



### Co-Parenting: Mathematical and Indigenous Practices Dimensions in Kenya

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**Abstract:** Co-parenting is a term employed in a dizzying variety of ways in social sciences thought and Law. This essay challenges how the Co-parenting is typically understood in contemporary legal oriented society. We start by delineating different types of response—prescriptive, comprehensive, explanatory—that are frequently conflated in answering the question “what is co-parenting?” we then discuss assorted experiences reported by different single parents in Nairobi cosmopolitan: after rejecting “mathematical” and “conflictual” approaches, we outline a contextualized alternative grounded in indigenous practices. Co-parenting, on this (comprehensive) account, is best characterized as the sum of the arguments that have been classified indigenous co-parenting, and recognized as such by anthropologist, over time and space. We argue that the scope of the co-parenting expanded during the last decade of rapid urbanization in Kenya, such that if adapted it can become a constitutive ideology of the modern families. This capacious (and deeply confusing) understanding of co-parenting would be a product of the ideological wars fought against “neoliberalism” and assorted developments in enhancing livelihoods of family members. Today we both inherit and inhabit it.

**Key words:** Indigenous, co-parenting practices, Single-Parent Families, Sustainable Livelihoods, Low-Income, Urban Beneficiaries

#### 1.1 Background of the study

Co-parenting can be traced back to works on families with a focus on divorce and childcare (Belsky, Gable & Crnic, 1995; Kinnear, 1999). Later, works of Clinical Psychologists (Tablot, 2002) and post-divorce child care. In the recent years, Charles (2015) explored co-parenting on intact families in Singapore. The Kenya constitution underlies the importance of parental duties, which include the provision of adequate diet, shelter, clothing, medical care, education and guidance underpinning the rights of children (Government of Kenya, 2010) in Article 53. This legal parenting statute underpins the right of the child to parental care and protection, which includes equal responsibility of the parents to provide for the child, whether they are married to each other or not. These prescriptions point to Co-parenting as an “enterprise” undertaken by two adults to bring up children (Mchale et al. 2014). This “enterprise” is

based on the shared responsibility of parenting towards, the children. The word “enterprise” however, appears to minimize the in-depth relationship between parents and children since it is limited to two persons. Further, these shared roles exhibit a mathematical way of dividing child care among parents who are separated or divorced. This is what contextualized the interest of this study to indigenous co-parenting.

Indigenous co-parenting is a model of child rearing inclusive of cultural parenting practices and characterized by operations within the social units of the extended families (Lilian, 2015; Huang, 2012; Berstein, 2016; Everts, 2013). In the African continent, indigenous co-parenting is embedded in social and cultural parameters and not necessarily the culture of a specific ethnic group or community (Moss, 2010; Amos, 2013). Livelihood in the context of this study refer to adequate stocks and flows of food and cash to meet basic needs (United Nations,1987). Additional elaborations by Chambers & Conway (1991) discussed livelihood as household capabilities to access tangible and intangible assets. The tangible ones are sufficient food, habitable housing, quality education, and affordable health. The intangible ones referred to the accessibility and the claim ability towards the tangible assets (Chambers & Conway, 1991).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, inadequacies facing the child in areas of day-to-day provisions including education are undesirable (Ngwaru, 2014). Emmanuel and Dei (ND) weighing on the view, say that social change, the shift in parenting structure, and poverty levels magnify the lack of provision of basic needs for children. According to Mungai, (2012), cases in rural Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, link this diminishing and lack of provision to high levels of poverty. In Kenya, Kiranga (2013) and Mbithi (2019) argue that the lack of sustainable livelihood for children is also attributed to the disintegration of family structures, dysfunctional families, individualism, and high economic demands. Njau (2017) while exploring the change in the family, notes the growing phenomena of single-parenthood and the contribution this has on sustainable livelihood. Her focus is on Zimmerman, a middle-income area. A question that interested the study was whether practices grounded in indigenous co-parenting could enhance family livelihood especially for the children. In order to explore this ideology midst modern families, this study was carried out among single-parent families who are beneficiaries of the Congregation of Mission, and live in Gataka, Kuwinda, Rongai and Kibera-Nairobi Metropolitan-Kenya.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

The family is considered the structure in which a child’s livelihood is provided. Indigenous co-parenting practices are undertaken within a community and among extended family members aimed at the provision of children livelihood. This collaboration renders indigenous co-parenting practices a social activity not attached to a specific location. Family members including parents have distinct roles and responsibilities in child-rearing, for the Hindus (Sudarsana, 2020), Muslim (Camp, 2011) and even Christian traditions (Chege, 2019). Therefore, moving to urban location should not be a reason to abandon the indigenous co-parenting practices towards the provision of the child’s livelihood. However, the situation of contemporary families, within which the beneficiaries of the Congregation of Missions lie, experience increased sense of detachment from the larger extended family systems and ties. This position is further, characterized by individualism and employment-related challenges, conflict-embedded parenting practices, separations, divorce, lack of responsibility from absent parents and widowhood. This situation amplifies the challenges

faced by single-parent families in relation to providing a sustainable livelihood for their children (Ntoimo & Chadoka-Mutanda, 2020). It is under these circumstances that the children are exposed to diminishing livelihood as a consequence that jeopardizes their development and subsequently wellbeing and shrinking sustainable livelihood.

### **1.3 The Study Objective**

This study sought to establish indigenous co-parenting practices as an alternative strategy of enhancing sustainable livelihoods among single-parent families.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

The importance of this study lies in reclaiming indigenous co-parenting practices that have been overshadowed by urbanization and emerging family types like single parenthood. Indigenous parenting promoted inclusion in child care regardless of a specific community. Communities share cultural practices; intention is same the process might be different irrespective of localities making parenting practices universal. Today we inherit and inhibit indigenous practices. It is on this ground that this research was carried out among the different ethnic communities represented at the Congregation of the Mission program. The study gives concerned single parents a chance to reflect deeper on their relatives, and other significant person and bodies, could contribute towards the sustainable livelihood of their children. Single parents could use the research outcomes to strategize and apply alternative ways to advance sustainable livelihood. It is hoped that the Congregation shall adopt the findings to inform their policies on supporting their beneficiaries in a transformative and sustainable way. Scholar may use this study finding or recommendations as a reference for further and future studies in the area of indigenous co-parenting. Lastly the government could generate policies on co-parenting outside legal frameworks to enable single parents attain a sustainable solution to child provision among and between extended families.

### **1.5 Literature review**

In this section, the relevant theory guiding this study and the empirical review of related literature supporting the study are discussed.

#### **1.5.1 Theoretical Framework**

**Critical theory:** Family as a social structure serves a social function or has effects on the society as a whole. Addressing livelihood and especially economic wellness, the role of the social rule in critical theory, sets out to ensure that members of the concerned communities have food, clothing, and shelter, and grow in a safe environment (Murdock, 1947) The theory advocated for socialization and embraces children education. On this note, education for instance, serves a variety of tasks in society, including how a family can improve the livelihood of their children. The theory occupies a central place in family setups (Kingsbury & Scanzoni, 2009). Family as a social structure serves a social function or has effects on the society as a whole. Functionalism, within the theory, claims that society is like an organism, with several elements that work together to form a whole (Haralambos, & Holborn, 2000). This concept then brings a basic tenet detailing that society is made up of coherent groups or institutions that share common standards and have a distinct culture (PAN, 2015).

In the current study, the family as a social institution concerned with the children's support, care, protection, and socialization (Evert, 2013). The functionalist perspective on family according to Audu (2014), focuses on the functions of the family, being the socialization of children, providing love and companionship, educating the children, and the occupation of various economic roles and responsibilities within the society. Additional implications of the theory to this study are that the family is a structure and each member functions within an inter-connectedness (Dai & Wang, 2015). This intertwined operation fosters solidarity and unity where each party is meant to join each other in fulfilling their parental responsibilities of rearing a child (Molongoana, 2015). Thus, the indigenous practices that form the family structure and members cannot be overlooked in contemporary child rearing and the discourse of sustainable development. This theory addresses the functionality of the family. It however does not focus on the capacities of parents and other adults to carry out their distinct roles. These capacities are core to the present study. In order to address the capacities of the parental care and that of other adults in availing sustainable livelihood, the study borrows from the capability theory by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (Ibrahim & Tiwari, 2014). This theory is discussed in the following section.

**Capability theory:** Developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, capability theory demonstrates an approach of defining and assessing progress (Ibrahim & Tiwari, 2014). The capability approach is a normative evaluative method. It suggests that freedom is an appropriate indicator of well-being, social arrangements and social justice. The leading indicator for assessing the well-being and level of satisfaction of the people in the community is the level of freedom that community members have (Sen 1999). What this means for this study is that if the children have high level of developmental freedom, then their livelihood is rated high as well. Households possess different levels of resource endowment to facilitate developmental freedoms for a sustainable livelihood (Alobo, 2015). These freedoms include; the freedom of interacting, games, sports, entertainment and traditional or community celebrations. The freedom-centered view of capability theory accounts for interpersonal and intercultural variations for child rearing promoting development of the people, by the people and for the people (Nayak, 2010). It emphasizes on interconnectedness of society and social justice for the child (Kundal, 2020), making the theory a comprehensive framework for assessing the level of sustainable livelihood for the child.

Capability theory promotes individuals function thus each party in the co-parenting context has the ability to be creative within his or her ability to co-parent. Co-parents are capable of making rational decisions and choices about their children's livelihood. Therefore, this theory will support the research in enhancing the developmental element of sustainable livelihood for the children. The two theories are deemed fit in guiding the study towards the realization of its objectives. The family as a structure stands in need of members who have the capabilities to actualize its functions. One of these functions is the ability to advance sustainable livelihood an area of interest for this study.

### **1.7.2 Empirical review**

#### ***Indigenous co-parenting practices required for sustainable livelihoods***

This study has an interest in indigenous co-parenting practices required for sustainable livelihood. Addressing this literature, provision for the material needs of the child (Yoshikawa & Kabay, 2015) emerges strongly. Among Asians, food and housing are core in the provision list (Committee on the

Rights of the Child, 2020), in addition to enculturation (Flagothier, 2016). Through strict responsibilities and roles of crop planting, tending, harvesting, and food storage, sustainable livelihood was assured to children (Huang, 2012). This agrees with Liliana (2015) who discusses the common trend in Australia and Europe where children's livelihood is given a priority. The Chinese indigenous parenting practices geared towards sustainable livelihood reflect a hierarchical concept of child-rearing that is elaborate among family members (Mchale, Dinh, & Rao, 2014). Within the hierarchy, each member is responsible for a particular contribution towards livelihood. This is similar to that of the Mexican tradition. Among the Mexican traditional parenting culture, the family organization sets up definite responsibilities and chores among members (Solís-Cámara, 2014). Each has a contribution towards the child's livelihood.

In Africa, indigenous co-parenting practices geared toward sustainable livelihood included the roles of community members (Mamaleka, 2020). Within education as a need, there was the use of proverbs by elders (Chegini, 2014), mother and father training on food provision, and training in initiation ceremonies (Emeagwali, 2016). These trainings focused on the sustainable livelihood of all societal members including the child. Family relationships were respected, encouraged and practices within extend family gatherings. In these inter-family connections, children would receive support from family relatives. This is contrary to what Aries (1977) had already noted that families were failing in fulfilling their social and emotional needs. Bessant (2014) and (Brando, 2020) observation that, separation or dysfunctional families (both nuclear and extended), and parents not taking up their rearing responsibilities deprive their children the material freedom they are entitled to. In some divorce cases, the fathers are unsupportive due to insufficient finances, however some fathers are able but refuse to take up their duties (Idris & Selvaratnam, 2012). In reaction to the importance of child wellness, Biggeri and Mehrotra (2011) state that material capabilities give children stability of life and sustainable livelihood. In Kenya, among the western Kenyan communities', an "Isimba" – youth house was constructed for the boys after initiation particularly the male child by their father (Oburu, 2011). This provided for their housing. The task was left to the father, but when unable, the extended family came in. Medical health practice was collective and treated as a religious activity in many indigenous practices, children could eat from their relatives or neighbor's house. However, this trade is fading away with the individualistic approach to life and dying inter-family connections.

This current study explores how these indigenous co-parenting practices geared towards sustainable livelihood could be adapted in contemporary families. These families face different challenges among them inadequate (single rooms) and at times a total lack of housing (Shanyanama, 2016). In worse situations eviction (Akoth, 2019). With such glaring effects of urbanization, these parents struggle to provide food, health and even education (Cowan, 2015). In the wake of modernization where individualism is a major world trend (Nsamenang, 2009; Mamaleka, 2020), the support from the extended family is minimal. When such families are affected by among other issues, dysfunctionality among spouses and separation (Bessant, 2014; Brando, 2020), divorce (Idris & Selvaratnam, 2012), and widowhood (Kiingati, 2019), the individual parent that is left to provide for the sustainable livelihood of the children, struggles.

This section has concentrated on the literature on the indigenous co-parenting practices and linked them to sustainable livelihood. Literature on parenting and or parenting styles (Wadende, et al 2016; Njau 2017; Kangedo 2017; Ngesu 2019) discuss issues related to how best a parent either single, separated, divorced, or widowed can bring up a child. These studies and available literature seldom addresses the



sustainable livelihood of the children. From the scholars, parenting practices that befit the provisions of sustainable livelihood are noted: clear responsibilities and roles, elaborate family structure, and inter-nuclear relationships. Structures, relationships and hierarchies linking each family member to responsibilities such as education roles, mother care, food, housing, medical care are discussed. These practices become a reality in different communities and cultures both globally, continentally and locally. In the wake of modernization and urbanization, when issues such as family dysfunctionality, separation, divorce or widowhood strike, the fabric that holds the contemporary families together crumbles leaving the children struggling with sustainable livelihood. It is in addressing this societal gap that the current study deals with indigenous co-parenting practices and how this could be adapted to advance sustainable livelihood among contemporary families. The following section addresses literature on indigenous parenting practices as a need for contemporary families.

The role of indigenous co-parenting practices into contemporary families in advancing the provision of sustainable livelihood is key in this present study. Studies in Europe, dictate that, Europeans parents should do their utmost best for their children even at the cost of their own well-being (Hermanns, 2012; Sandbæk, 2017). Budig (2011) from Australia, reiterates that co-parenting represents an active alliance among the important people in a child's life from the biological and, social parents, as well as agency workers. This last scholar paints a picture illustrating that indigenous co-parenting practices have a role to play in parenting of children.

In Africa, Amos (2013), discusses family structures within communal systems and the process of evolving parenting. Though he does not bring in the issue of sustainable livelihood, he informs the current study on the changing trends of parenting. Parenting in Africa Network (PAN, 2014), singles out pre and post-birth mother to childcare, responsibilities and respect, child-parent interactions as well as father's role in parenting however, does to present the role of indigenous co-parenting practice shared by the parents.

In Kenya scholars on parenting include Kangedo (2017) and Ngesu (2019). The focus of the first is in support of Amos (2013) on evolving parenting styles. The second has focus on the upbringing of the child majorly by house helps. Even though both touch on parenting, they revile a gap in these forms of parenting. Additionally, the background of this study noted that parenting has changed due to urbanization and modernization. Division of child care emerges strongly with the modern form of co-parenting. Which is high legalized. Thus, the need to establish what role would indigenous co-parenting practices have in advancing sustainable livelihood of children. Studies noting the contribution of social parents are looked at as societal responsibility rather than co-parenting (Zablon, 2018; Muli, 2019). In addition, studies addressing single parents and children's livelihood (Njau, 2017; Mbithi, 2019) fail to expound the co-parenting aspects not to mention their non-consideration of indigenous co-parenting practices.

Identified studies on indigenous co-parenting practices fail to address its contribution in the contemporary family structures towards advancing sustainable livelihood for the children hence the need of this research. The modern way of co-parenting inclines more on separation or divorce (Lewis 2019). The consulted literature considers majorly the psychological impact of the separations and divorces, and how these impacts on the behaviors and interactions of the child (Labarre et.al 2016). The wellbeing of the children in terms of sustainable livelihoods is scantily explored. There is a lack of explicit literature on the well-being aspect of co-parenting in the African societies. With the continued social changes and the disintegration of family setups that provided for the child, these growing minds continue to be victims

of neglect (Labarre et.al 2016). This study seeks to address how the indigenous co-parenting practices can facilitate and advance sustainable livelihood for families in urban setting and more particularly for single parent headed households.

### 1.8 Study Methodology and design

Qualitative approach and case study design were used for this study. Single parents who are beneficiaries of the Congregation of Missions living in low-income areas in Nairobi Metropolitan formed the case of this study. The study was carried out in the location where the single-parent beneficiaries of the Congregation of Mission come from, namely Gataka, Rongai, Kware, Kuwinda and Kibera. According to the register, the beneficiaries were 110 in total (grandparents, parents, children and other individuals). These people visited the Congregation of the Mission in search of food, school fees, medicine and start-up capital, all geared towards provision of livelihoods to their families. The target population was made up of 75 beneficiaries who were single heads of a family to represent a household. The unit of study comprised of, household members; father, mother, and grandparents. Purposively, the researcher structured the 75 beneficiaries in two groups of the grandparents (65year and above) and the adult single parents (18 – 64years) from beneficiaries' office record. The study adopted purposive sampling method and snowballing techniques to recruit study respondents. Purposive sampling was used to pick the first participant where by the key informant (an employee of the Congregation of the Mission) guided the research to identify the first household unit head participants selected based on 2 categories of elderly single parent grandparent and adult single parent. To ensure balance, each gender was represented in the 4 first respondents that is grandparent (male/female), and parent (male/female). These initial 4 led to other participants that were willing to join in the study. Table 1 below shows the sampling frame of the study. Since the research population was 75 single parenting representing households, the anticipated participants were 2 (male grandparents), 3 (female grandparents), 5 male single parents, and 9 female single parents, totaling to 19 participants. The number to 19 was the saturation point (Creswell 2014), where no more information on the subject could be obtained from additional participants.

**Table 1: Research Sample**

<b>Research Population</b>				
Grandparents		Single Parents		Total
Male	Female	Male	Female	
8	12	18	37	75
<b>Targeted Population</b>				
2	3	5	9	19

**Source: Field data, 2024**

### 1.8 Study Findings

#### Indigenous parenting

From the researcher, there was no doubt that participants understood the meaning of indigenous co-parenting practices. Though majority used the word traditional, the explanation on raising children, use of cultural ways, parenting as a family and community, taking up distinct roles met the research description of indigenous co-parenting. This understanding opened up seamless interactions which included home visit and use of understandable language with the participants. All participants understood English language. Swahili language was only use to clarify questions and answers given by respondents.

*SgMO7, (2024). Parenting is raising a child from birth to adulthood. Giving them what they want like school fees and making sure that they have good behavior. Husband and wife taking care of their children and involving relatives or friends.*

Further probe on Indigenous parenting, SgMO7, (2024) said:

*I think it is about culture. How I raise my child using the culture I learned from my community. In old days, when I was young if a boy was found grazing badly, he would be disciplined by that particular person. Likewise, I should let my children be discipline by another person because I am not always with them to see when they do wrong.*

SgMO15, (2024) description was: *Making a child grow like I was brought up by my parents. Teaching them things I was taught like respect. Providing for them as I was provided to by others including relatives. Like traditional way where a child was a business of everyone, from relatives to neighbors and community*

### ***Indigenous co-parenting practices required for sustainable livelihood***

The study established two themes family structure as well as clear roles and functions in response to this objective. These themes showed that people in the urban are aware of indigenous co-parenting practice.

***Family structures:*** The beneficiaries of the congregation had moved from different parts of the county to their current location for reasons such as marriage, work, and/or studies. Their relocation affected their extended or nuclear family relationships. Lack of connection and communication resulted in a weak family fabric and largely a disintegrated family structure. One of the respondents explained.

*“My uncle used to educate my son when we were living in the village (rural area). When I moved to the city in search of a better livelihood, he stopped supporting me. In the process, I got another man who married me. After some time, we separated. Now I have two children and none of their father is willing to take care of them. I cannot go back to my rural home because it is a shame to take two children to my mother's house. I tried reaching out to my uncle but he declined my request. Now I struggle here to raise them. That is how I ended up here at the Congregation seeking for food and school fees” (SgMO1, 2024).*

Listening to SgMO1, (2024) it was evident that the family played a big role in sustaining the livelihoods of its members. Sentiments like uncles, aunts and far relatives sharing their food, livestock and time to make sure the children never lacked were frequent. Another respondent affirmed this: -

*“Family helps a lot when you are in good terms. I have experienced both. After separating with my husband, his mother would visit and support us. When he remarried the bond with his mother died and she stopped caring for us. I turned to my family. Though they try it is not enough but even talking to them gives my children and I hope and strength to live” SgMO2, (2024).*

The data is significant on the importance of family structure. It is when there are different members within this structure that needy parents are assisted by those within their parental cadre. Children's cadre, however, can solicit assistance from adults who are not their biological parents. These data acknowledged that indigenous co-parenting practices through social parents in the urban areas could enable sustainable livelihood for the children.



**Clear roles and functions:** It is not always the case that people know their roles in parenting. In this study, respondents noted a gap in the provision of livelihood attached to failed duties. Respondents accepted that Indigenous co-parenting practices ensured that each family member knew their duties and responsibilities. Further, they agreed that, this is not a hard practice to carry out in their present parenting however it has been overlooked. Respondent SgFA1, said: -

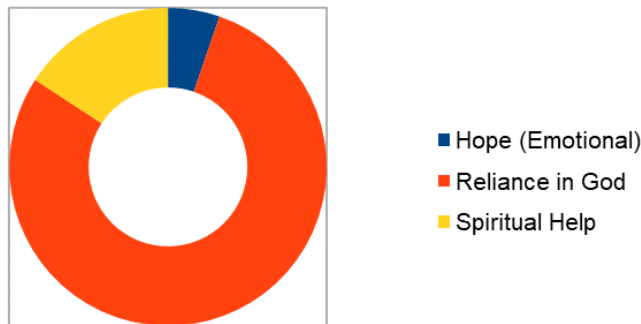
*“Responsibilities were based on gender. Men and women knew their roles. For instance, it was clear that the duty of the man was to provide food and home for his family. Female mainly Aunts trained/prepared girls for marriage. Children would be disciplined by anyone. But look at it now, even with this understanding, men in contemporary families are not practicing. They run away from their wives. They abscond their duties and leave their children at the mercy of organizations like the Congregation of the mission” (SgFA1, 2024).*

In the case of SgMO2, (2024) it was her grandmother who would assist in co-parenting taking up the role and responsibility of a husband. The grandmother encouraged her to trust in God and this gave her stability to work harder. She says:

*“Though now I am an adult and struggling to raise my children, I only wish it was like the time of my mother. Everyone knew their duty. We are a family of five and lost our father at a young age. When my brother was circumcised, our grandfather gave him a piece of land and build him a house because according to our customs he could not live in our mother’s house again. My aunties would seat my sisters and I down to learn how to be wives and mothers when we got married. We prayed together as a family getting strength from God to move on. In God their wisdom of how to deal with others and your children in things like discipline. So many things have changed...families don’t stick together. Some men made to be family don’t care about their children and when you report them like in my case, the legal process takes long and needs money to keep following. I even gave up” (SgMO2, 2024).*

It was clear from the participants that the indigenous co-parenting practices stipulated roles and duties for family members. According to data, roles have been mixed up. For example, single mothers take up the role of the father, thus, they become the sole heads of households and breadwinners. Families are run independently lacking family role models and highly depending on social media and other external bodies for parenting information. It was also shared that parents may have the capabilities to work hard to provide, however, the prevailing circumstances of unemployment and high cost of living are a hindrance. Their sharing exposed the following elements of livelihood.

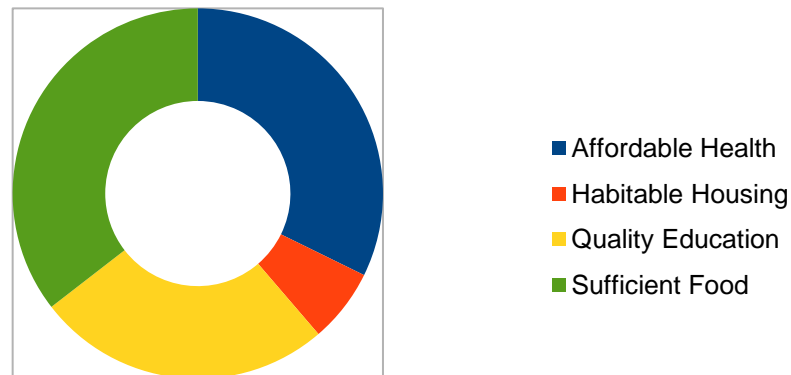
Sustainable Livelihood - intangible Assests



**Figure 1: Intangible livelihood**  
**Source: Field data, 2024**

Figure 1 presents the immaterial livelihood. Majority of the respondents (15 out of 18 responses on intangible assets; 79.1%). relied on God as a way of gaining reason for continuing, despite their challenges. Another 2 out of 18 responses (10.6%) expressed that spirituality is of importance to them, while the remaining 5.3% (1 out of the 18 responses), mentioned hope. The researcher participated in one of the meetings where the beneficiaries meet at the Congregation of the Mission. The researcher got to observe and celebrate Mass with the beneficiaries who later were given a motivational talk on remaining steadfast in their God, on parenting and creating a suitable environment to their children to grow and develop physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually. Though invisible, these pointers of livelihood contributed to growth and development as alluded by Nacie that “Putting God first has sustained by children in difficulty situations. This meant that believing in God inspired action that worked in favor of livelihood provision. Parents who had hope in God and spiritual support, were able to support their children advance their self-esteem.

### Sustainable Livelihood - Tangible Assests



**Figure 2: Tangible livelihood**

**Source: Field data, 2024**

These are noticeable things seen as indicators of livelihood for the children. Figure 2 shows their distribution as; sufficient food (11 out of 31 expressions; 34.5%), affordable health (10 out of 31 expressions; 32.25%), quality education (8 out of 31 expressions; 25.8%), and habitable housing (2 out of 31 expressions; 6.5%). Food, health, education, housing are not only means of livelihood but a component of social relations in indigenous co-parenting practices. Therefore, having affordable, habitable, quality and sufficient livelihood in contemporary families increases the level of sustainability. One of the reasons this sustainability lacks at times is the failing family links to support each other as lamented by respondents *SgMO3* and *SgMO4*. The researcher found out that the Congregation of the Mission had intervened greatly to sustain the livelihood of single-parent families' beneficiaries who were low-income earners.

#### ***Role of indigenous co-parenting practices in sustainable livelihoods***

Three quota of the participants figured out that indigenous co-parenting practices had a role to play towards advancing sustainable livelihood for their children. The themes of collaboration and security emerged in the in-depth interviews.

**Collaboration:** Participants described collaboration as a way of working together. *SgMO4* stated:

*"I have never thought of involving my cousins in my issues. I hardly call my Aunties to consult. Yet I know if I sought their support, they would offer...I cannot tell you why! But if families cooperated in child care, no child would suffer"* (*SgMO4, 2024*).

*SgFA2* and *SgMO5* sharing the same opinion stressed that:-

*"Teamwork for a family was important. Every family member even if leaving in town had come from a community that trained them on how to be responsible. If parents put this skill of parenting in practice, there would not be street children or single mothers. Partnering in times of death*

*was not enough. The sacrifices make to go bury someone should be used to bring up a child” (SgFA2 and SgMO5, 2024).*

SgMO6 narrated that: -

*“Each person had a part to play for the good of the children. Just as things were done in the traditional African community, nothing has changed except coming to town. People are aware of these relationships and activities but they ignore them. The result is that children suffer” (SgMO6, 2024).*

Data from the three participants show the importance of collaboration. Data points to the traditional African community and how the interactions fostered collaboration. It is also reiterated on the importance of teamwork. Respondents also acknowledges that; relatives would positively contribute to the sustainable livelihood of their children. This points clearly to the need of collaboration.

**Security:** The respondent acknowledged that indigenous co-parenting practice would enhance security of sustainable livelihood. There would be food security, secure homes because parents would have a fall back plan in case they were unable to provide for their children. In addition, fear to reach out to a relative or seek refuge in their homes would be limited. SgFA3 reported:

*“In town you fear to go to your relative because they may badmouth you. So even asking them to support you with food or school fee for you children becomes difficult. Up country people borrow even salt. If the same practice of support your neighbor of family member can be practiced in our town families, then people would be secure. Children would not fear to eat in neighbor house as it used to be in the rural homes” (SgFA3, 2024).*

As with collaboration, security is an important role of indigenous co-parenting practices in sustainable livelihood. Without the two, the attaining of livelihood towards the child would be jeopardized.

### **Discussion**

The inclusion of parenting exposed by findings does not bring out the notion of Co-parenting typically understood in contemporary legal oriented society. The teamwork posted, minimizes any gap in the provision that may occur thus ensuring a sustainable livelihood for the family and ultimately the children. Having a fallback plan to either of the family members gave hope to the single parents. These parents had faith that their children would receive care from any family member. Further the developmental freedom of the children and self-esteem is enhanced through family interactions rooted in role and responsibilities.

From this study, it can be interpreted that, domestic violence, separation, circumstantial marriages, and stigma affected participants’ beneficiaries of the Congregation of missions. These issues underwrite the challenges participants went through culminating to single parenthood (Kirby, 2010; Hamilton, 2012). Finding linked these subjects to low income resulting to poor leaving conditions in urban informal settlements. For instance, home visits took the research to participant’s home exposing vulnerable living conditions like small shared house of 10 by 10ft housing a family of five. These families consisted of a mother and children both boys and girls.

Findings also revealed that stigma made it hard for single parents to look for support from the initial families of origin and extended for that matter resulting to organizations like the Congregation of the

Mission. Information from Sennet (1984) on families, differentiates families according to class and culture points to differentiating factors of families as being labor (work), in the current study the differentiating factors are family types (single parent families, extended families, social families). These family types complicate the matter of co-parenting. The unsaid cry which the research grounded was that if only these single parent low-income urban dwellers would get the required support from the absent parent, relatives and willing neighbor, all would be well for their children.

Research results further indicated that not all participants saw the applicability of indigenous co-parenting practices in their current circumstances. However, the same findings showed that a majority were inspired by the way these practices would enhance livelihood of their children ensuring sustainability. Based on the findings, where data was collected from both adult and grandparent single parents, indigenous parenting practices could be used in urban environment. These practices as they narrated, had been passed to them from a different generation and nothing stopped them from applying them to their current generation. So, the research concluded that indigenous co-parenting practices were used and can be used in the contemporary families to enhance sustainable livelihood for families.

It was evident from findings that the provision enabled by indigenous parenting did not involve sharing of provision equally. No formula was used to divide family and children needs among parents or relatives however, children never lacked. The appeal from participants was indigenous co-parenting practices contribute towards provision of sustainable livelihood needed for the support of the upbringing of the child. This could be an alternative to the much-individualized parenting in the contemporary families that give room for diminished child livelihood.

### **1.10 Conclusion**

The study concluded that contemporary family structures are highly individualized weakening the social fabric of the family support system and network. Single parent headed families become vulnerable of disintegrated family structures and strained relationships disrupting and jeopardizing provision of children livelihood. Use of the modern co-parenting notion of legal and mathematical sharing of child provision does not favor children from single parent headed families. Additionally, relocation to urban environments reduces the application of indigenous co-parenting practices that expand the social network and security on ensuring sustainable livelihood for the children. It was distinguished that the single parent families stand in need of indigenous parenting practices regarding them as important and an alternative way of advancing sustainable livelihood of children.

### **1.11 Recommendations**

Study findings, discussion and conclusion have proven that indigenous co-parenting practices could be an alternative strategy towards advancing sustainable livelihoods thus drawing the following recommendations.

- i. Government and County Governments to review co-parenting policies to integrate indigenous co-parenting practice so that children can have a wide and secure provision network.
- ii. Civil Societies, especially the Faith Based Organizations should consider transformative actions for single parents in order to implement long term measure in the provision of sustainable livelihoods of the children.



- iii. Single parents to form support groups where they can share and learn skills on co-parenting, personal development and sustainable economic skills, taking care of their psychological and physical health.

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