

SOME PROBLEMS OF CHILD-REARING IN TANZANIA: A  
CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE CHILD (IYC)

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1. INTRODUCTION.

"When I look at my children my heart aches. I don't know how to bring them up in such a hostile environment". These are the words of a young parent of three children aged seven, five and two. The concern expressed in this statement is shared by many parents in Tanzania today, especially those in urban areas where the problems of child upbringing seem to be getting out of hand.

The factors that prompted the statement above are obvious in a number of ways. There is an increasing departure from the normal behaviour expected of children in the society. This is confirmed by the National Women Organisation's (UWT) inclusion of children's misbehaviour in public as one of the problems to be dealt with during the IYC.

It is a general opinion that delinquency cases are becoming a common factor. The fact that delinquency is prone to affecting children from poor families because of material dissatisfaction is no longer the only reason for delinquency. For, children from both high and low income families become delinquents. Child crime including pick-pocketing, drug addiction and robbery, is also on the increase.

A general lack of morals can be seen in the behaviour of many children in public places. Use of abusive language and disrespectful actions to adults are common features in the streets, inside public transport facilities and other places. Within the last one year, I have personally witnessed the following incidents, which I consider unexpected of children:

- (a) In an UDA<sup>+</sup> bus, a boy of about eleven years old abused a woman of about fifty after having stepped on her toe. When the woman complained the boy said: "Nini wewe bi kizee. Unatoka Kibugumo

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<sup>+</sup>UDA (Usafiri Dar es Salaam) is the city transport service in Dar es Salaam.

leo nini? ("What now you old woman. Have you just arrived from Kibugumo?"), indicating that the woman does not know the ways of the city. Kibugumo is a village in the outskirts of Dar es Salaam.

- (b) In an UDA bus, a group of primary school children played a trick on an old man. Someone had vacated a seat and the old man went to occupy it. As he was slowly easing himself into the seat, a boy of about ten quickly slipped behind the old man and sat on the same seat. So the old man sat on the boy. All the other boys broke into laughter and the naughty boy proudly sat on that seat forcing the old man to give up and continue standing for the rest of the bus ride.
- (c) A primary school girl of about thirteen said the following to a man of about forty who was looking at her:

"Babu wewe nini unanikodolea macho? Nenda kamkodolee mke wako Nyumbani".

("Old man why are you staring at me. Go stare at your wife at home").

Increased indiscipline in schools is yet another pointer. Truancy, drug addiction, abusive language, fighting are some of the many problems teachers have to deal with. In May 1979, one primary school in Dar es Salaam had to deal with a case involving three girls aged about thirteen who were caught admiring a picture of themselves in the nude while the teacher was teaching. Run-aways from homes and school frequently go to bars and nightclubs or take to the streets.

## 2. THE IYC OBJECTIVES.

The declaration by the United Nations, of the year 1979 as the Year of the Child must have given a glint of hope to the parents of children who have been caught up in the above mentioned behaviour and others whose children may also fall victims<sup>†</sup>. The general objectives of the IYC have been stated as follows:

- a) "To provide a framework for the advocacy on behalf of children and for enhancing the awareness of the special needs of children

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<sup>†</sup>Even though these are too few observations on which to draw specific conclusion, further research will probably show that more children are departing from the society's norms of child behaviour.

- on the part of decision makers and the public;
- b) To promote recognition of the fact that programmes for children should be an integral part of the economic and social development plans, with a view to achieving in both the long-term, sustained activities for the benefit of children at the national and international levels".

The implementation of the IYC objectives has been left to individual nations but in its guidelines for action UNICEF states that:

"All Governments are encouraged to review the situation of their children, to examine whether their national policies, plans and legislation take adequate account of the special needs of children in terms of relevance, content and efficiency of delivery, to develop the necessary research studies, discussions and consultations on national, regional and sometimes international levels, all aimed at lastingly improving and extending services for children".(2)

Both the objectives and the guidelines generally focus on the needs of the child. One of the basic needs of the child is parental care and guidance. It would seem therefore that the implementation of the IYC objectives would in addition to other things, focus on the task of the parents in bringing up the children. The importance of the parent to the child is emphasized in the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the child in which, among other things, it stipulates that:

"The child, for the full and harmonious development of his personality, needs love and understanding. He shall wherever possible grow up in the care and under the responsibility of his parents..."(3)

The implementation of the IYC in Tanzania has been given its due weight because the country does not doubt the importance of this matter. Numerous programmes have been undertaken. The following are just some of them:

- a) President Nyerere's IYC inaugural address to the nation broadcast over Radio Tanzania on the New Year publicised the importance of the IYC to the nation.
- b) Research studies on the establishment of minimum conditions for optimum child-care in Tanzania through nursery schools/Day care centres are being coordinated by The University of Dar es Salaam.
- c) A mass educational Radio programme on the basic developmental

needs of children, is broadcast every Saturday 13.30-14.00 hours (Radio Tanzania).

- d) IYC postage, stamp were issued to disseminate information on IYC by Posts and telecommunications.
- e) An Art/Photo exhibition on the child and its environment was planned for December 1979 by The National Museum.
- f) A production of a film on/for children was undertaken jointly by the Health, food and nutrition Centre, Audio Visual Institute and Tanzania Film Company.
- g) The Youth flag raising ceremony on mount Kilimanjaro was organised by The National IYC Committee and the Party Youth Organisation.
- h) Publications of materials, books, posters on child-related issues for use by different groups were produced by The Rotary Club, Health, Tanzania Library Services and other organisations.

Most of these programmes centre around the child's needs in terms of education, health and materials although not much is directed towards the needs for proper and adequate parental care and guidance. The IYC guidelines mention specifically that the attention towards the needs of the child should not end with the year 1979. IYC is intended to set in motion plans and programmes that ought to go beyond 1979.

It is in the spirit of action beyond 1979 that this article intends to draw people's attention to the problems that face the parents in their task of bringing up their children. As such, studies, plans, and programmes related to these problems could be undertaken by the relevant bodies for the long-term realisation of the main objectives of the IYC.

### 3. PARENTS AND CHILD UP-BRINGING.

That the parents have the first responsibility in child up-bringing is an indisputable fact. The Declaration of Rights of the child says that:

"The best interest of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his education and guidance; that responsibility lies in the first place with his parents". (4)

The task of parents in bringing up the child in Tanzania today has become difficult and complicated. Before many of them realise, their children have become delinquents, criminals and even prostitutes. Many parents never come to grips with the forces that work against their genuine efforts at bringing up their children in the proper manner. Some parents are so shocked at the behaviour of their children that they can only attribute it to witchcraft.

The factors that complicate the task of child up-bringing can probably be understood if looked at historically. The socio-economic changes that Tanzania has gone through have definitely affected the task of child up-bringing as they have the other spheres of life.

### Child-upbringing during pre-colonial times.

Generally speaking during the pre-colonial times, when members of the society were closely tied to each other through their collective mode of production and where social relationships and values were of great importance, the task of child up-bringing was a collective task because parenthood was a social rather than a biological phenomenon. Even though child up-bringing of this time had its shortcomings in some aspects, it much emphasised the community's assistance to the bringing-up of children.

A parent was assisted in bringing-up a child right from the time the child was born. Most Tanzanian tribal societies followed the practice of assigning special people to assist a mother, not only in taking care of her after delivery, but also in teaching and helping her with the care of the baby.

As the child grew up it was considered that everyone in the community had the duty to share in the responsibility of shaping the behaviour of that child. This included the right to correct misbehaviour and punish where necessary, regardless of whether one knew the parents of the child or not. For example, among the Wakaguru of Kilosa district in Morogoro region, if a child laughed at an adult, the adult would take some mabibo leaves (a particular type of soft leaves) and ask him to wipe off whatever dirt was on the adult (supposedly excreta) which supposedly must have been the reason for the child's laughing. (Nothing else was a good enough reason for a child to laugh at an adult!). On this, the child had to make an apology,

**failure** of which will force the adult to take off his clothes to allow the child to wipe off the dirt. Such an action was believed to place a **curse** on the child, the lifting of which would entail a cleansing ritual and the paying of fines by the family of the child. This forced **the families** and the children themselves to be very careful about their behaviour.

A similar procedure was followed for the parent who neglected his duty of child care. For example, if an old woman found a female child going naked (in the old days female children had to put on a **barkcloth** or beaded attire to cover their front) she would threaten to go naked as well. She would tell the mother that leaving a female child naked was the same as leaving an old woman naked because the children and old women were classified as belonging to the same age group. The mother or father would have to immediately make an apology, failure of which, the old woman would take off her clothes and a **curse** be placed on the parents, as related above.

In such an environment proper child-upbringing was ensured for the child. No child was allowed to misbehave in the sight of the parents and no parent was given a chance to neglect a duty that might lead to a child's misbehaviour.

Feeding a hungry child was another collective duty. The most striking example is the practice of the **Masai** where a breast-feeding mother has the duty of breast-feeding any baby she finds hungry in **the absence** of the biological mother.

Work-training for the child was also enforced by the community at large. Children were encouraged to perform their chores such as **pounding**, fetching water and firewood and cattle herding collectively. Songs were made and sung to distract children from laziness tendencies and these would be directed at anyone who showed signs of laziness. The following is an example of one such songs from among the **Wakaguru**, specific to pounding maize:

Chibunde chibunde msokoliko (Let us pound until we finish).  
Ae ao msokoliko (Yes we shall finish)  
Iwakwe mai (That lazy somebody)  
Kaudia ngeda (She will eat a meal of unpounded maize).

**Imparting** knowledge on all aspects of life through initiation rites, story-telling, proverbs, dances, and recitations was also a shared

duty. To take just the example of story-telling, one grandmother took up the task of educating children in the morals of the society by having story-telling sessions for all the children of her family and the neighbours. She would have collected information from mothers and others on the misbehaviour of the day by the children in the audience. She would then pick stories that had morals directed at correcting the misbehaviour. For instance, if someone had disobeyed an adult, a story like that of Waluguru of Morogoro region about the disobedient children, who got swallowed by a monster in a forest to which they were forbidden to go, would be told.

Respect and care for other people was inculcated in the children through encouraging them to offer their services to other people such as fetching water, and firewood, and running errands for neighbours, relatives and especially the sick and the old. Any adult had the right to ask for the services of the child and the child was not expected to refuse to offer those services.

Under such circumstances, the child developed a sense of belonging to the society as a whole. He was all the time aware that he was under the watchful eye of everyone in the community and that he in return had a duty to respect and value everybody in the society in the same way he respected and valued his biological parents. As such, the biological parents were not left to bear the task of child upbringing by themselves. Their child was everybody's child and the need to properly shape the behaviour of the child was the concern of the community as a whole.

This, in the final analysis, helped the society to maintain integrity because the society made sure that the new generation conformed to the behaviour best suited to life in that society.

#### 4. CHILD UP-BRINGING DURING COLONIAL TIMES.

Economic changes during both the German and the British colonial periods included movement of the means of production from collective community to individual hands of the few as in plantation production, cash crop production among the small farmers and an increased dependency on money to pay taxes and buy foreign produced articles. This forced many people into paid labour and, in several cases,

**into** extensive labour migration. These changes affected, among other things, social relationships in society.

The increased dependency on money forced people to leave their home areas to seek employment either in plantations or industrial and trading centres that developed into urban areas. In the urban set-up, people of different backgrounds lived together. The economic actualities that brought them to the urban areas were not organised on a basis that united them. Instead, they were individualised, each person's worth depending on how much he earned out of his paid labour. The welfare of family was the concern of the individual family. As such, the task of child up-bringing became the task of the biological parents. Parenthood ceased to be social and became a biological affair.

Two other factors further complicated the task of child up-bringing, namely the colonial education system and Christian religion. The colonial education System's preference for boarding schools took away the child from the care and guidance of the parents and the society, for the most part of the year. Instead, the child was put under the care of foreigners, in most cases European missionaries, who brought up these children according to the values and attitudes of a European culture. This was part of the colonization process, as stated by President Nyerere:-

"The education provided by the colonial government was not designed to prepare young people for the service of their own country; instead, it was motivated by a desire to inculcate the values of the colonial society and to train individuals for the service of the colonial state".(5)

The European values and attitudes which the children acquired from the colonial education process were in most cases incompatible with the Tanzanian traditional values and attitudes. This often created a conflict between the parents and their children. Since the children spent most of their time in the school (up to ten months a year), it was difficult for the parents to influence the behaviour of their children.

This difficulty was increased by the fact that most children did not live with their parents on completion of their studies but went to urban areas for employment.



The difficulty to influence children's behaviour was also increased by the colonial education's tendency to encourage the children to look down upon the indigenous traditional way of life. Sometimes songs were sung at school which could be easily misinterpreted and therefore enforce negative attitudes towards life in the village. For example the following song:<sup>†</sup>

Manyani hao manyani	(They are monkeys)
Wasiosoma shule	(Those who don't attend school)
Hao hao manyani	(See see the monkeys)
Wasiosoma shule	(Those who don't attend school).

Although this song was intended to discourage absentee children and those who refused to enrol in school, it could also be interpreted as an abuse to those who never got the chance to enrol into formal school. This accounted for most adults and about fifty percent of the children since there were not enough places for every child. A child who sang such a song could easily build an attitude that anybody who did not attend school (whether of one's own free will or due to unavoidable circumstances) was worthless, and this included parents of most of the children at that time. And there was no way of restricting the singing of such a song to only the classroom for the absentees. Children sang such songs at home to audiences of parents and people who never attend formal school. The following is another example:-

Mkulima mwenye shamba	(The farmer)
Alipanda viazi	(Planted potatoes)
Akachimba chimba	(He dug and dug)
Akaona almasi	(and found a diamond)
Loo! bahati	(Lo! what luck)
Ya mtu mwenye shamba	(For the farmer!)
Akatupa jembe upande	(He threw away the hoe)
Akaenda mjini	(And went to town)

<sup>†</sup>This song has different versions. This version is as was sung in the primary schools in Kilosa District. Another version is:-

Hao manyani wasiokwenda shule	(They are monkeys those who don't go to school)
Nipe ruhusa Bwana x 2	(Give me permission Sir, (Teacher)
Niwapige fimbo matakoni	(To beat their buttocks)

Kununua motokaa	(to buy a car)
Sasa ni tajiri	(And now he is rich)
Loo! bahati	(Lo! What luck)
Ya mtu mwenye shamba	(For the farmer!)

One possible negative interpretation to this song, is that luck is not in being a farmer but in throwing away the hoe, going to town and buying a car. And to get away from farmwork was the aspiration the colonial education inculcated in the children. Yet farming was the life activity of the majority of the Tanzanians. This song is still being sung today and even broadcast over Radio Tanzania, without considering its great possibility for misinterpretation!

As such parents and children were operating on two different sets of values and in most cases the children thinking their set values as superior to those of their parents. In this kind of relationship it was not easy for the parents to influence the behaviour of their children.

Conforming to a fourth century European doctrine of seeing human goodness only in the soul and all evil in the body, Christianity prohibited its converts from participating in dances and rituals. Tanzanian Christians, both children and adults, had to abandon their traditional dances and rituals. But the dances and rituals were one of the principle means through which the parents and the society at large educated their children on various aspects of life. Ngoma songs were and still are a principle means of correcting behaviour in most Tanzanian society. The following song is an example:-

Wadodo wenye mwaka	(This year's children!)
Ku mulomo gwe beje	(Their mouths are full of words)
Beje beje beje beje	(Talk! Talk! Talk! Talk!)
Ne wakulu chichi	(To your elders! Why)
Beje beje beje beje	(Talk! talk! talk! talk!)
Gwe beje	(Talk! talk!)
Ku wadodo iyee	(From these children)
Natuga beje beje	(I only go talk! talk!)

This song was composed specifically to comment on a group of girls who had become notorious for quarelling with elders in Rubeho in a village in Mpwapwa district. The song was expected to help check similar behaviour from others.

Likewise, the initiation rites for boys and girls were the most important institutions through which the children got their education on family life, the morals and history of the society, defence techniques, and so forth.

In place of these traditional means of education, of dances and rituals, Christianity required its converts to bring up their children according to Christian philosophy. The Ten Commandments, the teachings of Jesus and his disciples, the Bible in general and other Christian literature were used to shape children's behaviour.

This did help to shape the behaviour of the children to fit the Christian norms. In most cases however, the Christian approach to child-upbringing was idealistic in nature and did not adequately equip the children to grapple with the realities of life in the society. For example, prayers to God, which was an often suggested solution to personal problems, did not always help people to adequately deal with the realities of life. This approach in most cases lacked the practical nature of such traditional educational media like initiation rites.

For example, when a girl was getting married, Christian upbringing did not include instructions on the realities of married life including biological aspects of sexual relations, reproduction and the like: Yet these aspects formed the core of sex education (Unyago)<sup>†</sup> in preparation for adult life and adult roles.

A case is known of a girl who was a committed Christian. In the name of Christianity she refused to go through Unyago on the eve of her wedding day. European missionaries at the village supported her decision on the ground that this girl was a Christian and she had been taught everything about marriage in the Christian way. The missionaries went to the extent of hiding her at the mission station and prevented her relatives from taking her away.

After the wedding she conceived. Two months later, she felt a headache and thinking it was malaria she took some chloroquine tablets. She miscarried as a result of the chloroquine. Her husband's relatives came to inquire as to why she did not know that

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<sup>†</sup>Unyago: girl's initiation rites, concentrated on practical education and training of adolescent girls in anticipation of future adult woman's roles.

Bitter medicine can cause a pregnant woman to miscarry. They argued that this was one of the lessons in the Unyago she had refused to go through. Since she had said that she was taught everything about marriage in the Christian way, they demanded to know why she was not taught that particular lesson.

The girl may have been extra stupid and perhaps Unyago may not have helped her either,, but it is true that the Christian teachings about marriage that were often offered before the wedding did not grapple with the practical nature of the realities of life.

With the abandonment of traditional ways of life in favour of Christianity by many people, another ground was lost in the society's assistance to the task of child-upbringing. Either the parents themselves rejected the means that helped them to perform their task of child-upbringing more effectively or the children refused to be participants in the activities designed for their own education.

##### 5. CHILD UP-BRINGING IN TANZANIA TODAY.

On attaining Independence, and especially after the adoption of Ujamaa policy in 1967, measures have been taken to try and rectify the wrongs of the colonial times.

The Education for Self-reliance policy is placing importance on school being part and parcel of the community where the children are to be given an education that will make them fit in the society as well as giving the members of the community a chance to influence what is taught:

"... It is absolutely vital that they (the schools), and their pupils should be thoroughly integrated into the village life. The pupils must remain an integral part of the family (or community) economic unit. The children must be made part of the community by having responsibility to the community, and having the community involved in school activities".(8) 18

The negative attitudes towards the Tanzanian way of life inculcated through the colonial education and Christianity are also being corrected through such measures as the promotion of Tanzanian culture by the Ministry of National Culture and Youth and other relevant bodies.

In the rural areas, quite a number of Ujamaa villages have begun to feel the need for collective care for the children as seen in the miniature operation of Day Care centres in some villages. In most parts of the country it is also still relatively easy for parents in the village to get the help of grand-parents and relatives in child-up-bringing because the communities still maintain some amount of closeness.

The parents in urban areas have to depend mostly on the school for the up-bringing of the child for the most part of the day. For the children who are too young to go to school or whose parents cannot afford to put them in a day care centre or kindergarten, which are too few to meet the demand, child-upbringing is still an individual's problem. Families still live as individuals, class differences have become more sharpened and survival of the individual is the struggle of the day.

For lack of actual field research to determine the exact nature of child-upbringing for the parent, this section of the paper is only going to outline what seems to be the problems involved in this matter.

From purely personal observations, the problems facing the parents in their task of child-upbringing seem to be as follows:

- a) There is lack of a common foundation on which parents can base the upbringing of their children. Each parent is left to bring up a child the way he or she thinks right. Child upbringing ethics are obscure. This is most likely due to the fact that the economic base on which people are operating does not produce integrated social relationships. Individualism is still reigning. Parenthood is seen as a biological rather than a social phenomenon.
- b) On the individual level, many parents are themselves not a good model of proper upbringing. Some of them are victims of Christian idealistic upbringing, others of colonial education's European values and attitudes that are incompatible with the realities of the African way of life. Indeed, a number of parents are themselves victims of moral degeneration of today's society seen in over-drinking, unrestrained adultery and other corrupt practices. Much is left to be desired on how

effectively these parents can perform their task of child upbringing.

- c) The formal education system, with all its education for self-reliance ideals, is not adequately playing the role of the parent. Emphasis seems to be still on academic guidance. Self-reliance is placed more on manual work. An all-round life guidance has yet to be effected. The lack of family-life education, and the lack of after-class hobbies to develop children's personalities within the education systems are pointers to the fact.
- d) Child upbringing is not adequately integrated into national development planning. Child care seems to end at the provision of basic services for children's health, formal education and legal rights. Leaving the running of Day Care Centres and nursery schools to private organisations is a pointer to this fact. The neglect by industrial planning of the production of materials vital to the growth of the child such as books, toys, games equipment is another example.
- e) Public tolerance of child misbehaviour and the indifference to correcting it further enforces the attitude that parenthood is a biological and not a social phenomenon. It also undermines one source of additional encouragement that would have been given to parents in their individual effort to control child misconduct.
- f) The individual parent's lack of devotion of time to the children and the family deprives the children of parental care and guidance which is vital to proper and adequate upbringing.
- g) Lack of properly planned after-school activities that can meaningfully pre-occupy the children tends to lead the children into mischief and to the streets. The contribution to child growth of after-school activities presently organised by the Party Youth Organisation in Tanzania, such as child parades is debatable.
- h) The poor economic conditions of families deprive the children of their basic needs and often force them into money-earning activities during most of their free time. This deprives the children of their recreational time vital for their growth.
- i) The environment in which some children grow up is hostile, forcing them to develop certain habits to counter it. The lack.

of consideration, by relevant bodies, of the social-economic conditions under which the children grow leads to the improper handling of related problems.

In conclusion, it is hoped that, this outline will interest the IYC and other interested parties into conducting research and planning and implementing programmes that will come to the aid of the parents to whom the proper performance of their task of child-upbringing is of great concern. In that way the Tanzanian nation can bank some hope on the future generations.

#### FOOTNOTES:-

1. United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/31/168 of 21st December 1979, operative paragraph 2.
2. UNICEF - "Background and Guidelines for action in support of IYC" New York, 1977 p. 23.
3. United Nations - Declaration of the Rights of the Child - principle 6, New York 20th November 1959.
4. Ibid. principle 7.
5. Nyerere, J.K. Education for Self-Reliance, Government Printer, Dar es Salaam 1967 pp. 2-3.
6. During the 4th century, in one of his sermons in Rome, St. Augustine said "It is preferable to till the soil and to dig ditches on the day of the Lord (which is sinful) than to dance a choric Reigen. Oh! how times and manners change! What once was the business of lute players and shameless women only, namely to sing and to play, this is now considered an honour among Christian virgins and matrons who even engage masters in their art to teach them". Quoted in Soroell, W. The Dance through the Ages, Thames and Hudson, London 1967 p. 10.
7. From Wagogo of Mpwapwa district.
8. Nyerere, J.K. op. cit. pp. 21-22.