

Community Awareness of NPA-VAWC in Ending Violence Against Children

[1]Rehema Magesa*

Affiliations:
[1] Tengeru Institute of Community Development-Arusha, Tanzania
*Correspondence: likainda@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Violence against children remains a major global and national concern, undermining children's safety, development, and well-being. In response, the Government of Tanzania implemented the National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children (NPA-VAWC) to strengthen prevention and response strategies. This study examined community awareness of violence against children and the level of awareness and participation in the implementation of the NPA-VAWC in Mbeya City Council. A mixed-method approach with a cross-sectional design was employed, involving 100 randomly selected community members and four key informants. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and document review, and analyzed using descriptive statistics and content analysis. The findings revealed that while 96% of respondents were aware of violence against children, only 35% were aware of the NPA-VAWC. The overall awareness level was moderate, with 67% of respondents demonstrating medium awareness. The study concludes that limited awareness of national strategies constrains community participation and highlights the need for strengthened awareness campaigns and community-based education.

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Introduction

Violence against children (VAC) remains a persistent global challenge, affecting children's survival, development, and well-being. The United Nations estimates that over one billion children worldwide experience some form of physical, sexual, or emotional violence each year, with devastating consequences on health, education, and long-term social outcomes. VAC is increasingly recognized as not only a violation of human rights but also as a barrier to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to health, education, gender equality, and justice.

In sub-Saharan Africa, VAC is widespread and often entrenched within social, cultural, and economic structures. Harmful practices such as child marriage, corporal punishment, and neglect are frequently normalized within communities, making eradication efforts complex. Tanzania, like many African countries, has made legislative and policy efforts to address VAC, including aligning with international conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). Despite these efforts, violence against children persists at alarming rates, reflecting both gaps in enforcement and challenges in community engagement.

Tanzania continues to experience high levels of child abuse and neglect. National surveys and reports highlight alarming incidences of child rape, physical assault, emotional abuse, and early pregnancies. For instance, the 2011 Tanzania Violence Against Children Survey revealed that nearly three in ten girls and one in seven boys experienced sexual violence before age 18. Recent evidence indicates that these figures have not significantly declined. In particular, child protection concerns are acute in Mbeya Region. Reports by the Legal and Human Rights Centre [1] documented 441 cases of child rape, more than 30% cases of child neglect, and early pregnancies among 33% of girls aged 15–19, a rate much higher than the national average of 21%. Such statistics underscore the urgency of addressing VAC at both policy and community levels.

In response to these challenges, the Government of Tanzania developed the National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children (NPA-VAWC) 2017/2018–2021/2022. The plan provides a comprehensive multi-sectoral framework to address VAC through prevention, response, and support strategies. Its core pillars include promoting positive parenting, modifying harmful norms and values, strengthening household economies, improving legal enforcement, creating safe environments, and providing quality support services for survivors. The NPA-VAWC emphasizes the importance of community participation, recognizing that government-led interventions alone are insufficient to dismantle deeply rooted cultural and social practices that perpetuate violence.

Community awareness forms the foundation of meaningful participation in VAC interventions. When communities understand the nature, causes, and consequences of VAC, they are more likely to challenge harmful norms, report cases, and support prevention programs. However, lack of awareness, coupled with secrecy and cultural acceptance of violence, often undermines national efforts. Studies in other countries, including Indonesia [2], Saudi Arabia [3], and Vietnam [4], have demonstrated that insufficient community knowledge and misconceptions hinder effective prevention and reporting of VAC. Similar patterns are evident in Tanzania, where awareness of national frameworks such as the NPA-VAWC remains low among many community members.

Given the persistence of VAC despite policy measures, it is crucial to assess how communities understand and participate in the implementation of the NPA-VAWC. Mbeya City Council, as a regional hub and a hotspot for VAC cases, provides an appropriate setting to examine these dynamics. By evaluating community awareness and participation, this study contributes to identifying gaps that limit the effectiveness of the NPA-VAWC and offers insights into strategies for enhancing community ownership of VAC prevention.

The findings not only shed light on the level of awareness among community members but also highlight the socio-demographic and contextual factors that shape participation. Strengthening community engagement in Mbeya is essential for scaling up national strategies to other regions of Tanzania and ensuring that policies translate into sustainable, community-driven protection systems for children.

The persistence of VAC in Tanzania reflects the complex interplay between policy frameworks and community realities. While the government has established strong legal and institutional mechanisms, success depends on the extent to which communities are aware of, and actively participate in, these initiatives. Understanding community awareness of the NPA-VAWC is therefore central to bridging the gap between national commitments and local action. This study situates itself within this critical space, examining the awareness levels in the Mbeya City Council and exploring implications for the broader fight against violence against children in Tanzania.

Literature Review

Zakiah et al. [2] conducted a study in Indonesia on violence against children. It was titled "The Community Knowledge of Violence Against Children in Garut Regency". The study was a qualitative research design with a sample size of 63 people. Data were collected through questionnaires, FGD, and documentary review. The study revealed that a low level of knowledge was a challenge to ending violence against children. Even though the attitudes and behavior of

the community are expected to reduce the level of violence against children, some community members do not know and do not care. Therefore, it is very logical that their affection for violence against children is still low, even though the community has not participated in the increase in cases of violence against children.

Elarousy and Abed [3] conducted a study on barriers that inhibit reporting suspected cases of child abuse and neglect among nurses in a public hospital in Saudi Arabia. The study applied a descriptive research design, non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed to select a sample of 145 nurses. Questionnaires and interviews were used for data collection. The study findings indicated that communities had a low level of awareness of the child abuse reporting systems, which was a barrier to reporting cases of child abuse.

Do et al. [4] conducted a study in Vietnam on the "Perception and Attitude about Child Sexual Abuse among Vietnamese School-Age Children".A cross-sectional study was conducted among 800 Vietnamese students from grades four to nine. The study found that most of the respondents had insufficient knowledge of sexual abuse in children. This was noticed in most of the respondents' answers, (57.9% and 74%); said teachers and strangers would not be perpetrators which is not true because anybody can be a perpetrator and (55.8% and 58.8%) said schools and home were safe places which is also not true because child abuse can happen anywhere where the children are found, in the streets, homes, schools and where children play.

Research Methodology

This section outlines the methodological framework adopted to assess community participation in the implementation of the National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children (NPA-VAWC) in Mbeya City Council. It covers the research approach, design, study area, population, sampling procedures, data collection methods, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

A. Research Approach

The study employed a mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The quantitative strand generated measurable data on the level of awareness and participation, while the qualitative strand enabled in-depth exploration of underlying factors and challenges. This integration enhanced validity and provided a comprehensive understanding of community participation in addressing violence against children (VAC).

B. Research Design

A cross-sectional design was used, allowing data to be collected at a single point in time. This design was selected because it is cost-effective, time-efficient, and suitable for obtaining both quantitative and qualitative information without requiring a longitudinal follow-up.

The research was conducted in the Mbeya City Council, the headquarters of Mbeya Region, which has two divisions, 36 wards, and 181 streets (Mitaa). According to the 2022 census, the city has a population of 649,000. Mbeya has been identified as a hotspot for VAC, with high incidences of child rape, neglect, and early pregnancies [1],[5]. The NPA-VAWC has been operational in the region, making it an appropriate site for the study. Specifically, the research was carried out in Iyunga Ward, which has five streets: Ikuti, Igale, Inyara, Sisintila, and Maendeleo. The ward has an estimated population of 23,000, of which 18,000 are adults.

C. Population and Sampling Technique

The study population comprised adults aged 18 years and above, as they are directly responsible for protecting children. Using a 10% margin of error, a sample size of 100 respondents was determined. Two sampling techniques were applied:

- Simple random sampling was used to select the 100 community members who responded to questionnaires, ensuring equal representation of eligible adults. This procedure also guided the selection of Iyunga Ward from the larger city context.
- Purposive sampling was employed to select four key informants, namely the Ward Community Development Officer, Ward Executive Officer, Social Welfare Officer, and the lead Community Case Worker, as they hold critical positions relevant to VAC interventions.

Data collection involved both primary and secondary sources. Questionnaires with structured, closed-ended questions were distributed to 100 respondents across all five streets of Iyunga Ward. This method facilitated the efficient collection of quantitative data. Key Informant Interviews (KII) were conducted with the four purposively selected officials, providing deeper insights into awareness, participation, and challenges. A documentary review of NPA-VAWC reports, policy documents, and previous literature was undertaken to contextualize the findings and triangulate evidence.

D. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis. For measuring community awareness, responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale, and an Awareness Index was constructed.

$$\textit{Awareness Index} = \textit{Total Score} / \textit{Maximum Score} \times 100 \quad (1)$$

The results were categorized into three levels based on the mean and standard deviation. This combination of quantitative scoring and qualitative interpretation ensured robust conclusions about community participation levels.

E. Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations

To enhance validity and reliability, questionnaires were pre-tested, and triangulation was achieved through the use of multiple data sources and methods. Ethical standards were maintained by seeking permission from relevant authorities, ensuring informed consent, and upholding the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents.

Generally, the methodology integrated a mixed-method approach within a cross-sectional design, drawing data from 100 randomly selected community members and four purposively chosen officials in Iyunga Ward, Mbeya City Council. Data collection employed questionnaires, interviews, and document review, while analysis combined descriptive statistics with content analysis. The rigorous application of these procedures ensured credible, reliable, and ethically sound findings on community participation in the implementation of the NPA-VAWC.

Results

A. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This section presents the socio-demographic profile of respondents who participated in the study, focusing on gender, age, marital status, level of education, and occupation. Understanding these characteristics is essential in examining community participation in ending violence against children (VAC) within the framework of the National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children (NPA-VAWC).

1. Sex of Respondents

   The study aimed to capture the perspectives of both men and women in the Mbeya City Council. Out of the 100 respondents, 47% were male, and 53% were female. This slight dominance of female respondents reflects the traditional gendered division of labor, where women are more often found at home managing household activities and childcare, while men spend much of their time outside the household. The representation of both genders ensured balanced perspectives on community participation in ending VAC.

2. Age of Respondents

   The study considered adults aged 18 years and above, given their responsibility in protecting children. Findings indicated that the majority (46%) of respondents were between 31 and 59 years, followed by 41% aged 18–30 years, and 13% aged 60 years and above. This distribution implies that a significant proportion of respondents were in their economically and socially active years, suggesting potential for meaningful engagement in community initiatives against VAC. However, the relatively smaller proportion of elderly respondents indicates limited representation of older generations in VAC interventions.

3. Marital Status of Respondents

Marital status was examined to understand how family structure might influence participation in VAC interventions. The findings showed that 39% of respondents were married, 27% single, 19% divorced, and 15% widowed. The predominance of married respondents indicates a higher proportion of individuals with direct responsibilities over children, which could affect their motivation to engage in VAC initiatives. Conversely, divorced and widowed respondents, who together made up 34%, may face additional socio-economic vulnerabilities that influence their level of participation.

4. Education Level of Respondents

Education is an important determinant of awareness and participation in community development efforts. Findings revealed that 41% of respondents had attained secondary education, 25% had college or university education, 21% had primary education, while 13% had never attended school. The data suggest that although the community has a fair representation of educated members, a significant portion of respondents (34%) had only basic or no formal education. This relatively low education profile may affect the community's capacity to fully understand, adopt, and sustain VAC prevention strategies. Nevertheless, the presence of educated respondents is an asset for fostering awareness and leadership within the community.

5. Occupation of Respondents

Economic activities were assessed to determine sources of livelihood and their implications for participation in VAC interventions. Half of the respondents (50%) were entrepreneurs engaged in small-scale business activities, 20% were farmers, 16% were formally employed, and 14% were livestock keepers. The dominance of entrepreneurial activities suggests a community largely dependent on the informal economy. While this economic profile may offer flexibility for participation in awareness and advocacy activities, it may also constrain long-term commitment due to financial insecurities. Farmers and livestock keepers, who collectively account for 34% of respondents, reflect the rural-urban mix of the study area, while the employed minority (16%) represent those with more stable sources of income.

B. Awareness of Violence Against Children

Although the major aim of this objective was to examine the level of awareness of the implementation of the National Plan of Action to end Violence Against Women and Children (NPA-VAWC), the researcher sought to find out if the community members were aware of violence against children. The findings revealed (Table 1) that 96% of respondents were aware of VAC, and only 4% were somehow ignorant about VAC.

Table 1. Violence against children awareness (N=100)

Aware of VAC	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	96	96.0
No	4	4.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**

Those who were aware of VAC 96(96%) were able to mention at least four types of VAC that are persistent in the study area, as asked in the study. Majority 43 (43%) of the respondents showed that all forms of violence against children were extreme in the study area, followed by 21 (21%) who only showed that emotional violence was extreme in the study area. Moreover, 17 (17%) showed that sexual violence was extreme in the study area, and 11 (11%) showed that physical violence was extreme in the study area, while only 4 (4%) did not indicate any form of violence against children in the study area. Table 2 shows the distribution of these data in frequencies and percentages.

Table 2. Form of violence at Iyunga Ward (N=100)

Statement		Frequency	Percent (%)
1.	Physical violence (being beaten, kicked, injured, and all forms of physical harm)	11	11.0
2.	Sexual violence (being raped, early marriage, forced sex, female genital mutilation)	17	17.0
3.	Emotional violence (being discriminated against, being called bad names)	21	21.0
4.	Neglect	4	4.0
5.	All forms of violence	43	43.0
6.	Never heard of VAC	4	4.0
	Total	**100**	**100.0**

These results serve as a justification of the relevance of this study in the study area because violence against children exist and the fact that community members were aware of at least one or more forms of violence shows that ending violence against children is possible. So, it is important to look at the reasons as to why violence is not ending in the study area.

> "Violence against children is like a pandemic, it is everywhere in the world. Within our ward, we receive many reports of VAC from good Samaritans…" (KII, August 2023)

C. Community's awareness of NPA-VAWC

Respondents were asked if they were aware of the NPA-VAWC and where they got the awareness. This study aimed to determine if the communities are participating in the implementation of this plan of action. To come up with the result, the researcher thought about finding out if community members have heard about this plan. The results of these two questions were as follows (Table 3).

Table 3. Awareness on NPA-VAWC

Aware of NPA-VAWC	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	35	35.0
No	65	65.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**

From Table 3, the majority of respondents 65% indicated that they have never heard of the National Plan of Action to end Violence Against Women and Children (NPA-VAWC). while only 35% percent pointed out that they have heard about the National Plan of Action to end Violence Against Women and Children (NPA-VAWC). This implies that most community members are not aware of the NPA-VAWC, so it might be difficult for them to participate in a program they are not familiar with.

In this part, the researcher also wanted to know how the respondents who were aware of the NPA-VAWC obtained the information. The following were the results;

Table 4. Source of information about the NPA-VAWC

Source of information	Frequency	Percent (%)
Community gathering	4	4.0
Mass media	11	11.0
Seminar and training from NGOs	18	18.0
Social media	2	2.0
Never heard	65	65.0
Total	**100**	**100.0**

From the results (Table 4), among respondents who were aware of the NPA-VAWC, 18% indicated that they gained awareness from seminars and training by NGOs, 11% from mass media, 4% from community gatherings, and 2% from social media. These results suggest that using seminars and training from NGOs can be an easy way to raise awareness among community members, rather than community gatherings.

D. Level of awareness on the implementation of the NPA-VAWC

Community's level of awareness was measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from fully aware=5, aware =4, neutral =3, not aware =2, fully not aware =1. Respondents were given seven strategies of the NPA-VAWC to show their awareness of each strategy; the aim was to establish the community's level of awareness of the implementation of the NPA-VAWC. The following results were obtained (Table 5). According to Table 5, the community's awareness of NPA-VAWC strategies varied from positive parenting, family support, and good relationships to Safe schools and life skills. It shows that although the majority of respondents were aware of each strategy, they were more aware of positive parenting, family support, and good relationships than of other strategies.

Table 5. Community's awareness of the implementation of the NPA-VAWC

Statements	Fully aware		Aware		Neutral		Not aware		Fully not aware	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Positive parenting, family support, and a good relationship	61	61.0	30	30.0	0	0.0	7	7.0	2	2.0
Modifying norms and values	21	21.0	32	32.0	9	9.0	28	28.0	10	10.0
Safe environment for women and children	24	24.0	38	38.0	7	7.0	17	17.0	14	14.0
Household economic strengthening	13	13.0	22	22.0	15	15.0	24	24.0	26	26.0
Implementation and enforcement of the law	13	13.0	35	35.0	9	9.0	20	20.0	23	23.0
Response and support services for violence victims	29	29.0	38	38.0	11	11.0	10	10.0	12	12.0
Safe schools and life skills	**19**	**19.0**	**23**	**23.0**	**17**	**17.0**	**19**	**19.0**	**22**	22.0

Based on these results awareness index was established, then the mean and standard deviation were computed in order to establish the community's level of awareness. The obtained level of awareness is indicated in Table 6.

Table 6. The community's level of awareness of the implementation of the NPA-VAWC

Level of awareness	Category (M=50.9643, SD=14.65833)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Low	< 36.3	20	20.0
Medium	Between 36.4 and 65.6	67	67.0
High	> 65.7	13	13.0
Total		100	100.0

As shown in Table 6, it was discovered that there was a medium level of awareness among community members in the implementation of the National Plan of Action to end Violence Against Women and Children (NPA-VAWC). More than half of the total number of respondents 67.0% had a moderate level of awareness, while only 13.0% had a high level of awareness and 20.0% had a low level of awareness. These findingsindicate that community members have a medium level of awareness of the implementation of the strategies for ending violence against children. These findings were backed up by the following response from key informants;

> "… I can't rate people's level of awareness to be high or low, but they are aware of different strategies of ending violence against children because we provide education through Furaha classes after every three months in primary schools within the entire Mbeya CC…." (KII, August 2023)

Another key informant supported these findings by adding that;

> "…communities are aware of strategies for ending violence, but the level of awareness is not high, so we are empowering communities with education to increase their level of awareness…" (KII, August 2023)

This can be translated to mean that despite the efforts to raise awareness that are done by the government and NGOs in the study area, many community members still need education on violence against children and the strategies to end it. The aim is not for a few people to participate in implementing the NPA-VAWC, but for all community members to participate fully in the implementation of the NPA-VAWC, which is why the level of awareness is supposed to be high. This agrees with Sivarajasingam et al. [6], who suggested that there is a need for educating the community to raise their knowledge on violence and its consequences, and their roles as preventive agents.

The findings of this study also correspond with Sahebihagh et al. [7], who found that almost 95% in Iran have a medium level of awareness of the strategies for ending VAC. On the other hand, Mwanda [8] found that communities in South Africa had a low level of awareness of COPESSA, which is a community- based child abuse center in Protea Glen, Soweto. This indicates that in many areas, community members have either a medium or a low level of awareness of strategies for ending violence against children. This could be the reason why violence is still a major problem in many parts of the world.

Discussion

The study established that communities in the Mbeya City Council have a medium level of awareness of the implementation of the National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children (NPA-VAWC). Although 96% of respondents were aware of the existence of violence against children (VAC), only 35% had ever heard of the NPA-VAWC. This finding reflects a broader pattern observed in global research, where communities often recognize the presence of VAC but remain unaware of national strategies or reporting mechanisms designed to address it.

For example, a study in Indonesia by Zakiah et al. [2] found that low knowledge among community members significantly hindered efforts to reduce child abuse, as many did not perceive themselves as agents of change. Similarly, Elarousy and Abed [3] in Saudi Arabia highlighted that low awareness of child abuse reporting systems was a major barrier to addressing VAC, particularly among nurses tasked with safeguarding children. These parallels emphasize that awareness alone is insufficient if it does not extend to knowledge of institutional frameworks and mechanisms for action.

In Vietnam, Do et al. [4] found that school-age children themselves held misconceptions about perpetrators and safe spaces, with the majority believing abuse could not occur at schools or homes. This aligns with the Tanzanian case, where community members demonstrated uneven knowledge of NPA-VAWC strategies, being more familiar with positive parenting and family

support than with legal enforcement or economic strengthening. Such findings reveal that across contexts, awareness is often fragmented, leaving critical aspects of VAC prevention unrecognized.

Comparable patterns have been observed in Africa. Sahebihagh et al. [7] reported that nearly 95% of communities in Iran exhibited medium levels of awareness of strategies to combat VAC, while Mwanda [8] in South Africa found low community awareness of COPESSA, a community-based child protection initiative. These studies mirror the Tanzanian results, suggesting that medium or low awareness is a widespread barrier in translating national and community programs into tangible outcomes for children.

The findings of this study reinforce the critical role of community awareness as a foundational determinant of the effectiveness of national child protection frameworks such as the National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children (NPA-VAWC). Although awareness of violence itself was high, the limited familiarity with the NPA-VAWC reflects a persistent gap between experiential knowledge and institutional knowledge. This gap is widely recognized in child protection literature, where policy effectiveness often depends not only on legislative strength but also on community ownership and engagement [9], [10]. Without adequate awareness of specific strategies, reporting mechanisms, and intervention structures, communities may remain passive observers rather than active participants in prevention and response efforts.

Community awareness also influences reporting behavior and early intervention. Studies have shown that individuals with higher knowledge of child protection systems are more likely to report abuse and support victims, thereby strengthening overall prevention networks [11], [12]. Conversely, limited awareness contributes to underreporting, normalization of violence, and delayed interventions, which perpetuate cycles of abuse across generations [13]. This aligns with the findings of the present study, where moderate awareness levels may explain the continued prevalence of violence despite policy implementation.

Education level and access to information channels play a decisive role in shaping awareness. Public education campaigns, school-based programs, and community outreach initiatives have been shown to significantly increase knowledge and shift attitudes toward child protection [14], [15]. Mass media and NGO-led training, identified as key information sources in this study, have similarly demonstrated effectiveness in improving community engagement and promoting protective behaviors [16]. Furthermore, culturally sensitive and locally adapted awareness programs are essential to challenge harmful norms and promote positive parenting practices [17].

Importantly, community participation is increasingly recognized as a central pillar of sustainable child protection systems. International frameworks emphasize that prevention

strategies are most effective when communities are empowered with knowledge, resources, and clear roles in safeguarding children [18]. Strengthening community awareness, therefore, contributes not only to prevention but also to building resilient social systems that prioritize child safety. In this context, expanding education initiatives, strengthening partnerships with NGOs, and improving communication between policymakers and communities are essential steps toward enhancing the effectiveness of the NPA-VAWC and ensuring long-term protection outcomes [9], [18].

The Tanzanian findings, therefore, fit within a global narrative: while policy frameworks and plans of action exist, their success depends heavily on community awareness and participation. Where awareness is moderate or low, implementation lags, and violence persists. This underscores the importance of scaling up awareness campaigns, leveraging NGOs, schools, and mass media to ensure that strategies like NPA-VAWC move beyond policy documents and become embedded in everyday community practices.

Conclusion

This study examined community awareness of the National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children (NPA-VAWC) in Mbeya City Council and revealed important gaps between general awareness of violence and knowledge of prevention strategies. Although the majority of respondents (96%) were aware of violence against children and could identify its forms, only 35% were familiar with the NPA-VAWC, indicating limited understanding of the national framework designed to address the problem. The awareness index further showed that most community members (67%) had a moderate level of awareness, with relatively few demonstrating high awareness. Seminars and training conducted by NGOs emerged as the most effective sources of information, highlighting the importance of community-based education. These findings underscore the need for stronger awareness campaigns, improved information dissemination, and active community engagement. Enhancing public understanding of NPA-VAWC strategies is essential to strengthening participation, improving prevention efforts, and ensuring sustainable protection of children.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Authors



Prof. Rehema John Magesa is a Professor of Gender Studies and Senior Lecturer at the Tengeru Institute of Community Development in Arusha, Tanzania, with over two decades of academic, research, and professional experience. She holds a PhD in Gender Studies from the Open University of Tanzania, an Advanced Master's in Development Evaluation and Management from Antwerp University in Belgium, an MSc in Agriculture (Animal Science Production), and a BSc in Agriculture from Sokoine University of Agriculture. Prof. Magesa has an extensive research and consultancy portfolio covering gender, women's empowerment, human rights, rural livelihoods, and development, with numerous peer-reviewed publications on issues such as human trafficking, intimate partner violence, child marriage, and financial inclusion. She has provided consultancy and training for diverse organizations, including policy development, gender-responsive budgeting, and mainstreaming gender in public institutions. (email: likainda@yahoo.com).