

Chapter 2

Children in Kenya

Abstract The slow progress characterizes almost all realms of quality of life indicators in Kenya. Also in terms of the ‘child-friendliness’ index, the country has been slipping. Legislation is perfectly in tune with the Child Rights Convention, but daily practice is obstinate. Some overall indicators suggested that the situation is quite appalling in terms of violence against children. A benchmark survey in city slums in the capital and in the coastal villages gives evidence of the stark poverty and the limited access to institutions and basic infrastructure. Gross enrolment in school is not matched by net enrolment and the quality of teaching is bad, leading to a highly divergent class-age match. Most children like being in school, the gateway to a modernising world, but they dislike many of its aspects. Teachers are being accused of being lazy and disinterested and particularly of an exceedingly rough and punitive behaviour. The exposure to violence was a quite common experience, at home, on the way to and from school and in school. Low performance of children is associated with the malfunctioning learning environment and to the material conditions. Children apparently were not aware of the rights propagated by the CRC and had their own priorities for a proper childhood, particularly food, housing and education.

Keywords Human development indicators • Poverty • Deprivation • Quality of education • School violence • Child rights

The research underlying this study was conducted in two areas in Kenya. In order to get an idea of the background conditions, we shall first present an overview of the major social and economic indicators of the country, as condensed as possible (Lieten and Khasnabis 2011).

2.1 A Mixed Record

Kenya, located on the eastern coast of Africa, has a sparse population density in vast areas of the country, particularly in the North and parts of the Coastal areas. The majority of the 45 million inhabitants is concentrated in the south-western

region of the country. Christianity makes up 78 % of the country's population (45 % protestant and 33 % Roman Catholic). Muslims constitute a significant minority (approximately 10 %); they are the dominant religion in the coastal provinces where they comprise 50 % of the total population. The urban population has dramatically increased in the post-independence years. It rose from 5.6 % in 1950 to 24 % in 2012. In spite of the extensive dependence on agriculture, the contribution of agriculture to the GDP is only 20 %, while that of the bulging service sector is 60 % (Brown et al. 2006: 27). Economic growth over the period 1990–2012 was dismally low: 0.4 % (UNICEF 2014, Table 7) and poverty appears to be deepening. The proportion of the population living below the poverty line has worsened. In 2007/08, the percentage was as high as 58 %. In 2012, 45 % was living at less than 1\$ a day (UNDP 2008: 239; Suda 2001: 164–165; ACPF 2013).

The Human Development Index, which stood at 0.524 in 1995 increased marginally to 0.532 by 2005. The slow progress characterizes almost all realms of quality of life indicators. During the first 3 decades after independence, still in the enthusiasm of new beginning and a commitment by the new leaders, great progress had been made in child health, but gradually more headway was stalled when neo-liberal policies took over. Life expectancy which had increased swiftly from 52 years in 1970 to 59 years in 1990 afterwards stabilized at more or less that level and then even appears to have dropped. In 2012, the child (under 5) mortality rate, which apparently had declined from 200 in 1960 to 90 in 1995, again seems to have risen to around 115 per thousand in 2012 (UNICEF 2014, Tables 3 and 6, Ministry of Health 2008). Fertility rates remain high (4.8; and still 7.0 in the North-Eastern Coastal province), despite a perceptive decline earlier (down from 8.1 in the mid-70s). The child population below 15 constitutes still around 40 % of the entire population (UNDP 2008). Teenage pregnancy is common: a quarter of women aged 15–19 were either pregnant with their first child or were already mothers (Kenya Central Bureau of Statistics 2003: 61). Although polygamy still exists, especially in more traditional areas, it is rapidly decreasing (Whiting 1977; Bradley et al. 1997; Buchmann 2000). Still, families are often quite large, with many children and extended family members. One quarter of the adolescents get married before the age of 18, and there often is a great age gap between husband and wife. These various factors are not conducive to a child-healthy environment.

The high population growth (2.4 % annually) continues despite the high incidence of sexually transmitted infections among young people. HIV/AIDS was first detected in Kenya in 1984. Since then about 1.5 million people may have died of AIDS-related causes. The impact of AIDS on family life must have been terrific. Kenya possibly has 1.6 million AIDS infected people (6.1 % of the population) and 2.6 million orphans, of whom 1 million AIDS related (UNICEF 2014, Table 3). The number of single parents is on the rise—sometimes because of death, sometimes because of separation and increasingly by choice. These single parent- or grandparent-headed households are often unable to provide adequate resources for the family, resulting in an extra burden on children. Orphans are thought to be particularly at risk, especially if they end up among the children living on the streets. In 2006, ANPPCANN (African Network for the Prevention and

Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect), children's rights NGO, estimated that in fact approximately 750,000 children were living on the streets (OMCT 2008: 32). The World Organization against Torture reported that protective traditional structures are increasingly breaking down and that this is accompanied by a concomitant rise in the number of vulnerable children:

Many of these children face serious prejudice and exclusion and their vulnerability, including to trafficking and exploitation, is particularly high. In order to meet their daily needs some may engage in theft, prostitution, forms of hazardous labour and activities such as begging. This in turn makes them vulnerable to violence and ill-treatment - including physical and sexual abuse - at the hands of the police and others (OMCT 2008: 32).

The first African Child Policy Forum report on the wellbeing of the African child (ACPF 2008) ranked Kenya sixth out of 52 African states in terms of child-friendly policies. The 'child-friendliness' index is based on parameters relating to policies, budgetary commitments, and ratification of international conventions on child rights, as well as political indicators, but does not reflect the actual practice of accessibility to the various services and government programs and their quality. It is rather relates to what Mulinge (2002, 2010) regards as political correctness, adjusting the legal framework to international conventions. Field realities, however, remain appalling. Anyway, in the follow-up ACPF report (2013: 111), Kenya slipped from the 6th to the 21st position among all African states.

According to the Human Development Report (UNDP 2008), the adult literacy rate is around 75 %. Other findings suggest that literacy may be lower. According to one study, the age cohort 15–19 years recorded a literacy rate of only 69 % (Kenya Ministry of Education 2008: 23). Kenya is a signatory to the Jomtein Conference of 1990, the Dakar Framework of Action of 2000, and the Millennium Development Goals Conference of 2000; education was accordingly given priority status. The introduction of Free Primary Education in its commitment to UPE in 2003 resulted in a dramatic increase in school enrolment levels for both boys and girls. Primary school participation or net enrolment rate (NER) has increased from 68 % in 1999 to 83 % in 2011 ACPF 2013: 125). But educational achievement remained low. The number of out-of-school children suddenly declined from 1.8 million in 1999 to 1.2 million in 2004. In 2012, around 10 million children were in primary school but only close to 2 million in secondary school, indicating a sharp rupture in school participation of a majority of children (Economic Survey 2013).

Kenya ratified the CRC on July 31st, 1990. Since its ratification, the government has been working to translate its commitments into domestic legislation (Odongo 2004: 419–422). Under the Children's Act 2001, which gives effect to the obligations of Kenya under the CRC, a child is 'entitled to protection from physical and psychological abuse, neglect and any other form of exploitation including sale, trafficking, or abduction by any person'. Daily practice, however, is obstinate. Some overall indicators suggested that the situation is quite appalling in terms of violence against children. A survey by the African Child Policy Forum (2006) in three countries (Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya) showed that in any group of 10 Kenyan girls, all would have been physically and psychologically abused, 8

would have been sexually abused, while 2 of these young girls would have been raped. An overwhelming proportion of the physical and psychological abuse of young girls was reported to be carried out by other females, such as their mothers, female teachers, sisters or other female relatives. More than half the young females testified that they suffered sexual abuses repeatedly. The dramatic figures possibly are an exaggeration, resulting from action research and the intention to produce 'advocacy statistics'. Yet, even less dramatic statistics would be horrifying. Also UNICEF reported that the level of violence against children had reached unacceptable levels, particularly with regards to sexual violence. The UNICEF representative in Kenya emphasized: 'We need to get people talking, to break the silence around violence and make sure that everyone knows where to go to get help (OMCT 2008: 9).

Since then, overall national statistics have become available. In 2011, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child noted the lack of data on the root causes of violence against children and it was agreed that the government and UNICEF would conduct a country study in Kenya and Tanzania. Research in other countries (Cambodia, Haiti, Malawi and Zimbabwe) was on the anvil. The findings of the Kenya study (UNICEF 2012; also Kenya VACS 2012), as reported by young adults in the 18 to 24 age cohort, indicate that prior to age 18, 32 % of females and 18 % of males experienced sexual violence; around 70 % of males and females experienced physical violence as a child. Among 18 to 24 year old females and males, 76 and 80 % respectively, experienced at least one type of violence (sexual, physical or emotional). The present study, which has a comparable size of respondents, albeit restricted to two areas in the country, will provide a comparative set of data, but will augment the statistical data on frequency of occurrence and nature of the perpetrators, with a thick description on what actually happens when they experience violence, how it affects them and how they react to it.

2.2 Benchmark Survey

Prior to the child-based research on violence, a sociological survey was conducted in Kwale district and in different locations in the Kawangare, Kayole, Riruta and Njiru slum areas of Nairobi (Lieten and Khasnabis 2011). The households were selected on the basis of the official demographic data and the data on poverty. At the sub-location level, the households were selected on the basis of a stratified random sample. In the survey, 490 households (with 2791 family members) in Nairobi and 493 households (with 3822 family members) in Kwale were visited. In Kwale 66 % of the households was Muslim and the rest was Protestant or Catholic. In Nairobi, 71 % was Protestant and the rest was mainly Roman Catholic. In both areas, around 60 % was younger than 18. Whereas in Nairobi only 29 % of the families had a joint family structure, in Kwale this percentage was much higher (49 %). The difference could possibly be related to the lower stage in 'modernisation' in the latter area and the effects of urbanization in the

Table 2.1 Access to basic provisions by the respondent households (%)

	Nairobi	Kwale
Water (tap or well) nearby	71	42
Electricity	64	1
Telephone	11	1
Distance to school <1 km	73	38
Distance to school 1–2 km	22	33
Distance to school >2 km	5	29

Source Socio-economic survey, around 1000 households, in Nairobi and Kwale

former. The poverty levels in Kwale were appalling: 16 % could be classified as destitute or very poor and only about 14 % of the households in the sample population had a comfortable level of living. In Nairobi, 11 % of the families were destitute. On the other hand, around 20 % of the families earned middle incomes. The remaining families were classified as poor, all of them with poor access to water, electricity, telecommunications and schools.

The deep level of income poverty is very much supplemented by a poor infrastructure. Table 2.1 provides an idea of the failing infrastructure which impacts the children on a daily basis. The 4 proxy parameters for poverty (the access to safe water, electricity, telecommunications and the distance to school) suggest a grim picture. In Nairobi, only 33 % had a running tap in the compound and a further 38 % had a water tap or well in the neighbourhood. In Kwale, the percentages were much lower: 2 % had a tap within the compound and 40 % had a tap or well in the neighbourhood. Women often have to walk long distances to fetch water or to order young children to do the same work. In Kwale, only 4 households had electricity and only 3 families had access to a telephone connection; in Nairobi, 52 households (11 %) claimed to have access to a telephone. The availability of schools was better: 95 % of the poor households in Nairobi and 71 % of the poor households in Kwale have a school within 2 km of their house, but 8 % had to travel further than 5 km.

The data on violence, as reported by the sample, stands in sharp contrast to the already dramatic figures available from the few recent official surveys. In Nairobi, more than 98 % of the women stated that they had experienced physical violence and 82 % had experienced physiological violence when they were young. In Kwale, the percentage was somewhat lower (82 and 55 % respectively). In addition, around half of the female guardians in Kwale claimed that they had been the victim of sexual violence. In Nairobi, the figures were comparatively low (10 %). The percentages of FGM also differed quite substantially: 18 % in Nairobi and 38 % in Kwale.

Non-punitive approaches in raising children are relatively unknown. Most parents still rely on corporal punishment (Table 2.2). Both rural and urban women believe that (the threat of) violence is an important tool for parents and educators. Only a few women (6 %) disagreed with using violence and opted for positive

Table 2.2 Parents' view on physical punishment of boys and girls

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Kwale	69	25	1	4	1
Nairobi	40	53	3	3	1
Total	54	39	2	4	1

Source Socio-economic survey, around 1000 households, in Nairobi and Kwale

parenting. Women in Kwale were stronger in their conviction that punishment was an appropriate pedagogical tool: whereas in Nairobi only 40 % strongly agreed with the statement that physical punishment should be resorted to, in Kwale the percentage was as high as 69 %. There was no gender discrimination in these beliefs: punishment of boys and girls was considered equally desirable.

Survey data indicate that many children were attending elementary school. The actual number of children not in school may be higher than the survey suggests since information is missing on 375 children. The survey was conducted during the holidays and many of these children may have been working or may have been roaming around and could not be traced. In the sample, data were collected for 896 school-going children in Kwale and 610 school going children in Nairobi; children in the sample were those aged 5–17 who were at home when the enumerator visited.

Net enrolment in school is only part of the story of universal primary education. The other part is the quality of education and the progress which children make. Many of the children who are enrolled may not attend regularly and may not learn what is required at that level, and thus repeat classes. It turned out that a high number of these children were too old for the grade they were in, and were repeating classes instead of progressing to secondary school. The age at which children enter the first form and the age-wise distribution of the children across the different classes, as mentioned, makes for interesting reading. School participation obviously decreases with age. For example, whereas in the Nairobi sample, 99 children were in class I, only 34 children were in class VIII and only 7 in class XII. But Table 2.3 also clearly illustrates that, even in the case of the Nairobi schools (figures on Kwale are even more dramatic) that there is hardly a match between age and the age-specific form, which the children should be in. This is a problem which was referred to in the previous section as a general feature of education: a stark disjuncture in elementary schools between age and the age-specific form and thus also an age-heterogeneity in each form which may not be pedagogically conducive. The non-enrolment, early drop-out and class repetition ultimately result in a low educational level, despite high gross enrolment figures. Nafula (2002) has calculated that whereas 6 % never attended school and 60 % had incomplete elementary education, 13 % stopped after completing elementary education and 12 % had incomplete secondary schooling; of the rest (7 %) had accomplished secondary education and 2 % went to the university.

Whereas in Kwale, boys and girls stay in school for 6 to 8 h, in Nairobi, school hours are usually from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., an average of 9 h in school, including

Table 2.3 Age and class distribution of children in the sampled Nairobi schools

Age of the child	Class of the child												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
6	62	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	67
7	23	27	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	52
8	10	20	16	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	48
9	4	13	31	27	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	80
10	0	8	14	34	16	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	75
11	0	0	3	11	22	17	1	1	0	0	0	0	55
12	0	0	0	9	11	24	15	1	0	0	0	0	60
13	0	0	0	1	9	13	35	7	2	0	0	0	67
14	0	0	0	0	0	6	16	16	4	0	0	0	43
15	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8	5	7	1	0	23
16	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	4	8	3	0	21
17	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	8	7	19
Total	99	77	66	85	64	66	70	34	13	17	12	7	610

Source Socio-economic survey, 490 households in Nairobi (in *bold* the children who age-wise are in their proper form)

tuition; around one third leaves earlier, skipping the tuition hours. In addition to going to school, most boys and girls in Kwale, and a sizeable majority in Nairobi, claim to be working as well. The work the younger children do, both boys and girls, in most cases relates to household chores. In Kwale, around 36 % worked less than 2 h a day and around 56 % worked between 2 and 4 h; 10 % of the boys and 8 % of the girls worked more than 4 h. In Nairobi, 16 % of boys and girls spent less than 2 h working and 40 % worked between 2 and 4 h; only a couple of kids were working more than 4 h a day.

Primary schools are free (although, as we shall see, a variety of fees are still involved) and enrolment and attendance have increased significantly. However, the transition to secondary school imposes a particular threshold. In most cases, the expenses related to secondary education, and not the disinterest, were mentioned as the main reason for dropping out. Asked whether it would not be advisable to start working, a vast majority of children thought that working at a young age instead of going to school was not proper. They understood that a child indeed had to learn practical knowledge and skills, but that for later on in life, professionally or otherwise, education was needed. Whereas at a later age they could still learn how to work, it would then not be possible to attend school and get access to knowledge. Of the entire child population in the census, an average of only 6 % (9 % of the boys in Kwale) thought that children should start working at an early age. One could thus assume that dropouts who start working do so not on account of a cultural inclination, but more on account of economic necessity or, on the other hand, because they are push-outs (rather than drop-outs) in the school system.

Table 2.4 Degree of satisfaction with school learning

	Very much	Reasonably	Neutral	Not really	Not at all	Total
Kwale						
Boys	154	237	24	24	4	443
Girls	150	265	15	13	1	444
Nairobi						
Boys	227	44	7	5	0	283
Girls	261	56	4	5	0	326
Total	792	602	50	47	5	1496

Source Socio-economic survey in around 1000 households in Nairobi and Kwale

Most children like being in school. The general opinion is that they are being introduced to the modernising world and are given access to new skills and knowledge, which widens their horizon and kindles the hope that it will help them to improve their chances later on in life. Children are fairly satisfied with what they learn in school. We asked all the children still attending school to rate their satisfaction with what they learn, ranging from a high degree of satisfaction to a low degree. The answers (see Table 2.4) do indicate that a large majority of boys and girls were highly satisfied or reasonably satisfied with what they learned. Only a small percentage of boys and girls, particularly in Kwale, were dissatisfied.

If they do not like school, the reasons are varied but one factor, according to the survey, is paramount: punishment and humiliation by the teachers. One girl (12) said: 'The punishment by the teachers is so harsh, so extreme; beatings are the order of the day'. Another girl (13) said: 'The teachers beat badly, which makes us feel bad. The teachers want us to just keep quiet'. From the survey, we learn that the misuse of power by the teachers even takes the form of sexual harassment and abuse. The cases mentioned during the survey may not have provided a complete picture. The interviews in a more confidential setting, later on, may reveal that sexual harassment is a serious issue indeed. Some children also complained about bullying and harassment by other pupils as a reason for disliking school (Table 2.5).

Table 2.5 Reasons why children dislike school

	Boys	Girls	Total (N = 610)	%
Too difficult	11	16	27	4.4
Missing friends	6	4	10	1.6
Harassment/bullying	10	30	40	6.6
Punishment and humiliation by teachers	104	124	228	37.4
Physical/sexual abuse by teachers	13	10	23	3.8
Other reasons	74	80	154	25.2
No dislike or no answer	64	64	128	21.0
Total	284	326	610	100

Source Socio-economic survey, around 1000 households, in Nairobi and Kwale

Table 2.6 Kwale school-going children—reasons for not learning much (frequency in numbers)

Family related factors	
Have not paid the fees	49
Have to help/work at home	38
Hunger	33
Poor geographical access to school (hard to reach or dangerous trip)	32
Inability to provide for basic needs (e.g. uniform)	26
Home environment not conducive to learning	16
School-related factors	
No textbooks	127
Poor quality teaching, insufficient revision, poor teacher attendance	110
Punishment by teachers	40
Insufficient number of teachers	40
Poor school facilities (water supply, materials, tables, chairs etc.)	13
Overcrowded/too few classrooms	13
Individual characteristics	
Subject too difficult to understand	72
Lack of interest	11
Problems with instruction language	7
Sickness	7

The children also had various complaints about the ways in which the schools are run. We asked the children to tell us the reasons why they thought they did not learn as much as they wished. Table 2.6 presents the findings for Kwale. The findings for Nairobi were similar. The reasons were related to the individual social and economic circumstances of the child, the facilities provided in school, the quality of the teaching and the individual characteristics of the child (e.g. sickness, language difficulties and low intelligence). Children were free to mention any circumstance which potentially hindered their progress. Some of the children mentioned more than one item. The school management particularly was harshly criticised. One child in Nairobi said: ‘Subjects are difficult to understand, particularly mathematics, but we are too many in the class; there are not enough textbooks; we do not have enough teachers and also teachers who are absent and attend at their wish. We have few teachers, so some classes are never taught’. Another child said: ‘Teachers are few and we are so many, classes are congested’.

These statements sum up what in the table can be seen as by far the biggest complaint by the children. Teachers are accused of being lazy, not showing up, and of not teaching even while they are in school. They are often too rough and exhibit punitive behaviour. The table in any case suggests that disinterest in school and low performance should be ascribed less to individual attitudes of parents and children but to the malfunctioning learning environment and to the material conditions. A number of children also acknowledged that it is very difficult to motivate

the entire classroom and to maintain order. Individual poverty-related factors made regular and focussed school attendance even more cumbersome.

Punishment by teachers was spontaneously mentioned in 40 cases, and also the expenses associated with school attendance were frequently cited:

- We are always sent home for fees. Even today, a child was sent home because she had not brought the fees for the PTA (boy, 9; PTA = parents–teachers association).
- We are always sent home for money to pay for the training of unqualified teachers (boy, 11).
- I have family problems like going to school without having taken meals, but then also I suffer daily insults for lack of fees and even uniform (girl, 12).
- We're sent home for small fees frequently. My father is poor and mostly I am staying home and I miss classes (girl, 13).
- I lack a school uniform; so I am constantly sent home and miss classes (boy, 11).
- I lack the basics like school uniform, textbooks, fees and even cash to pay for the meal bills (boy, 15).
- We are often sent home for fees. The future is uncertain due to lack of fees which really discourages us. Yesterday, I had to work for 6 h in search of my own fees and my sisters. Family problems, lack of text books, uniforms, this is not motivating (boy, 15).

Poverty also was an issue which came up frequently, in another sense. Many children complained that they had to go to school on an empty stomach:

- My parents do not support me fully; I lack tools like pens, books and sometime I don't get any breakfast (girl, 9).
- I skip meals, and so I have lack of full concentration because I feel hungry (boy, 9).
- I go to school without breakfast and this makes me feel weak during class (boy, 13).
- Sometimes we go to school on empty stomachs and concentration is very low. There is a serious water shortage and most of the time is spent looking for water to fetch, and that on an empty stomach (girl, 12).
- The distance to school is very long. By the time we reach school, and not having taken breakfast, we are already tired when we reach and can't concentrate (boy, 12).

Given the constraints of poverty, many children mentioned that they had to work hard at home, assisting their parents in the house or on the *shamba* (agricultural land), or had to go out and earn some money:

- I am faced with family responsibilities. In my household our parents, both leave the house and leave me to look after my siblings, even for 1 week at a stretch. I have to do all the chores and work so that I and my siblings survive (girl, 12).
- Sometimes, I am told to stay at home to help in harvesting maize (girl, 12).

- Sometimes I do not attend because father tells me to go and graze the animals (boy, 12).
- Sometimes mother tells me not to go to school, and instead to take care of my younger ones (boy, 13).
- When I leave school I go to work in the *shamba* of other people to get money for food, so I do not get time to study (boy, 13).
- Not only me, but many other children also most of the times are overworked with domestic chores such that we do not concentrate fully in class work; daily I have to go and fetch water (boy, 15).
- Sometimes I feel exhausted because of the work while away from school (girl, 14).
- I do a lot of work and always go to school tired; thus my concentration is quite low (girl, 14).
- Most of the time, I have to stay home to take care of younger siblings especially when they are sick instead of being at school (girl, 15).

The exposure to violence was a quite common experience, at home, on the way to and from school and in school. Punitive measures, the survey suggests, are the rule rather than the exception. It was common for almost all children, when they misbehaved, to be beaten or to undergo other forms of physical punishment. Slapping and beating of both boys and girls was said to be a common practice. It is mostly done by male teachers (in 40 % of the cases), mothers, female teachers and fathers, in that order.

The short-term and long-term effects of this form of violence are difficult to measure. Most children actually claimed that, although they very much resented the shouting and the insults, they did not feel impaired. They claimed that it is part of their upbringing and that they have got used to it and take it in their strides. On the other hand, around one third of the children felt fearful of being shouted at and close to 10 % occasionally missed school because of it. Occasionally the child would hide, cry or run away. In most cases the child reacted to the insults and shouts in silence. In only a couple of cases did the child go and find solace from a trusted person elsewhere. A thick description of how, when and why this happens will be presented on the basis of anthropological field work (Chaps. 5–8).

Sexual violence will also be studied in detail. It is not reliably covered in a survey. Yet, we came across sufficiently widespread cases to assume that sexual violence is a risk. We counted cases in which children had been raped (mostly girls), had been forced to take off their clothes, had been indecently touched and had been forced into oral sex, etc. The perpetrators were usually neighbours, occasionally a teacher or a boyfriend. After an assault, whether verbal or physical, there was nothing much they felt they could do. They usually kept quiet and did not tell anyone. The children could not find anybody in their vicinity whom they could talk to, not even the parents.

2.3 Children and Their Rights

We mentioned above that when children face problems, they have no person or institute to turn to. They have to suffer the insults and hazards in silence. When they did talk or complain, it was to the parents, mainly to the mother (see Chap. 9 for an intensive coverage).

Recently, the idea of child agency, child participation, child empowerment and child resilience has been at the core of theories on modern childhood (see e.g. James and Prout 1990; Qvortrup 1994; James et al. 1998; Boyden and Levison 2000; Sanders and Mace 2006; Percy-Smith and Thomas 2010). International development agencies and the major child-focussed NGO's (save the Children, Plan, World Vision) have followed suit and have made participation and child empowerment into a key policy approach (World Vision 2000; Save the Children 2002, 2010; Hart et al. 2004; Black 2004; O'Malley 2004; IAWGCP 2008). UNICEF has also paid allegiance to this concept. Among other publications, the annual State of the World's Children in 2003 was devoted to child participation 'because children have proved that when they are involved, they can make a difference in the world around them. They have ideas, experience and insights that enrich adult understanding and make a positive contribution to adult actions' (UNICEF 2003: 9). The report went as far as to call it a very revolution:

Another quiet and respectful revolution has been under way. Children and young people have shown their willingness, energy, insights and contributions in making the world more fit. Across diverse countries, cultural and religious traditions, political contexts, castes and classes, children who were given the space and opportunity to participate in appropriate ways, more often than not, acted responsibly and effectively. Democracy begins with children (UNICEF 2003: 11).

More than one decade after the heydays of this child participation, none of this empowerment seems to have trickled down to the childhood experience in Kenya. When asked what children themselves can do to improve their position in school and in the neighbourhood (including approaching officials, approaching NGOs, and having school committees), the children were usually not forthcoming. Access to for example the Child Helpline, which in its briefings claims great successes, was limited. According to Child Helpline International (2012), child helplines are 'the most trusted and accessible gateway for children to find help', but the helplines remain inaccessible to the majority of Africa's children, who live in rural areas. Not only in the rural areas, one should add. Around 2 % in Kwale and 15 % in Nairobi claim to have heard of 116, the free toll number to dial for help, but only 1 child in Nairobi admitted to having dialled the help line. Much more could not be expected anyway, given the very limited telephone coverage in the poorer habitats. When ideas of what could be done were suggested to them, the children were most responsive to having a club to fight for their rights. Around two thirds of the girls, as opposed to less than half of the boys think that some form of organisation among the children would be helpful in dealing with their problems and in bringing in place solutions that would benefit them.

The awareness of 'child rights' is not obvious. Only a handful of children managed to express their views on child rights. In that sense, the UN Convention on

Table 2.7 Major children rights according to the children

	In general	In the life of the child
Education	35	12
Food	21	42
Good health	1	0
To be respected	2	3
Housing and clothes	3	16
Play and leisure	1	0
To express one's opinion	1	1
To be protected, to feel secure	1	3
Total	65	77

Source Socio-economic survey, around 1000 households, in Nairobi and Kwale

Child Rights, 25 years after its adoption in 1989, has not landed where it matters most, in areas where the rights of the children are negated in an absolute sense. When they listen to the radio or watch television, it is usually music programs or sports; information on child rights is hard to find. One third of the children claimed to have heard of child rights, but it was not clear whether they referred to the Child Rights in the CRC or just generally to rights which children should have and which they had formulated themselves. Even less children would come forward and mention specific child rights (Table 2.7).

We asked the children whether they could mention an important right of a child. In general, the children consider the right to education, food, and a good home and clothing, as essential. Other rights, such as the right to participate and the right to be protected, which are important rights in the development of a child, were hardly ever mentioned: the material survival was close to the heart and the mind of most children. In one exercise we asked these children to prioritise their rights: education was overwhelmingly given first preference, followed by love and respect, playing and, at the tail end with only a few first preference votes, participation (which is a child right which many child-focussed NGO are focussing on).

2.4 Conclusion: The Status of Children in Kenya

The extensive survey has provided useful insights in important aspects relating to the daily life of the (school-going) children in Kwale and Nairobi and thus does provide a good stepping stone for the thick description based on anthropological field work, which will follow in the next chapters. Two general findings are necessary to keep in mind as a general background in the discussion on violence:

- Most children face deep levels of poverty and poor infrastructure, which makes the daily struggle for survival as cumbersome as the preparation for future life, e.g. through schooling.

- Most of the women had experienced violence when they were young and believe that disciplining of children requires physical punishment; non-punitive approaches in raising children are relatively unknown.

Education appears to have been accepted as a childhood norm. Children like going to school and a vast majority thought that working at a young age was not proper. They understood that for later on in life, professionally or otherwise, education was needed. They by and large realize that they are given access to new knowledge, which widens their horizon. A majority of boys and girls were highly satisfied or reasonably satisfied with what they had learned in school; they also thought that school was a relatively safe environment, although physical and emotional violence was the rule rather than the exception. Yet, serious problems need to be attended to:

- On account of late enrollment and class repetition, the age spread within the different forms is pedagogically inappropriate.
- Particularly in Kwale, children spend much time on household chores, thereby eating into study time.
- If they do not like school, the reasons are varied but one factor is paramount: (corporal) punishment and humiliation by the teachers.
- Another major reason is poverty, which makes them hungry while in school and unable to pay the school fees: school fees and textbooks are a serious impediment for school-going children.
- Children are highly critical of the ways in which the schools are being run: insufficient teachers and disinterested teachers.

Children were not very knowledgeable about the official child rights charter (CRC). They perceived rights primarily as the right to material survival. Child rights for them were very concrete and related to immediately felt needs:

- The right to personal safety seems to be impeded. In addition to physical and psychological punishment (by teachers and parents), we have come across sufficiently widespread cases to assume that sexual violence is a risk; the perpetrators were usually identified as neighbours, occasionally a teacher or a boyfriend.
- A protection framework is lacking. In most cases the child reacted to the beating, the insults and offences in silence; when children face problems, they have no person or organization to turn to.
- In general, the children who had an opinion on child rights consider the right to education, food, and a good home and clothing, as essential; other rights, such as the right to participate, were hardly ever mentioned.

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