early years. Miller (2009) avers that the number of registered orphans was about 1.3 million and this number seems to be escalating from the period of 2010-2018. UNICEF (2010) reports that there are one million Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Zimbabwe and only 527000 of these receive external support and these figures are worrisome, showing that a lot needs to be done to cover in the parental gap of these orphaned and vulnerable children. The disruption of family care, especially at a young age, has important psychosocial effects. For example, children without secure attachment are more prone to behavioural problems such as aggression, learning difficulties, poor language development and weak decision-making abilities, and are less resilient to poverty. These, in turn, affect prospects for social mobility later on. The state should make it mandatory that the surviving parents with the help of the private sector ,the community and the state ensures that enough resources are available for orphaned and vulnerable children. Absence of responsibility and well planned care and protection affects the children ability to face the vicissitudes of life. The situation is even worse for children with disabilities, who are found in orphanages under the supervision of caregivers. While the caregivers make maximum effort to give support to the disabled children, the caregivers also have their own limitations because they also suffer stress and medical conditions when they carry grown up children on a daily basis. Such children are often found more vulnerable and unable to face life challenges alone in future (Raina et al 2004).In concurrence are Grossman (2014), Zuurmond (2018) and Gona et al (2011) who posit that the family remains the crucial unit to take care of all vulnerable children but unfortunately the heavy task to care for the physically challenged is usually left for grandmothers who are also vulnerable and already such in some cases. Such issues increase the chances of violating the rights of the children to identity documentation. When such children are in orphanages,

sometimes it is difficult for caregivers to get the identity documents and the children inevitably feel that they do not belong to the families taking care of them, thus affecting their levels of confidence and giving them a low self-esteem.

The orphanage is a very ideal alternative for orphaned children, who may be able to get all their basic needs through international support given to the institutions. However the problem comes when the children become of age and are ready to leave these orphanages. Such a child does not have a reference except for those children whose roots have been known. For those whose origins were never known by the caregivers, life becomes miserable because the young person does not have an inheritance, a start-up capital, a family, relationships or friends to fall back on after spending all their childhood in an orphanage (Tanur 2012, Barnados 2012). Such challenges should be averted by making all efforts to contact and reengage such children with their extended family at an early age so that one will find it east to re-engage with their families. The reality is therefore not easy to imagine for the unfortunate children without any traceable relatives, family or friends. The sense of belonging and identity is lost altogether and such children may end up on the streets or increase the statistics of juvenile delinquency in a country. This is so because every young person has different circumstances which should be examined (Van Breda 2014). Children should therefore not be treated as a homogeneous group but given the heterogeneity they deserve

From a human rights perspective, identity is an issue which must be granted to a child upon birth through provision of a birth certificate and to adults through provision of a passport or a national identity card. Zimbabwe is a member to the African Charter on the rights of the child as well as the Convention on the rights of the child, and is expected to adhere to this critical basic child rights, (Research and Advocacy Unit, 2008). These two instruments emphasize a child's right to a name and nationality, and make registration immediately after birth compulsory as a fundamental human right. Article 7 of the CRC provides that every child "shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name and to acquire a nationality". Similarly Article 6 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child provides that "every child shall have the right from birth to a name, shall be registered immediately after birth, and has the right to acquire a nationality". The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Zimbabwe also acceded, also states that every child "shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have a name' …and has the right to a nationality." This is clear indication that the international and regional documents are giving priority on the right of the child to identification and belonging to a nation. If a child does not have a birth certificate, they may not access education or write their public examinations in Zimbabwe. Such a child is excluded from inheriting a share of their parents' estate since the Wills and inheritance act requires that a child's birth certificate should be produced to show the same names as the deceased. In addition accessing health benefits through medical aid schemes, or free

benefits for the prevention of diseases like malaria, tuberculosis and so on which will threaten a child's right(article 6 of the CRC).All the challenges discussed above are against principle number 2 of the CRC which emphasizes the right to life, survival and development.(UNICEF 2011).A child cannot simply be given a life without developmental and survival principles, thus education, health, sporting activities and food are some of the fundamentals to satisfy the right to live.

According to Research and Advocacy unit (2008), there is a multitude of problems for those people (children and adults) who have no birth certificates, as well as those whose fathers have denied responsibility, and who consequentially have failed to get birth certificates. They will not be able to get identity cards for as long as they do not have these birth certificates. If everyone else has the same challenges when trying to secure birth certificates, ranging from long queues and requirements which are not user-friendly, then the challenges will be even worse for orphans and widows when they want to secure the same documents for their children. This is a clear indication that spouses should always be given enjoinders to secure documentation upon birth of the child to reduce challenges for children in future in case of death or parents separation.

Burns et al (2015, explaining the South African situation contends that young people have been historically excluded by the apartheid and colonial era but laments that even the rainbow nation paraded by the post-apartheid era is never a reality and nor an aspiration for young people as evidenced by their low inclusion in politics, economic and social activities due to lack of access to resources. The young people are often left to create their own spaces for expressing their identity and to forge their own meanings of belonging. Without guidance and with time on their hands, they will invent their own rites of passage and seek out role models who may provide bridging relationships. While the situation in Zimbabwe is emphasising the fact that issues affecting women in policies and legislation also affect children's rights, the situation in South Africa also explains that most African countries did not change the historical effects of social exclusion for women and children, undermining the objectives and benefits of independence since the youth remain the majority in most developing countries. Even the concepts sustainable development and democracy where intergenerational equity and majority interests are a prerequisite are threatened in these contexts. The same scenario was noted by Ejorh (n.d) who examines the rights of African migrants in Ireland and concludes that discriminatory immigration policies denies people particularly women and their unborn children an identity, belonging and a secure future. While a historical perspectives was given on how the sovereignty of states should be respected in terms of their own laws on immigrants, article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR 1948) states that everyone has a right to a nationality and no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality or denied the right to change his nationality. However, the semantics used in the document (UDHR) ,the fact that the continued use of "his' is actually discriminatory and

continues perpetuating gender discrimination is a study for another paper and not the jurisdiction of this paper at the moment.

Ndhlovu (2016) conducted a research on the lives of street children in Bulawayo and found out that Modernisation, colonialism, and, to some extent, Christianity have changed the balance of the traditional safeguards and belief systems thus engendering, in many African countries, a 'hybridised local cultural system' featuring a combination of traditional and modern aspects of family life. The research revealed that street children have created their own spaces where identity and belonging means togetherness in which they help each other to overcome challenges like hunger and starvation on the streets. In addition is the realisation that the street children have dreams and ambitions like any other children and most would want to see them out of the street and have an education and a better life. While it is not an easy and simple task to take the children and rehabilitate them, this paper pinpoints this as the main focus, the battle ground for the duty bearers, that is the state, the private sector and any other responsible authorities to intervene and continue giving the children an opportunity to leave the streets with birth registration certificates and ideal homes where their young talents can be nurtured for future prospects.

In a study carried out by Chibwana and Gumbo (2014) on the alternative care system for children in Zimbabwe, major findings were that Zimbabwe has enough legislation to cater for the rights of the child. However the pieces of legislation and policies are scattered without coordination in various ministries which include: Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Health and Child Care, the Ministry of Youth, Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment, the Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, and the Ministry of Home Affairs. This jeopardises effective child rehabilitation since each ministry would prefer to remain within their jurisdiction and autonomy. Absence of consistent and mutually reinforcing family-oriented policies designed to promote and strengthen parents' ability to care for their children was also one of the major findings, which if well promoted may make families and communities realise the need to prioritise the best interest of the child as one of the principles of the UNCRC OF 1989. Some of the family strengthening services not in place include parenting courses and sessions, the promotion of positive parent-child relationships, conflict resolution skills, opportunities for employment and income-generation. This is a clear indication that not enough effort is being made to avert the challenges affecting vulnerable children in urban areas. The state as the authoritative duty bearer should promote coordination and give enjoinders to other duty bearers for a multi-stakeholder approach in helping vulnerable children in urban areas.

IV. FINDINGS

- Many vulnerable children in Harare, particularly those on the streets are being sexually and morally abused because they do not belong to families who can protect, safeguard and give them care. It is not all children on the street who are bad or who came to the streets by choice. Some are good children forced by circumstances beyond their control which include disinheritance of property by relatives, sexual and physical abuse, thus given a chance they may want to continue with schooling and have a better life.

- Children need sense of belonging and identity in their everyday life. It motivates the child to work hard and achieve knowing there is someone to appreciate, reassure and applaud. Lack of family support lead to poor performance by children in school, inferiority complexes, increases in vulnerability, abuses and juvenile delinquencies.

- Vulnerable children in Harare face belonging and identity crisis because the nucleus family concept is used and relatives are not willing to take responsibility in case of deaths or family breakdown. Street children end up identifying themselves with those close to them leading to more problems and vicious cycles of poverty. Children on the streets also have dreams of better lives in future but lack the necessary support due to lack of family and parental support.

- The breakdown of the family unit is on the increase in the 21st century due to economic hardships, pandemics and loss of employment leaving children with no safety nets. This has led to an increase in child headed households and street children. It is more challenging for children in Harare (urban setup) to find proper groups to identify with or well-wishers to come to their rescue due to individualism, than the rural areas where a child belongs to the community and extended family.

- There are many vulnerable children in Harare who lack identity documentation which is one of their rights. This is because no relatives are readily available to help them acquire these critical documents. This prevents them from enjoying other rights like education, sporting activities, access to travel documents and ultimately good livelihoods in future when they are adults, creating a vicious cycle of poverty which is difficult to break.

- Orphanages should continue to be supported because they have taken the role of the broken family and the extended family. However, children in orphanages and children's homes also face identity and belonging crisis despite having identity documents…they have more questions than answers about their existence. Some older children have been reported to attempt to rape others in the same institution or family at the orphanage after inevitably realising that they are not family after all as they grow older. After leaving the

orphanages when they turn into adults, they have nowhere to go and no one to turn to.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings presented by this paper all show that the everyday life of all children irrespective of their backgrounds, gender, ethnicity, race, class should be full of play, learning, protection and care from parents, relatives and the community who are all regarded as duty bearers in the child rights discourses. This means children should be allowed to enjoy their childhood and child rights until they attain adulthood at the age of eighteen years, and that they are at a disadvantage without a proper family which provides all the necessary requirements for child development and growth which range from food, shelter, warmth, education, health just to mention a few. It is very difficult or impossible for the children to enjoy any of the rights stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) or any other document stating these rights at regional or national level across the globe without family care. With such a cruel world in the 21st century, children need all the necessary protection, safeguarding and care which only a family can provide, otherwise children are exposed to material beyond their age like pornographic material on the internet all in the name of globalisation and modernisation. When children belong to a family or a community, they are most likely to learn some morals and ethics which can protect them and give them that sense of avoiding the dangerous materials at their own discretion because they have been taught somewhere sometime in their families. Identity and belonging will help a child one day to be able to put aside what is morally unacceptable in their societies or families thus helping to create good citizens for the future, as they associate themselves with attributes of that particular group they belong to called family as posited by (McLeod (2008) and Vinney (2018) in their explanation of the social identity theory by Tafjel and Turner (1979). Safe communities should be developed through education, awareness campaigns and sensitisation workshops on the rights of the child. This may help every grown up person to be a responsible duty bearer in terms of child rights, knowing that if someone's child is in a difficult situation today, your own child may also be in the same situation in future, thus one should be ashamed to rape or sexually exploit a minor. This has become a cause for concern in Harare where children on the streets (as young as nine years) and in some communities like Epworth are reported to be abused by well to do adults who come to pick them up in expensive cars and offer them a few bond coins after sexually exploiting them. Families should therefore be well equipped to offer love and protection to their children, without exceptions. Young couples also need to be educated on child rights as they enter into parenthood so that they know what is expected of them before they venture into childbearing, otherwise they may become the culprits causing children to run away to the streets due to gender based violence or child abuse which range from rape, corporal punishment or denial of other rights like food, clothing and shelter. It will be pointless then to encourage a child to stay in an empty home where nothing but hurt and disappointment is on offer. Every child is proud to belong to, and identify with a well organised family with love, care, nurturing facilities so that even if difficult times come like the death of one parent or loss of a livelihood by one or both parents, children do not run to the streets or into early marriages, or into illicit affairs with elderly men because there will still be more benefits at home than out there. They should continue to have that sense of identity and belonging to the family.

It is also critical to converse on the issue of street children who are a mixed bag. Some of them are good children who need help to get out of the streets, but failing to get it, while some have been taken off the streets several times and returning because they are not used to family or orphanage setup where they have to do house chores, told what to do and when to it, preferring the street life where they do things at their own time, with access to a lot of money through begging and thefts. Duty bearers should make efforts therefore to identify these children and give them a chance for a shelter and some education. On another note, it is good that some orphanages make an effort to re-engage the orphans with their families or relatives when they turn 18 years of age so that they do not break contacts with their bloodline, and continue with that sense of identity and belonging, but some extended family members have taken this as a chance to get money from the orphanages or the NGOs offering help, and use the resources instead at the expense of the child, leaving the child vulnerable, open to abuse and on the streets again. That way they are forced to identify themselves with, and belong to common groups where they help each other obtain food and shelter through whatever means, as was mentioned by Ndlovu (2016).They create their own identity and forge their own means of belonging which society may not be willing to accept, as was aired by Burns et al (2015). Better ways to promote sustainability, independence and self-reliance for the young person must be found so that the child remains the protected and safeguarded.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper concludes that a family is a critical social unit; the first set up which children identify themselves and belong to. Without a family, children face identity and belonging crisis, in which they may end up creating their own spaces and their own contexts and meaning of identity and belonging which the society might not be comfortable with. Families should be as conducive as possible to child growth and development so that children are proud to identify and belong to these families. In cases where parents and communities are unable beyond their control to cater for the rights of the child, the Government, the highest duty bearer of children rights should intervene with the assistance of other stakeholders like NGOs and PVOs, thus open rules and regulations should be increased for the benefit of child development, identity and belonging. The orphanage has become the fall back plan for failed families.

This paper therefore makes the following recommendations to various duty bearers:

- The Government must put strict laws which discourage the breakdown of the family for the best

interest of the child, and the child's belonging and identity.

- Families in urban areas should be encouraged to resuscitate the traditional extended family set up so that children keep in touch with all family connections to reduce the challenges facing children after death, divorce or separation all for the best interest of the child.
- It must be mandatory with heavy penalties for parents who do not register their children at birth. This will reduce children without identity documents serve for those who are picked on the streets, and the social welfare department will have less cases to deal with.
- Health centers, antenatal clinics, schools or any other areas where people gather should give awareness and documentation teaching the rights of the child so that safe families and communities are created.
- Orphanages should be supported so that they give their best to child development, protection, safeguarding and care, including linking the children with their relatives after institutional care with enough start-up capital, giving enough monitoring and evaluation on whether the intended beneficiary has benefited from the proceeds.

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