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KENYA ALLIANCE FOR ADVANCEMENT OF CHILDREN (KAACR)

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CULTURAL PRACTICES THAT HINDER CHILDREN RIGHTS AMONG THE DIGO COMMUNITY – MSAMBWENI DISTRICT, KWALE COUNTY

**Towards Intervention: Recommendations on Modification of Harmful Cultural
Practices to Promote Children Rights**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents findings of some harmful cultural practices from among the Digo people in Msambweni District, Kwale County in coast region – Kenya. The main objective was to identify, through Focused Group Discussions and interviews, some of the harmful cultural practices that affect the growth of children in the district, with the objectives of developing interventions for program design, planning and implementation to protect children from these cultural practices while at the same time encouraging communities to continue practicing those cultural activities that protect children.

The survey was carried out between 21st October 2010 and 28th October 2010 in Msambweni Sub location and Diani Sub locations in Msambweni district, Kwale County. Two sites were selected for FGDs at Vingujini Primary School and Msambweni Primary School. Interviews were carried out at Diani, Msambweni and Milalani, all predominated by the Digo people.

Focus Group Discussions were used mainly to get information from children and adults, while interviews were used for information from professionals (with an external eye) working among the community. The FGDs took one day, held simultaneously in Vingujini and Msambweni Primary School grounds while the interviews took five days, held at different dates due to the schedules of the interviewees. Two village elders were included in the interview, basically to verify some of the information received from the FGDs and to confirm the currency of the cultural practices. Similarly, professionals were interviewed for the same reason, and also to offer “external perspectives”. Finally, discussions were made with the KAACR officers to help support design for program interventions in tackling these matters with the sensitivity they deserve.

The survey findings show that the Digo people still cling to cultural norms and practices. There is high belief in witch craft and spirits (*jinis*) even among the Moslem faithfully. Some of the cultural beliefs are very good and promote positive socio-economic growth, but many of the practices are evidently negative and hinder growth of the community. The main victims of bad cultural practices are children, whose voices are never heard in the process. Deep belief in negative cultural practices is further fuelled by high levels of illiteracy. This development has seen a vicious cycle of early marriages, child pregnancies, increased poverty and perpetuation of the culture of fear emanating from *uchawi* (witchcraft) and *urogi* (sorcery).

It was also evident that due to the low levels of illiteracy, many Digo people eschew modern medicine, prenatal and post natal care and would visit the *mganga* (herbalist) first before any other form of health care is sought. This particularly affects children before birth where women prefer Traditional Birth Attendants (TBA) to modern medicines and maternity health facilities. Certain cultural practices that involve death are insensitive to children as they are left unattended to as the parents attend *matanga* and sometimes, for the Moslem children a piece of cloth from the dead person is tied round their wrists, purportedly to ward off evil spirits. This makes the children very fearful.

There are positive aspects of the Digo culture, such as property inheritance by both boys and girls, both cultural and Islamic and now in the *katiba*, that promote some measure of

equality among all the community members without discrimination. But there are also beliefs and cultural practices, such as documented here that heighten fear and intimidate people from progress and economic development.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Culture is the social lifestyle of a people. It covers their world view, perceptions, norms and beliefs. It is dynamic and changes over time, adapting acceptability as new circumstances emerge and as time passes on, yet it is overwhelmingly a people's way of life, to the exclusion of others. Cultural norms are passed from one generation to the next through oral means and through a cross-generational interaction that links the youth with the elders, the elders with the children and vice-versa in a complex symbolism and non verbal means; only understood and comprehended by those living it.

Culture is seen through songs, dances, dress, artwork, mannerisms, religious practices, social relations, gender practices and behavior. Education forms a major pillar in progressing or dimunitizing aspects of culture. Western education has had a huge impact on different community cultures, among them the Digo people. Religion forms yet another pillar as does economic factors. While these "interferences" may be seen as opposing some cultural practices, the fact remains that some cultural practices are retrogressive and need overhauling.

The Digo people, predominant in Msambweni district are still believers in their cultural and traditional practices. Though predominantly Moslems, many still hold dear to traditional practices, especially matters of *uchawi* and *urogi*. There is deep belief in evil spirits to an extent that the Quran is misinterpreted to justify some practices. The people are of the belief that one needs his personal *tawakal* – some form of alternative to God, if God fails to protect one from enemies. Charms are tied round anklets, wrists, waists, placed in wallets and used widely to protect one from enemies and evil spirits. As documented, some of these charms are readily available in local shops. The people also believe in *jinis* (supernatural half spirits half humans) also described in the Quran and seek to please the good ones while protecting themselves from the evil *jinis*. "At least 80% of the population, relies mainly on traditional healers and herbalists for treatment"¹

1.1 Terms of Reference for the Study

1.1.1 Background

Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children (KAACR) is carrying out a project; *to prevent and respond to all forms of violence against children by establishing national child protection systems in Kenya*. The three-year project is being implemented in three intervention areas in Kenya, Tharaka, Msambweni and Butere districts. The project targets children who will be claiming their rights, organizations working with children, relevant government authorities (NCCS, Children Department, MOE and MOH), local leaders, parents, teachers and other school staff, police, communities and AACs. The project seeks to strengthen the National Child Protection Systems (NCPS) through developing good practices from the community level that can be replicated in other areas and up to the national level. To do this, the project is aimed at empowering local stakeholders, duty bearers and right holders through advocacy, capacity development and attitude change.

¹ The Kwale District Development Plan 2004 - 2008

Over the last two and half years of implementation, the project staffs have guided the stakeholders in identifying some harmful cultural practices which greatly contribute to child abuse. Given this, KAACR is conducting a study on two most rampant cultural practices in Msambweni and Tharaka districts. The ultimate aim is to provide a possible alternative to the practice that will enhance child protection.

1.1.2 The Terms of Reference:

In preparing this report, the researcher was expected:

- To devise ways of interacting with the key custodians of culture;
- To identify rampant harmful cultural practices among the community; and
- To make recommendations on how an alternative practice can be developed in order to promote and protect children.

1.2 Objectives

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To moderate Focus Group Discussions with community members, community leaders, and children on identified harmful cultural practice
2. To analyze outcomes of the Focus Group Discussions to ensure that the good aspects of the practice are promoted and
3. To advise KAACR staff on how to influence the transition of harmful cultural practices to the alternative cultural practice that promotes the protection of children.

1.3 Methodology

In undertaking this study, two sites were identified within Msambweni district where Kenya Alliance for the Advancement of Children (KAACR) works. In each location, a Primary school was randomly selected as the site for children and community members (parents) focus group discussions (FGDs). A total of four (4) FGDs; 2 for children and 2 for parents were held. Interviews were held with two local leaders (Village elders), two women (one elderly and one young) and two senior civil servants.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION OF THE DIGO COMMUNITY

2.1 Historical Background

The Digo are believed to have originated from Shunguwaya in what is now southern Somalia, together with the rest of the Miji Kenda (nine tribes) community comprising the Duruma, Jibana, Giriama, Ribe, Kauma, Chonyi, Kambe, and Rabai. Traditional literature say that a Digo boy killed a Galla boy who seduced their sister and buried him in cattle shed, but the secret was later revealed by a Digo woman who befriended a Galla man leading to the disclosure and the escape of the Digos from the wrath of the Galla people. They migrated to their current homeland where they met two Zulu brothers Mrima and Mwesi who formed the Duruma community. Another orature talks of the Miji Kenda moving southwards, where the Duruma settled first, then the Digo, then Rabai, Ribe, Jibana, Kambe, Kauma, Chonyi and finally Giriama in what is now coast region. They say they met the Watta² people, *Wariangulo*³ (eaters of tortoise) or *Wasanye* (collectors or gatherers) already settled in the coast region.

Today the Digo live in Msambweni district, and Kwale district in Kwale County of the coast region, flowing all the way into Tanzania along the Kenya Tanzania coastline. They share the county with the Duruma people, another of the Miji Kenda community, who occupy Kinango district, further inland. “There are eighteen clans of the Digo. These are Avirizi, Boza, Chome, Dzemba, Kalangwe, Kuria, Lago, Lela, Mangaro, Manji, Mchitseve, Ndzira, Ngala, Ngome, Njemi, Nyiro, Rama and Tsui. The Digo speak *Chidigo* with three dialects: *Chitsimba*, *Chiungu*, and *Chivumba*” (Ministry of Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services: 2004)

2.2 Traditional systems

Traditional Digo governance systems were based on a council of elders called the *ngambi* representing each clan. These elders worked very closely with the *kaya* elders, who they also were, in adjudicating all matters for their community. They were custodians of the traditional laws and maintained peace and order in the community. They also blessed the youth at times of war as well as in normal hunting, fishing and raiding expeditions. The elders represented the community under the leadership of a *mbega* and deputy leadership of a *mwatamba*.

Today, most of traditional systems have given way to modern and contemporary forms of governance. The lowest levels of community leadership are the village elders. The *waganga* still exist and are highly revered. Religious leaders, mainly the Imams have taken up from traditional religious leadership, but the *kaya* elders (described below) still have space in social lives of the people.

² A small marginalized community living in coast region.

³ Derogatory name for the Watta also referred to as Wasanye (collectors)

2.2.1 Kayas and Kaya elders

Kayas were and still are a place of prayer for the Digo people as well as other Miji Kenda people to this very day. Though their significance has diminished with time, they are still highly sought by the political class, to bless them when they are seeking political posts. Traditionally, a village elder (*mtawala*) lived in the *kaya* but they have now been preserved as sacred grounds. *Kaya* elders, invariably village elders as this study found out, are still the custodians of community cultural practices and commune with the spirits of the forefathers and ancestors. “Some matters of the community may not be disclosed to “outsiders”, as this may not please the forefathers”⁴.

2.4 Customary laws of the Digo

Customary laws of the Digo seek retribution rather than punishment except in very exceptional cases. For instance, when one clansman murdered; a man was sought for a man, a woman for a woman and so on. Curses and charms were and still are used to instill fear from committing evils among the Digo people. Customary laws are in the custody of male elders. Women and children are rarely allowed to make any significant contribution into matters of customary laws.

2.5 Traditional and Modern Religious Practices

The Digo can be considered to belong to double heritage of traditional religion and predominantly Islam. Some are Christians. Many Digo people practice traditional cultures and follow traditional norms and yet are apparently deeply Moslem. This contradiction is best illustrated by the fact that *pombe ya mnazi* (palm wine) is heavily consumed among the people whose Islamic faith considers alcohol *haram*.⁵ During the month of Ramadan⁶, consumption of alcohol is drastically reduced. Eighty percent of the Digo consider themselves Moslems and the rest are believers in traditional practices. The number of Christians is negligible.

2.6 Socio-economic activities of the Digo

A large majority of the Digo are peasant farmers, keepers of cattle and fisher folks. These economic activities occupy a majority of the people. Some people are business persons selling farm products as well as eateries such as *mahamri*. Women make mats for sale and mainly stay at home to support childcare while men venture out to eke a living. Increasingly the Digo are venturing into hospitality industry along the beautiful South Coast beaches. The South Coast houses at least forty two major hotels and resorts of international standards.⁷ Other community members are professionals in various public and private sectors across the country and abroad.

2.7 Social Organizations

Social organizations are still found among fisher folks, farmers and palm wine tapers, though most of these are breaking down as the economic needs are changing. Women still meet in modern day *chama* traditionally referred to as *chikola* to hold table banking

⁴ Comments by the village elders during interviews

⁵ Sinful

⁶ An annual fast and prayer period for Moslem faithfuls; one of the most important pillars of Islam.

⁷ Coast Tourism Information Center: 2010

and discuss matters affecting them. Most rural communities still have separate meetings for men, children and women. Infact children are not supposed to stay near a gathering of men or other adults. They are supposed to play among fellow children. This study found out that due to this, it became difficult to place a child mother in any social category in the community. She is considered neither a child nor an adult and hence lacks social support.

3.0 FINDINGS

The greatest and perhaps the most overwhelming cultural belief among the Digo people is witchcraft, This in turn affects other aspects of life and manifests itself in various ways right from birth to death. It is also evident that due to the low levels of literacy, many Digo people eschew modern medicine, prenatal and post natal care and would visit *wakingwi* (traditional birth attendants) and the *mganga* (herbalist) first before any other form of modern health care is sought. Below are just some of the manifestations of cultural belief closely tied to *uchawi* (witchcraft); and that affect children negatively; that emerged during the study.

3.1 Prenatal

As mentioned above, mothers prefer going to *wakungwi* (Traditional Birth Attendants - TBA) to modern medicines and maternity health facilities. This means that they will only seek modern maternity facility when there is an emergency at labour and the newborn is highly distressed. Children born under these circumstances are likely to suffer brain damage, and later suffer slower growth milestone achievements. Incidentally, such a child, if they survive, is considered as having come with ill intention, referred to as *kuja vibaya* and face discrimination for having “almost killing the mother” during child birth. Such a child, due to constant ill health they face, are considered *kisirani* (bad omen) and feel unhappy even in the family set up.

During the study, children felt that this practice is unfortunate and should be discontinued. They agreed that parents need to seek modern health facility before and after getting babies to protect both themselves and the new child. Elders were of similar opinion, arguing that times have changed, and that mothers need to seek modern medicine. They however insisted that these were matters for women and did not wish to dwell on them. Asked about their opinion on seeking prenatal support from modern clinic and hospitals, the women averred that though it was a good idea, it was better to have the baby in the hands of the traditional birth attendants. They felt that only weak or cowardly women would go to hospital. They however agreed that they would seek medical intervention in hospitals during an emergency.

3.2 Post natal and Early Childhood

The birth of a new child is highly celebrated among the Digo people. Children are considered, not only a source of wealth, but security in old age for the community members. Child birth also marks the rooting of a woman in marriage and in the husband's home. She gains acceptability and respect for giving rebirth to ancestors and elderly community members.

3.2.1 *Kuni na kata na upinde na msahle*

When a child is born, the Digo will tie a small bundle of sticks (*kuni na kata*) and place it at the entrance to the new mother's house, to signify a girl. For a boy, a small bow and arrow (*upinde na mshale*), is similarly tied, hence any guest is able to identify the sex of the newborn child.

During the study, all the adult participants felt that this is a good practice that ought to continue as it reduces the embarrassment of asking whether the newborn is a boy or a girl.

Children were of the opinion that the symbolism of the practice was not only discriminatory, but also sent a strong message of the place of women as water drawers and of boys as hunters; used to discriminate them by gender, later in life. The girls particularly felt strongly that this was a harmful culture that did not need to be continued. “There is nothing embarrassing in asking about a child’s sex. It is no different from asking for a person’s name. Afterall, the child is not always in the specific house all the time, and the question may be asked at the market place, in hospital or at the Mosque!” Persisted one girl. “The practice leads to discrimination of the children”. She added.

3.2.2 Kufungwa irizi mikononi mwa Watoto

Tied with the belief in witches and harm through witchcraft is the practice of tying *irizi* on children, this study found out. *Irizi* is a piece of cloth tied with some charm on the arm, wrist, waist or anklet of children. This is believed to ward off evil spirits and evil eye from *wachawi* (witches). The Digo community believes in witchcraft so much so that any small ailment is attributed to witches and evil spirits. The traditional healer is sought first before any modern medicine even for obvious infections. Mothers are encouraged to buy, (these are sold in local shops) a piece of *irizi* whose content is some foul smelling concoction mixed with elephant dung.

This practice offers psychological comfort to the mothers, but has no real benefit. Children often bite these pieces of clothing, that are hardly ever cleaned anyway, suffering stomach upsets and running stomachs which are further attributed to *uchawi*! (witchcraft). During the study, many of the participating children did not seem to comprehend the depth of this practice and could not give an informed opinion. The adults were seemly stuck to its practice and were reluctant to show that it will end. The study learnt that many an adult has a piece of *irizi* hidden somewhere on his body or wallet, explaining this reluctance.

3.2.3 Tohara

Tohara is circumcision of both male and female. Male circumcision is still very active in respect of the Islamic faith. Boys are circumcised at eight days old. There are, however pockets of female genital mutilation that are highly secretive. It is not common, mainly due to harsh government response to the form of traditional circumcision that used to take place among the Digo community. It was revealed that once circumcised, the girl was married off immediately, hence the radical approach to stop it. Male circumcision is considered a good cultural practice and is admissible, and even highly encouraged.

The secretive girl’s female genital mutilation was opposed by all participants. The elders clearly felt that it was not good at all, especially with modernity and change of lifestyle. The women equally opposed the idea of FGM and condemned those who practice it secretly. It was revealed that, after circumcision, girls would be married off to the first available man, sometimes the boy cousin of the girl, leading to forced marriages, which in turn led to divorces.

3.2.4 Nyoni

Again closely tied to belief in evil spirits is the problem of *nyoni* or *nyuni*. *Nyoni* is whereby a child suffers high fever and starts convulsing. When this happens, the child's uncle is called upon to urinate on the child, to ward off the evil spirit and calm the fever. Certainly, any fever of this nature can be treated with tepid water at body temperature, similar to urine.

Children argued that this was not necessary since modern medication can reduce the risk of convulsion and thus make it unnecessary for uncles to urinate on such a child. The elders supported the children, but also stated that the practice had a way of bonding families together. The study found out that the community was willing to stop this practice, but they needed to understand that convulsion has nothing to do with evil spirits, but was merely a result of high fever from malaria and ague.

3.2.5 Kukuja vibaya

A disabled child, a child with albinism or a breach-birth child is one among those considered bad omen children. They are said to have been born with ill intention, and are openly discriminated. When other children are given gifts, this child is left out, and is not part of the immediate plan of the family. They are constantly referred to as the bad omen child and face a lot of psychological abuse.

3.3 Adolescent

3.3.1 Makungwi

Girls between ages 9 and 17 are often taken for sex education called *kungwi*. Though highly discouraged by the government and state functionaries, the practice has persisted. "The practice is ideal for a woman betrothed to a man, but makes no sense to a 9 year old child", said one of the participants in the FGDs. At the *Makungwi*, girls are taught how to make their men sexually happy, how to be clean and keep their households clean and how to take care of their menstrual cycles. "While it is ideal for a woman headed for marriage, the practice is absolutely useless to a child" asserted one woman participant. This she averred "made a girl child sexually inquisitive and led to the current high rates of child pregnancies among our people". Virtually all participants felt that this is a harmful cultural practice to the girl child, which ought to be stopped. It was however ideal for a woman about to get wedded.

Girls who had undergone the *ukungwi* were sexually provocative and did not shy away from men, thus bringing the cases of child mothers to its critical levels in the region. The term 'your man' to a nine or ten year old is different when mentioned to a woman about to get married! This practice leads to child sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and early marriages as a result of pregnancies. Adult participants agreed that it was suitable for brides, and not children.

3.3.2 Kuanguka

It is not uncommon to see girls suffering hysteria, normally referred to as „*kuanguka*“ (to fall or collapse) especially when faced with a punishment and thus being taken by a group of girls away from school. This is believed to be brought by *pepo mbaya* (evil spirits) and leads to *kuchemuko kwa roho* (pulpitation). Any time a girl or a group of girls are faced by uncertainty, they resort to this type of behaviour, and the matter of punishment is quickly forgotten.

During the study, children were split in opinion on this behaviour. The boys opposed it vehemently, suggesting that it was a way of evading punishment by the girls, and many believing that it was mere pretense. The girls, though opposing the behaviour stated that they do not know what normally gets into them. They just find themselves in that circumstance. Elders and adults attributed this behaviour to spirits, which often grip girls, but leave boys alone. They treated it as something harmless that needed only a little calm to go away.

It was noted, however that any time a girl gets hysterical and collapses, a number of them have to leave class and thus interrupt the lesson. This means that the girls lost out on the lesson for the day, while the entire class was disrupted anyway. Some boys argued that girls simply pretended when faced with uncertainty. “Why does this never happen at home? Why only at school?” One boy asked. The senior government interviewed noted that the community needed a lot of sensitization to remove the notion of evil spirit in all aspects of life. They felt that these occurrences are as a result of lack of understanding and ignorance.

3.3.3 *Mizimu na mapepo*

The Digo place the dead in special reverence, as long as the death is not tragic. Anybody dying of an accident or tragic incident is hurriedly buried and quickly forgotten, but one who dies of an old ripe age and in a peaceful manner is highly revered. With a mixture of traditional practices and Islam, they are buried with a lot of ceremony and memorials are held long after they have been interred. Certain cultural practices that involve death are, however, insensitive to children. For instance, the study revealed that often parents leave children unattended to as they attend *matanga* and sometimes, for the Moslem children a piece of cloth from the dead person is tied round their wrists, purportedly to ward off evil spirits. This makes the children very fearful.

Children participants were all agreed that this makes them have nightmares and feel very fearful, besides, they are paraded out as “*watoto wa marehemu*” (orphans) for days, making them uncomfortable. Though children are quickly supported by extended family members following the death of parents or close relatives, they are often singled out by mourning relatives and shown out through loud expressions such as “*maskini watoto wa marehemu*” (Ooh poor orphans) by any new visitor to the *matanga*, (funeral) long after the actual burial. (Funerals do not end, and memorials take years). This act of singling out orphans only work to lengthen the healing process for the children.

Often following a funeral, adults attend traditional memorials called *matanga* or *ngoma ya matanga* for days, leaving children exposed to child abusers and potential defilers.

This practice has faced opposition from teachers and the Provincial Administration, but has been difficult to eliminate due the reverence attached to the living dead. The community believes that without a proper send off, bad things (*mikasa*) may occur in the family, including death of other members of the family.

3.4 Youth

3.4.1 *Kuhalwa*

Marriage is an important developmental process among all communities in the world. The Digo take marriage as a very crucial and important development in their lives. There are three predominant forms of marriage among the Digo; the traditional *kuhalwa*, civil marriage (*ndoa ya DC* – literally the District Commissioner’s marriage) and religious marriage (or *ndoa ya mkeka*). *Kuhalwa* is a traditional form of marriage among the Digo, where the girl is abducted, taken to a boy’s home, defiled – to confirm her virginity, and this is later reported to the “offended” family as *wizi wa ng’ombe* (cattle theft) whereby the father of the boy and elders from the clan visit the family of the girl and marriage arrangements are thereafter made. The study found out that the community considers a girl who has gone through *halwa* marriage as being “better married” than those who get married in the Mosque (*kwa mkeka*) or any other forms of marriage including civil marriage.

This form of marriage where a girl is “abducted” by a man, taken to his homestead and defiled; and where the act is referred to as “*wizi wa ng’ombe*” evidently comes out as illegal and unlawful.

According to the children, whenever the girl’s family comes to her rescue, she is so traumatized to realize that infact they are coming to condemn her into the marriage that she did not choose. The women folk though, make her feel that she has been married in the best way possible and is highly honored. This form of marriage causes early child marriage with very few chances of reporting to the government, as the matter is kept secret and the practice time honored. This practice is closely linked to the *ukungwi*, described above as the *wakungwi* are able to inform prospecting men which girls are virgins, after the *ukungwi* period.

This form of marriage, though time honored and highly valued by some members of the community, clearly violates the rights of the girl child, offering her no opportunity for redress and hindering her participation in the marriage process. Whose still, she is described as some form of *stolen cattle*. If perchance she reports the matter to the local chief, the sheer pressure to withdraw complaint is so overwhelming, as the practice is considered very valuable. Mother-in-laws treat daughters-in-law who have been married in this manner as very precious and regard them very highly, thus reducing the need for these girls to make formal complaint anywhere.

3.5 Other general beliefs

3.5.1 Uchawi and urogi

As mentioned at the beginning of these findings, witchcraft is held in awe as is the fact that one may get bewitched (*kurogwa*). Children are initiated in the fear of witchcraft and getting bewitched very early in life and this forms part of their daily existence. As they grow up, they do not get a chance to voice their concern on these matters. Indeed during this study, it was difficult to get precise answers regarding personal beliefs in witchcraft and getting bewitched. Every participant seemed to have either witnessed a bewitched person suffer or had themselves suffered some mild form of incident that they believed were a result of witchcraft.

3.5.2 Tawakal and jinis

The Digo enjoy double heritage and live it and love it. Though Moslems, they still hold dearly to a lot of the traditional beliefs and cultural practices as observed earlier. Two quasi religious beliefs that affect the Digo people are the belief in personal protector, derived from the Islamic teachings, and that of the supernatural being – the *jini* or *djini*. One of these. The belief in personal protector partly explains the *irizi* tied on children hands and which many an adult Digo wear round their arms, wrists, or keep in their wallets or tie at the tip of their *leso*.

These beliefs as mentioned above affect the way people relate. It is common place to hear that a man has used traditional medicine men “to pull” a beautiful lady, or a man has been “pulled” into a relationship by a woman. The study established that these are common beliefs and are easily advertised by medicine men on small posters nailed on trees and at market places. Participants stated that *jini* can be used to amass wealth and hence they are kept by people seeking such wealth. Children expressed fear on reference to jinni and personal protector charms, *tawakal*, and did not wish to discuss them much.

3.5.3 Contemporary “cultures”

During the course of this study, it emerged that there are new “cultural” behaviors that are negative and harmful towards children. For instance, an increasing number of parents are encouraging their children to “get out there and get their own *riziki*” (income). This includes exchanging sex for money or getting involved with elderly *mzungu* (white persons, usually tourists) – both male and female. Whereas it was traditionally considered very bad to be involved with an elder women, it is now acceptable, even admired, when a young man has a white elderly lady women friend and stays with her in exchange for sex. Similarly a girl is encouraged to keep an elderly male *mzungu* for the same reason. This “beach-boyism” and “beach-girlism” has led to school dropouts and increase in cases of child trafficking for sexual exploitation and pornography. It has also increased the uptake of drugs and substance abuse by young people who can only gain courage to be kept while under the influence of drugs..

There are also increased cases of forced marriages where a “foreign” man is forced to marry a girl who has been tacitly encouraged to seduce him, as a way of exploiting his lack of the local culture, and to benefit from his income. This forced marriage is done in a hurry and is exploitative, to the men involved, leading to poor relationship with the girl. Ordinarily the man will ask for transfer and abscond from his paternity duties.

Other related contemporary cultures include increased cases of divorces. The participants considered this alarming as children were left uncared for and in many cases with the mothers. Many times a man who married another woman placed his children in the hands of cruel step-mother. Divorce, and polygamy, admissible by Islamic laws further complicated the place of children within households in Msambweni district and among the Digo people.

The contemporary culture has loosened family fabrics, and reduced the place of family as a child protector thus increasing violence and abuse of children. Many children in polygamous marriages easily seek to get away and end up in early marriages and even worse situations from the one they are running away. One observation made by the participants was that most marriages are within family circles. Cousins marry, and thus when one is divorced, it is her aunty who turns out to be her mother-in-law, and therefore her favorite relative. In this way, to some extent, her children are protected, as they are in the hand of their grandmother who is also a relative of her daughter and the mother of their father! This complicates the man's position as he is forced to obey his mother and provide for his children in the process.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TOWARDS PROGRAM INTERVENTIONS

Having identified the fact that witchcraft and the fear of witchcraft lies at the center of cultural belief of the Digo people, and taking note of the fact that most of the cultural practices need change of behaviour and attitude, and in order for Kenya Alliance for the Advancement of Children Rights (KAACR) to come up with interventions that will support child protection, while taking into cognizance the sensitive nature of the community cultural practices and norms, the following proposals are made:

4.1 Participatory Training, sensitization and awareness creation.

KAACR needs to support participatory awareness forums where training and sensitization of community cultures can be discussed and both positive and harmful cultures identified. Once done, the community can then isolate the cultural practices that promote child protection, and those that do not and in this way the community will by itself seek solutions to eliminate cultural practices that are harmful to their children.

It is proposed that forums, using participatory techniques and separately for elders, women, boys, girls and inclusive of child mothers and non-Digo people, be held to discuss the various cultural practices, and get solution from among the participants. These can then be used to develop Information, Education and Communication materials which can be propagated in the district, in addition to deliberate public sensitization and awareness creation. This may be targeted at schools, Mosques, *barazas*, public gatherings, market days and mobilized foras of different stakeholders.

4.2 Public Dialogue and Advocacy for Good Cultural Practices

Following the above identification of both positive and negative cultural practices, a program may be designed through public dialogue and advocacy at community level to deliberately promote good cultural practices, seeking to enhance child protection. This will include matters such as nutritious food, and the culture of protecting children even in a divorce situation.

One of the best methods is to hold cultural fares promoting nutrition, traditional dances, traditional costumes, traditional games and sports, and use the opportunity to highlight those positive cultural practices that promote and protect children. Cultural and artistic performances can thus be used to promote positive cultural practices while creating opportunity to downplay matters such as witchcraft.

4.3 Awareness creation on harmful cultural practices

In the same manner that good cultural practices are identified, negative and harmful cultural practices need to be identified, discussed and alternative measures taken. Awareness creation need to be done, taking care of the community sensitivity of their own cultural practices, use of moral approach, especially Islam, modern education and knowledge of the law and the constitution could help in the process, and this needs the support of cultural and religious leaders, education stakeholders, health practitioners, and child right stakeholders.

This can be done by having various stakeholders including *kaya* elders, village elders, various professional persons, health workers, and child right practitioners coming together in an organized community symposium to discuss and present, through respected cultural leaders, a public communiqué, following discussions, those cultural practices the community feel are no longer useful and that do not serve the community, especially the children. Religious leaders and *kaya* elders are highly respected, and if they make such pronouncement, the community is likely to listen to them.

4.4 Lobby the government and Advocate for the construction of institutions that protect children

Together with other civil society and faith based organizations, KAACR should lobby and advocate for the construction of institutions such as health facilities, schools and cultural centers, which besides being child protection centers, will also support campaign towards the use of modern health facilities, education and socio-economic progress of the people. The presence of these institutions will by and by reduce belief in witchcraft and harmful cultural practices.

4.5 Sensitize the community on religion and the place of the family.

Using religion and family values, the community could be brought to protect children especially on matters of family. Islam is against alcoholism, drugs and substance abuse, and supports and promotes virginity while upholding the circumcision of boy children hence a useful tool in fighting some harmful culture. Legal references may also support the protection of children, and where necessary, KAACR may utilize this as an option for the general public good and hold parents responsible if children under, say, 12 years get pregnant. This will instill a sense of responsibility on the parents and reduce incidents of early child marriages and child pregnancies.

This means that while KAACR engages the support of religious leaders in working towards moral support for child protection, child abusers, defilers and persons who in any way abuse children must face the law and this must be evident to the public. This calls for support of the law enforcement officers, and the judiciary, ensuring that children get protected from violence and harm.