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*Article Submission to*  
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**Name:** Dr. Afua Twum-Danso Imoh

**Department & Institution:** The Department of Sociological Studies, the University of Sheffield

**Address:** The Department of Sociological Studies, the University of Sheffield, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield, S10 2TN, England, UK

**Email:** [a.twum-danso@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:a.twum-danso@sheffield.ac.uk)

**Title of Article:** Tackling the Physical Punishment of Children in Resource Poor Contexts: The Utility of a Community Starting Point Approach for Action and Intervention in Children's Rights Programming.

## **Abstract**

Despite the global wind of change in public attitudes towards the physical punishment of children, partly influenced by the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, the practice remains prevalent in diverse societies. This implies that current efforts are limited as strategies to initiate behaviour change, especially in societies where, the practice is not only condoned, but also where governments lack the capacity, largely as a result of resource scarcity, to enforce legislation. Therefore, this article proposes an alternative approach which foregrounds using the starting point of communities as a more effective strategy to protect children's rights in such socio-economic contexts. Focusing predominately on sub-Saharan Africa, this paper outlines the rationale for the continuing prevalence of the physical punishment of children before exploring the utility of approaches that take community perspectives as their point of departure for action and intervention and analysing the importance of dialogue to this process.

**Keywords:** children's rights, resource scarcity, the physical punishment of children, community starting points, dialogue, sub Saharan Africa.

## **1. Introduction**

In recent decades public attitudes to the physical punishment of children have changed in a number of countries, especially in the years since the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in November 1989. In addition to legal reform, other key drivers of these changes have been the advocacy programmes, sensitisation projects and interventions launched by international agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which have sought to not only advocate for changes in laws and policies, but also inculcate modifications in parenting behaviours that are perceived as harmful in various contexts. However, despite these efforts, the physical punishment of children continues to be a central feature of the socialization process in numerous countries with diverse historical, religious, political, economic and social features.

The continuation of this practice, therefore, implies that current efforts - be they focused on legislation, sensitisation and advocacy - are limited as strategies to initiate behaviour change as it relates to the physical punishment of children which is still seen, in many contexts, as an effective disciplinary tool. This is especially the case in societies where, the practice is not only widespread and condoned, but also where governments lack the capacity, largely as a result of resource scarcity and mismanagement, to enforce provisions stipulated in the various laws and policies that form their legislative framework. Therefore, the question this raises is: how do practitioners and policy-makers inculcate a change in parenting behaviours in contexts characterised by resource scarcity, limited government capacity and widespread acceptance of a particular practice? To address this question this article seeks to explore whether, in such contexts, an approach which is more contextualised and embedded within communities and thus locally-driven may be more effective in protecting children. Examples

in this paper will be predominately drawn from sub Saharan Africa which is not only the poorest continent in the world, but also consists of the largest proportion of young people under the age of 18.

## **2. Dissonance between global policies and local realities**

Within the international human rights community the physical punishment of children is seen as a violation of children's fundamental human rights to human dignity and physical integrity (see Freeman, 2010). In the years since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child the phenomenon of violence against children has been prioritised on a number of high level agendas (see Pupavac, 2009, 2011; Freeman, 2010; Renteln, 2010). For example, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the body established by the United Nations to monitor the progress of the Convention, organised, in 2000 and 2001 respectively, two days of general discussion on: state violence against children within the family and in school. Following these discussions the Committee recommended, to the UN General Assembly, that a study be undertaken on the question of violence against children worldwide focusing on five settings: the family, schools, alternative care institutions and detention facilities, places where children work, and the communities in which they live (Pinheiro, 2006). The study resulted, in 2008, in the establishment of a new role within the UN - a Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children - which was charged with ensuring effective follow up to its recommendations.

In addition to the prioritisation given to this issue at the level of the United Nations, many children's rights NGOs, often working within the framework of the Convention, have been key drivers of the changes that have occurred (see also Pupavac, 2009, 2011). These various

efforts have, in the past 26 years, had a considerable amount of success as, as of December 2015, 48 countries have banned the physical punishment of children in all settings including the home (<http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/progress/countdown.html>). While most of these countries are in Europe, it is worth noting that full prohibition has been achieved in countries in other regions as well such as Venezuela (2007), Kenya (2010), Tunisia (2010), the Republic of Congo (2010), South Sudan (2011), Honduras (2013), Brazil (2014), Cape Verde (2014) and Benin (2015). These laws, it is argued, indicate a shift in conceptions of childhood (Smith and Durrant, 2011; Freeman, 2014) as well as a redefinition of physical punishment 'from a legitimate parenting practice to an act of violence' (Durrant, 2008:6; see also Smith and Durrant, 2011). Beyond a focus on legislative reform, many international NGOs have also launched programmes targeted at local communities which seek to instil a change in child rearing practices particularly focused on introducing families to different approaches to parenting, including positive discipline methods (see Save the Children, 2013). Added to this, a number of initiatives have been established to help reduce the use of physical punishment by parents including clinics providing support and counselling in Chile and Costa Rica (Stewart *et al*, 2000) and parenting programmes to reduce parental stress and address poverty, which they believe will, in turn, reduce parental use of physical punishment in Thailand and the Philippines (Lansford *et al*, 2010).

Nevertheless, in numerous communities around the world, including some parts of the Global North (amongst both host and immigrant communities (Renteln, 2010)), the physical punishment of children remains widely practiced and accepted (see Freeman, 2014). The rationale behind the continuing practice of physical punishment of children in many of these contexts is multifaceted. Ensuring that children grow up into the adults their communities wish them to become is a key reason behind the persistence of this practice (see also

Frankenberg *et al*, 2010; Twum-Danso Imoh, 2012, 2013). Therefore, in the majority of societies where physical punishment is administered, it is seen as a tool for socializing children (Korbin, 1981, 2002; Langness, 1981; Levine and Levine, 1981; Levinson, 1989; Kavapalu, 1993; Yousseff, Attia and Kamel, 1998; Archambault, 2009; Frankenberg *et al*, 2010; Lansford *et al*, 2010). According to Montgomery (2009:161), in such societies, physical punishment is not perceived simply as a method of punishment, but rather, it is linked to 'wider philosophies of socialization and ideas about the correct relationship between people'. These ideas also emerge in Kavapalu's (1993:317) study of Tongan society in which she asserts that physical punishment, which was sometimes severely administered in that context, was not a 'random act of violence or cruelty', but was rather perceived as a process aimed at producing someone who was 'good', 'nice', 'proper' and 'appropriate'.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the socialization process in many societies has traditionally been centred on training children to become honest, respectful, obedient and self-disciplined members of their societies. For example, writing of Kenya in the 1960s, Levine and Levine (1963) found that the concept of intelligence amongst the Nyansongo, a Gusii community in the south western part of the country, included respect for elders and filial piety, which were critical ingredients in the socialization process. Due to the emphasis placed on children learning the key values prioritised by their communities, no effort was spared in ensuring that these were instilled in the young from an early age. Similar evidence has been found more recently amongst the Maasai in southern Kenya, who view early childhood as a critical period of intervention dedicated to teaching children 'respect' and 'discipline' (Archambault, 2009:288). And for most parents in this context, physical punishment is the most effective method to ensure that these objectives are achieved (see also Frankenberg *et al*, 2010).

Furthermore, religion, especially evangelical Christianity, plays a central role in the continuing administration of the physical punishment of children. In particular, Biblical passages from Proverbs and other Books from the Old Testament which if, interpreted literally, seem to encourage parents to use physical punishment are frequently cited by those supporting the practice (see Ripoll-Nunez and Rohner, 2006). Writing of Kenya, Archambault (2009) has argued that Biblical references are used to endorse the use of the cane with the view to instilling key Christian values such as discipline, respect and obedience (see also Kavapalu, 1993; Last, 2000; Twum-Danso Imoh, 2012). Therefore, the socialization of children is embedded within broader religious, in particular, Christian, beliefs which guide communities on value-setting, behaviour regulation and social interactions across genders and age groups.

Additionally, the political organization of a society has been found to play a factor in explaining the use of physical punishment in child rearing in some societies. For instance, Ember and Ember (2005) found evidence to suggest that the physical punishment of children is more likely to be administered in societies with higher levels of social stratification and with low levels of democratic participation. These contexts, the authors suggest, place a higher value on submissiveness and obedience and thus parents seek to instil these characteristics in their children in order for them to grow up into adults with the requisite attributes valued and, importantly, expected by their societies. By contrast, it is argued, the democratisation of society fosters more democratic and participatory relations within the context of the family (Smith, 2011).

As a result of the physical punishment of children being driven by the combination of socialization goals, religious beliefs and the political organisation of a society, many

individuals within communities in which this practice continues hold very firm ideas about the use of this disciplinary method (see Frankenberg *et al*, 2010; Twum-Danso Imoh, 2012). In my own study on the physical punishment of children in Ghana (see Twum-Danso Imoh, 2012), the majority of adult participants in both rural and urban areas and with different levels of education insisted that the practice was key to the child-rearing process in their contexts and they objected to the introduction of laws within the home to curb or ban it. There was, furthermore, a sense that while attitudes and parenting styles have changed in other societies, ‘this is how we do it here’ and that ultimately they felt Ghanaian children were ‘better behaved than those elsewhere’ (i.e. in Western Europe or North America) (see Twum-Danso Imoh 2011a). This viewpoint is further supported by Harris-Short (2003:177) who claims, in an article on the relativity of children’s rights, that the cultural values and principles of their own cultures may lead communities to ‘look in horror at the individualistic rights-based ethos of the West and seek instead to strengthen and re-trench their own traditional values and beliefs’.

### **3. Tackling the physical punishment of children in resource poor contexts: an additional layer of complexity**

In many parts of the world such resistance has been addressed not only by the introduction of laws, but also by a powerful state apparatus which seeks to enforce these laws through institutions such as those relating to social welfare, education, policing and justice (Durrant, 2008). However, the question that this raises is: how do you curb a practice in societies where it is not only widespread and accepted, but also where the government lacks the capacity to enforce laws introduced? This is a crucial factor to consider as a lack of resources is critical to informing the child rearing approaches adopted by caregivers. Levine (2003:85) explains it thus:

The African parents with whom I have worked want their children to become obedient in part because they believe it is the single most important quality involved in adult economic adaptation, and they are concerned that their children have the capacity to survive in a world of scarce and unstable resources.

The importance of economic factors is also underlined by Frankenberg and colleagues (2010) who state that in poor urban contexts in Tanzania where there is no social welfare to ensure the care of people as they age, more control may be adopted within child rearing processes to ensure that children grow up into adults who are able, and willing, to take care of their parents (see also Pupavac, 2009, 2011). And as part of this need to ensure control in the parent-child relationship, adults believe that physical punishment is crucial in the child rearing process. Hence, the lack of resources and its impact on government's ability to change attitudes and practices through law, policy and its institutions is a critical for consideration.

Ghana presents a noteworthy example of a country where the physical punishment of children is not only widely accepted, but also where legislation and state institutions have had little impact on this practice. While the Ghanaian government has made provisions, in its 1998 Children's Act, to prohibit any correction of children 'which is unreasonable in kind or in degree according to the age, physical or mental condition of the child' (Government of Ghana, 1998, Section 13.2), the physical punishment of children is prevalent in Ghanaian society. This widespread and condoned practice is largely due to social norms and socialization goals which ultimately seek to develop a 'good adult' (see Twum-Danso Imoh, 2013). The acceptability of this practice takes place within a country which, in the decades following independence from British colonial rule in 1957, has been based on an economy

relying on the export of a few primary products (cocoa, gold, bauxite and aluminium and more recently, oil). Such dependency on a few primary products has repeatedly made it vulnerable to price fluctuations dictated by buyers in developed countries. In addition, low earnings from these products have meant low revenue for the country. As a result, the economy of the 1970s and 80s suffered stagnation and decline, resulting in the implementation of the World Bank and IMF's Economic Recovery and Structural Adjustment Programmes in the period following 1983 (Brydon and Legge, 1996). The extensive liberalization and adjustment in the 1980s produced some growth in services and mining, but did little to produce and sustain growth in agriculture and manufacturing (Government of Ghana, 2003). As a result, both growth and incomes remained stagnant. This continued into the 1990s when the economy was characterised by high rates of inflation, high interest rates, the continuous depreciation of the cedi, dwindling foreign reserves, excessive public debt overhang and stagnant economic growth. Importantly, spending on social programmes for poverty reduction such as health and education was low and further constrained efforts to poverty reduction (Government of Ghana, 2003). The advent of the new millennium saw the country sustain a period of economic stability and one of the fastest rates of poverty reduction in sub Saharan Africa. Income poverty declined from 42% in 1997 to around 35% in 2005 (DFID Country Profile). Furthermore, real GDP growth averaged at 5% between 1983 and 2006. In addition, the government was successful in arranging the cancellation of other external debts, which had amounted to approximately \$6 billion in 2001 and achieving lower middle income status in 2004 (UN and the Government of Ghana, 2004). However, in more recent years these achievements have been countered by severe challenges. For example, Ghana's economy was expected to slow down to an estimated 3.9% growth rate in 2015, making it the fourth consecutive year which has seen a contraction in the economy. Much of this sluggish growth can be attributed to a severe energy crisis, unsustainable

domestic and external debt burdens, and deteriorated macroeconomic and financial imbalances (African Economic Outlook, 2015). As a result of these persistent challenges to growth in recent years Ghana was recently ranked 138<sup>th</sup> out of 187 countries in the 2014 Human Development Index, with 30.4% of its approximately 27 million population living in what is termed ‘multidimensional poverty’ (UNDP, 2014).

This economic context, needless to say, affects not only the lived experiences of a significant proportion of the population, but also the delivery of government services, including those relating to child protection. For example, evidence has been put forward which suggests that social workers in Ghana often lack the resources to implement legislation introduced by their government and follow up any cases with families, especially those living in remote areas (Laird, 2008a; Laird, 2008b; Sossou and Yogtiba, 2009; Twum-Danso, 2011b). The impact of resource scarcity on the effectiveness of social welfare programmes in countries with similar socio-economic profiles in sub Saharan Africa has been well documented (see, for example, Bak, 2004; Mildred and Plummer, 2009). A lack of appetite by the Ghanaian government to intervene in homes, along with a lack of support for interventions by the general populace, further exacerbates the situation (see Cusack and Appiah, 1999; Gagnon, 2005). The lack of resources also affects the reaction of citizens to laws and policies initiated by government especially when it touches upon family practices. For example, findings from my own study, mentioned above, indicated that the inability of the Ghanaian government to support its citizens from economic shocks and risks through social protection (and other) programmes may impede on its ability to intervene within families. This was articulated most clearly by an adult participant in a focus group discussion:

The government also has its responsibility. If the government does not help me in my house and he just writes laws to punish me then it won't help. They should also see

how they can help so that those things that make parents frustrated so they hit their children will not happen like a welfare package. But if there is not food and it is my business only to ensure that there is food and no one helps me, you cannot then come into my home and tell me how to treat my child (2<sup>nd</sup> Dodowa Focus Group Discussion Quoted in Twum-Danso Imoh, 2012: 129).

The issue of resource scarcity and its implications for tackling the physical punishment of children was also raised by Uzodike (1990:87), writing specifically of the Nigerian context:

Any law which attempts to abolish corporal punishment will be much more difficult to enforce in under-developed countries than in countries of the West where the law implementation processes are much better organised.

This suggests that in a context characterised by both resource scarcity and the widespread acceptance of the physical punishment of children, the introduction of laws and the launching of advocacy and sensitisation campaigns are not sufficient. Hence, in order to initiate a change in behaviour relating to the physical punishment of children in such contexts there is a need to move beyond a focus on legislation and sensitisation and instead, seek to identify the various perspectives and insights that exist within a community and use these as starting points to engage community members in dialogue and action.

#### **4. Embedding interventions within communities: the importance of community starting points**

That human rights or children's rights standards need to obtain community-buy in has long been recognised within the human rights literature (see for example, An-na'im, 1992; An-na'im, 2002; Merry, 2006). For example, An-na'im (1992), who, as a result of his belief that human rights stand a better chance of implementation if they are perceived to be legitimate

within the various cultural traditions of the world, suggests an approach which foregrounds internal cultural discourse and cross-cultural dialogue (An-na'im, 1992a). In his view there may be 'room for changing a cultural position from within, through *internal discourse* about the fundamental values of the culture and the rationale for these values' (An-na'im, 1992a: 4). Ultimately, An-na'im is of the opinion that it is possible to achieve universal cultural legitimacy for human rights standards even retrospectively through what he calls 'enlightened interpretations of cultural norms' (An-Na'im., 1992b: 20-21). While this argument is certainly significant, it is important to not simply focus on legitimizing existing human rights in the eyes of communities who, ultimately, are expected to accept these standards.

Other commentators have gone further and argued for the need to recognise the importance of community ownership in not only the ways that human rights standards are implemented, but, crucially, in the very conceptualisation of these rights themselves. Ibhawoh (2000:855), for example, insists that if respect for human rights is to be realised, they must exist 'in the living and practiced culture of the people', not just in law. He adds that without such a sense of 'ownership' of human rights at the grassroots level, resistance to the laws and programmes based on these principles will remain strong. In addition, Van Bueren (1998) questions whether prohibition through legislation alone is sufficient especially as, she argues, some beliefs and practices may be perceived as being the defining mark of that community's identity. Instead, she asserts that

To implement children's rights in one culture is not simply a matter of translation; attention has to be paid to the functions they perform in different traditions. Children's rights have a better prospect for implementation if they reflect local cultural beliefs (Van Bueren, 1998:17).

Thus she calls for the need to develop alternatives ‘organically’. More recent research has taken this line of argument still further by highlighting the importance of using perspectives from within a community as starting points in action and intervention on human rights and children’s rights issues within a particular context (De Feyter, 2007; Vandenhole, 2012). In particular, de Feyter (2007:68) argues that there is a need to take the

human rights needs as formulated by local people (in response to the impact of economic globalization on their lives) as the starting point both for the further interpretation and elaboration of human rights norms, and for the development of human rights action, at all levels ranging from the domestic to the global.

This viewpoint is further supported by Vandenhole (2012) who insists that a bottom-up approach would enable more effective responses to the specific challenges and contexts of a particular community. Hence, local needs and issues must be considered as the point of departure for action. In the child protection literature the idea of community ownership has also been identified as key to effective programming. Wessells (2015) who, in a paper based on a global review of community-based child protection mechanisms conducted in 2009, identified seven factors that contributed to the effectiveness of such programme, the most important of which was community ownership. Specifically, the review found that “the level of community ownership was higher when people identified the work as ‘ours’ and took responsibility for its effectiveness” (Wessells, 2015: 11).

Thus to achieve the effective protection of children within their communities there is a need to go beyond translation and move toward community ownership of these concepts and strategies within their contexts. These arguments are worthy of consideration by those seeking to initiate a change in child rearing practices, especially relating to the physical punishment of children in contexts where governments are limited in their capacity to ensure

the effective implementation and enforcement of laws. This does not mean external actors cannot play a role in the process (An-na'im, 1992; Wessells, 2015), but the community must be in the 'driving seat', a term which has increasingly become popular in the international development literature (Contu and Girei, 2014).

The feasibility of putting community members in the driving seat becomes further evident when we appreciate two factors about communities and the cultures upon which they are based. Firstly, culture is not monolithic and as a result, 'it cannot be viewed as being uniformly distributed or having a uniform impact on all members' (Korbin, 2002:638). Instead, as Bennet (1998: 3-4) argues, culture is a conscious construction instead of "a spontaneous outgrowth of community practice." As a conscious construction, then, culture can be manipulated by dominant forces in society who possess considerable power within the community. Thus not all members may be able to contribute to the construction of culture within that society and hence, they may not buy into that conceptualisation of 'their' culture (Bennett, 1998). While such a post-modern approach to understanding culture has been critiqued (see Renteln, 2004), it raises valid points that deserve consideration. For instance, if we recognise that culture is a construct as opposed to something that is a given in a society, then, it can be argued that culture is not a homogeneous entity that serves the interests of all members of a particular community and that there are in fact some members of a group who deviate from the norm (See Bennet, 1998; Renteln, 2004). The implication of this for the discourse on the physical punishment of children is that within a community there will be different perspectives on child rearing and the utility of physical punishment as a disciplinary tool (see Twum-Danso Imoh, 2012). Therefore, while physical punishment may be prevalent there will be those within the community who may disagree with the practice and may be

open and willing to engage in a dialogue process about child rearing and disciplinary approaches within their community.

The other key factor which may facilitate entry into a community is that research has shown that community members themselves often set their own limitations on the practice and impose sanctions on each other for punishment that they consider to be outside the 'norm'. For example, in their research on child rearing in Tanzania, Frankenberg, Holmqvist and Rubenson (2010:463) make distinctions between what they call the 'non-care of non-beating' which indicates the lack of care associated with the lack of physical punishment by caregivers, and 'as if beating a snake' which represents child abuse for communities as it is seen as too harsh and may directly harm the child's well-being (see also Korbin, 1981; Langness, 1981; Archambault, 2009). These limitations community members impose on each other also influence how they perceive those who they believe have gone beyond the 'norm'. As Einarsdottir (2000), in her study of child-rearing in Guinea-Bissau, observed, when the punishment of children was too harsh or prolonged, people talked uneasily about the parent, 'claiming that he or she must be sick in the head to beat their child in that way' (Quoted in Montgomery, 2009: 176; see also Korbin, 1981, 2002; Levine and Levine, 1981; Langness, 1981; Nsamenang, 1992; Gottlieb, 2004). These restraints highlighted demonstrate one important point. Even in contexts where the physical punishment of children is acceptable and widely practiced, communities have themselves set a line, informed by their own values and norms as well as a result of discussions amongst its various members, that they believe should not be crossed. If this line or threshold is crossed, a feeling emerges that a person has 'gone too far' and that intervention is required to curb parenting behaviours that are considered to be of an unacceptable nature in that context. These limitations indicate that there is a point at which physical punishment becomes unacceptable at the level of the community. The fact that there is such a level of 'unacceptability', presents an entry point for

policy-makers and children's rights activists to engage in discussion with members of a community which may lead to the development of more effective strategies for protecting children in the contexts in which they live.

## **5. Accessing community starting points: strategies for effective intervention**

A first step in an approach that seeks to take its point of departure from the starting point of community members is the need to move away from centring our focus on legislation and policy towards an approach which places the community at the centre. As Laird (2002:901) asserts, in relation to traditional harmful practices in Ghana:

The belief systems and social circumstances, which result in adverse practices against children, cannot simply be legislated out of existence. They have to be addressed through interventions, which engage with both traditional norms and economic realities.

Laird's solution to this is the provision of well-organised and tightly focused mass education programmes which 'seek to strengthen the voices of dissension within the community, for no consensus is monolithic' (see Laird, 2002:903). This point is supported by the Committee on the Rights of the Child which has asserted that 'law reform must be accompanied by awareness-raising, guidance, and training' (Freeman, 2010: 223). While education may certainly have a role to play in the process of change, this strategy seems to assume that once people receive information about, or become 'aware' of, a particular issue they will accept it and subsequently start modifying their behaviours. However, this is not necessarily the case. As I have discussed above, also in relation to Ghana, people do not passively imbibe global ideals. Hence, a top-down education/sensitisation strategy, which assumes that once local communities are aware of children's rights and child protection principles they will adapt their own practices, is misleading.

Instead, there is a need for dialogue between practitioners and policy-makers and local communities in which both sides are perceived as equal partners whose views require serious consideration. Freire (1993:70) aptly sums up the essence of dialogue:

Because dialogue is an encounter among women and men who name the world, it must not be a situation where some name on behalf of others. It is an act of creation, it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another.

He goes further and asserts that it is not sufficient to explain to people or ‘deposit’ ideas in them. Instead, there is a need to dialogue *with them* about their action. For him this is essential as, ‘without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education’ (Freire, 1993:73-74). This strategy is supported by Ford (2005:184), who, focusing specifically on interventions around female genital cutting, proposes a dialogue approach to communication with local communities which starts with an understanding that ‘female circumcision occurs because parents love their children and want the best for them’ and proceeds by encouraging the entire community to discuss health and development issues and work towards reaching a consensus on the human rights and responsibilities of members, especially girls and women. Similarly, any dialogue on the physical punishment of children in a community needs to start from that community’s own starting point – their justifications and rationale for the practice, the goals they are trying to achieve as they raise their children, the ways they use this method as a disciplinary tool (for what transgressions, the frequency), the regulations and limitations they impose and the alternatives they already use to discipline children.

The adoption of an approach focusing on dialogue can lead to the development of partnerships with communities in which the priorities and needs of all stakeholders are

considered seriously, even when they go against dominant children's rights and child protection discourses. However, the kind of partnership that is developed requires careful consideration as evidence suggests that partnerships produced on the ground can reproduce unequal relations and offer 'no scope for reassessment and dialogue over outcomes' (Contu and Girei, 2014:213; see also Wessells, 2015). Instead, an environment which seeks to facilitate open dialogue requires what Lewis (2007) refers to as an 'active partnership' based on negotiation and learning (in Contu and Girei, 2014). Key to such partnerships are positive values such as mutuality, dialogue and reciprocity (Contu and Girei, 2014). The principle of reciprocity also emerges in An-na'im's (1992: 28) strategy for initiating *internal cultural discourse* within a community. Specifically, he argues that treating others the same way that you would like to be treated promotes a positive relationship amongst those engaged in this dialogue process. Added to these are factors such as the recognition of equality amongst all parties and the acceptance that within this space all stakeholders should be able to not only express their views freely and frankly, without fear of condemnation, judgement or criticism, but also listen respectfully and carefully, even if they object to the views that are being expressed.

A further factor to take into account in the facilitation of dialogue is the need to create opportunities for individuals within a community to engage, as a group, in a process of ongoing reflection on their daily lives in order to develop solutions to problems within their community (Bak, 2004). The importance of reflection is particularly well outlined by Freire (1993) who sees reflection as essential to any action. In fact, in his view, action and reflection together form the praxis on which dialogue is based. Reflection, he argues, enables individuals to stand at a distance from the routine of everyday living and gain 'a perspective

that permits them to emerge from that daily route and begin their own independent development' (Freire, 1978 in Bak, 2004:87).

Finally, this dialogue process initiated must not only be between practitioners, NGOs, social workers and policy-makers on one hand and community members on the other, but also amongst the members of a given community. Ensuring a diversity in community perceptions is critical, as on many issues there are bound to be differences, at some level, within community perceptions and practices, based on variables such as gender, age, education, ability vs. disability, class and access to power (see Chambers, 1997; Korbin, 1981; Wessells, 2015). As Wessells (2015) found in his own study, many child protection programmes identify community leaders with whom they work to implement a programme of action relating to child protection. However, he argues that 'this approach is problematic because quite often there are marginalised people, including children and the poorest of the poor, who either do not attend such gatherings or remain voiceless when they do attend' (p.12). Hence, any dialogue process that is initiated needs to ensure that different members of any community, including those who find themselves on the margins, are able to engage appropriately in the dialogue initiated and contribute to any consensus that is ultimately achieved. It is only in this way that it can be claimed that interventions are embedded within communities or lead to a sense of ownership by community members.

## **6. Conclusion**

To conclude, then, the underlying argument of this article is that since the physical punishment of children remains a central feature of many societies, current efforts to sensitise, educate and legislate need to be reconsidered. This is especially pertinent in

countries where a lack of resources, accompanied by a lack of political will and public support, all intersect to limit the impact of laws or social policies, especially as they relate to family practices, and thereby leave many children vulnerable. In such contexts to ensure a modification in parenting behaviours as they relate to the discipline of children, the most effective strategy may be to use community perceptions, insights and limitations as a starting point for dialogue, action and intervention, even if these perceptions seem objectionable to those outside the community. Failure to seek community starting points and use that as a basis for dialogue will compound the dissonance that currently exists between the global discourse on children's rights and the reality of child rearing in many societies.

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