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JUSTICE AND PEACE COMMISSION

REPORT ON CHILD HEADED FAMILIES



*"BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT, FOR THEIRS IS THE
KINGDOM OF HEAVEN"*



Introduction

In the spirit of supporting our communities to survive in this challenging situation, the Justice and Peace Commission in conjunction with Downes Murray International Ltd, (DMI) distributed daily basic food parcels to people directly or indirectly affected by COVID-19 in Lamontville and Tongaat area in the township (Hambanathi) and the informal settlements (Mona and Driefontein) on the 26th of August 2020. These parcels consisted of rice, flour, sugar, coffee, tea, beans condensed milk, sardines, soy sauce, noodles, and cooking oil to people.

These distributions have been going on since the beginning of the lockdown and have improved peoples live in a great way. The main aspects that came out strongly include child headed families' challenges such as perpetual bereavement, single mothers' struggles to cope with the current situation, neglect, discrimination and isolation amongst families among other issues. The section below gives an overview of the interviews done during the distribution of food parcels in the communities cited above.



Image 1: Participants in Lamontville before distribution of food parcels- Courtesy of J&PC team- Lamontville - 26/08/20

1. Child headed families

A number of families visited both in Lamontville and the informal settlement in Tongaat stated that COVID-19 had made life even harder for child-headed households. Nosipho (not her real name) and her two siblings have been living without a mother and father for more than three years. Their mother died a few years ago, and their father left them three years ago and later died leaving the three kids in a difficult position.



Image 2- Nosipho (not real name) with her two siblings in the house their deceased parents' home -Courtesy of J&PC team – Tongart - 26/08/20.

"Our father used to come home once around Christmas holidays. He would buy us some food which lasts about two weeks, the time he spends with us. Then he leaves us again. We finish the last bites of the food he bought by the time he goes away and starve again for the whole year", narrated a downcast Nosipho (not real name). I am now struggling to finish my mechanical engineering diploma due to fees that is required which I don't have.



Image 3: Sandile (not real name) with his physically challenged brother receiving a food parcel from the J&PC Coordinator Kallie Senyane - Courtesy of J&PC team – Lamontville - 26/08/20.

2. Perpetual bereavement

The interviews done established that children were reportedly in a state of continuous grief of their deceased adult breadwinners. The children indicated that they had “*intense remembrances of their deceased parent/guardian*” while others mentioned that they “*would sometimes lock themselves and cry*” for their deceased parents. Particularly, worrying was that this perpetual bereavement was mainly elaborate among children who were household heads. It remains to be investigated if the occurrence of perpetual bereavement among child headed household heads had anything to do with their highly challenging roles as caregivers to their siblings. The following sentiments were common during our interviews with some of the child head families:

(Mbali (not real name) Sometimes, *I cry when I will be missing my mom...I just don't want my young siblings to see that. I just don't know what to do without our mom; I just make them see as if I am coping...*

(Muhle (not real name) Sometimes *when I sit alone, I start remembering about my mother who used to look after us.... I recall everything we used to do together and how she used to buy us goodies and nice clothes, but now we don't have anyone to buy us the things she used to buy for us..... It makes me feel very sad.*

(**Misheck (not real name)**) Before our parents died, they taught us to pray every night before we sleep, but I have since stopped that because every time we start singing and praying, all my younger siblings start to remember and miss our parents, and they start crying, so we no longer pray at night...



Image 4: Mr Petros the senior Deacon at the parish church in Tongaat, Kallie, Nothando (Not real name with her younger sister at the house they are staying the two of them. Their father and mother died. -Courtesy of J&PC team – Tongaat 26/08/20.

The feelings captured above vividly show how the memories of their bereaved parents were cruelly affecting the children's sentiments, thinking and social well-being. The gaps have eroded the love and the provision they used to get from their breadwinners.

3. Neglect, discrimination and isolation

The discussions carried out indicated that one of the major shortfalls of growing up in a child headed household was that children were experiencing neglect and emotional despondence that goes with it. The children stated that that they were always avoided and stigmatized by some in the community. *Smangele (not real name)* asserted that there is a belief that we are not socially and economically at the same level with our community members. To add to this, some mentioned that they hated some of their relatives who

snatched their inheritance after their parents passed away.



Image 5: One of the child headed families receiving their food parcel from the J&PC Coordinator, Kallie Senyane and Wendy, J&PC Member from Lamontville parish. Courtesy of J&PC team – Lamontville - 26/08/20.

Smanganiso not real name stated that the only person with genuine concern for us is the social worker who often comes to help us; our family relatives and even people from church don't appear to care. Last time, when I went to church, other boys were making noise in church and I was blamed for that, I think it's because I come from a home without parents. I have been demoralised to go to church after that.

Mandla not real name argued that It's painful to lose a parent. Before our mother passed away, she used to support the entire family financially, but now all our uncles do not even want to see us near their homes, they are forgetting that it was them who looted our mother's property and money...they just tell us that our mother died poor but we know that is not true, she left some money for us and they took it.....



Image 6: Cynthia from (Downes Murray International (DMI) with a family.- Courtesy of J&PC team – Lamontville- 26/08/2

The implication of the above declarations is that children living in child headed families face stigma, discrimination and isolation. More so, it is apparent that the children from child headed families usually present symptoms of self-pity and low self-esteem or at least keep the view that due to their living conditions, they are ignored by society.

The evidence that children from Child headed households in Lamontville and Tongaat clearly exhibits signs of poor personal coaching, uncertainty and avoidance of challenging situations. This illustrates one of the ugly results of growing up in a household bereft of adult care and direction. 'Research shows that in most traditional societies, the death of an adult person is often contested with speculations on the probable causes of death. This may result in relatives suspecting and blaming each other over spiritual forces such as witchcraft. This in some instances creates a lot of conflicts which may result in children being isolated. In worse scenarios, the death of a parent may be speculated to have been caused by dreadful diseases which carry societal stigma such as HIV/AIDS. This results in the stigma of the disease being extended to the children of the deceased, thus resulting in their isolation and alienation.

4. The Plight of Single Mothers and Grandmothers

Single motherhood has always been fraught with challenges. Compared to married

mothers, single moms face greater economic uncertainty, isolation, and obstacles to balancing work and motherhood. Being a single mother during lockdown could be hard. The stories told by the single moms in Lamontville and Tongaat were touching and informative. The courageous ladies narrated their stories with smiles on their faces despite the challenges they face every day. It was humbling to see strong characters and fighting spirit in these women of faith.



Image 7: Lihle, single mother with her two daughters receiving her food parcel - Courtesy of CCJP team – Lamontville -26/08/2

Lihle (not her real name) had this asserted that *"Raising children single-handedly without a job is extremely hard, half of the time you find yourself getting angry over small issues because of being constantly irritated. With tears rolling her cheeks, she could not control her emotions and ended her story saying 'Every day is a struggle'. 'I can't even afford to spoil my daughters as I would want to.*

I have to make sure I prioritise, and it hurts. Imagine not being able to afford something as simple as basic stuff." She said. Even though Lihle (not real name) receives support in the form of the social grant, she often she finds herself negotiating with loan sharks to cover some of her basic needs. *"Even paying off the loan is another burden," she said covering her face with her hand while shaking her head.*



Image 8: Luthando (not real name) with her two sons and her Elder sisters three sons who she support single headedly- Courtesy of J&PC team – Tongaat -26/08/2

Luthando (not her real name) asserts that said she broke up with the father of her children when they were small. *"I tried to have a conversation with him so that he could be there for his children but he would always make false promises. Sometimes he would come and before I know it, he has disappeared again and this is very insensitive to the boys. I have stopped making contact with the father my kids. "He knows he has children but chose not to be part of their life."*

The phenomenon of grandparents raising their grandchildren is not new in different parts of the world and South Africa is not an exception. It has been noted that taking up parental role has become the norm of grandparents especially grandmothers.

Nolizwe (grandmother) not her real name in Lamontville stated that she became a caregiver due to death of one of her daughters after being sick. 'I am forced to take care of the kids because e the mother succumbed to HIV. The role that I do is not easy at all.' She

said. She also explained her other daughter fell pregnant as a teenager and she is staying with her. ' I am using my pension money to support them all since there is no one who is working'.



Image 9: Nolizwe (grandmother sitting with her other daughters and grandkids 18 in total and J&PC team - Courtesy of J&PC team – Lamontville -26/08/2

She's taking care of 18 grandchildren as some of them their mothers just vanished from the face of the earth, the youngest amongst them being 3yrs old boy. They are surviving with granny's grant and child support of the two youngest kids. "Families or relatives they just don't help at all nor visit to check at our situations, we are left to fend for ourselves but with God's grace we have been surviving and thanks to my elderly neighbour who helps me and my grandchildren whenever she can"



Image 10: Senzeni-not her real name (Grandmother, showing her deceased son who left seven children she is looking after- Courtesy of J&PC team – Tongaat 26/08/20

'I am taking care of my grandchildren because their father died in 2019 and their different mothers dumped them at my homestead and there is nothing I can do than to support them with the little that I have 'she said. It is hard but God is watching over us in these hard times.

Conclusions and implications

Just like all other societies, South Africa ought to be seen to be supporting the welfare of OVCs particularly that of Child headed households whose composition and structure clearly make them vulnerable. This research done by the Justice and Peace Commission has briefly explored the display of some core psycho-social deficits related with children domiciled in households bereft of adult care, protection and supervision in Lamontville and Tongaat suburbs in Durban, South Africa. Among the main findings of this endeavour was that psychosocial deficits among child headed households were manifesting as poor personal grooming, uncertainty and avoidance of challenging situations.

Additionally, it was established that psychosocial deficits among children from Child headed households were manifesting through sexual violation and exposure of the children to unplanned teenage pregnancy. This was noted to be further complicating the lives of the

already vulnerable children. It was also revealed that deficits in terms of emotional support in CHHs were driving children, (particularly child headed household heads) to experience perpetual bereavement. Lastly, the study revealed that psychosocial deficits among children from Lamontville and Tongaat Child headed households were manifesting through neglect, discrimination and isolation of the children by their families and communities in general. Given the foregoing, the Justice and Peace Commission unit propose the following:

a) Initiate Moral Regeneration Programmes

Socialization of children should become a priority for South Africa if the country means well in terms of caring and protecting its children. Perhaps a practicable and much needed intervention could be the initiation of a national moral regeneration programme sponsored by the government and implemented by civil society organizations in tandem with the Department of Social Welfare under the Ministry Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare. Among the main agendas for the moral regeneration programme should be the need to re-stimulate a sense of social responsibility and willingness among extended families and the general society to honour their socio-culturally bestowed responsibility of caring and protecting the children of their deceased kinsmen. The general lobbying stance should be focused on keeping children in normal homes and avoid Child headed households.

b) Self Defense and Strengthening of Child Protection Systems

Sexual abuse and exploitation shatter the lives of children in unprecedented ways. It is unconceivable let alone acceptable that children living in CHHs are being sexually exploited and abused. Unequivocally, sexual predators leave children with permanent psycho-social and emotional scars which diminish their chances of success in life. This is even worse in cases where sexual abuse and or exploitation results in unplanned pregnancy. Perhaps there is need to equip vulnerable children with self-defence skills geared towards helping them to

protect themselves against sexual predators. Self-defence programmes should also be intertwined with proper reproductive health and sex education in families, the community and in schools.

This is because in some instances, young girls are falling pregnant because they engaging in sex at young age and contracting sexually transmitted diseases. The church teaching of total abstinence from sex is definitely safe method working perfectly in addressing teenage pregnancy. Perhaps government promotion of preventative measures for teenage pregnancy should be scrapped altogether and follow moral teaching which is abstinence. Accordingly, the government through the Department of Social Welfare and in tandem with local NGOs needs to initiate or strengthen programmes for enriching children with sexual reproductive health skills. More so, the current stance of zero tolerance against underage sexual exploitation and child marriages should be supported with resources.

c) Increase Access to Quality Grief and Trauma Recovery Services among OVCs

Taking note of the perfidy of bereavement associated with children in CHHs as elaborated in this study, it is crucial for the Department of Social Welfare in tandem with the social workers employed by NGOs to develop sustainable grief and bereavement containment programmes specifically targeting children as survivors of trauma. This also perhaps calls for social work education institutions in the country to consider repackaging their curriculums towards meeting the ends of infantile grief counseling. It is critical that interventions are put in place to equitably provide grief counseling and support to all children in the country.

Lastly, the Justice and Peace Commission appreciates the unwavering support that **HIS Eminence Cardinal Wilfred Napier and His Grace Archbishop Abel Gabuza** continue to give at our point of need for the benefit of vulnerable communities around us during this time of COVID- 19 Pandemic. The church support to the needy

goes a long way and until this day, the church plays a pivotal role in helping the poor, needy and afflicted of which the government over the years is failing to do.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I would like to recommend that J&P with the support of the Archbishops, visit affluent parishes and seek support from them to help the poor. Definitely their assistance will go a long way to alleviating poverty in those poor communities. In some instances, I came to realize and recommend each parish to open a Community Resource Centre, as some of people we interviewed lack proper documentations to apply for social grants or social relief during Covid 19 period. If the priests can work hand in hand with J&P Commission most families will be able to be assisted and able to receive neither Identity Documents nor Birth Certificates in order they may be able to apply for grants available for them. If parishes had functioning Family Desks, some of these needy families would have been identified and helped, we are a missionary church and we supposed to be able to care for each others



This picture was taken at Mona Area – the outstation of Tongaat parish the children in this picture lives with their 19yrs old sister and uncle all their mothers have recently passed on and their fathers are nowhere to be found

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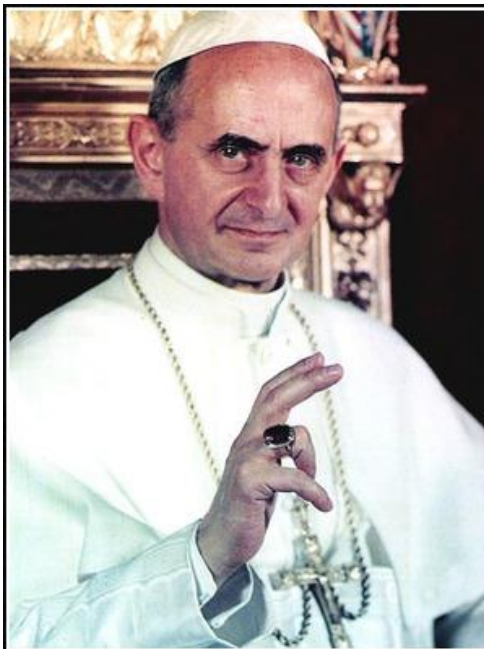
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THE CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF DURBAN JUSTICE AND PEACE COMMISSION



Pope Paul VI established the Pontifical Commission "Justitia et Pax" by a Motu Proprio dated 6 January 1967 (Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam).



If you want peace, work for justice.

— *Pope Paul VI* —

AZ QUOTES



**Southern African Catholic
Bishops' Conference**