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## Travel and Research Award 2018-2019

*'Victim or Villain: A case study of NGO's in Kenya in the field of child protection'*

As the recipient of the 'Travel and Research Award' by Royal Holloway University of London, I had the amazing opportunity to travel in April 2019 to Nairobi, Kenya in order to carry out the research part of my dissertation.

Having lived in Kenya the majority of my life, I participated in multiple volunteer experiences with organizations involved in helping children from disadvantaged backgrounds. I have always been interested in exploring the field of child protection by trying to understand, in relation to society and its components, the extent to which children were actually safeguarded. In this regard, particularly impactful was my experience as an intern with GRT (Gruppo per le Relazioni Transculturali), in the world of street children. Hearing their stories and being exposed to their reality of children neglected by their families and considered to be the downfall of society, I began to question whether they were the threat or whether society was the true threat to the protection of these children. I took, therefore, the opportunity to utilize my dissertation in order to explore this enigma and through semi-structured interviews, I carried out field research involving the stakeholders of the different NGOs.

For the realization of this project I collaborated with CCM (Comitato Collaborazione Medica), an organization that safeguards the physical and mental health of children through sports and other education activities; GRT, who's main aim is to explore the socio-economic aspect of the child through the empowerment of the families; Jukumu Letu, which is a community-based organisation that works together with the families and the surrounding community to ameliorate the physical, cognitive and psychosocial development of the children in care; CEFA (The seed of Solidarity), who empowers individuals to become self-sufficient through gaining respect for the fundamental rights in freedom of expression, gender equality, education, work, and health; Anita's Home, which is a children's home that protects children from vulnerable backgrounds and that come from the streets by providing for them an opportunity to ameliorate their future through education. The choice of these 5 organizations was done through a careful selection in order to gain a perspective from a health, social, juridical, education and institutional perspective.

Throughout the duration of the project, I had the additional opportunity, outside of the formalities of the interviews, to explore, participate and visit various active projects on the field. During such opportunity I was able to speak not only to the children but also to interact with individual social workers in order to gain an idea of an overall picture of the current situation. In a population of 46 million people, 61.5% is under the age of 18. Within this figure, 3.6 million children have been classified as vulnerable. Included in this is 1.01 million of children involved in child labor, 19,542 held in juvenile detention centers without a clear sentence, and 250,000-300,000 found working and living in the streets (Unicef). Reported locally there is a lack of collaboration within communities and the government itself to try and reduce these numbers.

As a result through this research paper, it was identified the presence of an overall lack of consideration of the basic rights of the child mentioned in the Convention on the Rights of Children, due to poor knowledge at a local level of the existence and implementation of these. When there is a lack of recognition of the needs, rights and of the overall provision for the child, there is a higher chance that these will live and grow up in poverty. This creates a vicious cycle with little to no chances of coming out of it. The main role of these NGOs is to implement a systematic approach to address the individual childcare within the household, and through community mechanisms that can ensure the protection of the child. This sensitization aims at recognizing the vulnerability of the child and encourages various components, at a national and local level, to no longer view the child as a 'villain' but rather as a 'victim'. Through the findings, it can be deduced that within the Kenyan scenery, the activities adopted in providing child protection are fragmented, and disconnected, between the key four agents: the child, the environment, the society, and the institutions. It can be therefore concluded that without an interconnected approach in the micro-field of the child that is impossible to ensure a fully protected environment.

The realization of this research would have not been fully possible without the help granted by the Travel and Research award. The visit was crucial to contribute to the exploration of the topic and to deepen the content of the dissertation. Without this opportunity, the project would have not been able to receive the success and positive feedback to it given.