



“You’re all categorized together. No one will come ask you, ‘How are you today? What did you do at school? How are you feeling?’ Or if you achieved something, [there is no one] there to celebrate with you. Another thing that is not there is unconditional love.”

» Winnie, describing her experience of growing up in an orphanage in Kenya

Caring for Orphans and Vulnerable Children

A Study Guide for
Journeys of Faith

SESSION 2

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The Impact of
Poverty and
Separation from
Family Care



A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families.

Psalms 68:5–6a NIV

Caring for Orphans and Vulnerable Children
A Study Guide for *Journeys of Faith* (Sessions 1 – 6)
The Faith to Action Initiative, 2015.
Photo credits: Firelight Foundation and World Vision

This series is designed to support small group study accompanying *Journeys of Faith: A Resource Guide for Orphan Care Ministries Helping Children in Africa & Beyond*. The series includes six downloadable sessions and a facilitator guide, which together equip small groups with the tools, resources, and information needed to engage participants through discussion, readings, videos, group activities, and prayer.

The Faith to Action Initiative serves as a resource for Christian groups, churches, and individuals seeking to respond to the needs of orphans and vulnerable children. Through our publications, website, and workshops, we offer practical tools and resources and up-to-date information on key strategies and research to help guide action.

www.faithtoaction.org

WELCOME AND OPENING PRAYER

 5 minutes

Welcome to Session 2 of *Caring for Orphans and Vulnerable Children*. In this session, you will:

- Learn more about the role that poverty plays in children being placed in orphanages, and how separation from family care impacts vulnerable children.

Before starting your discussion, begin your time together with prayer, inviting God to open your hearts and minds as you seek to learn more about caring for orphans and vulnerable children.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Checking In

 15 minutes

1. Use one or more of the following questions to check in with each other about what you've learned and experienced since your last gathering.
 - What stood out most to you about the Session 1 discussion, or what new insights did you discover in your additional reading, study, and reflection? (See "On Your Own," page 11 in Session 1, as well as any notes you may have taken on pages 16–18.)
 - As part of "Make Prayer Your First Action" (Session 1, page 10), you were invited to make a commitment to daily prayer your first action step. Briefly describe your experience of prayer since the last session. For example, in what ways has it been especially challenging, meaningful, or helpful to you?

Hard Choices



2. Imagine you live in a developing country and are the parent of two small children ages two and five. Over the past two years, you have experienced a series of catastrophic events, including the death of your spouse, the failure of your small business, and the subsequent loss of your home. You feel overwhelmed and hopeless and realize you no longer have the physical, financial, or emotional resources necessary to provide for your children.

On your own, briefly review the following list of whom you might choose to care for and raise your children. Prioritize the options from 1 to 8, using 1 to identify your first choice, 2 your second choice, and so on, through all eight options. After everyone has finished prioritizing his or her list, use the questions that follow to discuss your choices.

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| _____ Close friend | _____ Adoption agency |
| _____ Foster care | _____ Institutional orphanage |
| _____ Aunt/uncle | _____ Grandparent |
| _____ Group home/family-style orphanage | _____ Extended family member |

- Go around the group and have each person state the options he or she rated first and last (1 and 8), without additional comments or clarifications.
 - Overall, what similarities and differences do you notice in the options each of you chose?
 - Where did the two orphanage options fall on your list? Near the top, the bottom, or somewhere between?
 - Generally speaking, do you think the high and low priorities you identified would be very similar to or very different from the priorities parents in developing countries might choose if they found themselves in similar circumstances? Share the reasons for your choice.
3. UNICEF estimates that at least 2.2 million children in the world live in orphanages. This number is considered by many to be a significant underestimate since many orphanages are not registered and the children within them are not officially counted (other estimates, for example, range from 5 to 8 million). Depending on the region, between 50 and 90 percent of children in orphanages have at least one living parent. There are both “push” and “pull” factors that drive these parents to place their children in institutional orphan care. Push factors are difficult circumstances—they *push* families to consider orphanages as a potential way out of their hardships. Pull factors are real or perceived benefits—they *pull* families toward orphanages as a means of providing resources their children might not have access to any

other way. Listed below are several examples of push and pull factors that might cause a family to place children in institutional care.

Push Factors

- Poverty
- Death of one or both parents
- Physical or emotional disability or chronic illness (of parent or child)
- Domestic violence and abuse
- Natural disaster
- War or civil unrest
- Unemployment

Pull Factors

- Basic needs (shelter, food, water, clothing)
- Actual or perceived educational opportunities
- Information and technology (TV, internet, libraries)
- Vocational training
- Active recruitment by orphanage personnel or community members
- Medical care

To truly help orphans and vulnerable children, it is important to consider how push and pull factors such as these might contribute to the placement of children in orphanages.

- We typically think of children in orphanages as having no caregivers. But if it is poverty, not lack of caregivers, that pushes children to be placed in orphanages, how might it change your view of what it means to care for orphans?
 - In considering the options you might choose for helping orphans and vulnerable children, what kinds of aid efforts might unintentionally increase the likelihood of a child being placed in an orphanage? What aid efforts might be more likely to prevent a child being placed in an orphanage? As part of your response, consider how various aid efforts might respond to push factors and minimize pull factors.
4. Strengthening and supporting families to care for vulnerable children is the most effective strategy for preventing the placement of children in orphanages. It not only prevents “poverty” orphans and separation from family care, but it also ensures that even when children are separated, family-based care (including kinship, foster care, and adoption) are supported, which keeps children in a family setting rather than an orphanage.
- What changes in your mind or heart when you consider focusing your efforts on helping families rather than orphans?
 - What factors might make one option (family aid or orphan care) more compelling than the other?

VIDEO

“We All Need Families at the End of the Day: Maureen”



Produced by UNICEF and The Better Care Network, this video tells the story of a young girl named Maureen and her two siblings, who were placed in a children’s home in Kenya when their mother died. Use an internet-connected device such as a laptop, tablet, or smartphone to access this video at the Faith to Action website: <http://faithtoaction.org/videos>. As you watch, use the outline below to follow along or to take additional notes on anything that stands out to you.

Video Notes

In Kenya, an estimated 50,000 children live in residential care. Too often, family-based alternatives are not being considered.

Many institutions have poor standards of care. They are unable to provide the children with the individual care they need to thrive.

Many children have parents or extended family that could take care of them. With some support, children can often be reunited with them.

Catherine Kimotho, UNICEF Child Protection Officer

Within a family setup, children are able to develop a sense of belonging and a culture. . . . They know the values, the things they respect—these they are taught by the adults they live with.

Maureen

I start asking myself why my mother had to die, and why my dad is mad, and why do I live in a children's home.

Grandmother

Even if there may not be enough room here, this is still their home. The kids are ours.

Maureen

I would love to come back home, go to school, and continue with my education. And I'll study hard so later I will be able to help my family.

Catherine Kimotho, UNICEF Child Protection Officer

With the government, UNICEF has partnered in setting up a program of cash transfer for orphans and vulnerable children, which prevents children from getting out of families. So the families that are vulnerable, that are poor, are given money every month to be able to take care of orphans and vulnerable children within their households.

In 2004, the cash transfer program was initiated. By June 2013, over 150,000 families and over half a million children were enrolled in the program.

Maureen

I say a home is a place somewhere where my grandpa is, and to me he will be like my daddy. My grandmother as my mother. And I have a sister and a brother. At home we say, I get love from my grandparents, and I love them back. Way before, I was feeling like my heart wanted something, but it's like I needed something and got it finally.

GROUP DISCUSSION

The Impact of Institutional Care



20 minutes

5. Use the questions that follow to discuss the video “We All Need Families at the End of the Day: Maureen.”
 - What stands out most to you about what you just watched?
 - What push and pull factors are evident in the story of Maureen and her siblings?
 - How would you describe the impact living in an orphanage had on Maureen? Consider physical, spiritual, social, intellectual, and emotional factors.

6. Fortunately for Maureen and her siblings, their status as orphans was short-term. However, many children in orphanages remain orphans throughout their childhood and into young adulthood. To better understand the consequences living in an orphanage can have for a child, go around the group and have a different person read aloud each of the statements in “The Impact of Orphanages on Children” (page 9). As the statements are read, underline any words or phrases that stand out to you.
 - Which statements, if any, surprised you? Why?
 - Among all the potential options available for providing care to vulnerable children, what role, if any, might orphanages play? Share the reasons for your response.
 - When you consider the impact of orphanages, what values or principles would you want to guide your own efforts to help orphans and vulnerable children? For example: *An orphanage cannot replace family care. Children grow best in families and thrive in communities.*



The Impact of Orphanages on Children*

The impact of orphanages on children is felt in many different ways, but research consistently demonstrates the harm experienced by children in three areas: child development, social relationships, and increased risks later in life.

Child Development

- Chronic neglect in institutions can weaken and disrupt the developing brain structure, resulting in problems related to mental health and physical disease.
- The negative effects of institutionalization are more severe the longer a child remains in residential care and are most critical in younger children.
- The first three years of life are considered a “sensitive period,” when a child must receive intimate emotional and physical contact. If this is not present, there is a high risk the child’s development will be significantly impaired.

Social Relationships

- Orphanages separate children from family and community life, both of which are essential for developing healthy relationships as a child, and developing and maintaining healthy relationships as an adult.
- Orphanages lack the close relationships and day-to-day interactions within a family that provide the foundation for a child’s social and emotional development, self-image, and sense of belonging.

- Growing up in a family environment, children are able to learn the meaning of kinship and parenting. These are essential experiences children need to draw on in their own emotional and spiritual growth and when they become parents later in life.

Risks Later in Life

- After growing up in orphanages in which they have followed a structured daily routine and had few opportunities to make their own choices, children leaving orphanages as young adults are frequently unprepared for independent life.
- The vulnerabilities orphans experience as children are largely delayed rather than eliminated. Having reached adulthood, they may not know how to keep a home or cook, how to manage money, or how to take initiative in providing for themselves because they have not had role models or caring adults who taught them such skills.
- Young adults leaving orphanages are at greater risk for unemployment, homelessness, conflicts with the law, sexual exploitation, and perpetuating the cycle of vulnerable children through their own poor parenting skills.

* For more information, see “Children, Orphanages, and Families: A Summary of Research to Help Guide Faith-Based Action,” published by Faith to Action and available for digital download at <http://faithtoaction.org/resources/childrenorphanagesandfamilies>.

Making a Personal Connection



15 minutes

7. Today, we might take it for granted that each human life has inherent dignity and value and that every child is precious. Sadly, in many places in the world, this is not the case, and it was not the case in Jesus' day either. In ancient times, human dignity and worth were hierarchical—the closer you were to the gods and those in power, the more value you had. Kings were at the top of the value ladder, peasants and slaves at the bottom. And children, especially girls, were sometimes considered of so little value that Roman law permitted them to be left to die of exposure. Jesus repeatedly challenged the value systems of his day with statements like this:

Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me also welcomes my Father who sent me. Whoever is the least among you is the greatest.

LUKE 9:48 NLT

Most of us aren't regularly interacting with vulnerable children in developing countries, but that doesn't negate Jesus' command to welcome the "least of these" (Matthew 25:34–46). But how do we do it? How do we welcome vulnerable children—accept them as persons of great worth and dignity—when we may never meet them?

A simple place to begin is by "welcoming" everything you're beginning to learn about orphans and vulnerable children and opening your heart to it. Whenever we're exposed to information and stories about suffering, there's a temptation to avoid them—we switch channels, turn the page, or click onto a new site because "it's just too hard to know that." We protect ourselves by limiting what we learn or by not letting it into our hearts. When we choose to be welcoming, we refuse to distance ourselves from the hard truths. Instead, like the prophet Job who "wept for those in trouble [and] . . . grieved for the poor," we receive the information and allow it to impact us, just as we would receive and be moved by a vulnerable child in our presence.

- Which word best describes your initial reaction to the information and stories you've been exposed to in this study: fight or flee? For example, have you felt compelled to fight—to take some kind of immediate action? Or have you felt more inclined to flee—to avoid what you're learning or keep it from impacting you emotionally?

- In what ways, if any, might your response change if you chose to welcome the information and stories—to warmly receive them, accept what they teach you, and treat them with the same care and dignity you would naturally give to a vulnerable child?

In addition to welcoming what we learn about vulnerable children into our hearts, we can welcome “the least of these” by supporting those who are part of their daily lives—their families, communities, and churches. These are the people who are in the best position to meet the needs of vulnerable children. That’s why strengthening families is so important—it’s a significant part of how we live out the biblical mandate to “look after orphans and widows in their distress” (James 1:27 NIV).

- How has what you’ve learned in this session affirmed or changed your understanding of what it means to care for orphans and vulnerable children?
8. One of the values of studying and learning together in a group is that God can lead us in and through our relationships, empowering the group as a whole with a sense of shared leading and direction. As you continue to learn and discuss the issues surrounding orphans and vulnerable children, are there any ways in which you sense God may be beginning to lead you as a group?

CLOSING PRAYER

Close your time together with prayer.

As an option, you might use the following prayer to close your meeting. To quiet your hearts and center your focus on God, consider allowing a few minutes of silence before reading the prayer.

We thank you, God,
that you have given us
hearts to be moved by love and compassion,
hands to be raised in praise and service,
and minds to be guided in wisdom and discernment.
Strengthen our hearts, hands, and minds to follow more fully
the path that you set before us.
Guide the steps of our journey
so that we can follow in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus,
who has taught us by his own example that we are called
to humbly serve the orphaned, the widowed, the vulnerable—
all of those in greatest need.
Strengthen the work of your church—
to bring justice to the oppressed,
to help without hurting,
to serve as the hands and feet of Jesus,
in a broken and wounded world.
Amen.



On Your Own

Between now and the next group meeting, set aside 90 minutes to read, watch, and then reflect on the following:

- “The Call to Respond to the Needs of Orphans and Vulnerable Children,” *Journeys of Faith*, pages 4–5 (accessible and downloadable at <http://faithtoaction.org/resources/journeys-of-faith/>).
- “Twelve Strategies for Strengthening Families and Community-Based Care,” *Journeys of Faith*, (pages 17–19).
- Two stories of partnership: Rockland Community Church and Ngaramtoni Parish, *Journeys of Faith*, pages 18–22; Wheaton Bible Church and Nakuru AIDS Initiative, *Journeys of Faith*, pages 23–27 (accessible and downloadable at <http://faithtoaction.org/resources/journeys-of-faith/>).
- “The Long-Term Vulnerabilities Facing Teens and Young Adults Raised in Orphanages,” Sarah Chhin (pages 15–16).
- “VisionFund Presents: Genevieve’s Story” (access the video on the Faith to Action website at <http://faithtoaction.org/videos>).

Note any insights or questions in the space provided on pages 20–21. You’ll discuss what you’ve read and watched in your next meeting.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Online

- *Children, Orphanages, and Families: A Summary of Research to Help Guide Faith-Based Action* (<http://faithtoaction.org/resources/>).
- *The Importance of Family Care and the Limitations of Orphanages* (<http://faithtoaction.org/resources/more-resources/>).
- *Alternative Care for Children without Parental Care: Kinship, Foster, and Adoption* (<http://faithtoaction.org/resources/more-resources/>).
- *Best Practice Strategies in Family and Community Care* (<http://faithtoaction.org/resources/more-resources/>).

Video and Audio

- “Webinar 2: The Continuum of Care,” 38 minutes, (accessible at <http://faithtoaction.org/videos/webinars/>).
- “Why Not a Family?” 22 minutes, produced by Uniting for Children, (accessible at <http://unitingforchildren.org/video/>). This video focuses on the efforts of several organizations within Cambodia who are working to keep vulnerable children in family-based care.
- “Children Grow Best in Families,” Wendy McMahan, 3 minutes (faithtoaction.org/videos).
- “Helping without Hurting, Part 2: Seeing God at Work,” 12 minutes, produced by The Chalmers Center and LifeChurch.tv (<https://www.chalmers.org/media/entry/small-group-experience-unit-2>).
- “The Tragedy of Orphanages,” 11 minutes, TED Talk by Georgette Mulheir (faithtoaction.org/videos).
- *Theology of Poverty*, multiple audio files of varying lengths, (<http://povertyunlocked.com/theology-of-poverty/>).

Books

- *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself*, Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, chapters 1–3 (Moody Publishers, 2009).
- *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, Revised and Expanded Edition, Bryant L. Myers, chapters 3–4 (Orbis, 2011).
- *Can Anyone Hear Us? Voices of the Poor*, Deepa Nrayan (Oxford University Press for the World Bank, 2000).

LONG-TERM VULNERABILITIES FACING TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS RAISED IN ORPHANAGES*

SARAH CHHIN

Sarah Chhin is Child Welfare Advisor of International Cooperation Cambodia (ICC) and Co-manager of Project Sky, a Christian research-based child welfare organization focused on identifying and responding to the needs of older children in Cambodian orphanages. In the following article, Sarah describes what Project Sky discovered about how teens and young adults raised in orphanages view their prospects for the future as independent adults.

We spent eight months researching thirty-eight orphanages and three shelters. In those forty-one places, there were 2,398 children, a third of them aged fifteen or above. The oldest we found were two twenty-eight-year-olds who were living in the orphanage as staff because they hadn't been able to reintegrate; they did not consider themselves children of the orphanage, although the rest of the staff did.

We devised an interactive, creative research workshop for the young people to find out what their aspirations were, what their worries and fears were, what they wanted to do, where they wanted to live, what they thought they might need to prepare themselves, and any problems they thought they would encounter. We based everything on their future; we didn't want to bring up their past.

Our work was conducted in fifteen different workshops with 514 young people aged fifteen to twenty-five. We got them to work together and play games, do group work, [and] create individual pictures, and [used] many other ways of getting information. Support workers and facilitators listened in on conversations and jotted down what the young people said as they were working, so we had two sets of information: one set based on their answers to our questions, and the other based on observations of the views and attitudes they expressed toward orphanage care and each other while they were working.

What we discovered was tragic: they were so afraid of the future. They knew they would be vulnerable. They were afraid of having no job when they left, of being homeless, of never being able to have friends. They were afraid of discrimination, that no one would give them their rights,

* Excerpted and adapted from "A Discussion with Sarah Chhin," August 6, 2010, by the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University. The complete interview is accessible online at <http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/interviews/a-discussion-with-sarah-chhin-project-sky-co-manager-international-cooperation-cambodia>.

that no one valued them, and that they would become victims of crime. They were so alienated from their families that they felt they would have no place in them even if they wanted to go back. They observed that because they lived with children and not adults, they could not identify and understand adult body language or the way adults used language.

None of them had been to the market to buy food and none of them knew the prices for food. Their life skills were very basic, so they knew that if they were on their own in the community, they would be very easy to cheat. Because they did not understand the way adults work, they had no one to learn from, which added to their fears that they would be easy to exploit and abuse.

One group said they were afraid of becoming criminals. They were afraid they would be duped into becoming drug runners or into becoming gang members, even if they didn't want to. They feared being easily targeted by people who would make them do things that were wrong. Others said that because they would have no money and would be hungry, they could turn to violence to get what they needed. It was very tragic. One young lad said, "I feel like a duck being let out of a cage [who is] afraid that someone is going to cook it."

The overriding trend among all 514 orphans was that they did not want to leave the orphanage. Some said, "I've been here for so long, how can I think of leaving?"

Orphanages take on young children because they are vulnerable, but they aren't taking away their vulnerability; they just delay the effects. Many young people will be more vulnerable when they leave the orphanage than when they went in because however dysfunctional their support network may have been—whether they were in a gang or whatever—they actually had one. They knew how their community worked. They had people they knew would feed them if they needed it. When they leave the orphanage as adults, they've lost everything they knew about society, so now they are even more vulnerable than when they entered the orphanage. This is the exact opposite of what orphanage directors and supporters believe happens. The effects of institutionalization that result from orphanage care have a huge, long-term negative impact on the children.

TWELVE STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY-BASED CARE*

Our actions should be guided by principles and strategies based on good practice. The twelve strategies that follow are based on principles that have been agreed upon and endorsed by a broad constituency of community, church, and faith-based organizations, as well as foundations and international agencies serving children. These strategies speak directly to churches, groups and individuals seeking to launch or support orphan care ministries. These strategies promote a holistic approach in considering all aspects of a child's wellbeing, including the importance of family-based care.

1. **Focus on the most vulnerable children, not only orphans.** Many causes, not just loss of a parent, can make a child vulnerable, including poverty, disability, and illness. Designating support for orphans only, may cause unintentional harm by contributing to the social isolation of the children served or by failing to provide help for those in greatest need.
2. **Strengthen the capacity of families and communities to care for children.** Most families and communities want to care for their own, but those living in poverty or other difficult circumstances often need additional support. Strategies that strengthen families' ability to care for children help ensure that fewer children will be abandoned or placed in orphanages. For children who no longer have parents that can care for them, churches and community groups can help support family-based alternatives, such as kinship care, foster care, and domestic adoption.
3. **Reduce stigma and discrimination.** When children and families face discrimination due to poverty, health status, ethnicity, disability, or any other cause, they become isolated and at greater risk for harm. Pastors and other community leaders can use their voices and actions to raise awareness, change hearts and minds, put an end to harmful social attitudes, and increase a sense of community and service to those in need.
4. **Support HIV and AIDS awareness and prevention strategies, particularly among youth.** AIDS remains a leading cause of orphanhood in Sub-Saharan Africa and other regions of the world, and HIV-infection continues to be a major risk factor for youth. Churches can play a role in prevention and protection, including help youth and others access HIV testing and counseling centers, as well as offer family life and human sexuality education, peer support groups, and mentorship programs that foster faithful, healthy, and life-sustaining choices.

* Adapted and updated from *Journeys of Faith*, pages 6-7.

5. **Strengthen the ability of caregivers and youth to earn livelihoods.** Poverty is a leading cause of family separation and placement of children in orphanages. Families need basic financial resources in order to send their children to school and provide them with adequate food, clothing, medical care, and shelter. Churches can help caregivers access the skills and resources to earn livelihoods through such programs as microcredit loans, savings groups, small business training, vocational education, and subsistence farming programs.
6. **Provide material assistance to those who are too old or ill to work.** Income-generating projects can be an effective way to help caregivers provide for children and themselves. However, for those who are too old or too ill to work, additional assistance is required. Cash transfers, food donations, home repairs, and other forms of material assistance lessen the burden on the ill and the elderly, such as grandparent caregivers.
7. **Ensure access to health care, life-saving medications, and home-based care.** In addition to saving lives, access to health care and life-saving medications help prevent orphanhood and family breakdown. Churches can help community members access health care, and medicines, such as antiretrovirals to treat HIV infection. Churches can initiate and lead home-based care programs in which trained volunteers visit the homes of the ill. The volunteers offer emotional, spiritual, and medical support, and also monitor the wellbeing of children within families living with HIV or other serious illness.
8. **Provide daycare and other support services that ease the burden on caregivers.** Parents and caregivers, particularly women, are limited in their ability to earn livelihoods if they do not have access to daycare and other necessary support systems. Churches can offer daycare, giving children opportunities to grow and learn while freeing family members to work or attend school. Support groups give parents and caregivers space to gather in a community setting, experience a sense of solidarity around shared challenges, and offer one another spiritual and emotional care. Easing the burden on parents and caregivers strengthens the family care and protection of children.
9. **Support schools and ensure access to education, for girls as well as boys.** Too often, children are placed in orphanages so that they can access an education. Others remain in their families but are unable to attend school because their parents cannot pay for school fees, textbooks, and uniforms, or because children are needed to help care for ill parents or contribute to the family's livelihood. Churches can help children remain in school—and in families—by providing support for education costs and by helping to lift families out of poverty. Pastors and church members can encourage their fellow community members to make education for all boys and girls a priority and a means to end the cycle of poverty.

10. **Support the psychosocial as well as material needs of children.** Orphans and vulnerable children have emotional, spiritual, and social needs that can leave them at risk if left unmet. Children may need help coping with great challenges: the loss of a parent, separation from siblings, the emotional toll of illness in the family, or exposure to violence and conflict. The Church supports the healing process and helps build children's resilience through faith, prayer, and fellowship, and by demonstrating God's love and care. Bereavement counseling, peer support groups, and recreation and arts programs also provide children and youth with encouragement and support.
11. **Engage children and youth in the decisions that affect their lives.** Children often bring valuable ideas, information, and viewpoints to the decisions affecting their lives. When children are invited to participate in ways that are appropriate to their age and maturity, they are less fearful and feel a greater sense of ownership. Local churches are often involved in decisions such as helping identify alternative care for orphans or supporting families in crisis due to abuse and neglect at home. Providing opportunities for children and youth to share their viewpoints and engage in meaningful ways in these and other important decisions helps to ensure their wellbeing.
12. **Protect children from abuse, gender discrimination, and labor exploitation.** By supporting good parenting and family coping skills, the church can help parents and caregivers better understand and meet children's needs. As leaders in the community, churches and particularly pastors can promote protection of children as a shared responsibility and concern among all those who interact with children: teachers, neighbors, church members, as well as those visiting the community. Children and youth can be taught how to recognize and to report abuse wherever it occurs. Through awareness-raising campaigns and community education on issues such as child abuse, early child marriage, gender-based violence, and child labor, churches can help ensure the care and protection of children.

