International Child Sponsorship:
Children's Experiences with a Compassion International Sponsorship Program in Uganda

Irene Maria van Andel – de Raad

Thesis for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Childhood Studies

Trondheim, May 2011

Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology Management

Norwegian Centre for Child Research

Dedication

To the children of Seeta Child Development Centre

Your strength, courage, and optimism made a lasting impression on me

May your dreams for the future come true

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my gratitude to all who contributed to the accomplishment of this thesis, by providing me with professional insights as well as personal support. I would like to mention the following people in particular.

First and foremost I wish to thank the children and youth of Seeta Child Development Centre, who were willing to share their lives with me and became to appreciate me as a friend.

I am extremely grateful to my Ugandan host parents, Kenneth and Miriam Mugayehwenkyi, who cared for me as if I were their own daughter and provided me with valuable insights into Ugandan society.

I would like to thank the project staff at Seeta Child Development Centre, who assisted me with the planning of my research activities and provided me with all necessary information about the project.

In particular I want to thank my 'brother' Solomon Mwije, who accompanied me on every home visit and has acted as an interpreter whenever this was needed.

I am grateful to the people at Compassion International's country offices in both Uganda and The Netherlands, who helped me carrying out this research in diverse ways.

My sincere gratitude goes to my supervisor Anne Trine Kjørholt at the Norwegian Centre for Child Research. Your critical comments, helpful suggestions, and personal support have been extremely valuable to me.

I wish to thank all of my classmates, but in particular Ingvild, Janne and Owusuaa, for their friendship and the constructive discussions we had in our reading rooms.

Last but not least, I am very grateful to my husband Guido and my mother Christa, who have supported and encouraged me during the whole working process. I would not have been able to complete this work without you.

Abstract

This study explores children's experiences with a Compassion International sponsorship program in Mukono District, Uganda. International child sponsorship is offered in various ways by a large number of NGOs as a means to alleviate child poverty. While the sponsoring of individual children has been criticized for its divisive effects, little research is done on the topic from participating children's own perspectives. According to the new social studies of children and childhood, children can provide valuable insights into matters that concern them. By focusing in-depth on the life stories and views of children and youth participating in a Compassion International sponsorship program, this study aims to give a nuanced picture of the ways in which child sponsorship can affect the lives of individual children.

In order to present a structured account of children's experiences with the sponsorship project in which they participated, my results are organized according to topics including children's thoughts on the family and community impact of the project, children's evaluation of the relationship with their sponsor, children's perceptions of the role of religion in the project, children's thoughts on the advantages and disadvantages of individual child sponsorship compared to community-focused development approaches, as well as children's expectations and goals for their lives after having completed the program.

Because rich data material was needed to realize the aims of this study, qualitative methods have been used including focus group discussions, narrative/semi-structured interviews and participant observation. In addition, children were given the opportunity to present a written account of their life histories, and to capture their daily lives by means of photographic reports. All informants were between the ages of 12 and 20 years.

Although some problems were reported due to the sponsorship program's individual character, all children experienced that participation in the program has given a positive turn to their lives. From a life in poverty with little opportunities, the sponsorship program has helped children to move towards a better life. The active use of religion, the provision of educational opportunities, and the possibility to expand one's social network were among the most important factors contributing to this positive change of life. When thinking about their future lives, children felt that the sponsorship program empowered them to reach their personal goals and to make a difference for their families and communities.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Theme of the Study

The current study is dealing with the practice of international child sponsorship. Child sponsorship schemes are a popular way of providing help to children in poverty and are offered by a number of both larger and smaller NGOs that focus their activities on children. These NGOs match an individual, Western sponsor with a child in a 'less-developed' county. Children participating in these sponsorship programs are often selected by local authorities as 'the poorest of the poor', the ones most in need of support. In many of these programs, children and their sponsors are allowed to communicate with each other through letter exchanges. The monthly fee paid by the sponsor is usually spent on education, nutrition, and medical care for the sponsored individual, or community provisions aimed at developing a child's community.

There are differences in the degree to which sponsor money is used for the benefits of the individual child versus the benefits of the community in which the child lives. Some NGOs prefer to focus on the needs of the child's community first by using the sponsor's money on community provisions that aim to benefit both the sponsored children and the rest of the community. In this case the sponsorship is more symbolic as the sponsored individual represents a larger group of beneficiaries. Others, on the other hand, prefer to target the needs of individual children first, believing that these individuals will have a 'domino effect' on the rest of the community. Another important division can be made between organizations that work from a religious motivation and those that base their work on humanitarian values only. Children's experiences of participating in a child sponsorship program are shaped by these organizational differences to a large extent.

1.2 Research Problem and Aim

The sponsoring of children in 'developing' nations has evoked heated debates in which the effectiveness and desirability of such approaches is questioned (e.g. New Internationalist issues 111, 1982 and 194, 1989; Bornstein, 2001; Jefferess 2002). It has been mentioned that while participation in a sponsorship program can create unique opportunities for individuals (and to a varying extent for their communities), it can also accentuate localized experiences of poverty and cause divisions within families and communities. However, no systematic research on these programs has been done from the participating children's own perspectives.

The interdisciplinary social studies of children and childhood perceives children as competent social actors who can provide a unique perspective on the social world about matters that concern them (e.g. James, 2007). By focusing in-depth on children's experiences with a sponsorship program in Uganda administered by Compassion International, this study aims to give a nuanced picture of the ways in which child sponsorship can affect the lives of individual children.

1.3 Research Questions

The leading question for this study is:

"What are children's experiences with international child sponsorship?"

The following sub-questions have been formulated:

1. What is the importance of child sponsorship in individual children's lives?
2. How do the children evaluate the impact of the project on their families?
3. What are the children's thoughts on the community impact of the project?
4. How do the children experience the relationship with their sponsor through letter exchanges and gifts?
5. How do the children perceive the role of religion in the project?
6. What do the children see as advantages and disadvantages of individual child sponsorship as a means to alleviate poverty?
7. What are the children's expectations and goals for the future?

1.4 Research Methods

Data collection has taken place in August and September 2009 at the Seeta Child Development Centre in Mukono District, Uganda, which is a Compassion International assisted project. The project was started in October 1998 and at the time of data collection, 225 children were registered (111 boys and 114 girls). Out of these children, 48 were in primary school and 177 in secondary school (Seeta Child Development Centre, 2009). Children participating in this project are trained in skills like tailoring, drawing, crafts, home economics and gardening. Next to that, they have the opportunity to socialize through clubs, debates, music and games. A more detailed description of the research site is to be found in chapters five and six.

Children at the Seeta Child Development Centre could volunteer to participate in one or more research activities. The following methods were used, which will be further elaborated on in chapter three:

1. Participant observation;
2. Written life stories;
3. Focus group discussions;
4. Narrative/semi-structured interviews;
5. Visual methods (photo reports);
6. Study of program documents.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis is structured as follows. In chapter two, 'Theoretical Framework', I start by discussing the ways in which children and childhood is and has been considered in social science research, including the theoretical perspectives from which the current study departs. In this chapter I will also discuss research that has been done earlier on the topic of child sponsorship and the work of (religious) NGOs in the South. In chapter three, 'Methodology', I will discuss the design of the current study, the research methods that have been used for collecting and analyzing the data, the reliability and validity of the data, the ethical considerations that have been made, the challenges I encountered during my data collection as well as the limitations of this study. In chapter four, 'Study Area Backgrounds', I will focus on the situational context in which the research has taken place. This is done by presenting a country profile of Uganda as well as a short description of the living circumstances in and around the village of Seeta where the data collection took place. In chapter five, 'Compassion International: Position, Aims and Organization', I will look into the ways in which Compassion International is functioning as an organization, and compare its aims and approach to that of two other major sponsorship organizations. This knowledge is a prerequisite in order to be able to understand the specific experiences of the children in my study. My research findings are presented in chapter six, 'Children's Experiences'. In this chapter I aim to present an overview of how children's lives are being shaped by their participation in the sponsorship program. The chapter will start out with an introduction into the daily lives of the participating children, as well as my personal observations at Seeta Child Development Centre. Thereafter it is structured in a way that each sub-chapter presents

my findings for one of the seven questions outlined in section 1.3 above. In chapter seven, 'Summary, Concluding Discussion and Recommendations', I will summarize the findings presented in the previous chapter and discuss these in the light of the theoretical perspectives and empirical literature presented in chapter two. I will end this chapter with some recommendations and suggestions for future research and practice.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I aim to outline relevant theoretical perspectives for my study and offer a review of literature related to the topic of international child sponsorship. In section 2.1 I start by presenting a short overview of how social scientists' perspectives on researching children and childhood have shifted during the last few decennia. From seeing children as 'human becomings' and objects of research, they are now regarded to be research subjects that are worthy in their own right. This transition is marked by the paradigm known as the new sociology of childhood, which forms the general framework for my research and is discussed in section 2.2. Because this is an overarching paradigm including diverse approaches, I will direct my attention to childhood as a social construction, children as social actors, and children's rights. After considering the theoretical perspectives on researching children and childhood, my attention shifts to the topic of international development. In section 2.3 I will discuss the interplay between faith and development assistance, a topic of great importance in order to grasp the motives behind Compassion International's development assistance. Finally section 2.4 contains a detailed literature review on the specific approach known as international child sponsorship.

2.1 Researching Children and Childhood: Shifting Perspectives

Ever since the antique era, moral, social, and political theorists have tried to constitute a view of the child that would fit to their own particular visions of social life and their speculations concerning the future (Jenks, 1996). Theories of major influence include Parsons' socialization theory, Piaget's theory of cognitive development, and Kohlberg's theory of moral development. These theories have two important aspects in common: they are built on the presumption that childhood is different from adulthood, and they overemphasize processes of integration of the child into the adult world. It has been argued that certain theories present the child side of the relationship in a negative sense, with the child having a lower social status then the adult. Since the normative structure of the adult/parent world is presented as an independent variable, these theories may be said to express a form of ethnocentrism (Jenks, 1996). One of the first to recognize this problem was Speier (1976), who makes note of 'the adult ideological viewpoint in studies of childhood'. With this he means that although children have long been a subject of major interest for researchers, they have exclusively been studied through the eyes of adults. As Prout and James (1990) note,

"the history of the study of childhood in the social sciences has been marked not by an absence of interest in children [...] but by their silence" (p. 7-8). As a consequence of this recognition, social scientist increasingly adopted ethnographic and participatory methods concentrating on children's everyday life experiences (e.g. Alderson & Morrow, 2011; Corsaro, 2005; Ennew et al., 2009). These methods were considered to give a more authentic representation of children's voices and actions than research on children as objects (Prout & James, 1990; see James, 2007 for a critical discussion about this assumption). But also quantitative studies were applied in a way as to include childhood as a permanent structural category (Qvortrup, 2002). This development reflects the shifting view on children: no longer were they seen as 'human becomings' or potential human beings who had to be socialized into the world of adults, they were now seen as 'human beings' worthy of studying in their own right (Qvortrup, 1994; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). A nuance on this view is presented by Lee (2001), who argues that children can be "positioned in overlapping states of dependence and independence" (p. 34), meaning that they can be viewed as both human beings and becomings. Also Kjørholt (2004) argues for a less dichotomized view on children, as they move between positions of vulnerability, independence, competence and autonomy.

2.2 The New Sociology of Childhood

This new way of researching children and childhood which arose as a reaction to traditional models of socialization and development became known as the new sociology of childhood (also referred to as the new social studies of childhood, or simply childhood studies). In 1990, Prout and James identified a number of key features of this paradigm: first, childhood is understood as a social construction, meaning that it is a product of time and space rather then a natural and universal feature; second, childhood is considered as a variable of social analysis which cannot be treated separately from variables like class, gender, or ethnicity; third, children's social relationships and cultures are seen as worthy of study in their own right; fourth, children are seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of others and the societies in which they live; fifth, ethnographic methods are particularly useful for the study of childhood; and sixth, studies of childhood are to engage in the process of reconstructing childhood in society (Prout & James, 1990). Here I will illustrate the first and fourth features by linking these to concepts and themes relevant for my study, including interventions for children labelled as 'orphans' and the social agency of children living in poverty. In addition I will present a discussion on the topic of children's rights, whereby relevant perspectives from childhood studies are included.

2.2.1 Childhood as Socially Constructed

Before continuing my focus on childhood as a social construction, it is relevant to get insight into the diverse ways in which the concept of 'child' can been defined. Stainton Rogers (in Woodhead & Montgomery, 2007) mentions three different types of definitions. First, there are definitions focusing on an individual's developmental status, looking for example at children's bodily maturation and increasing thinking capacities. Second, there are definitions taking children's civil status as a decisive factor. The United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), for example, considers every person below the age of eighteen as a child. In spite of the UNCRC's widely used definition, it has been recognized that the use of a fixed age as a determinant of whether a person is belonging to the category of child should not be taken for granted. As Franklin (1995, p. 7) puts it, "definitions of children, as well as the varied childhoods which children experience, are social constructs formed by a range of social, historical, and cultural factors. (...) Distinctive cultures, as well as histories, construct different worlds of childhood". Therefore a third kind of definition may be used which focuses on an individual's social status.

This definition views childhood as socially constructed. According to James and James (2008), a social construction is "a theoretical perspective that explores the ways in which 'reality' is negotiated in everyday life through people's interactions and through sets of discourses" (p. 122). The development of this concept, which was first introduced by sociologists in the 1960s, has been of major importance for childhood studies (Ibid.). When applying it to childhood, childhood can refer to "a social status delineated by boundaries that vary trough time and from society to society but which are incorporated within the social structure and thus manifested through and formative of certain typical forms of conduct. Childhood then always relates to a particular cultural setting" (Jenks, 1996, p. 7). In the Compassion International project I visited, as was explained to me by the project staff, all participating young people were considered to be children regardless of their actual age, as long as they had not yet finished school. In this study I therefore define 'children' as all people that are considered to be a child according to their social-cultural context, including those that may have already passed the age of eighteen.

In addition to seeing childhood as a social construct differing in time and space, one could define the concept of family in a similar way. The family can no longer be seen as the co-residence of generations in a nuclear family, where children are taken care of by their parents. Such a view on the family ignores the situation of many children in the global South, who may as a consequence of parental death be heads of families and looking after younger

siblings (James & James, 2008). Neither does it take into account the fluidity of Ugandan families, where family boundaries may be difficult to define as cousins or more distant relatives can become part of the household for a certain period of time. It may therefore be more useful to think in terms of 'doing' family life instead of 'being in' a family (Ibid.).

In spite of this global variation in defining the concepts of 'child' and 'family', a Western, romantic view on how childhood 'should' be has been exported to the rest of the world through colonialism, international treaties as well as NGO policies (Ansell, 2005). This view on childhood has been described as 'the global model of childhood' and holds the following features. First, it presumes a "natural and universal distinction between children and adults, based on biological and psychological features that are taken for granted". Second, it looks upon children as "smaller and weaker and defined by the things they cannot do". Third, it assumes that "children develop through scientifically established stages, for which there is a normal route and timetable". And fourth, it is considered to be a model "superior to all other childhoods" (Ansell, 2005, p. 23). When international action for children and youth is based on a model denying the social constructedness of childhood, negative consequences for children are likely to arise. Here I will illustrate some of these consequences by focusing on a group of children categorized as 'orphans'. A number of children in the Compassion International project defined themselves in such a way.

Many intervention projects in the South have been influenced by the Western image of an 'orphan' as a helpless being in need of support. In Compassion International and other organizations, a so-called 'orphan' is often more likely to be eligible for support. However, what counts as an 'orphan' is culturally determined and definitions based on a global model of childhood may therefore clash with local understandings of orphanhood. According to UNAIDS (2004), "An orphan is defined as a child under the age of 18 who has had at least one parent die. A child whose mother has died is known as a maternal orphan; a child whose father has died is a paternal orphan. A child who has lost both parents is a double orphan" (UNAIDS, 2004, p. 62). This definition is thus based on the death of one or both of a child's biological parents. However, according to Meintjes and Giese (2006), differences between maternal, paternal and double orphans are often not taken into account when international agencies are speaking about the disadvantages faced by orphaned children, which leads to overlooking important subtleties. Moreover, these authors note that "The global preoccupation with the category [of 'orphans'] (…) centres analytical attention on absence of parents, and loses sight of their presence" (Meintjes & Giese, 2006, p. 411). As a consequence, an inaccurate picture of children's actual circumstances can be presented.

Ennew (2005) is line with this when illustrating that maternal and paternal deaths have differing consequences for a child, dependent on societal organization. In patrilineal societies for example, the implications for a child of losing a father compared to losing both parents can be quite similar, since children (as well as women) can be socially and economically dependent on an adult male. In these cultures, it is common to refer to a child whose father is dead and mother alive as an 'orphan'. In matrilineal societies, on the other hand, maternal deaths can have greater consequences than paternal deaths. Furthermore, a definition of orphanhood based on the death of one or both of the child's biological parents "does not take into account (…) that many of the problems of biological orphans are shared with children who might be called 'social orphans', who have been abandoned by both parents, or whose fathers have abandoned them to the sole care of their mothers, whether or not they are wives" (Ennew, 2005, p. 129). The 'orphan' category can thus encompass children of widows, bi-parental orphans, abandoned children, children whose fathers have abandoned their mothers and many illegitimate children (Ibid.).

Labelling children that have experienced the death of a biological parent as 'orphans' may not only give an inaccurate picture of children's circumstances, but can also lead to stigmatization of both the 'orphaned' child and the people involved in providing substitute care for the child. Meintjes and Giese (2006) illustrate that in certain African languages and cultural practices, the label of 'orphan' is associated with a lack of care and/or resources. This can be explained by the words selected to translate the English word 'orphan' in African languages such as Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho and Shangaan. In Xhosa, for example, the term *inkedama* includes the verb root *kedama,* which means 'to be cast away, deserted, orphaned, to become downcast'. The term 'orphan' is thus only applicable to a child who has no parent and no 'substitute' caregiver, putting more emphasis on the social than the biological aspects of parenting. Therefore, "the labelling of a child in this way is not only stigmatizing of the child, but a direct insult to those participants in the social network providing care and support to the child" (Meintjes & Giese, 2006, p. 423). In spite of the disadvantages of this label, children may find it necessary to identify themselves as 'orphans' in order to receive support. In this way NGOs are moderating local understandings of orphanhood.

Limiting interventions to those that fit into the global category of 'orphan' is even more problematic when considering that these children may not necessarily live in more difficult circumstances than the children around them that, although they may have living parents, are suffering from poverty. In fact, "many of the hurdles orphans face are poverty-related, such as lack of access to food, education, medical care, and sanitation facilities"

(Abebe & Aase, 2007, p. 2067). Yet millions of African children are living in poverty, especially those living in HIV/AIDS affected communities. Therefore Meintjes and Giese (2006, p. 420) put forward that "directing a response at orphans – or at least one that targets their poverty – to the exclusion and often at the expense of other vulnerable children, is locally inappropriate". These authors even suggest that "there is evidence to indicate that directing material resources to children who have been orphaned to the exclusion of other poor children can in some instances place orphans at increased risk in neighbourhoods where there is a high degree of poverty and unemployment" (Ibid.). It has become clear that the category of 'orphan' is problematic in the way that it has been used by international agencies. This example underlines the relevance of looking at childhood from a social constructionist approach, taking into account its local conceptions.

2.2.2 Children as Social Actors

According to James (2007) and others within the paradigm of childhood studies, children are competent social actors who can provide a unique perspective on the social world about matters that concern them. With regard to development assistance and research involving children, it has been said that "most development projects treat children as passive targets or beneficiaries rather than as active participants in the development process. Children, however, are 'social actors' in their own social, economic and cultural contributions to society. A child-centred approach builds on children's potential, capacity and capability and seeks to actively involve children in research, implementation, awareness raising and advocacy work" (Theis, 1996, in Ennew & Boyden, 1997, p. 37). It is therefore that this study has particularly aimed to come to an understanding of children's own views on the development project they are involved in. Next to considering children as social actors in relation to my research methods, there are a number of ways in which they can be social actors in their own life worlds. I would like to focus more particularly on how children living in poverty are social actors in their daily lives, and on children's use of religion as a coping mechanism. Here I link poverty and religion by using the concept of resilience.

First of all, it is important to consider the ways in which poverty can be defined. The United Nations 1995 World Summit for Social Development defined absolute poverty as a condition characterized by deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to social services (United Nations, 1995). In addition to this absolute definition of poverty, poverty can also be defined as a more relative state

indicating "the falling behind, by more than a certain degree, from the average income and lifestyle enjoyed by the rest of the society in which one lives" (Montgomery, Burr & Woodhead, 2007, p. 81).

Next to the division between absolute and relative poverty, a division can be made between material and non-material poverty. The United Nations 1995 World Summit for Social Development's definition of poverty is considered with material well-being in the first place. Compassion International (2008) developed a definition that includes material as well as non-material aspects of poverty, whereby poverty is defined as "a lack of opportunity (…) [which] may be the result of inadequate social services, scarce income or assets, social discrimination or oppression, or simply self-limiting behaviours rooted in culture or self-esteem" (p. 3). Montgomery, Burr and Woodhead (2007) even argue that in many cultures, the non-material ways aspects of poverty may be more important than the material ones. Amazonians, for example, may define orphans as poor because they do not have the 'wealth' of many relatives (Ibid.). Poverty can then be defined as a social status (Sahlins, 1988, in Montgomery, Burr & Woodhead, 2007).

NGO's approaches to reduce poverty, whether based on an abstract, relative, material or non-material view, are often directed towards children. A reason for this focus on children is clearly expressed by UNICEF: "Children are often hardest hit by poverty: it causes lifelong damage to their minds and bodies. They are therefore likely to pass poverty on to their children, perpetuating the poverty cycle" (UNICEF, 2000, p. 1). Compassion International (2008) argues that "While people of all ages are in need of opportunity, that need is greatest in children who are only beginning their lives and are thus extraordinary vulnerable. They are also extraordinary full of potential should the right opportunities come along that can transform their lives before long-term consequences of poverty take hold" (p. 4). This illustrates Compassion's view on children in poverty as both needy and full of potential. Nevertheless, the Western or global view on childhood has too often denied children's agency by representing them merely as passive victims of their circumstances (e.g. Ansell, 2005). According to Boyden and Mann (2005, p. 19), "viewing children as helpless means that their own efforts to cope are often not seen as legitimate or, indeed, even recognized at all. This lack of acknowledgement of the validity of children's own strategies can undermine their ability to act on their situation".

A large body of research, carried out in diverse geographical areas, presents a more nuanced image of the daily lives of children experiencing poverty (e.g. Abebe, 2008; Ansell, 2005; Chant & Jones, 2005; Evans, 2006; Iversen, 2002; Kesby, Gwanzura-Ottemoller &

Chizororo, 2006; Panter-Brick, 2002; Punch, 2001; Punch, 2003; Robson, 2004; Swanson, 2007). These studies show that children living on the streets can develop effective coping strategies, that children can make crucial contributions to their family's household economy, and that children may assume full responsibility for certain household tasks, including the care of siblings. Although recognizing the difficult situations in which certain groups of children may find themselves, these studies illustrate children's social agency.

Moreover, they also illustrate children's resilience in dealing with adversities. Resilience is understood as "an individual's capacity to recover from, adapt, and remain strong in the face of adversity" (Boyden & Mann, 2005, p. 6). Connected to the concept of resilience is the notion of risk factors and protective factors. With risk factors is referred to variables increasing an individual's susceptibility to negative developmental outcomes such as poorer health, developmental delay and/or psychological difficulties. These risk factors can be both internal and external. Internal factors may include an individual's temperament or neurological structure, while external factors may include poverty or war (Ibid.). Certain risk factors are likely to coincide. Children who are confronted with adversity, for example, are often also denigrated and excluded by others. A study of child poverty in India, Belarus, Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Bolivia (Boyden et al., 2004, in Boyden & Mann, 2005, p. 15) revealed that "the way in which poverty undermines an individual's social interactions and relationships with others can be far more important to children than having to go without food or other commodities". Therefore Boyden and Mann (2005, p. 15) argue that "one of the worst consequences of being thought of as 'poor' is the associated shame, social exclusion, and susceptibility to teasing bullying, and humiliation by peers".

However, these risk factors can be buffered by variables increasing children's resilience, which are called protective factors. Like risk factors, these can be both internal and external. An adult or peer showing interest in the child can be an important external protective factor, while internal protective factors may include a sense of humour, belief in a bright future, and spirituality (Montgomery, Burr & Woodhead, 2007). These internal protective factors can enable children to exercise their social agency. Although poverty may restrict children's possibilities to a certain extent, their life courses may be just as much determined by personal choices. Children's choice of religion, for example, can be of great influence. Religion can help to make sense of negative life experiences by placing these in a bigger narrative about the meaning of life. It may give individuals the strength to overcome adversities, as well as the motivation to care for and connect to others in similar situations. This makes religion an important coping mechanism for dealing with poverty.

<u>2.2.3 Children's Rights</u>

Although the concept of children's rights is widely discussed nowadays, the idea of having a separate set of rights for children next to general human rights is relatively new. Today's leading children's rights document, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), was adopted on the 20th of November 1989, thirty years after the establishment of the Declaration on the Rights of the Child from 1959. This document, which has now been ratified by almost every government in the world, has had a great influence on people's understanding of childhood and how to improve children's quality of life. A children's rights document similar to the UNCRC was developed by the former Organization of African Union (1990) and focuses specifically on the situation of African children. This 'African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child' differs from the UNCRC in that it also recognizes children's responsibilities toward their family and society (article 31).

The rights contained in the UNCRC can be divided into 'three P's': Provision, Protection and Participation rights (Alderson, 2000, p. 23; Woodhead & Montgomery, 2007, p. 144). Provision rights enable children's growth and development and include rights to necessary goods, services and resources such as food, housing and education. Protection rights are concerned with protecting children from neglect, abuse, exploitation and discrimination and with intervening once these rights have been infringed. Participation rights enable children to take part in decisions made on their behalf. These rights distinguish the UNCRC from former children's rights declarations, which only contained protection and provision rights (Fottrell, 2000). As a child progresses from infant to late adolescence, different classes of rights are becoming more relevant: protection and provision rights will be overtaken in importance by participation rights (Ibid.). Participation rights are considered to be the most radical ones since these could challenge adult power. This might be seen as threatening within some societies (Lansdown in The Open University, 2003, in Woodhead & Montgomery, 2007). Therefore governments have done the least to implement this type of rights (Van Bueren in The Open University, 2003, in Woodhead & Montgomery, 2007).

Even though the UNCRC has been adopted globally, a discussion has been going on about the desirability of children's rights. Some argue that special rights for children are not necessary. According to Freeman (1992), these people employ one of the following two myths. The first one "idealises adult-child relations: it emphasises that adults (and parents in particular) have the best interests of children at heart" (Freeman, 1992, p. 30). Here a laissez-faire attitude towards the family is adopted: intervention by the state should be reduced to a minimum. The second myth "sees childhood as a golden age, as the best years of our life"

(Ibid.). Here children are seen as innocent creatures that, because they can avoid the responsibilities and adversities of adult life, are not in need of children's rights. Both of these assumptions are idealized and not in accordance with the reality of children's lives today, as the suffering of children because of maltreatment, exploitation and/or poverty is widespread.

Two more arguments against children's rights are put forward and refuted by Alderson (2000). The first is that rights cannot be bestowed, but can only apply to groups which understand, claim and exercise rights for themselves. In arguing against this, Alderson (2000) mentions that "the provision and protection rights involve duties which adults owe to children, who did not ask to be born and who are inevitable dependent at fist" (p. 24). When it comes to participation rights, she puts forward that "although young children may not use rights language, they repeatedly say they want adults to listen to them and take heed of their views" (Ibid.). The second argument against children's rights Alderson (2000) identifies is that rights go with obligations and responsibilities, and that children are irresponsible. She refutes this by arguing that "children often want some participation rights so that they can share more responsibility with adults" (p. 24). Freeman (1992) provides one more reason for the importance of children's rights: "rights are important because possession of them is part of what is necessary to constitute personality. Those who lack rights are like slaves, means to others' ends, and never their own sovereigns" (p. 31).

Apart from discussing whether or not children should be given rights, it is perhaps even more challenging to discuss the kind of rights children should possess. Two main standpoints have been taken in this discussion. To begin with, some are convinced that children should have exactly the same rights as adults. Since the early 1970's rejection of authority and general movement towards emancipation of mankind, certain groups began to claim that children (as well as women) needed to be liberated. Archard (1993, p. 46-47) puts forward that "the basic claims of the children's liberationists are that the modern separation of the child's and the adult's worlds is an unwarranted and oppressive discrimination; that this segregation is accompanied and reinforced by a false ideology of 'childishness'; and that children are entitled to all the rights and privileges possessed by adults." This means that children should have those rights which require them to act and choose for themselves (the rights to self-determination), which are for instance the rights to vote, work, own property, choose one's guardian and make sexual choices (Archard, 1993). These are the rights that are seen as central to children's liberation, because their absence underlines the different status between children and adults.

A second group of people believes that children should have special rights, since they differ qualitatively from adults. This so-called caretaker view "offers an account of why children should not be free to make autonomous decisions, and of how their caretakers should be guided in making decisions for them" (Archard, 1993, p. 52). Here the underlying assumption is that the caretaker will choose what the child would choose by itself, if it were competent to make this choice. The caretaker view thus denies children the rights to self-determination, which are seen by the child liberationalists as central to the removal of children's oppression. Nevertheless, people who advocate for the caretaker view have a number of reasons for assuming that children are in need of special protection, as outlined by Woodhead and Montgomery (2007). First, children are still growing and are therefore more vulnerable than adults. Second, they do not know as much about the world as adults because they have less experience, which makes them less competent to make judgements. Third, their communication skills are not as developed as those of adults. Finally, children have less power and are therefore more at risk of being abused by adults who have more power.

Having illustrated the general discussion surrounding children's rights, it is now relevant to look at this discussion from within the field of childhood studies. In line with the perspective on children as active participants in the social world, researchers within this paradigm have focused towards participation rights rather then protection or provision rights. This category of rights is, according to Hutchby and Moran-Ellis (1998, in Qvortrup, Corsaro & Honig, 2009), "dealing - in the core - with the problem of giving children a voice and studying their social competencies" (p. 404). According to this position, improvement in children's living conditions and their perspectives is only possible through children's own active participation (Ibid.). In contrast, Compassion International seems to hold more of a caretaker view, basing their actions mainly on the realization of protection and provision rights (see section 5.1.1). An explanation for this may be that in situations where children's basic rights to survival and development are infringed severely, it can appear necessary to restore these rights first.

2.3 Religious Influences on International Development

"Releasing children from poverty in Jesus' name". This is the slogan used by Compassion International on their website, clearly stating the religious motivation for their work with children. Religion is incorporated into all aspects of their programs for children. For this reason I will devote this section of my theory chapter to the interplay between faith and development.

First it is important to define what is meant with development and religion. Human development has been defined differently during the past decades. To begin with, it has been defined it in terms of a long-term view with an emphasis on socio-economic structural transformation (as for example the shift from an agrarian economy to an industrial economy), which was common practice for most of the post-World War II period (Sumner & Tribe, 2008). Another way of defining human development arose in the 1990s, when it came to be defined as a short- to medium term outcome of desirable targets (as for example the growth of income per capita and poverty reduction) (Ibid.). Defining the meaning of human development is quite a controversial task. The reason for this is that it inevitably links value assumptions and associated policy responses to the nature of the definitions employed. Chambers (2004) notes that "if development means good change, questions arise about what is good and what sort of change matters" (p. iii). He argues that "any development agenda is value-laden, and some academics abhor anything that smacks of moralising. Yet not to ask questions about values is value-laden by default, and not to consider good things to do is a tacit surrender to professional conditioning, personal reflexes, and fatalism. Perhaps the right course is for each of us to reflect, articulate and share our own ideas about values, problems, potentials and priorities, accepting these as provisional and fallible" (p. 1).

Providing a single definition of religion may be even more challenging. Klein Goldewijk (2007) notes that religion has been defined in many ways, each emphasizing different elements. It has been defined as a worldview; belief system; system of symbolic actions, rituals and ceremonies; normative framework for justice; sustain to the local and global moral order; uphold of human flourishing or interior human impulse towards God. However, according this author "the many different and ambiguous, powerful and ordinary aspects of the sacred and the spiritual in people's everyday lives find not much place when religion is defined in such terms" (Klein Goldewijk, 2007, p. 34). Therefore I would like to consider religion more in terms of the meaning it gives to people's everyday lives. Christianity in particular can then be looked upon as a ground for people's current and future expectations for life, as well as a connecting factor providing people with social networks and relationships of belonging.

Now that I have considered the concepts of development and religion, I would like to look at how a faith-based development organization differs from a non-religious one. According to Ferris (2005, p. 312), faith-based organizations have "one or more of the following [characteristics]: affiliation with a religious body; a mission statement with explicit reference to religious values; financial support from religious sources; and/or a governance

structure where selection of board members or staff is based on religious beliefs or affiliation and/or decision-making processes based on religious values". Like non-religious humanitarian organizations, faith based organizations may be involved in a wide range of activities. These include both long-term development assistance as well as short-term humanitarian assistance. However, two characteristics clearly set them apart from non-religious humanitarian organizations: "they are motivated by their faith and they have a constituency which is broader than humanitarian concerns" (Ferris, 2005, p. 316). Among Christian organizations, there are differences between those who separate assistance and evangelization and those who integrate their humanitarian work with their missionary activities, with Compassion International belonging to the latter category.

Christian organizations have become main players in the world of NGOs. Starting in the colonial era, the church has become involved in social services all over the world, particularly in the areas of education and health (Ferris, 2005). According to Klein Goldewijk (2007), religion has long been neglected in development theory and practice due to common assumptions rooted in Western secularization and modernisation theory in which it became conceptualized as a set privately held beliefs or doctrines. Nevertheless, religion is expanding with great speed across Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, America and the Middle East. The different authors in Klein Goldewijk (2007) agree that if social and economic development is to be successful, it should correspond with societies' moral basis. Thomas (2005, in Klein Goldwijk, 2007) notes that "it has become a widespread insight that faith-based development organizations themselves are ill-equipped today to deal with the religious dimensions of their work with partner organizations" (p. 324). Religion thus connects to important development policy issues.

This connection can approached in different ways, of which I will outline one that is of particular importance to my topic of research. This is the notion that "faith based organizations, whether Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, or Christian, are often close to the everyday lives of the poor and the environments in which they live. In this approach the focus is on their positive contribution as organizations with the capacity to mobilize for change. The predictable, mostly unquestioned outcome of this approach is often that religion is a source of inspiration for those concerned and a social support in the provision of basic services" (Klein Goldewijk, 2007, p. 325). Tripp (1999), writing about her experiences with World Vision, confirms this notion by her observation that the vast majority of people with whom they work in development projects, whatever religion they belong to, regard the spiritual realm to be equally relevant to daily life as the physical aspects like food, water or health care. To respect

these people's culture demands acknowledgement of the spiritual aspects of their lives. Considering this, promoting a secular approach would even be an insult to them. Tyndale (2003, in Bradley, 2005, p. 339) agrees with this as well, suggesting that faith-based organizations "are more firmly rooted or have better networks in poor communities than the non-religious ones and that religious leaders are trusted more than any others. Faith-based organizations are thus seen as essential agents both for influencing the opinions and attitudes of their followers and for carrying out developmental work at the grassroots". This assumption is in accordance with the views of Compassion International (2008, p. 5).

Nevertheless, the relationship between faith and development can also been approached in a negative way. Bradley (2005) for example, in performing a case study on the work of a Christian NGO in rural Rajasthan, concludes that faith may render NGO employees blind to the experiences and needs of others. He argues that the religious obligation to help the needy and poor creates a one-sided image of an underdeveloped 'Other'. This symbolic construction of 'Other' may block the potential for direct dialogue with target communities and groups, and may therefore prevent them to see the complexity of poverty. In addition, Bradley (2005) argues that the emotional attachment of religious NGOs to the beneficiaries of their program makes it difficult for them to leave a community behind when aid proves to be unsuccessful. Another well-known critical point is that religious organizations may try to convert local communities or individuals to their own beliefs, showing disrespect for local religions and customs (e.g. Bornstein, 2001; Bradley, 2005; Stalker, 1982). However, these critics are less applicable to organizations where local partners are implementing the development program, as is the case for Compassion International.

2.4 The Child Sponsorship Approach: Critical Literature

I will finish my theory chapter with a review of available literature on the practice of international child sponsorship. Surprisingly little (empirical) studies have been carried out on this particular topic. Starting in the eighties, New Internationalist magazine addressed the topic in several of their issues (1982, vol. 111, p. 7-29; 1984, vol. 132, p. 3; 1985, vol. 148, p. 18-19; 1989, vol. 194, p. 4-23). Although dated, this magazine provides the most extensive evaluation of the approach of international child sponsorship. However, the authors' arguments are rather one-sided: only the disadvantages of this practice are addressed. Herrell (1986) on the other hand, while acknowledging its possible hazards, argues for the effectiveness of international child sponsorship schemes. Bornstein (2001) has performed a case study on a World Vision sponsorship program in Zimbabwe, and illustrates its

'paradoxical effects'. Ennew (1996) focuses on the organizational level of child sponsorship schemes and addresses the tension between fundraising needs and programming ideology. Duncan (2004) explains this kind of tension with a theoretical model called 'impact philanthropy'. Jefferes (2002), who focuses on TV fundraising appeals, criticizes one particular sponsorship organization's representation of sponsored children. Finally, Smith (2004) presents an analysis of some sponsorship organizations' advertisements. In the remainder of this section I will organize these authors' arguments and standpoints. I will save my own insights, following from my practical experiences with Compassion International, for the discussion chapter.

Ennew (1996) mentions a first critic of child sponsorship: that this practice can cause divisions within families and communities. The criticism of individual child sponsorship causing divisions and inequalities has indeed been expressed by several authors. Stalker (1982) argues that "helping an individual is divisive, and is particularly damaging in societies which are already sharply divided in all sorts of ways" (p. 8). The same author thinks it to be unlikely that even one person can be 'catapulted' out of poverty. Shaw (1989) adds to this that individual child sponsorship can create family rifts, whereby "the chosen few may receive extra food, education, clothes, medical treatment and gifts" which brothers, sisters or other family members do not (p. 22). Moreover, it can cause feelings of humiliation for the parents because outsiders are providing things which they cannot. Herrell (1986), although generally positive about an individual approach to child sponsorship, recognizes that divisions, inequities and jealousies may occur if not every eligible family in the village, neighbourhood or school is admissible and that "the interest of the sponsor in one child (...) may eclipse recognition of the need to serve the entire group" (p. 241). Finally, Bornstein (2001) argues that "the irony of child sponsorship is that as much as it links people across nations in transnational relationships of a global "Christian family", it divides people locally and has immense potential to inspire jealousy" (p. 609). She notes that gifts sent in addition to monthly child sponsorship dues can in particular contribute to heightened understandings of localized inequalities, and concludes that "new perceptions of economic disparity are produced by the very humanitarian efforts to overcome them" (p. 595).

A second argument put forward by the critical authors on individual child sponsorship is that it makes children and their families conscience of their dependence on aid. According to Hancock (in Stalker, 1982) sponsorship makes the aid-side of development very obvious "since beneficiaries are at all time conscious that they are 'answerable' to their sponsors and dependent on their continuing good will" (p. 22). Stalker (1982) adds to this by stating that

the communications between the sponsor and the child receiving help may cause a feeling of inferiority on the side of the child. Finally, Shaw (1989) also underlines that dependence is maintained through individual sponsorship when writing that "the sponsored child is constantly reminded that they are the 'poor relation'. They must always be prepared to show gratitude to the 'rich cousins' on whose charity they depend" (p. 22).

Related to this is the third criticism put forward in the available literature on child sponsorship: that the one-to-one relationship between a child and a sponsor can have harmful effects. These effects are observed both in relation to the correspondence with a sponsor living in a rich country, and the possibility to receive extra gifts from this person. With regards to the correspondence, both Stalker (1982) and Shaw (1989) argue that it can create unfulfillable desires and false expectations. According to Shaw (1989), a child who reads about a sponsor's way of life "can become dissatisfied with his or her own community and wants to be taken away to that affluent world" (p. 23). Stalker (1982) notes that children may believe that one day they will move to the country of the sponsor's family to live with them, even though the sponsor does not mention this in his letters. Next to creating false expectations, the exchange between child and sponsor can according to Shaw (1989) be culturally insensitive to a child's way of life. Children may for example be encouraged to send their sponsor a Christmas card, while they know nothing about Christmas. Or they may receive pictures of the family's favourite dog, while in their culture dogs do not merit special favour, except when prepared as a rare feast (Hoover Seitz, in Stalker, 1982).

However, also positive aspects of these letter exchanges are reported. Herrell (1986) states that "perhaps the most obvious benefit of sponsorship is the child's having 'someone who cares', even at a considerable geographical distance" (p. 240), and that "it has been observed that in many instances the child's behaviour and school performance improve when correspondence is taken up with a sponsor" (Ibid.). In addition, it can provide an "opportunity for cross-cultural education and understanding for both child and the sponsor" (Ibid.). Stalker (1982) has a different opinion. According to him, the letters written by sponsored children are not always much informative and consequently have little educational value to the sponsor. Shaw (1989) also notes that the cultural interchange between donor and child is generally very limited. Because the donor finds out little about the child or its culture, these letters can perpetuate ignorance on the side of the sponsor. Moreover, Herrell (1986) recognizes that "some sponsors may be motivated by a need to be emotionally important to a child" (p. 240), or may abuse the privilege of correspondence. In this way they may use the one-to-one relationship to make up for the inadequacies in their own lives (Williams, in Stalker, 1982).

Another criticized aspect of the one-to-one relationship is the practice of receiving gifts from the sponsor. As noted before, gifts can be a cause of divisions and inequalities in particular (Bornstein, 2001). Not only can this practice provoke jealousy by other children, it can also have adverse effects on the child receiving the gift: Williams (in Stalker, 1982) presents the account of one girl who became unpopular because of the many gifts she got. Furthermore, gifts can be culturally inappropriate: in cultures where birthdays or Christmas are not celebrated, gifts related to these events can cause confusion (Williams, in Stalker, 1982). Finally, child sponsorship can "in the process of empowering a child, [dislodge] the purchasing power and thus the authority of the parents" when parents do not have responsibility over the money sent to their child from a sponsor (Bornstein, 2001, p. 614).

This leads to the next point of criticism: the creation of conflicts in the family as well as in the children's lives. Bornstein (2001) notes that because the sponsored child's siblings do not benefit from the sponsorship to the same extent, jealousy and feelings of inferiority can be created within the family, as well as suspiciousness about the sponsor's motives. One account was reported by this author whereby a father feared that his child would be taken from him by the sponsors, whom he thought were not able to get children of their own. When speaking of Christian sponsorship organizations, Bornstein (2001, p. 600) argues that children risk feeling "a stress between their local family and their perceived sense of place in a global Christian and humanitarian community". Children's local identities can be reformed because they experience new, transnational relationships of belonging.

Christian child sponsorship organizations are particularly criticized for having missionary aims. Shaw (1989) reports that "in order for a child to qualify its parents may have to cease certain forms of political or religious activity, or the child may be pressured to take up activities like reading the Bible. This conditional giving violates the rights of the child to choose its own beliefs" (p. 22). On the other side, as was put forward in the previous section, are faith-based organizations often closer to the everyday lives of the poor than organizations who don't consider the spiritual aspects of people's lives (Klein Goldewijk, 2007; Tripp, 1999). Offering religious activities for children in a child sponsorship program can become more problematic when that religion is strange to the child's culture, as Stalker (1982) illustrates several times.

Also the provision of education by child sponsorship organizations is criticized. Shaw (1989) argues that "programmes which give education to individual children can isolate them from family and friends. They are educated to uselessness, unable to obtain well-paid white-collar work in their own towns or village and unwilling to do low paid 'menial' labour. As

adults they either remain at home dissatisfied, or take their skills further afield, away from the community that needs them" (p. 23). Knott (in Stalker, 1982) looked at one situation in India where sponsored children were taken away from their families to be educated in hostels, and concludes that the education they received was irrelevant to the situation in their villages. A similar problem was observed in Kenya by Hancock (in Stalker, 1982), where the curriculum for children in primary schools had little practical value and was only useful for the small number of children reaching university. This author concludes that as long as sponsorship programs do not criticize a country's malfunctioning educational system, helping children up the educational ladder can have mixed results.

According to Stalker (1982), child sponsorship agencies only have effect when they take into account political factors: "Agricultural training is no good if someone is going to take away the land. Nutrition education is no good if all the food has to be sold to pay off debts, and family planning makes no sense where people need more children. Realistic aid has to take all these factors into account — the 'political' as well as the technical — because none of them are going to go away" (p. 26). Child sponsorship organizations are thus criticized for not dealing with the underlying causes of the children's poverty. A research committee from the Canadian Save the Children Fund (Cansave, in Taylor, 1984) concluded that child sponsorship "attempts to deal with symptoms of underdevelopment, not root causes. It reflects Western individualism and subverts the sense of community and equality which is traditional in many Third World societies" (p. 3). Also Moir (in Stalker, 1982) argues that sponsoring individual children as a means to solve local problems is questionable. She observed that underlying problems of the area limited the effectiveness of a sponsorship scheme in India. Here the problem was that even though they received financial support for their education, children often had to stay away from school to look after cattle and earn some money for the rest of the family.

Herrell (1986) thinks more optimistically about this. According to him, "the problems affecting a child's development usually parallel problems affecting a community's or even a nation's development. Therefore, addressing one helps address both" (p. 239). He argues further that child sponsorship can bring about strong community involvement: when the needs assessment and planning are done locally by the client community, a focus on children helps this community address the longer-range development needs of their area. Even Hancock (in Stalker, 1982) notes that the sponsorship organization he observed in Kenya had become very much the property of the local community. Here almost every major decision (including the selection of children on the basis of need) was made by the community

concerned, or the community in consultation with the staff. He states that "if community development is communities getting what they want – and their thirst for education is even more than they do for water – [a child sponsorship organization's work] does have a strong and positive community-development role" (p. 21).

Individual child sponsorship is said to be a very effective way of obtaining funds. Because people make a long-term term commitment to a child, funding received through child sponsorship is reliable, predictable, and ongoing (Ennew, 1996). However, the ways in which these funds are used are criticised widely. Stalker (1982) notes that the photographs taken of each child, the monitoring of each family and the translation of 'and endless flow of letters' makes child sponsorship expensive to run. Shaw (1989) calls it a 'wasteful spending', noting that much is spent on letters, photos, and reports which are for the benefit of the donor rather than the child. Fundraising methods are said to play on Western individualism and the donor's desire to visualize and obtain feedback from the recipient of the aid (CEDOIN, in Stalker, 1985). Ennew (1996) notes that because the individual involvement of NGOs advertising with child sponsorship speaks to the public, organizations may continue to raise money from child sponsorship even if their actual focus is on community development. According to this author there is "a crucial tension within all development aid NGOs between fundraising needs and programming ideology" (p. 855). While staff of the overseas aid "adhere to the development consensus of promoting independence", staff of the fundraising departments are "driven by marketing imperatives that entail maintaining the image of dependency and appealing to the public that 'You can help this child, now'" (p. 856).

This fits into the model of altruism called 'impact philanthropy' developed by Duncan (2004). According to this model, an impact philanthropist is someone who has the desire to personally 'make a difference'. Duncan (2004) states that "anyone for whom feeding one child is more satisfying than giving each of a thousand children a single grain of rice (…) has at least some impact philanthropy in them" (p. 2176). Impact philanthropists would thus prefer to sponsor an individual child rather than a children's organization. This model suggests a conflict between charitable organizations and its donors concerning the allocation of charitable gifts: whereas a charitable organization typically prefers to spread a donor's contribution across many goods, a donor prefers to target his or her contribution at a specific good. In the same line as Ennew (1996), he argues that child sponsorship organizations are forced to offer child sponsorship purely as a means to attract donors.

In order to appeal to potential donors motivated by the desire to help the needy, child sponsorship organizations may use advertisements that perpetuate negative stereotypes of children as passive victims and in this way distort our image of the Third World (Shaw, 1989). Picturing children in this way is nothing new: Gullestad (2007) illustrates that with the onset of missionary activities in non-western cultures, pictures of children living in adversity were spread among the European public, which were used to underline the importance of the missionaries' assistance. This legacy may still influence the way in which children are portrayed by NGOs today. Ennew (1996) confirms that "NGO fundraising often depends on appeals based on emergency relief and on otherwise casting children as victims who represent the helpless, dependent stereotype of Southern countries" (p. 856).

Jefferess (2002) addresses this problem in relation to World Vision's fundraising appeals on television, which according to him contribute to the construction of a 'needy' 'Third World' other. He argues that this organization's "presentation of the act of sponsorship as a life-changing act of self-fulfilment deludes the viewer or sponsor of the complex relations which perpetuate poverty" and suggests that "World Vision's marketing discourse constructs world poverty outside history and sells the possibility of instant gratification through the act of sponsorship as a form of consumption" (p. 1). Also Smith (2004) looked at how NGOs shape the public faces of development through their own marketing, fundraising and education work, as well as in partnership with the media and other organizations. According to him, these are shaped by contradictions. By analyzing some sponsorship organizations' advertisements, he found that contrasting images are spread to the public. Whereas these advertisements on the one hand emphasize empowerment, autonomy, and respect for the individuals concerned, they on the other hand remain to have possessive implications by offering potential sponsors a choice of picking out 'needy' looking children with a certain sex and from a certain area.

It has become clear that the literature on international child sponsorship from the last few decennia puts forward a great number of critics on this practice. My current research will address a number of these critics, as it aims to view child sponsorship through the eyes of the involved children. However, to be able to give a more complete analysis of this practice further research is needed, which should include different child sponsorship organizations working within various geographical areas.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In order to be able to answer the research questions that are leading this study in the best possible way, I have chosen to use a qualitative research design. I will motivate this choice by first explaining the characteristics of qualitative research, after which I will argue why these characteristics fit best to the nature of the knowledge that I wanted to obtain.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) define five features of qualitative research. The first one is that qualitative research is naturalistic, meaning that it has actual settings as the direct source of data and uses the researcher as the key instrument. A second feature is that it deals with descriptive data, meaning that qualitative researchers try to analyze the data with all of their richness as closely as possible to the form in which they were recorded or transcribed. Hereby researchers present their results in a narrative form instead of reducing them to numerical symbols. A third feature is that qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products. They may for instance be interested in how people negotiate meaning, or how knowledge is produced in interaction between people. Fourth, qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively. Instead of searching out data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses they hold before entering the study, they rather build abstractions when the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together. Finally, an essential concern with qualitative research is to focus on 'meaning', or participant perspectives. Hereby qualitative researchers try to set up strategies and procedures to enable them to consider experiences from the informants' perspectives. To add on these authors' points, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) also mention the intimate relationship that exists between qualitative researchers and the people they study, the value-laden nature of the research, and the situational constraints that are shaping the research as important features.

Qualitative research is sometimes given a lower scientific status than its quantitative equivalent. As Kvale and Brinkman (2009) illustrate, the social sciences have unjustly tended to rule out qualitative approaches. They explain that this has not always been the case, because the social science dogma of quantification was not an original part of positivist philosophy. The founder of classical positivism himself, August Comte, believed that "our business is to study phenomena, in the characters and relations in which they present themselves to us, abstaining from introducing considerations of quantities, and mathematical laws, which is beyond our power to apply" (Comte, 1975, p. 112, in Kvale & Brinkman,

2009, p. 307). Comte's statement clearly shows that science does need to be linked to quantifications in the first place. Contrary to that, it encourages researchers to collect rich data in natural settings.

As becomes clear from my introductory chapter, the main focus of this study is to learn about the experiences of children involved in an international sponsorship program. One of my aims was therefore to obtain knowledge on the meaning of this intervention in the children's lives by inviting them to narrate their life histories. In addition, I wanted to learn more about children's own perspectives on particular aspects of their participation in the program by encouraging them to express their opinions and negotiate their views with each other. The use of a quantitative approach enabled me to observe the children in the actual settings shaping their lives, as well as to build intimate relationships with them. It allowed me to present their life stories and personal views as nuanced as possible.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

In this section an overview is given on the specific qualitative methods of data collection that have been used in this study. For each of these I will elaborate on the purpose, the exact method used, and (if applicable) the characteristics of the sample.

3.2.1 Participant Observation

Purpose

The participant observation which was carried out had two main purposes:

1: To build relationships of trust with the children, so that they would get used to my presence and would feel comfortable to share their personal experiences with me.

2: To get an impression of how the Child Development Centre operates and what kind of activities children are taking part in.

Method

Participant observation has taken place during ten project activities, as well as one staff meeting and one parents' meeting organized by Seeta Child Development Centre in the period August – September 2009. Usually activities are organized every Saturday, but due to the school holidays during this period some activities were also organized during week days. When there were no organized activities, I was often present at the project office (which was placed in the project compound where all activities took place). Next to getting a general impression of the way in which the Centre operates, this gave me ample opportunity to talk to

the project staff and get familiar to the children who came by the office. Field notes were taken in a notebook, where I recorded what happened during certain activities and at the project in general, as well as my own reflections on the program and challenges related to my role as a researcher. For all observations, also during focus groups and interviews, a standard observation sheet (Appendix A) was filled out. As it was my aim to build relationships of trust between the children and me, I have tried to adopt a 'friend role' (see Fine & Sandstrom, p. 17-21) by placing myself in the same position as the children whenever this was possible.

3.2.2 Written Life Stories

Purpose

The life stories that were written by the children had as a main purpose to get insight into the life worlds of the children that participated in the sponsorship program at Seeta Child Development Centre.

Method

After introducing myself to the children during the first project activities I attended, I have asked all the present children except those in the youngest group (below twelve) if they would like to write 'a story about their life', as a way of presenting themselves to me. The children were free to decide whether they wanted to do this or not, and those who raised their hands were gathered together to do the assignment. These children were given a sheet of paper (Appendix B) on which they could write and which contained a written explanation of the task (its purpose, some suggested topics, and a confidentiality statement). In addition, they were given the opportunity to ask questions if anything was unclear to them, and they were allowed to leave at any time.

Sample characteristics

70 children handed in a story to me. Of those I excluded two who only filled out their names but left the rest of the page (nearly) blank, so the remaining number of usable stories was 68. See Table 1 for the sample composition according to age and sex.

Age	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Boys	6	3	4	6	0	4	6	3
Girls	3	3	1	7	11	4	7	0

TABLE 1: Children participating in the story writing.

<u>3.2.3 Focus Group Discussions</u>

Purpose

The purpose of the focus group discussions that were held was to enable children to exchange and discuss their ideas and views on different issues related to their participation in the sponsorship program at Seeta Child Development Centre.

Method

The focus group discussions were held during one week of the holiday program that was organized for the children. On average I organized two groups per day that would be on the same topic (but with different participants each time). Only the discussion on the role of religion appeared so interesting that it was held three times. Five different topics were discussed (see Appendix C), which makes the total number of focus groups eleven.

At the beginning of a day, I would introduce the topic for that day's discussion groups to the children aged twelve and above, after which I asked for a number of volunteers to take part in the groups. Children could raise their hands if they wanted to participate and then they could meet me during break time in order to divide themselves into groups. The focus groups were held during the tea break, the lunch break, or after finishing the daily program. Most groups (eight out of eleven) were held in the church building in the project compound, because this was a quiet place without much distraction from other people. Because the church was sometimes occupied, one group was held outside on the compound behind the church building, and another two groups were held in classrooms of the school building that was used by the project. In the latter cases the groups were somewhat more disturbed by outside noises or playing children. However, in none of the cases have the groups been overheard by non-participating children or staff members.

Before the discussion was started, a group of participants would receive information that included the voluntariness of their participation, the confidentiality and anonymity of what was going to be said, and what would be done with the tape recordings afterwards. Then all participants received a piece of paper with a specific assignment for the discussion, and got the opportunity to ask for clarifications if they did not understand (part of) the assignment. After the groups were finished discussing, each participant was given another piece of paper containing my contact information, which they could use in case they or their parents would have any further questions.

Sample characteristics

Each group consisted of four to six members of mixed sexes. As boys and girls were interacting freely during project activities, I found it not necessary to separate them into different groups. All participants were between 13 and 20 years of age, and they were not divided according to age ranges as this appeared practically difficult. Participants could volunteer to take part in more than one focus group, and a total of 37 different participants filled 58 spaces (boys and girls filled respectively 22 and 36 spaces). Except one girl and one boy, participants did not take part in more groups about the same topic. Furthermore, two groups on different topics had exactly the same group composition, as they were recorded immediately after one another.

3.2.4 Narrative/Semi-Structured Interviews

Purpose

The purpose of the individual interviews was to obtain in-depth knowledge about the life experiences of a number of sponsored children, and to learn about how their participation in the sponsorship program has shaped their lives.

Method

Individual interviews were carried out with 15 children in their own homes. The interviews were a combination of a narrative part about the child's life history and a semi-structured part with some more specific topics related to their participation in the program (see Appendix D). However, these two parts were usually mingled during the interview, as children often continued to tell more about their lives after specific topics from the semi-structured part were introduced. One pilot interview was carried out at first, after which revision of the interview guide took place. Participants could volunteer for a home visit and interview by writing their names on a list which was circulated around during project activities. A total of 33 children wrote their names on the list. Out of these I excluded every child below the age of twelve, as well as a number of children who, according to the project staff, would be difficult to reach because they would be back in boarding school or living in an area difficult to reach. After that I remained with a list of 17 children. As girls aged 19 were overrepresented, I decided to exclude two of them, in order to come at my aimed number of 15 children to conduct the interviews with.

Most interviews took place after the school holiday had ended, which meant that the children had to be visited during afternoon or evening hours when they would have returned from school. Appointments for the home visits were usually made by contacting one parent who lived in the area that was to be visited, where after this parent would notify the other parents in the area of the planned visit. Officially a staff member was supposed to accompany any visitors from abroad that wish to see a sponsored child at home, but in my case I was allowed to go accompanied by a Ugandan student who had just started his internship at Seeta Child Development Centre (and in some cases a parent who could direct us to the different homes). This appeared to be a very good solution, as I feared that bringing a staff member to visit the children would make it difficult for the children to tell any critical things about the sponsorship program.

When arriving at the children's homes, the present parent or caregiver was asked for permission to let the child participate in the interview. When the parent did not understand English well enough, as was often the case, the Ugandan student who accompanied me translated into the local language (Lugandan). After asking for consent from the parent or caregiver, I would try to find a place where the child and I could talk in privacy. Before starting the interview, the children were once again informed about its purpose, the meaning of voluntariness, confidentiality, and anonymity, and the use of a tape recorder. They were also asked for permission to record the interview. After ending the interview, the participants who did not already took part in a focus group discussion were given the piece of paper with my contact information.

Sample characteristics

The 15 children that were visited at their homes and interviewed were between the ages of 13 and 20 years. Every one of them had been a part of the sponsorship program for several years, and they lived in three different areas surrounding the project site. See Table 2 for the exact sample composition.

Age	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Boys	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	1
Girls	1	0	1	3	2	0	3	0

TABLE 2: Children participating in the interviews.

3.2.5 Visual Methods (Photo Reports)

Purpose

The purpose of this method was to obtain a visual image of the life worlds and daily routines of children growing up in the study area, Mukono District.

Method

Out of the 15 children participating in the individual interviews, I asked five children (two boys and three girls with some age variation) to make a photo report of one day in their life using a disposable camera. They were instructed to make photos of common events that would take place during the course of a day (see Appendix E). As it was not possible to develop the pictures in Uganda, I let the children write a list of what the picture they took were showing, which I used afterwards to interpret the pictured events. Because the pictures could not be used in conversations with the children, I did not use them in my actual analysis.

3.2.6 Study of Program Documents

Purpose

To obtain detailed knowledge about the ways in which Compassion International's development projects and in particular Seeta Child Development Centre are operated, including the theoretical foundations on which the organization's work is based.

Method

Various program documents have been studied, including Compassion International's Program Field Manual (2008) and the current annual plan and administrative guidelines for Seeta Child Development Centre.

3.3 Data Analyzing Methods

Here I will explain what I have done to analyze and interpret the data gathered by the data collection methods described above. I will start by focusing on my main data, which are the conversations with the children during individual interviews and focus group discussions. To begin with all sound recordings were transcribed as precise as possible, hereby indicating when pauses in the conversation took place and which words or remarks appeared to be unclear. Next to that, I added some remarks on my own impressions about the mood of the child during some parts of the interview (for example being sad or excited) if this seemed to be important to interpret the meaning of what was said.

Then the process of analyzing was started by using the method of meaning coding (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 201-205). By reading through the interview- and focus group transcripts I made a number of categories which appeared to be relevant. The codes which I developed for each category (such as for instance 'schooling', 'family' or 'religion') were thus data-driven, since they emerged from the data. Each of these codes was given a different colour, and children's utterances were marked according to which categories (usually more than one) they roughly belonged. After this first round of coding, I repeatedly read through the transcripts during the analyzing process, whereby I sometimes added sub-codes or changed the initial code I had given to a piece of text in a more appropriate one. After having divided the transcripts into categories with codes and sub-codes, I organized the pieces of texts according to their codes, so that I had an overview of all things that were said by the children on a specific topic. Then I used the method of meaning condensation (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 205-207), whereby I summarized the issues that were addressed by the children. In this way I obtained an overview of the children's standpoints regarding the topics my research addressed. This overview is presented in chapter six (sections 6.3 to 6.9).

Next to this approach of meaning coding and condensation, I used another approach for analyzing some of the individual interviews. As was stated in the section above, the interviews included narrative elements in addition to semi-structured elements. The extent to which children were able to tell spontaneous narratives about their life differed greatly, whereby some children were able to recall many details from even their earliest years of life while others only did not say much at all. Out of the interviews which contained extensive enough narratives I chose three which I analyzed using a narrative approach (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 222-225), after they had already been analyzed by means of meaning coding. The choice for these three narratives is explained further in chapter six (section 6.3), where I use these stories to illustrate the importance of child sponsorship in the children's lives. Here I first present the narrative structure for each of the stories. Then I extract the specific themes that are present in each of the narratives, after which I discuss the common themes in these narratives in relation to the total of collected narratives.

The written life stories have been analyzed in a similar way as the interviews and focus groups, by using meaning coding and condensation. Here too I developed a number of categories and responding codes that emerged from the data, and marked the information fitting to each of the codes with a colour. However, because this was an introductory task I gave to the children in order to get a general overview of the their life situations, I didn't focus on individual children's experiences and views here. Instead I looked at topics like

children's family compositions, employment of their parents, religious backgrounds, daily routines and activities that children participated in. An overview of this is presented in chapter six (section 6.1). The photo reports, consisting of children's pictures accompanied by their explanations, were merely meant to supplement the children's written life stories and were not analyzed in a more systematic way.

The extensive field notes that were taken during participant observation on the days when programmed activities for the children took place were combined and presented as an overview of how a regular day in the project could look like (section 6.2). Finally, the program documents that were studied form the basis of the organizational analysis of Compassion International that is presented in chapter five.

3.4 Verification and Generalization

Here I will address the issues of verification and generalization with regard to my main methods of research, which are the individual child interviews and the focus group discussions. According to Kvale and Brinkman (2009), a critique of research interviews is that their findings are not valid because the subjects' reports may be false. However, they argue that the way in which validity is to be assessed depends on the way in which research questions were posed. The purpose of the current research was to learn about children's personal experiences with a specific event (their participation in a child sponsorship program) and thus led to an experiential reading of the interview statements. Even if an interviewee may not be 'telling the truth' about factual states of affair, their statements may still be a valuable source as they may present the truth of this child's view on certain issues (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 252), which corresponds with the aim of this research.

Another possible objection to this type of research regards the researcher's own subjectivity when carrying out a qualitative interview. However, the meaning of objectivity is not only freedom of bias as it is often defined, but can also be interpreted as reflexivity about one's contributions as a researcher to the production of knowledge. I would like to argue with Kvale and Brinkman (2009, p. 242) that "striving for sensitivity about one's prejudices, one's subjectivity, involves a reflexive objectivity". During my time at the Compassion International project, I became much aware of how my own background and ideas were shaping my contact with the children. I can illustrate this with two examples. The first one regards my own religious background. Being a Protestant Christian, my religious background was similar to that of most of the children participating in the project. This facilitated the process of connecting to the children with a great extent, because I could join them in their

religious activities and understood the Biblical principles underlying their ways of speaking and acting. Without this background I think I would not have been able to understand this seemingly important aspect of the children's lives to a similar extent. A second example regards my previous assumptions on the practice of child sponsorship. During my conversations with the children, I continually realized that my view on child sponsorship was shaped by the critical literature that I had read on this topic on forehand. Because I had read articles on the adverse affects of individual sponsorship schemes regarding the allocation of gifts to a single child, I encouraged children to speak about any difficulties they could have with the project's gifts policy. These examples show the necessity of viewing the researcher as a co-author of the interview, where knowledge is emerging in an interaction between the researcher and the subjects of the research. Invalidity occurs only when the researcher's input is not recognized as such.

I would like to continue by addressing the topic of generalization. The extent to which generalization of research findings may take place is often questioned when case studies have been used as a main research method, like in the current study. Traditional scientific research may demand a large number of cases in order to make statistic generalizations. However, Kvale and Brinkman (2009, p. 261) notice that "in a postmodern approach the quest for universal knowledge […] is replaced by an emphasis on the heterogeneity and contextuality of knowledge, with a shift from generalization to contextualization." They suggest that "we may ask not whether interview findings can be generalized globally, but whether the knowledge produced in a specific interview situation may be transferred to other relevant situations" (Kvale & Brinkman, p. 261-262).

This may be done using a form of generalization called 'analytical generalization', which is based on a reasoned judgement about the extent to which the findings of one study can be used as a guide to what might occur in another situation, by focusing on the similarities and differences of the two situations (Kvale & Brinkman, p. 262-263). This presupposes rich, detailed, or 'thick' descriptions of the cases, as I have tried to offer in the current study by carefully addressing issues like the children's life situations, the specific practices of the organization that offers support to them, and the backgrounds of the area and country the children live in. On the basis of such detailed contextual descriptions, the reader may judge whether the findings may be generalized to and relevant for other situations. These other situations may include the experiences of children in the same sponsorship project, a similar sponsorship project in a different place, perhaps administered by a different organization, or even a different kind of development program.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Before participating in the story writing, the focus groups, the interviews, or the photo assignment, all participating children were asked for their consent orally. With regard to the participant observation, I have informed the group of children present at Seeta Child Development Centre as a whole about the purpose of my visit and the research activities that would be taking place, as it would have been practically impossible to ask permission from each individual child.

Before starting any of my research activities, consent was asked from the children's parents or caregivers during a parent's meeting which was organized by the project staff. I was introduced to the parents by the Project Director and they were explained the purpose and the main methods of the research. None of the parents objected to letting their children participate in the research and they appeared to be enthusiastic about the idea of me visiting their homes. However, not all the children's parents were present at this meeting so the possibility exists that some children have actually participated in one or several of the research activities without their parents knowing about it. Next to that, it cannot be assumed that all parents who gave consent fully understood the nature of academic research, as this might not be much related to their own life worlds.

Next to informed consent, importance was given to the issue confidentiality. Due to the purposes of my research and its qualitative nature, children have been encouraged to share experiences from their private lives. Therefore none of the personal information that was gathered has been passed on to other people like the project staff, children's families, or other children in the project. The five photo reports which contain pictures of the children and their home situations form an exception to this. Hereby participating children (and if possible, their parents) have been asked specifically for permission to use their pictures in my report. From the rest of the data material, children's real names and any other information about their situation that could uncover their identity has been altered or removed.

3.6 Challenges during Data Collection

Before I had even started with my research activities at Seeta Child Development Centre, I was confronted with a sponsored girl who was trying to get help from me by exaggerating the severity of her life situation. She told me that she was an orphan without a sponsor, and that she needed me to become her new sponsor. Later I found out that both of the girl's parents were alive and well, and that she was aware of the fact that she already had a sponsor who supported her. This happened before I had introduced myself as a researcher at the project.

After introducing myself and explaining the purpose of my visit to the children's project, certain difficulties did not stop right away. When reading the life stories written by the children during the first days of my presence at the project, I was surprised to see that many children used this opportunity to ask me for money (like for example requesting me to contribute to their school fees). Apparently they had not yet fully understood the nature of my visit to their project at that time. This was understandable because the only visitors they had received from abroad earlier were sponsors who may have been donating money to the project. I tried to solve this misunderstanding by having a short discussion on the meaning of research with the children. Then once the research activities had been going on for a while, it seemed to me that most children had become to understand the purpose of my presence at the project pretty well.

Nevertheless, even after being around the project for a considerable time, one more misunderstanding occurred with some children who took part in one of the last focus group discussions. During a focus group on ideas for improvement of the program, I observed a girl writing on one of the boy's hands: "We will be departed". To be departed means being suspended from the program, so I assume that the girl was afraid to be sent away if she would mention any critics related to the program, even though I had informed the group that whatever would be said in the discussion would not be listened to by anyone else but me. It seemed to me that not only the girl, but also most of the other participants in this particular focus group appeared to be somehow uncomfortable with the research activity. The problem with this group may partly be explained by the fact that this time a teacher had pointed out the children to participate in the focus group in order to help me out, instead of letting them volunteer by themselves. In addition to that, I did not know the children in this particular group because I hadn't seen them in any of the previous project activities. For these reasons I decided to exclude the data material from this group from my analysis.

I also encountered some challenges related to consent. When asking for consent from parents, a lack of understanding of the nature of academic research may have influenced their judgement. Next to that, a language barrier could also have played a role as I was not able to check whether the translations offered to the parents were appropriate. In the case of the children, the problem of language may also have played a role since not every one of them was equally proficient in the English language. In addition, it may be possible that some children have consented to take part in a research activity mainly because of the general culture of obedience towards adults in Uganda, whereby children are expected to do what an adult asks of them. Because I knew this on forehand, I tried to prevent it from happening by

emphasizing that children did not have to participate if they somehow didn't want to do this. Nevertheless, I cannot guarantee that all of the children who participated in a research activity have felt free to refuse at any time, especially the younger ones who may have been especially eager to do what an adult asks of them.

Finally, it was not always easy to keep up the friend role, as I was sometimes put into a teacher role by the project staff and voluntary workers. But although some younger children kept calling me "auntie Irene" or "teacher Irene", most older children did not approach me as an authority figure after some time and started to include me in their peer interactions. When the time had come that I was about to finish my period of data collection, a number of children expressed their appreciation for being their friend in a goodbye-letter, by giving me a friendship bracelet, or in another way.

3.7 Limitations of the Study

In spite of the valuable contributions this study can make on the ways in which participation in an international child sponsorship can shape the lives of children, which is a topic that has hardly been researched before, a number of limitations should be taken into account.

First of all, different approaches of international child sponsorship organizations may affect children in very different ways. In chapter five I will elaborate on the various ways in which development organizations may practice child sponsorship. Children's experiences with individual child sponsorship are likely to differ profoundly from children's experiences with programs that are primarily directed towards the community as a whole. Therefore it is necessary to carry out further research on children's experiences with other types of sponsorship programs.

Secondly, the current study has aimed to generate in-depth knowledge on the experiences of one particular group of children living in Mukono District, Uganda. Children from different cultures or even from different areas in Uganda may be experiencing their participation in a similar sponsorship program in quite different ways. One factor that may cause major differences in children's experiences is religion. In Uganda, religion (mainly Christianity) is a very visible part of people's daily lives. When spending time with the children from the Compassion International project, I noticed that religion was deeply interwoven in their way of thinking and acting. Therefore religion has become a major theme in presenting this group of children's experiences. However, the role of religion in the lives of the children may not have been that obvious when a focus was placed on the experiences of sponsored children living in cultures less familiar with the Christian religion.

It should be noted that the method of sample selection (self-selection) may also have caused some bias. It might have been the case that the children who volunteered to participate in an interview, focus group, or story writing task, were exactly those who were most enthusiastic about the program they participated in and/or most actively participating in the activities organized for them. Moreover, children with a more critical attitude might have been afraid to be sent away from the program if they would express their opinions, even though it was made clear to them that this would not be the case (see my experience with one of the focus groups, which was discussed in the section above). However, considering the fact that many children, particularly those participating in the focus group discussions, were still able to express critical views on certain aspects of the program, it is reasonable to assume that any bias caused by the method of sample selection has not distorted the results in a significant way.

Next to that, an important advantage of using self-selection in this study is that it is probably more ethical than using random sampling, whereby children may not easily refuse to participate in a research activity when asked. This may be even more so the case in an African context, where children are generally learned to do what an adult asks of them. Here I can again refer to the one unsuccessful focus group (discussed in the limitations section). Because the children in this group were asked to participate by an adult teacher instead of volunteering to participate by themselves, they felt uncomfortable during the discussion and accordingly did not want to share their personal views with me. The choice of self-selection as a method of sample selection was thus a necessary one in order to obtain valid results.

The small number of participants that has been included in the current study may be considered to be a final limitation. However, in order to fulfil the aim of this study, which is to give a nuanced picture of the ways in which child sponsorship can affect the lives of individual children, it was neither possible nor desirable to gather information on a larger number of children. It is important to note that this study offers insights into the ways in which the lives of children *can be* affected by a specific development program, and does not aim to give an account of how the lives of children are definitely affected by participation in such a program.

Chapter 4 – Study Area Backgrounds

In this chapter I am providing some general background information about Uganda as well as the specific area that was visited. This information will provide a better understanding of the situation in which the children that are the focus of this study are living their lives. The main part about Uganda in general is, if not stated otherwise, adapted from the Oxfam Country Profile of Uganda by Ian Leggett (2006). The short part on the specific study area is based on the project's Annual Plan (Seeta Child Development Centre, 2009).

4.1 Country Profile

In 1894 the London Gazette announced the creation of a country called Uganda and this country's status as a British protectorate. Being the result of competition between the imperial powers rather than a process of national integration, the country's borders cut across existing economic, political, and social relationships. As a consequence, the people inhabiting this newly defined country did not feel much like a national unity.
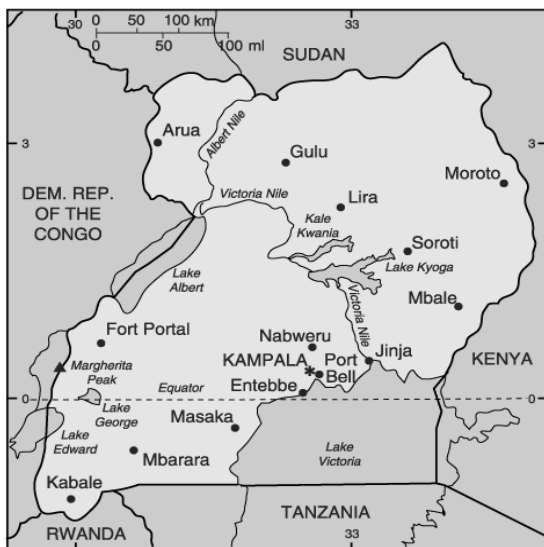
FIGURE 1: Map of Uganda.
Source: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/
the-world-factbook/geos/ug.html
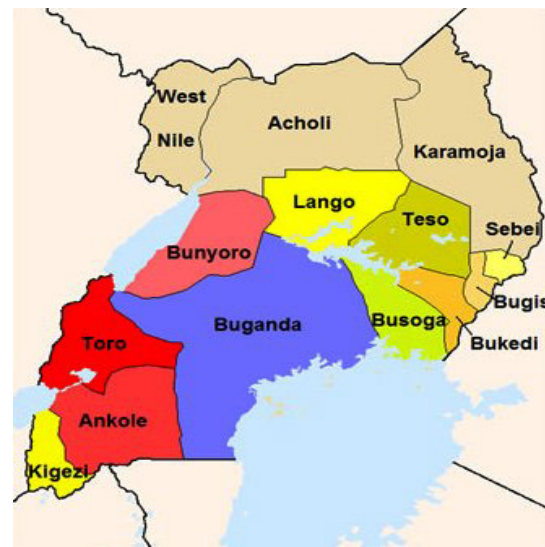
FIGURE 2: Uganda's Administrative Boundaries.
Source: http://www.uganda-visit-and-travel-
guide.com

4.1.1 Divergent Geography and Livelihoods

Uganda is situated in the heart of Africa and is currently divided into 112 districts. It is inhabited by more than 28 million people, of which most are living in rural areas. When it comes to the country's physical features, a clear division can be made between the fertile

areas south and west of the Nile and the plains to the north of the river. These divergent features are determining the livelihoods of the people inhabiting the areas. South and west of the Nile the land is well watered which makes crops grow easily. This has enhanced significant agricultural development and a relatively dense population, resulting in the division of labour and the creation of relatively complex patterns of production and consumption. As a consequence, the area became organized into various kingdoms with hierarchical structures. The kingdom of Buganda, which is the largest and most central kingdom (see Figure 2), played an especially important role during colonial times and in the political and economic development after the country's independence.

The parts of the country north of the Nile developed in quite another way. Here the area consists of semi-arid rangelands with a lighter population density. Because of the lower and less reliable rainfall, surface water is scarcer and drought more common. Cattle herding is a common livelihood, especially in the north-east region of Karamoja. Settlements are of a temporary nature and smaller size, as people and animals have to move around with the seasons in search of pasture and water. Because mobility is an essential part of life for these groups of people, conflicts over access to land and competition for natural resources such as water and grazing are quite common. This way of living has impacted the social organization among these groups profoundly. Instead of larger kingdoms governed by a monarch, people are organized into smaller units such as clans with a chief or elder on top, whereby leadership is based on the achievement of consensus.

4.1.2 Colonization and the Exacerbation of Divisions

With colonialism the differences between the various areas and peoples of Uganda became more pronounced, which would eventually contribute to the development of internal conflicts after independence. From the beginning of British rule, the kingdom of Buganda had obtained a special place for them. Because the system of a hierarchical society headed by a king was appreciated by the British because it was somehow similar to their own system, they started colonial administration, education, and other forms of 'modern development' in Buganda. A system of administration for the whole country was developed based on the system found in Buganda, not taking into account the very different social and political structures that had evolved in the north and east of the country. When the Baganda, the inhabitants of Buganda, were employed as agents and administrators throughout the country, it evoked superior feelings among them, while people throughout the rest of Uganda became to feel dissatisfied.

<u>4.1.3 Conflicts after Independence</u>

In 1962, Uganda became an independent country. Because of the country's tribal and religious fragmentation around the time of independence, the most important division was not between the colonial authorities and a nationalist movement demanding independence, but between the kingdom of Buganda and the new national government of an independent Uganda. At independence an initially alliance was formed between the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) and the Kabaka Yekka (KY, meaning 'King Only'). The latter represented the Baganda leadership while the former consisted of local government leaders outside Buganda. Milton Obote, the leader of the UPC, became Prime Minister, and the Kabaka of Buganda became the first President of Uganda. It was not surprisingly that this alliance soon started to fall apart once the elections were over. Things escalated in 1966, when Obote suspended the 1962 Ugandan constitution and declared himself Executive President and Buganda's opposition was crushed. Constitutional government, parliamentary democracy, and accountability through the rule of law had ended after only four years of independence.

In January 1971 Colonel Idi Amin, who had been the Deputy Army Commander, overthrew President Obote. His dictatorship is characterized by terror and severe abuses of human rights. To begin with he eliminated primarily members of the armed forces, as he feared that treason might happen in an army created by Obote. These victims were also primarily people from the northern districts of Lango and Acholi as the people there were perceived to be supporters of Obote. The lack of unity in Ugandan society was clearly visible, since the systematic elimination of Amin's real or imaginary opponents did at first not meet much condemnation. Because of the terror that was spread around by his spies, and because Uganda's politicians and political activists who had gone into exile had been unable to overcome their historical differences, Amin managed to remain in power until 1979. Then his army was defeated after an attempt of invading Tanzania.

After his fall, disorganization and fear were prevalent in the country and in 1980 a new election (the first one since 1962) was met with anxiety that the UPC would not accept another party's victory. The UPC did win but the results were widely considered to be rigged. Obote became president for the second time, and his army became a major threat to the civilian population in different parts of the country. Whole communities were seen as 'the enemy' and the first violence was directed to those living in north-west Uganda because Amin was from this part of the country. This was considered to be reason enough to punish the whole area and the levels of violence were extremely high.

At this time Yoweri Museveni, a politician who had been active in the war against Amin, organized opposition and started a guerrilla war against Obote's army. His group was called the National Resistance Movement (NRM) and his army the National Resistance Army (NRA), which based itself to the north-west of Kampala in the district of Luwero. Here human rights abuses like killings, torture, rape, extortion, and detentions were widespread. The poorly-disciplined troops of Obote were becoming increasingly no match for the well-organized and mobile guerrilla fighters, and when the NRA captured Kampala in 1986 Museveni became Uganda's new President.

After 1986 the country still experienced several internal conflicts, of which the most severe have been in the northern districts of Kitgum and Gulu, which is the residence of the Acholi people. The Acholi have an uneasy relationship with the Karimojong living east of them (see Figure 2). Although the Karimojong are dependent on access to the pastures and water of Acholi in the dry seasons, they repeatedly organize cattle raids in eastern Kitgum. In 1987 a series of Karamojong raids happed whereby well-armed Karimojong took almost the entire stock of Acholi wealth (250,000 cattle), destroying the local economy completely. Because the military authorities have made no attempt to stop the Karamojong, the Acholi became to suspect that the army was involved in the raiding, which could hardly have occurred on such a big scale without approval of the authorities.

In the meantime, opposition to the NRM government was taking several forms. In 1987 a movement arose called the Holy Spirit Movement (HSP), which was led by a young Acholi woman who claimed to be possessed by religious powers. Already within a year the HSP was shattered. However, a small group of rebels from different movements eventually managed to organize themselves under the leadership of Joseph Kony, calling themselves the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Like the leader of the HSP, Kony was supposed to be used as a medium by religious powers. However, the LRA acted in a completely different way. While the movement claimed to be resisting on behalf of the Acholi people, it was in reality terrorizing the population with violent, unpredictable and arbitrary behaviour. Instead of attacking the army, its targets were civilians, villages, and the unarmed. Schools, health centres and passing vehicles were attacked and serious human rights abuses were committed like cutting of victims' ears, lips, or legs. Because the movement lacked popular support, the LRA began to use the cruel strategy of abducting children and young people. Fear of abduction is still part of the Acholi people's daily lives. Families have fled out of the district or sent away their children to relatives in safer places. Large numbers of displaced people have been living in camps, with little protection and lack of food and hygiene.

4.1.4 The Struggle with HIV/AIDS

Uganda was among the first countries in Africa that was hit by AIDS. It first appeared in the 1980s, when it was poorly understood and met with superstition. But because of its devastating effects which were already becoming visible, the government of Uganda was quick to come with a response. The result was a policy characterized by openness, an integrated approach to care and prevention, and the inclusion of a wide range of organizations in policy definition and implementation. In spite of this commitment of both government and donors, it was not easy to combat the pandemic. During the late 1980s the prevalence rate was increasing threefold in just five years, leading to widespread prejudice, discrimination and rejection of those with the disease. The risk of being infected with HIV during unprotected intercourse is greatest among younger girls, both biologically and due to social factors whereby woman have less power than men to make decisions on their own.

Nevertheless, Uganda is considered to be one of the few success stories in Africa in developing an effective response to AIDS. After the estimated prevalence of HIV infection peaked at about 30 percent in the early 1990s, it had already fallen to 12 percent in 1999. In 2009 the estimated prevalence rate was set to only 6.5 for adults aged 15-49 (UNAIDS, 2010). Infection rates have also reduced significantly among young woman. Changing behaviours and beliefs around HIV/AIDS are seen as major reasons for this overall decline.

4.1.5 Developments in Education

By the mid-1990s, the largest recurrent household expense for many families with children was the payment of school fees. Educational costs were around one-fifth of the annual income of an average Ugandan family. Almost one-third of the school aged children were therefore unable to attend school, and of those who were enrolled in primary school only a very few managed to reach the final grade. In 1997, the Ugandan government decided to provide free primary education for at least four children from every family. This had a huge impact on the number of enrolments, which increased from 2.6 million in 1996 to 5.1 million in 1997. A new curriculum was also developed which aimed to be more responsive to the needs of Ugandan communities. The language of instruction during the first three years of primary education has now become the mother tongue, and subjects as population and family life education (including topics as reproduction, family spacing, hygiene, and health) have been included in the curriculum. Education at secondary and university level is also being reformed, but to a less significant extent. Currently only about 40 percent of primary school leavers continue with a secondary school education. One major reason for this low enrolment

is that secondary schooling is expensive: school fees are relatively high and additional money is needed for books and other equipment. Because money remains a major determinant of access to advanced education in Uganda, it continues to exacerbate differences between the rich and the poor.

4.1.6 The Economic Situation

Agriculture has always been the most important sector of Ugandan economy, with more than 80 percent of the people working in the agricultural sector. Exports are dominated by agricultural products, while imports are consequently dominated by manufactured goods. The economy is heavily dependant on coffee. This makes it very vulnerable to changes in world coffee prices, since Uganda has no influence on their level because it has such a small economy. Nearly all agricultural work is carried out on al small scale whereby Ugandans rely almost entirely on their own and their family's labour. Collecting water, gathering firewood, digging, and harvesting is all done by hand. It is common for children to work on their family's farm before and after going to school.

Another characteristic of Ugandan economy is that it is strongly unbalanced. Already before colonization, regional imbalances had existed as a result of a combination of factors related to history, geography, climate, and agricultural development. Existing differences between the fertile areas around Lake Victoria and the poorer, northern districts were exacerbated by colonialism. Industrial and manufacturing development was focused on the fertile south-west, and the railway which was constructed in the south in 1900 encouraged those living in the areas around it to produce export goods for Britain. The colonial authorities dealt with these disparities by recruiting men needed for the army and the police mostly from the northern districts. After independence this situation continued when young men with little opportunities in the north went to join the army. Because of the consequently unbalanced composition of the army, it has been vulnerable to abuse by politicians and military leaders who put their personal and ethnic interests above national ones.

Until Amin's coup in 1971 the national economy had been managed well, apart from these regional differences. But during the years of Amin and the second period of Obote the economy collapsed. In 1987 the NRA reached an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and adopted an economic reform package. Since then the economy experienced growth rates between 5-10 percent. However, this economic recovery is almost entirely based on concessional and conditional transfers of foreign development aid, instead of any fundamental improvement in the basic structure or capacity of the economy. Improving the

country's economic situation is challenging as long as Uganda remains to be dependent on foreign aid. Moreover, since the economic growth inequalities between the poor and the rich have become even bigger.

A Poverty Eradication Plan that was approved in 1997 stresses the need to increase the incomes of poor women and men. But still education, health, and social services are mainly available on payment of cash, something which makes them less accessible for those who have very small cash incomes. These are often the people who need such services most. When it comes to health, more than 50 percent of Ugandans have no access to clear water, making them vulnerable to cholera and diarrhoea. Diseases like malaria and respiratory illnesses are a major cause of death but can be easily prevented in the early stages. However, because hospitals have to charge for their treatments, many Ugandans turn to cheaper traditional medicines before attending a hospital. By the time they get to a hospital, their illnesses may have become too advanced to treat. A government initiative to extend the access and quality of health care including better-resourced local health services and public health education may bring some improvements.

Nevertheless, policies to increase the incomes of the poor and to provide better public services will have little impact in the parts of the country where conflict and security are still going on. In these districts, the productive basis of the economy has been destroyed because people have limited access to land or have no animals left. An end to conflict is therefore a necessary condition for Uganda's economic and social development.

4.2 Study Area Profile

The area in which this study is conducted is Mukono District, which is situated in the southern part of the country bordering to Kampala District. Seeta is an upcoming urban centre near the town of Mukono. It is here that the development project in question is situated. As Seeta is situated next to Mukono Town and on the road leading to the capital Kampala, it is facing problems associated with urbanisation. Within the trading centres and slums, there is a dense concentration of settlements, which are characterized with very poor housing, draining and sanitary conditions. Most houses are consisting of one room which may be divided into smaller units by a curtain. Many people do not have clearly defined businesses in the trading centre. The small-scale businesses which are carried out are for example charcoal selling, market vending, kiosks, hair saloons and food vending. Because of the poorly accessible health care, diseases like malaria and respiratory illnesses are widespread. Next to that, HIV/AIDS is affecting many households in the area.

Chapter 5 – Compassion International: Position, Aims and Organization

5.1 Positioning Compassion International

The variety of organizations that practice child sponsorship can in my view be placed on a continuum ranging from individual based to community based, as well as from explicitly religious to explicitly non-religious. I will illustrate the position of Compassion International, which is the focus of the current study, by comparing its approach with that of two other major organizations that practice child sponsorship: World Vision and Plan International. The information on Plan international and World vision presented here is collected during interviews with employees of these organizations while visiting both of their country offices in Kampala on September 25, 2009. The main source of information about Compassion International is the Program Field Manual (Compassion International, 2008). This is the key programmatic document that explains what Compassion does in each program and intervention.

5.1.1 Compassion International

Compassion International is a Christian organization working mainly with individual child sponsorship. The organization has a strong sense of their Christian identity and beliefs. Its core purpose is as follows: "In response to the Great Commission[1], Compassion International exists as an advocate for children, to release them from their spiritual, economic, social and physical poverty and enable them to become responsible and fulfilled Christian adults" (Compassion International, 2008, p. 1-2). Even though its purpose is to enable children to get a good life in the future by 'becoming' responsible adults, the organization also recognizes the value of children as human 'beings' in the present (referring to the view on children as both human beings and becomings as illustrated in section 2.1). This is expressed in the statement that "a child is of great value, not needing to wait to be an adult nor have a list of achievements, but of value simply by virtue of the fact that he or she is created in God's image and of great worth in His eyes" (Compassion International, 2008, p. 3).

The way in which the organization's purpose is to be realized is defined in its core strategy: "Christian holistic development of children through sponsorship" (Ibid., p. 2). With holistic is meant that both spiritual and physical needs are to be addressed, because one can

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[1] In Christian tradition this indicates the instruction of the resurrected Jesus Christ to his disciples that they should spread his teachings to all the nations of the world (Matthew 28: 16-20, the Bible).

not go without the other. The term holistic is also used to reflect the range of programs available for children, as summarized in Compassion's 'Christian Holistic Child Development Model' (Figure 3). This model consists of four interrelated programs that are carried out in collaboration with local churches: Child Survival Programs, Child Sponsorship Programs, Leadership Development Programs, and Complementary Interventions.

FIGURE 3: Compassion's Christian Holistic Child Development Model.
Source: http://www.compassion.com/about/programs/default.htm

The Child Survival Program (CSP) focuses on (expecting) mothers and children under the age of four. Through this program Compassion provides "nutrition, medical assistance, parental education, spiritual development opportunities and social support for mothers and caregivers to help very young vulnerable children survive the first few years of life" (Compassion International, 2008, p. 6). The Child Development through Sponsorship Program (CDSP) is the most far reaching program and the focus of the current study. Children can be enrolled in this program between the ages of 3 and 9 and are expected to complete it between the ages of 13 and 22. This long-term program "creates the opportunity to more deeply address the holistic needs of the child", and a "concerted effort is made to build a meaningful relationship between the child and the sponsor" (Ibid., p. 6). I will go into more detail on the CDSP further down this section. The Leadership Development Program (LDP) provides talented and service-oriented graduates of the CDSP program the opportunity of a university education, combined with intensive leadership training so that they can "develop their God-given gifts and become skilled professionals and Christian leaders who can impact on their churches, communities and societies" (Ibid., p. 6).

These three programs are the Core Programs, and build upon each other progressively. In addition to these, Complementary Interventions are carried out to support the Core Programs. Examples of activities that fall into this category are health initiatives (including

HIV treatment and malaria prevention), medical assistance, educational assistance, non-formal education (including vocational training, money management/household budgeting, and job searching skills), parental education, disaster relief activities, micro-enterprise/income generating activities, infrastructure improvements, and water projects (Compassion International, 2008, p. 90-103).

As Compassion International's aim is to release children from poverty, it is useful to understand the organization's view on poverty: as a lack of opportunity. Compassion believes that "whatever the manner in which lack of opportunity manifests itself, the creation of opportunity is the beginning of hope and the empowering of people to eventually overcome the dire circumstances in which they live" (Compassion International, 2008, p. 4). Releasing children from poverty is thus done by creating opportunity and hope for them to grow and develop. According to Compassion, "individual attention and love of children – by their parents and caregivers, people in the local church, and sponsors who deeply care for the children – is the key to their development" (Ibid., p. 5). This is why their approach to addressing child poverty is highly individualistic.

An important characteristic of Compassion International's organizational structure is the partnership relation with a local church. Together with many other NGOs, Compassion considers local ownership and understanding by individuals in the community to be fundamental in addressing poverty. According to Compassion, "the Christian Church is an institution that is uniquely local and uniquely global. It is both part of the society in which it exists and part of the global church. It has a deep respect and knowledge of its local culture and context and can also reflect true local initiative" (Compassion International, 2008, p. 5). Compassion is an interdenominational organization, which means that it intentionally partners with diverse local churches and denominations. The church-based model through which Compassion works is called a Child Development Centre (see also the description of Seeta Child Development Centre, section 6.2). Here sponsored children and caregivers meet on a regular schedule to participate in programmed activities, which are administered by the local Church Partner. A Partnership Facilitator is responsible for the coordination of Compassion's responsibilities within this partnership. In addition, the Project Director is responsible for the partnership to function effectively in practice by directing and supervising day-to-day activities. Finally, local accountability and support for Compassions work with children is provided by a Church Partner Committee that may consist of caregivers, sponsored youth, local church leaders, the pastor and Christian leaders in the community.

The organization has a clear vision of what they would like to reach in the future: "As a result of our ministry to children in poverty, Compassion will be recognized by the Church worldwide as the leading authority for holistic child development and will be the global benchmark for excellence in child sponsorship" (Compassion International, 2008, p. 2).

5.1.2 World Vision

World Vision is a humanitarian development organization that offers child sponsorship as one component of their broader community program. Like in Compassion International, each of the selected children is linked up to an individual sponsor. However, a difference with Compassion International is that in World Vision the selected children are not participating in a regular program and do not necessarily get their school fees paid by the organization. As the focus of World Vision is on development, the organization wants to move away from direct benefits such as providing school fees towards empowering a community. By working in this way, they aim to reach a larger number of children then only those who are sponsored. The sponsored children are then viewed as representatives of all children in a community. These children are called 'agents of change': models of transformation to influence a community by acting as an example to others. In addition to that, the sponsored children should also transform their sponsors by educating them through letter exchanges about the situation in which they live. In this way, World Vision aims to transform the mind sets of both child and sponsor.

The selection of children that are eligible to be in a World Vision program is done by local structures, including (but not limited to) churches. There are three categories of children that World Vision is targeting their interventions on: children affected by conflict, children from communities affected by HIV/AIDS, and children living in poverty. When these three categories overlap, World Vision aims to include the 'worst cases' in their programs, in other words the ones that fall into several categories.

World Vision is a Christian organization, but the role of the church is different from that within Compassion International. While in Compassion International all projects are linked to a church and all children are taught about the Christian faith, World Vision chooses their local partners not on the basis of religion (Mosques may, for example, also be seen as suitable local partners). As a consequence, the children in their projects are not explicitly taught about religion. If a church is involved, its role is limited to empowering people in terms of general morals and family values.

5.1.3 Plan International

The approach of Plan International, one of the world's largest child-centred NGOs, is in many ways opposite to that of Compassion. Their approach for delivering programs is described as 'Child Centred Community Development' (CCCD). A 'Multi-level Situational Analysis' from a child rights perspective is carried out in order to decide on what programs to carry out. Hereby Plan assesses which rights are being met, which are not (and by how far), which groups of children are benefiting least from the progressive realization of their rights, and what underlying factors are causing these violations. Then it is considered whether intervention by Plan would deliver the greatest developmental benefits. Plan has four core areas of activities in Uganda: protecting girls, boys and their families affected by HIV/AIDS; empowering girls, boys and their families living in poverty; strengthening girls, boys and their families' health; and promoting lifelong learning (Plan Uganda, 2008).

Although the organization wants to keep up an individual relationship between a child and a sponsor, the 'sponsored' children do not receive any more benefits than other children in their communities. Support in the form of school fees is given on the basis of need and school performance, irrespective of whether a child is symbolically sponsored or not. According to the employee I interviewed, the reason that they want to keep linking an individual child to a sponsor is that one of their biggest aims is to build up relationships between children (with their families) and sponsors in which they can learn from each other. This approach is also bound to some challenges because sponsors may sometimes feel that their child should benefit more, and families may find it less attractive to cooperate with a local Plan project when they do not receive direct benefits from it.

Furthermore, Plan International is an organization without any religious, political or governmental affiliation. With regards to religion, the organization argues that having a specific religious agenda may exclude some families who are not comfortable with that particular religion. In this the approach of Plan International is markedly different from that of Compassion International, whereby religion is the very basis on which the organization is founded and participation in religious activities is an important aspect of its programs.

5.2 Compassion's Child Development through Sponsorship Program

Here I will go deeper into Compassion's sponsorship program for children between the ages of 4 and 22, which is the program in which the children in the current study participate. First I will explain more about the selection process and criteria. According to Compassion International (2008, p. 58), the organization "desires to work with the neediest and most

vulnerable children that it can reach with its program". Children who meet the following criteria can be considered for selection, whereby most children will fall into several categories: children from families with low family income and assets; children with chronic illness and/or malnutrition; children who are unable to attend school or progress in school; children who are orphaned, abandoned, or exploited; children who are physically or mentally handicapped; children who have parents or guardians who are physically handicapped; or children who live with a poor widowed parent or relative. Next to this, children should come from both non-Christian and Christian families, be between the ages of 3 and 9, have good access to the Child Development Centre (within an approximately 30-minute walk from the home), and be non-transient and stable within the community. There should also be an equal distribution of boys and girls. Normally no more than three children from the same family may be registered for the program.

The selection process starts with identification of a home in need. Every case will be discussed by Church Partner Committee, and an assessment of the poverty of the family is made. As a part of this assessment, interviews with the parents or caregivers are carried out and a visit to the home is made. During this visit, the history of the child in question is discussed and the family's willingness to participate in Christian training and other activities is assessed. Selected children must also agree to this by themselves. If children are found eligible to be admitted, they will be called to the Child Development Centre as soon as more children can be registered.

Once admitted to the sponsorship program, children will be offered "educational opportunities (both formal schooling and nonformal training); health care and supplemental nutrition, as needed, and health education; life-skills training; a safe, loving environment in which they learn and play; the opportunity to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and be discipled; training programs for the caregivers to improve on their income generating activities and how to care for the children in their homes; and communication to their sponsors through letter writing" (Seeta Child Development Centre, 2009). Children are followed up and guided individually, and are expected to participate in all scheduled activities.

Children's sponsors have the opportunity to send gifts to the children they sponsor, their families, or projects as a whole. According to Compassion International (2008), these gifts "serve to strengthen the relationship between a sponsor and a child, address real needs and encourage" (p. 105). These gifts are guided by local decision-making whenever possible, so while sponsors are welcome to make suggestions, it is the decision of the receiving church, family or child how the gift money will be used. When a gift is sent to a family, the family in

question may receive advice from the project staff on how the gift money can be spent, especially in cases when the planned use of it is judged to be "in clear conflict with the child's developmental interest" (p. 106).

All formal, nonformal and informal opportunities, relationships and processes that are both for the group and the individual child are focused on achieving the child development outcomes. Compassion defines four development outcomes. To begin with, the cognitive development outcome is that the child "exhibits the motivation and skills to be economically self-supporting". Second, the socio-emotional development outcome is that the child "interacts with other people in a healthy and compassionate manner". Third, the physical development outcome is that the child "chooses good health practices and is physically healthy". Finally, the spiritual development outcome is that the child "demonstrates commitment to the Lordship of Christ" (Compassion International, 2008, p. 44-51). To this purpose, every child in the sponsorship program is given an age-appropriate Bible.

It is always desired that children complete the program and fulfil the development goals. However, when children no longer attend or adequately participate in the program, they risk being departed. This is a necessary measure in order to ensure financial integrity and happens in the following circumstances: when a child is "not attending a program activity for two consecutive months, unless absence is justified and temporary", when "family circumstances have changed positively so that the child no longer needs Compassion's assistance", when "a child refuses to write to his or her sponsor or provide update information", when "a child places the physical, emotional or spiritual welfare of other children at risk due to aggressive or offensive behaviours", or when "the Church Partner is not able to provide or identify activities or staff to address the specific needs of the child" (Compassion International, 2008, p. 61). A child is prepared for departure through counselling and career guidance, especially using the 'My plan for tomorrow' document in which children aged 12 and up develop a plan for their future (see also section 6.2). When children move out to a non-Compassion area, Compassion will locate their new home and aims to ascertain these children's wellbeing as well as their future in school (Seeta Child Development Centre, n.d.).

Nevertheless, planned completions of the program are the ideal, and happen when young persons complete the full program offered to them by the Church Partner. They will then be invited to a completion ceremony and receive an official certificate from the Church Partner (Compassion International, 2008).

Chapter 6 – Children's Experiences

In this chapter I present my data on the experiences of children and youth[2] with their participation in a Compassion sponsorship program. Data from the individual interviews and the focus groups constitute the most important part of this chapter and are presented in the sections 6.3 to 6.9. Each of these sections represents one of the seven research questions that were outlined in section 1.3 of the introduction chapter. Data from the written life stories and the photo reports are included in section 6.1. In section 6.2 I include the data received through participant observation at the Child Development Centre. I would like to emphasize that sections 6.3 to 6.9 are organized according to the information given by the children. Unless clarified otherwise the views presented in this chapter are purely those of the participating children. Moreover, the quotations used may not necessarily represent the opinion of all children in the project. If possible I have tried to specify whether opinions are generally shared, shared by a small group of children, or expressed by an individual only. In cases where children's remarks were relevant for more than one section, I have chosen to present the quotation in both sections since referring back to previous sections makes reading more difficult. The chapter is build up in the following way.

In section 6.1, to begin with, I will give a general description of the children's daily lives, which is based on the 68 written life stories and supplemented by information from the five photo reports made by children in the Compassion project (presented in Appendix F). It should be clear that every child has a unique life story. Nevertheless, while recognizing this uniqueness they also have much in common in how their daily lives are organized. It is these common elements that I want to give an overview of in this section. Subsequently, in section 6.2 I present the data gathered through participant observation. Hereby I combine the data gathered on all days I spent at the project site into a general description of usual activities at Seeta Child Development Centre.

The research question that is addressed in section 6.3 is: "What is the importance of child sponsorship in individual children's lives?" Because it is practically difficult to present life histories of all participating children, I will base my analysis on three extended narratives of sponsored youths. The use of narratives enables me to remain relatively close to the children's own voices, which is in accordance with the view on children as competent social actors as put forward in section 2.2.2 of the theoretical chapter. Of each narrative I will

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[2] Even though participants were between the ages of 12 and 20, I will refer to them as children, boys or girls (see my explanation in 2.2.1). If exclusively referring to participants of age 16 and above, I will use the word youth.

discuss its structure together with some of its important themes. In the end I will set out which themes were common in these three narratives, as well as in the remaining children's narratives.

In section 6.4 I try to answer the research question: "How do the children evaluate the impact of the project on their families?" The findings presented here are based on all fifteen individual interviews, including those three from which narratives were presented in the previous section.

The research question that is addressed in section 6.5 is: "What are the children's thoughts on the community impact of the project?" The findings presented here are drawn from two focus group discussions with a total of 10 participants (3 boys, 7 girls) that were held on the topic of community impact. The exact instruction that the children participating in both groups received was: "Discuss concrete ideas on how your community can benefit from your participation in the sponsorship program. Include in your discussion the situation of other children in your community that are poor, but are not sponsored." I will start this section with describing children's ideas on the first part of this assignment which deals with benefits for the community, where after I will proceed with the second part which deals with the situation of not-sponsored children and how the project children relate to them. I supplemented this part with some quotations from the focus groups on advantages and disadvantages of individual child sponsorship.

The research question that is addressed in section 6.6 is: "How do the children experience the relationship with their sponsor through letters and gifts?" The findings on which this section is based are drawn from the individual interviews as well as two focus group discussions with a total of 11 participants (5 boys, 6 girls) that were held on the topic of sponsor gifts. The exact instruction that the children participating in both focus groups received was: "Discuss the difficulties that may arise when some children and their families receive gifts from sponsors while others don't. Then discuss what you think are the best ways to overcome these difficulties." Although not specified in the instruction, children also discussed the topic of sponsor letters here. A reason for focusing on difficulties in these focus groups was that during a parents meeting I attended, a number of parents had expressed some concerns related to the topic of gifts. Therefore I was eager to find out more about what the children themselves thought about this.

During the individual interviews the topic was not per se limited to receiving letters and gifts, but could entail any aspects of the child-sponsor relationship since I used to address the topic by asking children the open question: "Can you tell me something about your

relationship with your sponsor?" I will start this section by describing how children are evaluating the relationship with their sponsor in general terms. Thereafter I will continue to discuss both positive and negative aspects related to receiving letters and gifts from the children's sponsors which were put forward by the children, as well as the some of their ideas to solve the problems they experienced.

The research question addressed in section 6.7 is: "How do the children perceive the role of religion in the project?" The findings that I will present here are drawn from three focus group discussions with a total of 15 participants (6 boys, 8 girls; one girl participated in two groups) that were held on the role of religion in the project, as well as from the individual interviews. The exact instruction that the children participating in all groups received was: "Discuss what according to you should be the role of the Christian faith in the project. Also discuss how you think the program would function if it did not have this Christian character." In addition to the three focus group discussions on this topic, religion was a recurrent theme during the individual interviews. Because most children had adopted a Christian worldview, they used a religious framework for explaining their life circumstances and used religious standards to judge about what they thought was 'good' or 'bad'. I start this section with the advantages that the children mentioned about having religion in the project (no disadvantages were directly mentioned). Then will I describe children's thoughts on how the project would function without including religion in it, and finally I address some possible conflicting situations due to the project's Christian character.

Section 6.8 is dealing with the research question: "What do the children see as advantages and disadvantages of individual child sponsorship as a means to alleviate poverty?" The findings presented here are drawn from two focus group discussions with a total of 10 participants (2 boys, 8 girls) that were held in which children discussed possible advantages and disadvantages of the individual child sponsorship approach and contrasted this approach with other ways of development assistance. The exact instruction participating children received was: "Discuss what you think are the advantages and disadvantages of individual child sponsorship, if compared to approaches directed towards the community as a whole." As this assignment might have been too complicated for the younger children, I especially invited those of age 15 and above to participate in the groups on these topics.

Finally, the research question addressed in section 6.9 is: "What are the children's expectations and goals for the future"? This section is based on the individual interviews, whereby a conversation about the topic of future expectations and goals was usually prompted by questions as: "What expectations do you have about your life in the future, after

you have left the Compassion project?", and: "What role could your participation in the project play in reaching your future goals?" Clearly children's views on the future are divergent, but some commonalities can still be observed.

6.1 Children's Daily Lives

What follows here is an overview of common elements of the children's daily lives which were derived from the written life stories. For a visual illustration of children's life situations I refer to a selection from the five photo reports on 'one day in my life' (Appendix F).

I will begin by describing the children's family and home situations, as how they presented it. A large majority of the children is not living with both of their parents. The most common family pattern is one in which the children's fathers have died and their mothers are taking care of the family, while one-parent families headed by fathers were least common. These one-parent families do not always receive support from other relatives (especially on the father's side of the family after a father's death), as one 19-year old boy explains: "Many of your relatives are so much closer to you when your mum or dad are still alive but when they pass away [and] we become poor, the once close relatives will no longer be appearing". In addition, mothers and their children may be chased away from their houses and lands by the deceased father's relatives, which makes obtaining a livelihood even more difficult. In these situations children are often no longer able to attend school.

Situations in which children live with other relatives are next common. These relatives include grandparents, aunts or uncles, or older brothers or sisters. One 15-year old boy living with a grandparent expressed his anxiety about what would happen when their caregiver would die: "I have left my grandmother very sick but I always pray to God that my grandmother should be healed because she is the one looking after me". The number of people living together as a family can be very large, as many families consist of both biological children and children of deceased relatives. In addition to that, polygamous families (a husband having several wives) also exist.

Most children did not mention anything about their parent's employment, but those who did include it in their stories wrote that their parents are farmers (mentioned by five), teachers (mentioned by two), tailors (mentioned by one) or unemployed (mentioned by three). Although farming is mostly not mentioned as an occupation, it becomes clear from the children's descriptions of their daily tasks that farming is practiced widely. This can be done in the family's own or in other people's gardens and includes growing crops like cassava, beans, maize, sweet potatoes, bananas, or fruits like mangoes.

Based on my own observations as well as the children's photo reports, I would like to add that some variations can be noted with regard to the children's housing. On one side of the continuum, there are those who live with many siblings in one-room houses without much private space (as the sleeping area is separated by a curtain or what was called a 'soft wall'), whereby families might own little land without animals. On the other side, there are those who live in relatively big houses with several rooms and a larger piece of land surrounding the house, where animals like pigs were kept. This illustrates that the children participating in the Compassion project are no homogenous group with regard to their (economic) backgrounds, and that at least some of them may not belong to the very poorest layer of the area's population.

Returning to the children's life stories, next to their family and home situation many children wrote about religion. Most of them mentioned that they "accepted Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour", why and at what age they did so, and what meaning this has for them in their lives. Often they described good things that happened to them as blessings from God, and in cases where they have gone through difficult times in their lives like experiencing the death of a parent, they wrote that their religion has helped them to cope with this. It became clear that most children and their families attend church every Sunday and are joining bible study groups one or several times a week. Especially popular are church choirs and dancing groups, since a large number of children mentioned that they participate in what they called a "worship team". At church children can also meet with their friends, which illustrates its social as well as its religious functions in the children's lives.

During a common day in the children's lives, children mentioned the following activities. In the morning they usually wake up early, which is around 6 AM, and say their morning prayers. Then they greet their parents and perform tasks in the house like cleaning or washing clothes (mostly girls) or tasks in the garden, like digging or caring for the animals (mostly boys). After that they may have some breakfast and wash the utensils, fetch water, or prepare lunch for the whole family (only girls). Lunch may consist of beans, posho (cooked crunched maize), matooke (cooked banana), or millet. Rice and meat are more expensive and are sometimes eaten in the weekends.

On school days, lunch is taken at school. Schooling is taken very seriously by the children and many wrote that they are proud of their schools, that they are working hard, and that their teachers are appreciating them because of their discipline or exemplary behaviour. It would be logical that in a situation where the payment of school fees is such a big burden for the children's families, children may feel a large responsibility to perform well. Next to

academic tasks, children are also participating in various other activities at school like sports competitions, reading competitions, or discussion groups. Outside school hours children may participate in various leisure activities. Playing football is very popular among the children, and activities like riding a bicycle, going for a walk, swimming, dancing, singing, reading novels, and listening to stories from old relatives were also mentioned. In general, great importance is attached to friendships with age-mates. In the evening children may eat supper, which usually is about the same as what they had for lunch. After that children may do their homework or read in the Bible, say their evening prayers and go to bed.

6.2 Observations at the Child Development Centre

First I will start by giving a description of Seeta Child Development Centre. When entering the gate to the project compound, there is a square with a church in the middle. On the left of the church is the Compassion office, where the staff resides. On the right of the church is the reverend's house. Behind the church is a small field with a number of goats. On this field the toilet building is situated, which is built in the common Ugandan way: holes in the ground surrounded by a concrete structure. On the left side of the square, past the Compassion office, lays a big field with school buildings. These buildings are normally used by a school, but on project days it is where the Compassion children gather. On the field in front of the school buildings several trees are placed along the pathways with signs nailed onto them, saying: 'be proud of yourself', 'choose the right friends', 'moving alone is dangerous', 'be aware AIDS kills', 'respect your teachers', and 'don't be late'.

On a common project day, around 50-60 children show up. The day starts between 9:15 and 9:30 AM with a morning devotion. This devotion has a joyful character and consists of singing accompanied by clapping, drumming and dancing, praying, and a Bible lesson by a staff member, the reverend, or a guest speaker. Sometimes a simple game is organized, such as a competition in blowing up balloons. The bible lessons often had topics that were meant to be encouraging for the children, like God's faithfulness and involvement in the children's lives ("God will never let you down"; "if you feel that everyone has abandoned you, you can feel encouraged by God"; "if God opens a door for you, no one will close that door"). Other topics that were addressed included different types of love and the expression of love by doing good, finding the right environments to develop oneself, being humble and esteeming others higher than oneself, and encouraging one another and shining out in the world as children of Compassion.

At the time I visited the project a holiday conference was organized for the children, which meant that they had a full program during one week. In the beginning of this week, children were asked about their fears and expectations for the time to come. Their expectations included the following: getting to know more about God, expanding one's understanding, getting solutions to life challenges, acquiring words of courage and wisdom, time for discussions and sharing of views, challenging questions from the facilitators, enough food, a balanced diet, knowing more about their health, counselling and guidance, and making friendships. Their fears included: boredom, to much talking by the teachers, prolonging hunger, every day the same food, fear to discuss certain things in front of the teachers (one suggested that the teachers should go out of the classroom when discussing sensitive topics), and disappointments. Children were encouraged to sit next to a new person every day, so that they might learn to like everyone.

After the morning devotion children would divide in groups according to their ages, and discuss divergent topics. Throughout the week, the following questions were discussed by the oldest children: What are the qualities of a pure heart?; What is unconditional love?; When is one supposed to have a partner?; What is the minimum period of courtship before marriage?; When is a right time to have children?; What are the reasons that we have young mothers and fathers?; What are solutions to young mothers and fathers?; What are signs of adolescence and how do we control sexual feelings?; and: If you have these feelings, to whom do you go to seek advice? Most children were actively involved in these discussions. They were divided into around six smaller groups, whereby they had to present the results of their group on a large piece of paper in front of the entire group. On the discussion about young fathers and mothers (why girls may get pregnant at a young age) for example, children came up with the following reasons: curiosity/wanting to experiment, peer pressure, rape/defilement of girls, lack of responsibility by the parents, freedom around them, literacy, poverty/girls selling their bodies, influence of western culture with respect to clothing, neglect of God, conflicts in the family/children sent away from home by their step parents, ignorance, and religious influence/Muslim girls being forced to marry young). Children were praised by the staff when they would stand in front of the class to present their results, and they were explained that this could be a useful skill when getting a job in the future.

When break time had come around 11:00 AM, children lined up outside the building with a plastic cup to receive porridge with bread. They used to sit together on the grass while eating, and when they were finished they cleaned their cup in a bucket of water.

During the remainder of the day, several activities could be programmed. These included health education by a nurse, career guidance, filling out 'My plan for tomorrow', and writing letters to sponsors. The health education, to begin with, was about signalizing and preventing breast cancer, cancer of the cervix and TBC. False beliefs were also discussed. The education continued with AIDS: how it is spread, and how important it is to know your status. After this, children who agreed to be tested (which were almost all) were tested in a nearby classroom. Some parents also showed up to be tested, as they had been invited to this by the staff on forehand. The test results were anonymously made known to the concerning children and parents shortly after.

Career guidance was defined as: 'counselling about one's goals and set of objectives in order to achieve these goals'. A number of considerations for choosing a career were identified by the children: public status, contribution to society, academic performance, salary scale, and humanitarian purpose. Children were encouraged to have a dream, for example to become a doctor, even though their circumstances seem to make this difficult for them. They were advised to use the following action plan: keep around people with the same dream, seek God's kingdom, have self-esteem (know who you are), and value yourself. As possible hindrances to keeping their dream from coming true, the following were identified: the people around them (but: "if God says yes, no one can say no"), lack of faith in God, and lack of self-esteem and self-value. In addition, children were informed by the project director about what they could do to be eligible for the LDP program, which is Compassion's program for supporting university students.

An important part of their career guidance is that children are to fill out 'My plan for tomorrow'. This is a personal plan of action, whereby each child formulates goals on four areas, which conform to Compassion International's development outcomes: physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and spiritual. First, children evaluate how they have realized the goals they set for themselves some months ago. For each goal they are to mention factors that were helpful in realizing the goal, as well as obstacles that kept them from realizing it. They also have to give themselves a grade for each goal (from 1 to 10). Then they need to formulate new goals and corresponding actions for the next few months.

Writing letters to children's sponsors was another main activity. On several occasions I was asked to assist children who needed help with their letters. Children's letters were supposed to include the following: a drawing for the children in early primary school, answers to the sponsor's questions, new personal information about the child (interests, family, spiritual, etc.), a new question for the sponsor, a thank you message, and a prayer.

Next to these regular activities, children also used time to prepare for a festive event: the yearly visit of the bishop. For this purpose they practiced with pieces of drama, dances, and songs. The drama pieces were about making the right choices in life, and using their talents in a good way. On the actual day of the visit parents were also invited to attend the ceremony and see their children perform what they had practiced with.

In general I observed that during project activities the Compassion staff and other teachers tended to give the children many advises on how to behave: "abstain from sex until marriage"; "no matter how poor you are, never get involved with men with dishonest motivations"; "help your parents"; "be humble and obedient"; "if you want to be successful, you have to have a goal in your life", "finishing school is very important in order to reach your goal", and "don't let yourself be distracted, for you will lose your focus". Although some of these advises seem rather directive, they make a lot of sense in an African culture where sexual intercourse has pronounced health risks, respect for parents, teachers and other adults is appreciated, and an education greatly improves children's chances to a life without severe poverty.

6.3 The Importance of Child Sponsorship

I will focus on the importance of child sponsorship in individual children's lives by taking three narratives as a point of departure. For each narrative I will present its structure and important themes, which I will discuss in relation to the whole group of children afterwards.

6.3.1 Three Narratives

The following stories are those of Lucy (19), John (16), and David (20).[3] My reasons for choosing these three youths were the following. First, they presented more or less complete stories of their early life, the circumstances that made their life difficult, their admission to Compassion, and the transitions which have marked their lives afterwards. Second, their stories give a representative picture of the general experiences of the total group of children when it concerns the movement from a difficult life characterized by a lack of opportunities, to a better life characterized by education and possibilities for the future. Originally the stories presented here were part of longer interviews held with these youths and have been adapted in such a way as to make them briefer and more coherent. For this purpose the order of different fragments has sometimes been changed, repetitions have been omitted, and any

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[3] Participants' names and other identifiable information has been altered in order to protect their privacy.

questions or other input from the interviewer have been removed. However, when certain parts of the narratives were clearly prompted by a question asked by the interviewer, I will specify this question in parenthesis.

Lucy's story

"I was born in 1990. My father, he doesn't live with my mum. He abandoned us. So it's my mum who was supposed to cater for me since I was born. From nursery to Primary 1, she was the one who was paying for me the school fees, and… We were sleeping, it was around ten PM when my grandfather came and called me, and told me that they need me to be registered among the children who were going to be helped. But by then, my mum had gone in the hospital. My sister was sick, that one who died. So I was living here alone with my brother, we were two. So when my grandfather told me, I went at Seeta and they registered me without even my mum knowing it, because she was in hospital. She came to realize it later.

So it was me and my brother, who were living in this house. I'm the one who was caring for him. But I was given some food, I have my relatives around here, they were giving me food. In the morning we were supposed to go to school, and when I came back at around four, I prepared the meals for supper. That's how I was. Then when my mum came back she started caring for me, but the Compassion members were the one who were paying for me the school fees. So when she came, she only had the duty of caring for my siblings.

Then I joined Secondary School, it was the Compassion members who were caring for me. Senior 2, Senior 3… and then I was in Senior 3 when my father wanted to come back and start look after me. But he was giving me some conditions, and… I couldn't. 'Cause for him he just wanted me to go and live with my step mum and yet it was impossible, 'cause my elder sister was living with him and they were mistreating her. So I refused to go at my father's place, so he said that if I refused to go there he will not give me anything. So for me I refused and that's why he has refused to continue giving me support till now.

When I joined [the Compassion project], I'm no longer disturbed at the school, they cater for me. When I fell sick for example last term, OK I have a problem with my health. I don't feel very fine whenever I read books, but I was taken to the hospital and they gave me some medicine. I think that's very nice because my mum couldn't afford to cater for me when I'm sick.

About the [school] fees, when they give me the fees, my mum gets some little money, she goes and digs for some people and they pay her, and then she buys for me the scholastic materials. That's how she gets the money, the other money. (…) [How has your participation in the project affected your family?] I think it has reduced on the burden of my mum who is catering for me. 'Cause when they pay the school fees… since my mum doesn't have a job, the little money that she gets, she has to cater for my brothers. I think it has reduced on that burden on the paying of my fees and even catering for my health. When they cater for me I think my mum, the money that she gets, she just uses that money for my siblings.

[Do you have any ideas on how to help your family with the things you learn in the project?] When I get ideas from the project, I come and then I give them to my siblings and to my friends. 'Cause for example my sister, since she grew up with my step mum, she was mistreated. And then when they brought her back this way, she never wanted even to join OK to study. But with the ideas that I had got from the project I encouraged her, and now she's learning there in Kampala. I think I have encouraged her.

[What are the most important changes in your life since you entered the project?] Spiritually I changed, 'cause I was a Muslim and now I'm a born again. (...) Before I was not going at the church, but I started going to the church. They preached to me and then I came back and preached to my siblings, so they all saw God involved in the things. Due to my changing I'm now interested in the church, 'cause I participate in the Praise & Worship, and whenever I get some problems, I only read my Bible, I'll fellowship with my friends or the reverends. I think that has helped me. (…) In Joshua 1:9 it says that "Remember that I have commanded you to be determined and confident, do not be afraid or discouraged, for I the Lord your God I'm with you wherever you go". That memory verse has helped me because I get determined in what I do, 'cause whenever I get some challenges, when I read it or when I remember it, I think that I'll succeed in life. Biologically I think I also changed because I was not like this. (...) Whenever we go at the project, they give us food like the balanced diet.

[Did you find out more things about yourself in the project?] I found out many things. 'Cause at the project they taught us the skills, I didn't know that I could sew a mat, but when I entered the project they taught us. Even leadership skills, even in... in sports. I didn't know that I'm fit in playing netball but, I think I've changed. (...) 'Cause we went and participated in the class competitions, and I was given a prize. I was among the best players.

I want to be successful in life, and I expect to help other children in the village like those ones [pointing to the children standing outside the house], 'cause most of them are not schooling due to lack of school fees. So when I get a job, I think I'll help them. And also help my mother to build a house 'cause I think this one is not nice. And I also cater for my siblings, and pay for them the school fees so that they also finish up."

I identified the following relevant themes in Lucy's narrative: struggle for survival, abandonment, parental unemployment, lack of financial support, health problems, lack of care, care for others, change of life, education, religion, belonging, social relations, feeling of empowerment, and vision on a good future. These themes can frame the narrative structure of Lucy's story. The narrative structure of all three presented stories can be divided into the following three elements: life situation before entering the Compassion project (including circumstances leading to admission), life situation after entering the Compassion project (including most important life changes), and expectations for the future. When organized in this way, Lucy's narrative looks like this.

Lucy grew up in a one-parent family. Her mother has been taking care of her and her siblings, because her father has abandoned the family many years ago and has not provided them with any financial support since *(abandonment; lack of financial support)*. Although her father offered to give some support under the condition that Lucy would live with him, Lucy explains, she would be at risk of mistreatment if she did. As her mother doesn't have a regular job *(parental unemployment)*, it has been difficult for the family to pay for Lucy's and her siblings' schooling and health treatments *(struggle for survival)*, including medicine treatment for Lucy's illness *(health problems)*. Then the situation for the family became even more difficult when Lucy's little sister fell sick and had to go through a long treatment at the hospital, before she eventually died. During the period in which Lucy's sister was treated, her mother stayed in the hospital. At that time Lucy was living alone with one of her younger brothers whom she had to take care of *(lack of care; care for others)*, although relatives living in the neighbourhood could support her in her caring tasks. It was in this situation that Lucy's grandfather found out about the Compassion project that was recently started. Lucy still remembers how she was woken up by her grandfather and told that she could be "among the children who were going to be helped". So she went to the project and got registered.

After being registered in the project, Lucy's school fees were paid by Compassion *(education)*. According to Lucy, this helped reducing the financial burden for her mother who now only has to take care of Lucy's siblings. Next to that, Lucy now receives proper medicines for her illness. One of the most important changes in her life since entering the project is that she changed spiritually *(change of life)*. She became Christian, started attending church and participating in a church choir *(religion; belonging)*. Reading from the Bible and being together with Christian friends has helped her to solve her problems and to get determined in what she does *(social relations; feeling of empowerment)*. Next to spiritual change Lucy speaks about biological change, meaning that she improved physically due to the meals received at the project. She has also been able to develop practical skills, leadership skills and athletic skills.

Lucy has hopeful expectations for the future. She expects to get a job and be successful in life *(feeling of empowerment; vision on a good future)*. Having experienced care by herself, she now has a vision to care for others including her mother, siblings, and other children in the village.

John's story

"I'm John. I joined the project when I was eight years, and I was in Primary 1. But at first, my father died in 2002. By the time he died he had already lost the job, because he was working in the Bank of Uganda by the time of Idi Amin's regime. When Idi Amin was overthrown, another president came, that is Obote. When he came, he took power. He ordered all the Bagandas to move outside. So he lost the job, he came back in our village, and he started doing some little farming, and my mother also she was a farmer. So they didn't have enough money for supporting me, in my education. So they decided to stay, they decided keeping on farming, working in other people's farms, so that they can receive some money for supporting us.

So when I was in primary 1, God favoured me and he… We heard the project which they have set up in our areas. My mother, she was in the village, she was doing some little farming when a friend of my mother heard they have set up a project here in our area. So while I was in school, she decided to call me. They did some little arrangement and took me there at the project. And they decided also to, they favoured me, and they wrote my name on those who are going to be supported. Then from all the process, taking all the photos, and everything finished, they… God also helped me, and I got a sponsor. So he started also taking a part of responsibility of my parents, paying the school fees and he, of course he sent for me some little gifts. And I became happy, and he continued to supporting me up till now, because he started when I was in Primary 1, and now I'm in Senior 3. So I thank God for that. (…) It's God's grace for me to study, and even to survive and to live.

So my vision in life, I want to be a judge. That's what I'm aiming to be in the future. Reasons why I like that, is that the injustice which is in Uganda, they presidents, the way how they behave towards their fellow members… you know in Uganda we have tribes. But you may find that if a president comes into the power, he doesn't favour other people's tribes. He cares only for him and his tribes. So that's one reason which is forcing me to study about the laws, and even to become a judge such that I can maintain justice in the country.

And another thing which I want also in our country, is the employment. Whereby in our country, if some… it goes on even our president which we are having right now. You may find that those outside countries, they send in Uganda the little help to support these… like me, the fellows which can't supports ourselves. Like even those patients who are suffering from AIDS, but you may find that this government we have into power, they decided to take all the money, and those are the kind of the reasons which really hurt my, which really affect my heart. They just use [the money], they just eat it! They don't even support these… poor. They don't matter, they just take the money and they divide it by them, they divide it each by them so they don't support these, they don't help these fellows.

So… if I go back on my life, I have forgotten, is that my life it wasn't, it is not easy. When I was from five years up to eight we were somewhere there in the village, but really, the life was difficult before I came here and joined the project. We used to sleep on the ground whereby we just put there the mat like this [referring to the mat we are sitting on], and we sleep, so even the door it wasn't…

We were just sleeping on the open place, we had the little, this muddy houses, eh? If you know those houses whereby there is no door, anything can happen without knowing what is going on. So life it wasn't good, up to… right now, because of the Compassion.

By the time I joined the project, the first thing, before I joined that project… was for me to become a Christian. I thought it had something which is senseless, eh? It doesn't make sense. (…) But when I joined the project, and the way how they have been treating us, to love God, and how to behave towards other people… Because for me I've told you, I grew up in the, I grew up in the life which is not good. We used to stay there in the bush, whereby you take long to associate with other people, do you see that problem? I wouldn't like other people. But after joining it, really, God helped me through the project and other counselling people they bring to us, and really… we used, they told us the ways how to associate with others. Because for me at first I didn't know anything, how can I bring other people, how can I talk to them, how can I create relationships with them? (…) Now for me here, through the project, because there we associate with anybody who comes in, and we share ideas, and do everything, we're together, so I really, I thank that because… I have learned to create relationships, and creating friends, through the project. Such that now, now it's not difficult for me to talk with my sisters, my brothers, my mum...

And another thing which is financial or economically, they're encouraging us to do some little… some little odd jobs at home, like paltering, and maybe setting up a garden there for yourself, whereby if you run into any problem, you can sell anything which you are having, to save you, that is… that also had helped us to, and also it has contributed so much on our employment, financially. That is the fact.

And another thing from the project, it's the health of mine. Because by the time I joined the project, I've told you I've already come from the village whereby we used to eat something, which, even if it's rotten, but it's a matter of cleaning it with your hands and you eat. You may find that you have a lot of, I had a lot of diseases in my body. Malaria… you know those, those funny diseases from the poor, if you've been living in the society which doesn't take care of having any important thing, that those are the sign the kind of problems. So really I have benefitted from them, they have been treating us, this eye problem. Now I have my eyes and they have a problem, each year they have… they have to suffer, I don't know what kind of disease, and I have to go there at the project and they treat me.

And another thing from the project is the way how can we… the solution to my challenges which I face in life, you know? You know for us Africans, with such problems concerning body changes, we don't talk to our parents… it's the difficult thing. If I face anything on my body, which is a problem, it's very difficult for me to tell my parent that I have this and this. But for you, you are lucky that you talk to, we heard that you talk to your parents, yeah? But here in Africa, we don't have such. I feel more comfortable to talk to my fellow-members, all the challenges which I face physically, everything, and I talk to them, through the conferences which the Compassion organises to us.

I like my sponsor, and also he likes me. Really they have shown me a good heart, and even love. He makes sure that each year, at least, he sends for me any letter, and even the first, and even the birthday gift, he sends for me that, and he, after receiving that, my heart then... I become more happy, and even the way how he is communicating to me, he puts there some little courageous, courageous words towards me. And I get to know, I… accept the situation which I'm moving in, because the courageous words which he puts, the words which he wrote there keep on building me.

I used to use this whatever, this scripture in the Bible where it is in Hebrews, 11 verse 1, it says faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. You know for me I have that belief whereby I'm believing that God will help me and help very important persons in this nations, such that I can promote good justice, and being faithful to other fellow-members who I'm staying with. And also I want to help other people, because also for me, I have been staying just, I have been living with just the help from other people.

You know, apart from spiritual, my best eh… how can I say it, my best and lovely… let me say my best thing in life is politics. I like such, because also I have a friend who is very good in politics. (...) So we are, after our studies, if God enables us, really we are there to see that we are changing our nations. (…) If we don't maintain justice in our country, also they [our children] face at the same problem, which would be very worse for them."

I identified the following relevant themes in John's narrative, which can frame the narrative structure of his story: parental unemployment and death, lack of financial support, health problems, struggle for survival, injustice, politics, change of life, education, religion, social relations, sponsor relations, encouragement, feeling of empowerment, ambition, and vision on a good future. The narrative structure of John's story looks like this.

John grew up in a remote village with his siblings and parents. Typical for John's narrative is that he places his story within a political context, whereby he expresses his concerns about the government neglecting the poor, and the injustice in his country following from the tribal system *(politics; injustice)*. His father, who passed away when John was still young, had worked in the city many years ago. Due to his tribal background he was fired and forced to move back to the village *(parental unemployment and death)*. After this, both of his parents became dependent on farming to earn their living, making it impossible to pay for their children's education *(lack of financial support; education)*. John's makes it clear that his life was difficult before he entered the project. It was not only characterized by a lack of proper housing, unhealthy food and illness *(struggle for survival; health problems)*, but also by a lack of social capital and communication skills *(social relations)*. When he had just started primary school, his mother heard about the Compassion project that was set up. John

remembers that she called him while he was at school and took him to the project to get registered. After joining the Compassion project and receiving a sponsor who supported him, John "became happy" *(change of life)*.

One of the first changes that John encountered after being in the project was that he became a Christian *(religion)*. This helped him in particular to learn about social norms, enabling him to create friendships with peers *(social relations)*. These friendships are an important resource for him, as they contribute to finding solutions to problems which are traditionally not discussed with parents. In addition to its social value, John's faith also motivates him to contribute to a better situation for his country *(feeling of empowerment; ambition)*. Another positive contribution to his life situation is the communication with his sponsor, whereby the letters John received "keep on building" him *(sponsor relation; encouragement)*. Furthermore John's health improved because of the treatment he received, and he learned practical skills in order to improve the family economics.

Because John has been living "just with the help from other people", he is determined to help others. His vision for the future is to promote justice in the country, so that the next generation would not face the same problems as the present one. Therefore he aims to become a judge or a political leader *(vision on a good future)*.

David's story

"I was born by both of my parents, my mum was there and my dad was there. I was born in 1989, in the hospital, but I can't remember the name of the hospital. My parents were happy, that is what they say they were happy to receive me, yeah. Then life began there where I grew up, she [mother] used to be working, she was a primary teacher. She was working by that time when she produced me. Up till now she is working, still teaching. She used to carry me towards… You know it's very hectic, teaching and having a baby is very hectic. She used to be with me, a hard working lady, that's why I appreciate them.

What I remember is that I used to like singing, and that's why my uncles told me that, you boy eh! You used to sing for us every night, used to dance! When they were going to have meals, especially at supper I used to sing for them. I used to entertain them from nowhere, of which I can't now remember that I did. Then, when it came to… I grew up from one year, two years, crying… you now very many things. I joined nursery section, she was a teacher she told me how to write, she used to cane me my hands, "write well!" To teach me to coach me every time as I used to go home, she used to encourage me to write and I started nursery for one year. Another year, she told the teacher to promote me to P1. I started studying. I used to perform well from that time.

It was 1998, I was in P3. (…) And then another mum, she informed my mum that Compassion in Seeta was advertising for sponsorship of the children. Then that

mum wrote my name and she contacted my mum, she told both of us to come. We were there, they wrote our name… And good enough, the reverend knew my mum. She knew my mum because my mum used to go to that church, she used to sing in that choir. And my dad used to work in that same area. My mum was a primary teacher and my dad used to work as a headmaster, in the government Secondary School. After the death of my father, the father's relatives chased us from their family and I was not given any care since 1998. The reverend she knew everything, so she included my name and I was among the children who were registered in Compassion International.

Then, 1998, we started, when I was registered as a child in the Compassion, then the Compassion fully operated in 1999. We started receiving… attending every centre days, and they used to teach us everything, many things, we used to learn, they used to sing, they used to teach us how to write letters, we used to come and do very many things at the project. And more so they used to organize the conferences, where they used to take us to teach, to preach, where they used to take us and we hear the word of God. (…) We used to eat, come the project, eat everything we had, we used to celebrate birthdays, every month we used to celebrate birthday parties. Yeah every month, they called a list, children who are on to this, we are celebrating. They used to celebrate for us. And what I remember they used… they the Compassion, used to pay our fees, and beside our fees, it used to pay all the other school requirements, they used to provide us books, as we were going to, when we were about to start school. Books, pens, buy our school uniforms (…) and… what actually entertained everyone is that we received from the project blankets, mattresses, and that thing amused every people in the town. Because they handed our mattresses and as young as we were, we used to go, we… everyone was give his mattress and handed it direct home, carrying it on the head, you know? It's very funny!

More, we continue, I grew up, I was now happy, I got in P5, P6, up to my primary I passed well, I joined Senior School, and… (…) in 2005, I actually started seeing some of the important thing in my life towards, from Compassion, and that was accepting, Christ as my personal Saviour and Lord. I was seeing Compassion impacting my life on that thing. And that was what, which is like my turning point, I accepted him as my personal saviour and Lord, for you have to thank Compassion but you have to thank more the church. That turning point which is accepting Christ as Saviour, it paved the way, towards me. It widened my heart. From there, I actually started out to read I get access to know and read more about the Bible. I can read the Bible I memorize some of the memory verses, to use in each and every challenge that I go through. My favourite one is Philippians 4:13: "I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me." When you have Christ in your heart, you can do it!

I feel as in my behaviour, my life has changed socially, I changed the way I always interacted with people, I started giving them the respect they deserve, I also started giving myself the respect I had, I… became honest, I had to be… associable with everyone, I had to be a very good listener, towards the... towards each and everything. They tell me mány things, because if you put your turn and accept Christ as my your personal Saviour and Lord, you have to make a very big

difference to everyone. Everyone has to look at you and say eh! This person accepted Christ. So you have to make a difference.

I often get letters [from my sponsor] and that is the way we talk. If I get a letter, I just feel that my sponsor still loves me, cares for me, and has the heart of Christ in him. I feel happy, I… we pray together. Because in the letters I receive I read them, he always encourages me that he's… He always tells me that in their family they still remember me in their prayers, and that is a wish of me. I also remember them in my prayers, regularly. Our connection is very good. I receive photo's, I receive letters, sometimes stickers, sometimes cards, a card like a Christmas card, which is… which weighs much. Yeah, our relationship is good, we are connected towards each other, and whenever I write a letter he comments about me, telling me that you've grown, your writing has véry improved… he's very appreciative.

Compassion has paved my way towards… leadership, leadership skills. I was advised to be a leader. And one time, I was a food store manager at the project, and another time I was selected as a what, the head boy of the project. I was selected in 2000… I think in 2000, and I liked it very much. When you're a leader, it makes you very active, to love each and everything and because you have to be exemplary. And a second thing… Compassion has paved my way to my plan for tomorrow which is my career. And, beyond that, all, to add on that is that Compassion has at least contributed, has been… there for me in each and every situation that I have been going through. It has been there to pay my medical fees, and the most important when it has been there to pay my school fees, part of my school fees, which has excited my mum, at least to also contribute the little she's having to top up the fees and I continue with my school work. Compassion has been there for me, and their paying or their contributing the little they have, have made me, to at least get to know English. Paying my school fees has led me to find myself somewhere. But, finding myself somewhere is… being happy with the English I have, though I haven't reached my dream, and that is the greatest thing Compassion is aiming. Because it's aiming to each and everyone to fulfil their plan for tomorrow, what will you become in the future.

I want to become an engineer, or an accountant, but my vision was becoming an engineer. If I become an accountant, it will be like the money, because engineer you take four years, accountant you take three years. And what will be your desire you'll do your desire your career in some five years to come, you become a responsible self, a responsible what, child. That is now I'm seeing Compassion uplifting me from where I was caught up, reaching to some extent… and reaching to the final thing.

I'm so grateful for what [name of the former PD] did. She was the one, she used to come and encourage us. I'm aiming, I finished now Senior six, I applied my LDP [Leadership Development Program] I applied for interviews, although I didn't go through I will still have faith, because I know with Christ in my heart I can smile at the storm [this is a children's song], I can come and… I can smile at the storm my storm is not going through but He Christ, is giving me another chance, another plan for me, where to go. He's looking for me, He's seeing me, He's seeing that I will go somewhere."

In David's' story I found the following themes to be relevant: joy, parental guidance, parental death, lack of care, change of life, education, religion, belonging, encouragement, resilience, social relations, respect, sponsor relation, connectedness, leadership, feeling of empowerment, and vision on a good future. David's narrative can be structured in the following way.

David first describes a warm relationship with his family members. Singing, dancing, and entertaining the family during meals was common *(joy)*. His mother, who is a teacher, has been closely involved with his scholastic development *(parental guidance)*. But after the death of his father *(parental death)*, his situation changed. He and his mother were chased away from their properties by the father's relatives, and David no longer received sufficient care *(lack of care)*. David remembers how another mother informed his mother about the Compassion project advertising for children. The reverend at the project was already familiar with the family's situation and so David was admitted.

Now David could join project activities like singing, writing letters, taking part in conferences, eating, and celebrating birthdays. In a way these activities are a continuation of his early home situation when it comes to being educated and expressing joy, but seen in the context of his participation in the Compassion project they may have had a wider meaning for David. He also notes the importance of receiving a contribution to his school fees *(education)*. The support David received from the project made that he "was now happy" *(change of life)*. But there was an even bigger turning point in his life: the acceptance of Christianity as his personal religion, or in his own words "accepting Christ as my personal Saviour and Lord" *(religion; belonging)*. For David, his faith is a major incentive to keep pursuing his goals in life in the face of adversities *(encouragement; resilience)*. The choice of his favourite Bible verse: "I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me", illustrates this well. Being a Christian, according to David, also means that you have to make a difference to others. So he changed in the way in which he communicated with people *(social relations)* and started to respect others as well as himself *(respect)*. David experiences a close relationship with his sponsor, to whom he feels connected *(sponsor relation, connectedness)*. The practice of praying for each other illustrates this personal involvement in each others lives. A final way in which Compassion contributed positively to David's life is that he had the ability to develop leadership skills *(leadership, feeling of empowerment)*.

David's plan for the future is to become an engineer. Even though he realizes that this may not happen right away, he is confident that he will eventually succeed in life *(vision on a good future)*.

By comparing these three narratives with each other, a number of common themes appear which also recur in the life stories of the remaining twelve participants. When telling about their lives before entering the Compassion project, all participants speak of a difficult life characterized by parental death, unemployment, and/or abandonment together with a lack of care and/or financial support. After being admitted to the project, their lives take a positive turn. For around one third of the subjects, this turn was explicitly marked by their acceptance of the Christian religion. For them religion is seen as a door-opener to a new life. Although the remaining participants do not explicitly define religion in such a way, all but two clearly express the importance of religion in helping them to cope with their daily lives. After religion, education is mentioned by the same number of participants as an important way in which participation in the Compassion project changed their lives. A smaller number of participants mention the development of new social relations as a positive contribution of the project on their lives. When speaking about the relationship with their sponsor, at least two thirds of the children describe a warm relationship characterized by love, care and/or friendship. Finally, for all children their participation in the Compassion project means that they can look forward to a good future, whereby they feel empowered to reach their goals.

6.4 The Project's Family Impact

A first way in which the project can impact on the children's families, is by reducing the financial burden of their parents (mentioned explicitly by five out of fifteen children). By supporting one child with school fees, parents have more money left to spend on school fees for the others siblings, as was explained earlier by Lucy:

> "I think [the project] has reduced on the burden of my mum who is catering for me. 'Cause when they pay the school fees… since my mum doesn't have a job, the little money that she gets, she has to cater for my brothers. I think it has reduced on that burden on the paying of my fees and even catering for my health. When they cater for me I think my mum, the money that she gets, she just uses that money for my siblings."

It appears that parents can find additional ways of obtaining school fees for their children that are not supported by Compassion. Some children for example reported that relatives like uncles are helping out with paying school fees for other children in the family. If supported in such additional ways, the money parents earn with their small (farming) may could then be

enough to pay for the remaining part of their children's school fees. Around half of the interviewed children explicitly mentioned that their siblings had enough support.

This may be an important reason why nearly all children reported that their participation in the Compassion project is not affecting their siblings in a negative way, and that they have never experienced any jealousy or envy from their siblings towards them (one girl even laughs at the very idea of it). An exception to this is one 16-year old boy, who gave a more ambivalent account. While he reported that his participation in the project did not affect his siblings, the tone at which he repeated his siblings' words may reflect some envy among them: "It has not affected them because, even sometimes they tell, haven't you gone to the Compassion? But I don't care." Nevertheless, most children reported excitement and happiness among their siblings because at least one person in their family has been given hopeful opportunities for the future. In this way, this person may eventually be able to support them as well. Like this 17-year old girl (with younger siblings) expressed: "They're very happy because they know one day I'll achieve my goal, and help them."

Furthermore, as will also become clear from the next section on community impact, it appears that the Compassion children are distributing things they learn at the project to their siblings (and friends). One 13-year old girl did this for example by making a small list of things taught on a project day, and bringing this list home to her family members "where they can interpret for their selves". Most often the children speak about the Biblical lessons and the behavioural values they learned (being obedient, well-disciplined, assertive, or honest). Also the importance of the education and planning for one's future is passed on to siblings, as was also reported by Lucy:

> "When I get ideas from the project, I come and then I give them to my siblings and to my friends. 'Cause for example my sister, since she grew up with my step mum, she was mistreated. And then when they brought her back this way, she never wanted even to join OK to study. But with the ideas that I had got from the project I encouraged her, and now she's learning there in Kampala. I think I have encouraged her."

A final way in which children are viewing the project's impact on their families is that through their education and consequently improved chances to getting a well-paid job, they may be able to help their families (and other people) in the future. Nearly all children expressed this, among them this 19-year old female:

"As I learned from Compassion that, they help the needy, like me. So I hope after finishing my studies, for sure I know, in God's name I'll get a job, and when it's a paying job, I plan to help my… There's my sister who gave birth to a little kid who has been here with me, and I feel like, because her dad died, and as for now she can't look after her well, but if I gain money in the future I'll look after her. And when they are not relatives to me, those people, I think I hope to help them, as I have been helped, also."

In other words, most children feel that they are empowered to care. Nevertheless, when the same topic came up in a focus group discussion one girl was more sceptical about this way of helping relatives, saying "But how can you help, when they have grown up?" By the time a sponsored child has finished school and earned money, siblings and friends would already have grown up without an education. So this help may come too late for them. Moreover, it is difficult to say something about the actual chances of the children getting a job that would pay enough for supporting their family members. But if they do manage to earn enough money for helping out their family members, it is reasonable to assume that they will keep up to their promises. It may be more common in Uganda than in Western cultures to offer financial support to less fortunate relatives as people are expected to take responsibility for the well-being of their relatives. Perhaps this characteristic of Ugandan as well as other African families may contribute positively to the impact on a whole family of supporting one of its members.

6.5 The Project's Community Impact

6.5.1 Spreading the Project's Benefits to the Community

Acting as examples of 'good behaviour' to others

Religion (Christianity) is seen by the children as a key condition in order to have an impact on their communities. However, what becomes clear is that the children put most emphasis on the behavioural aspects of being a Christian. Changing one's social practices is seen as a logical consequence of adopting the Christian faith, and children seem to see themselves first and foremost as examples to other children on how to behave.

"I entered Compassion when I was seven years. But I'm changed, mainly in the Christian life. (…) And if someone sees you that you're from a poor background, and he's also the same, and he sees you changed, he can also be forced to change."

> "You live a changed life, for example at school you can say that everyone lives his own life, but you live as a Christian, so someone can trust you, maybe tell you something, …"

When speaking about this change in social practices, children use highly moralistic expressions like 'good', 'bad', or 'immoral'. Being in a Christian project has changed them 'from were they were' into 'good' children. This value-laden way of speaking has been evident in all conversations with the children. It might in part be explained by the way in which adults practice authority over children in Ugandan culture, and perhaps in part by the sometimes dangerous conditions in which children in the area may be living whereby a clear conception of 'what to do and what to leave' can protect them from harm.

> "Many children in the community nowadays, they're not working they're not going to school, they're there being there, they develop some… bad habits like stealing. So the impact of us being in the project, some of us are changed from where they were, to good children. Because it's a Christian thing."

Providing counselling to fellow teenagers

> "We provide some counselling. As we are counselled, we also learn how to counsel others. So if someone gets a problem you can maybe put here down, tell him something or what, so he benefits from us."

> "We get a chance to preach to fellow teenagers, eh? Tell them of what you experience, so they put their trust in you, in that if someone is going through a hard time, she can come and say [name of child] this and this, so you can explain and tell her, no matter what the situation is you can still move out of it, but because of where we are from, because of the things we are taught, that makes… us to go and take the gospel out to others who are not having the same chance we are having."

Children in the project experience that they are able to support fellow teenagers who may be 'going through a hard time' because being the project has taught them how to counsel others. Because project children may have been in similar (difficult) situations as their peers but have learned ways to move out of it, they feel that they find themselves in a good position to offer some guidance to them. It is not surprisingly that this counselling is closely linked to Christianity, as the children repeatedly expressed that it was the Christian faith that helped them to overcome their difficulties.

Obtaining trust from others in the community

> "We've got the trust from those people in the villages, the community, 'cause when they hear that what Compassion they know that you're good, you can't do anything bad. So they have our trust and… Let me say an old lady there can send you to go buy something, she knows that you might bring, you have to bring the bananas, because… let me say we're trusted."

It appeared that the children in the Compassion project feel that they have a reputation in their villages of being trustworthy, and they experiences that other people ask them to do certain jobs for them. This idea of being trusted was expressed several times by children in the focus groups and also ran through the previous topics addressed. Again this is linked to Christianity, since all participating children considered being 'God-fearing' a necessary condition for earning the reputation of being a trustworthy person.

Using acquired leadership skills on a community level

> "For my case I've been a compound prefect here, so I got those leadership skills, then I had to go and inspire others to go into leadership, because you never know, some of us are going to be the presidents, the ministers,… so we use those skills and go to teach them to the other students."

> "You can be a responsible person in the community, maybe you can become the chairman or what, or even a doctor, so it's benefiting."

> "OK more connected to the above, they benefit but especially those ones who are close to the project centre. Because sometimes we don't move, we just be around our own communities, so we just benefit this ones who are surrounding us."

Many children feel that being able to practice leadership skills at the project prepares them to help their community later on, when they may have been able to get responsible functions in their village. The most ambitious among them are even aiming at important political functions. Contrary to that, one girl (the third citation above) holds the opinion that effects on their communities are mainly limited to those areas close to the Compassion project centre, which are the areas in which the children themselves live.

Teaching livelihood and academic skills to others

> "I think the community has benefitted, whereby when the project involves us in the livelihood skills like sewing the mats, so when you go back home we teach our younger brothers and sisters (…) who teach the others, therefore they also learn."

> "We people who are educated, we behave as an example for them [the 'illiterates in this society'], and they learn from us."

Children in the project seem to be willing to teach the practical skills like sewing mats or tailoring as well as the reading skills they have gained through the project to their siblings or friends. Although it is impossible to assess to what extent this would happen in reality, two pictures from the children's photo reports (Appendix 6) show a sponsored child reading together with younger siblings or friends.

Being involved in community work

> "Sometimes we organize groups, as project children. We go out, we can pick the community, the surroundings. We clean, we slash around people's homes, where they benefit in that where those bushes have been cleared, there's a chance of them not suffering from Malaria. We can clean the wells, as in being good Samaritans. In that way they also benefit. (…) They [sponsored children] enter this in that they will be protected, they won't be in the community doing some things which are bad eh, like fighting."

Most of the children that participated in the focus groups mentioned that they are involved in certain 'community work' clubs. Hereby they go out into their communities and do certain jobs like cleaning the surroundings and helping the 'old' or 'disabled' with daily tasks like fetching water. It is interesting to see that being involved in this kind of community work can have two sides for the children, as the above citation illustrates: first of all they feel that it helps the people in their communities, and secondly they feel that it prevents the children themselves of spending their free time hanging around their village and doing 'things which are bad'. What also becomes clear from this citation is a religious motivation for helping other people, as this child compares herself with the biblical figure of the 'good Samaritan'.

Uniting people from different religions

> "Our being in the project has helped us to unite people of different religions. You can find that for me, I'm a Catholic, and this one's a Muslim, but now we are united in one… religion like this."

Children seem to feel that being in the Compassion project has helped them to create better relationships between people with different religious backgrounds. They express that they would not have had the chance to be friends with people from outside their own religion in their daily lives if it was not for Compassion. Schools, for instance, are often separated along religious lines. Yet the above citation shows a remarkable contradiction. While people from

different religious are united in the project, the project only practices one religion: Christianity. Although some children with other than Christian backgrounds stick to their own religion, it is viewed by many children that become a Christian is desirable. I will further elaborate on this topic in section 6.7 about the role of religion.

6.5.2 Relating to Not-Sponsored Children

Shame and concern

> "It's just a chance of God [to be in the project], because we are many, I think it is planned by God, because you know there are many students out there, who are yearning towards to be in the project, but they can't… But I think it is a God give plan, or a chance eh? To be in the project."

Children in the project are aware of the large numbers of poor children in their community that wish to be supported by the project as well, and they see their own admittance as a chance given by God. However, this privilege they have is also causing feelings of shame towards those children who may be equally needy but didn't get this 'chance', as the following boy expresses when he sees other, probably hungry children staring at them while they are having lunch at the project.

> "For example on the food part, I see okay, I see some children passing by, they look this side, we are eating, (…) how did you get that chance, we want to join, but we can't now. They also get as if… OK let me see, ashamed of, I don't know even how to term it but, as in we need them also to be in the project, other than just standing there looking at us, when we are consuming our… yeah."

Most of the children in the focus groups express that they are concerned about the children who don't have the same chances as they have, especially when it comes to education and health care. The following girl for example expresses her concern about the children at school who have to go through a lot of trouble for getting their school fees, and states that she feels bad about this.

> "At school, those ones, the fees defaulters, are asked to leave the what, the school. And bring the money that they what, that they have to pay. But us, the Compassion students, were not chased out from school. So we compensate in our books, and yet for them they are moving up and down looking for school fees, some fetch water, others dig, in order to get the what, the school fees. (…) We feel very bad [about that], because even those ones, they need… a chance to get the money so that they may attend the studies."

Social stigma in and outside school

> "OK, for me, if I came these ends, we were still in the [name of town] project, but… I was a bit young, but we used to be like five, moving in a group where from the project going back home, so... some children who are not in the project, but in that community, used to say that: you orphans! That it's a team who supports orphans, those ones who are less fortuned. So they used to say we go there to eat eggs, because every morning, we just eat eggs eh?"

> "Back in the days when they had just started with the Compassion thing, people were like, are those ones orphans? Why should they be helped eh?"

> "We were somehow humiliated you'll be like, why should I go there everybody is looking at me, abusing me, others are sending every kind of pity. There are those who pity you, but in a good way, but they're those who pity you in a bad way."

Children describe that during the time that the project had just started and people in the community were not yet familiar with it, they were sometimes humiliated on their way to the project. People would for instance say that they 'go there to eat eggs', which is a luxury that most families cannot afford. Because their participation in the project revealed the children's status as 'less fortunate' children or 'orphans' (they were supposed to wear a project uniform), social stigmatisation could easily occur. It becomes clear that helping an 'orphan' was not accepted by everyone. This stigmatization also happened at school, as the following quotations illustrate.

> "But for those kids who just joined here, when you get to school people would be like, are those project people being sponsored? And would be like, why you're a child of a, you're a needy child don't come amongst us, you're needy. Or some people would be like, hmm lucky you, you get all you need. When you're in need, when you need to share something with someone somebody would be like, you don't also have this, I thought you rich people have this. And you'd feel out of place."

> "When I was also in O-level eh? We used to remain at the gate. If you don't give school fees in time you remain at the gate. So they have to read the names of those who paid, they enter, you remain outside. So sometimes we would remain there, then they come with our receipt. Or with anything which is bearing the names. So they would read the names from one maybe to ten, those of Compassion. But when you are entering someone would say a word, and you feel he's big for you, maybe he would say, those are orphans what, what eh? And sometimes, a person who would say that would have remained at the gate. Hmm, so you just laugh at him."

> "Yes because as you'd stigmatised all that kind of thing, you're achieving some, you're earning something, you're being paid for the school fees, and it's on a sure deal that if you feel focused, you will get something in the future."

It appeared that children were sometimes avoided at school, because they were labelled as a 'needy child' because of the support they received through Compassion. However, most children stated that they were not that much bothered by this, they just 'laugh it off' because they know that they're 'aiming at something', which Compassion helps them to reach. In addition, all but one of the children claimed that they were only having this kind of bad experiences in the beginning years of Compassion, and that their participation in the project has become accepted among their classmates now.

6.6 The Child-Sponsor Relationship

6.6.1 General Evaluation of the Child-Sponsor Relationship

All children that were interviewed experienced a positive relationship with their sponsor, often using phrases like "we love each other". They express great appreciation towards the sponsor for the support they receive from them, especially when they have had the same sponsor for many years. When children talked about their sponsors, I did not observe any stereotype perception of them as being very rich and leading lives free from troubles, as might have been expected. One 16-year old boy for example expresses that "they do all their best whereby they send the little which they are having to us", and a 19-year old girl described being "very touched" when her sponsor wrote her that he had lost one of his children. Children express their concern for the sponsor's family's well-being, and expect the sponsor to do the same for them and their families. One 18-year old boy said that "a day cannot pass without of thinking of that family. And I always pray for them, and I know that one day, maybe we shall meet, and see each other." Praying for each other seems to be important for many children, as it may create a feeling of connectedness between sponsor and child and reflects the sponsor's commitment to the child's well-being.

The communication between child and sponsor is base wholly on the practice of exchanging letters, which are appreciated much by the children as the citation below illustrates. However, being fully dependent on exchanging letters with a sponsor in order to develop a relationship with this person may have some negative consequences for those children who don't (regularly) receive letters, as will be become clear from the following section.

> "Our relationship is very good, we communicate together, although I don't see him but our communication is in the writing. When a child receives a letter you

feel very great. You feel that your sponsor loves, remembers you, has been for you, and he actually likes… have to smile yeah, that I have my sponsor, I have a caring one."

6.6.2 Letters

Positive aspects of the letter exchanges

"Let me say most of them, according to me, I like it because at least you get a chance to talk to someone who's like a friend."

"She puts some funny words, and funs on the letters, and she can make funs with me, how I look like and they put... [laughs] (…) And she also likes me so much. When I write a letter when it has problems, she replies it back quickly. And that's a good thing. For her, she replies it quickly she doesn't delay. She brings and she says sorry what like that, to counsel me she tries to counsel when, she has written on the letter."

"...and even the way how he is communicating to me, he puts there some little courageous, courageous words towards me. And I get to know, I… accept the situation which I'm moving in, because the courageous words which he puts, the words which he wrote there keep on building me."

"My sponsor, he also encourages me to read hard so that I may (...) my future plans, he also encourages me to be a good, caring person, and he also encourages me to respect my parents and... he also sends greetings to my parents in the letter, and I show it to my parents, this one, and they enjoy reading them."

Many different aspects were mentioned by the children when asked what they liked about the letters. First of all, children may feel that writing letters to their sponsor gives them at least a chance to talk to someone "who's like a friend", as the 13-year old boy in the first citation above put it. A 13-year old girl (second citation) likes it when her sponsor puts some "funny words" in the letters, and appreciates the quick responses and counselling she gets when she has notified her sponsor of some problems. Several children described how their sponsor's comforting or encouraging words helped them to overcome difficult situations or to focus on the future. The 'memory verses' are another aspect of the letters that is very much appreciated. These are short texts from the Bible which can be learned by heart (a common practice at Christian schools in Uganda) and are meant to be helpful to the children by for example giving them a positive self-image and hope for the future.

Negative aspects of the letter exchanges

"Those letters are good. They become bad if those people don't reply. They say eh! After all we write, but for them they don't reply, now, why do you write? Let me stop writing."

The practice of exchanging letters itself is thus seen a something positive by the children, but it can have negative consequences if children's sponsors are not participating in the letter writing. The next citations illustrate some of those consequences.

> "They loose that interest whereby you may write a letter, and your sponsor is taking a long time without any reply, eh? You think that your sponsor is not loving you. (…) Maybe you are forced to come [to the project] by your parent [in order to write a letter], but when you are not feeling it from your heart, eh? You can't write."

> "These students they wrote letters, and they sent them to their sponsors. But they feel guilty and shy if the sponsor doesn't respond. (…) So they start losing interest in writing letters, something they started to dodge, you know? Sort of that… so what I'm trying to contribute is that, it is not a command, eh? But I'm just discussing, is that if we write letters and we send them the sponsors, maybe they should try their best to see that they respond, maybe like sending gifts, or any letter, any letter! To make our hearts happy."

These negative consequences can first of all include feelings. Some expressed feeling "guilty and shy" when they have written a letter to their sponsor and are not getting a reply, and one child even mentioned "getting scared" when not getting a letter. Next to feelings, changes in social practices may also occur as a consequence of a lacking response from the side of the sponsor. These may even include no longer attending school or project activities. These negative reactions are likely to be enforced by the kind of relationship children have with their sponsors: they don't just view them as providers of material support but as persons who love them and are committed to their wellbeing. Because of the desirability of such a personal relationship, children may get feelings of personal rejection when a reciprocal letter exchange is not taking place. As is illustrated by the first citation above, they may think that their sponsor is not loving them.

6.6.3 Gifts

Difficulties related to the unequal distribution of gifts among children

> "Some children who take long to receive gifts… they have that mind, that maybe their sponsors quit sponsoring them, and they feel like, maybe my sponsor has forgotten about me."

> "And maybe, some cases… you may be blessed eh? And then when someone does not get a gift she'll say "why me!", so she also stops to come."

"But if you are not even blessed, and by the way if you don't even trust in God, if you pray… and if that someone does not take everything, serious, she will not take part in the prayers. So, she'll, can I say, she'll be like, why should I go to the centre? I'm not… chosen from the many."

The same problem as with the letters is also applicable to the situation with the gifts: when children rarely or never receive a gift from their sponsor, they may loose interest in coming to the project. Children may interpret the fact that they are not receiving gifts as being forgotten by the sponsor (who in the children's minds is someone who supposed to love them, like I explained above), or being 'not blessed' or 'not chosen from the many'. Because children may easily interpret the receiving of gifts as a blessing from God, their religious beliefs and practices may be influenced in a negative way in a situation where they don't receive gifts, which eventually might harm their self-image. In addition to loosing interest in project or religious activities, another consequence of the arbitrariness which characterizes the practice of sending sponsor gifts is that jealousy can easily arise between those children who receive big gifts and those who receive small gifts or nothing at all, as the citations below illustrate. One boy (last citation below) even thinks that out of jealousy, someone can do "a bad thing" towards a project child who has received a gift.

"OK, for me what I say, if one child receives a gift eh? And another one does not, I think… the other one who couldn't receive the gift, will feel a bit… some jealous towards the other one eh? Cause, for her or he, has not got that gift, yet the other one is having. So I think that's… difficult."

"And maybe even the difference… between the gifts. Let me say, someone would be given a very large sum, then another one, let me say, gets little. So… this is why I wish I was the one so we start… doubting, yeah."

"And I think that if a child who gets money from the sponsor, then that if it's too much, and you can share for the family, the whole family and this one doesn't get. I think this one can do a bad thing to the other one. Because this one has not given that money."

Difficulties related to how to spend gift money within the family

It appears form the children's discussions that tensions can arise between a sponsored child, and his or her parents (and other family members) when a decision has to be taken on how to spend the received gift money. Most children would like to use it to buy something for themselves like a new cloth, while their parents would rather spend the money on things like food or clothes which they probably find more necessary. Nevertheless, the last two citations

illustrate that some children do recognize that their families' basic needs may have to come first, although children with this opinion were not in the majority.

> "And to the side of this one who received, when he… OK, to some, when that gift goes home, OK when it's received in the absence of the child eh? Or by the guardian, that child, that child may get a problem of, maybe, she or he may wish to buy things, like to by a T-shirt for her own, yet the parent says do this, using this money, OK do this eh? Something like that. Yet the child wants to buy something…"

> "And a difficulty here may be, if the relationship between the family of this child, who's got a gift, because you can receive a gift and you want maybe to buy a dress, and you mummy is saying maybe you give it for school fees because here they give us a half. So she may say buy books, buy a uniform yet you want to buy a dress. That's difficult."

> "There are some families which are poor. Such that, when they see their child gets receiving gifts from the sponsor, they just say, thanks be to God we get what to eat at home."

> "If you are a grown up yes so I think in that way, you cannot buy a cloth when there is no food at home."

Certain conflicting interests within the family may in some cases even lead to the development of feelings of mutual distrust between both 'parties'. Children may feel that their parents are spending the money that is given to them "in a wrong way" and that they are "not taking care of them". It seems to them like the money intended for them is just disappearing. Some children mentioned that when this happens, parents may sometimes force children to tell the staff that the money is spent on this for the child. Being in such a situation can create a dilemma for children, who on the one hand oppose to 'lying' to the staff and on the other hand can't afford to "put their parents at risk", as one girl (citation below) describes. It can be a realistic fear for some children that their parents may send them out of the home if they don't obey them, something which in the poor environment in which the children live can have severe consequences for a child's access to basic needs.

> "Improper… spending of the money. That can come as a result of the parents, spending out actually the sum given to the children, of the child. Your parents can decide to use your money in a wrong way."

> "And to add on this one's point, some parents may pretend as in, he gets the money, he takes it, he shows that he's going to use it, and some parents can even

take it and they say that I'm going to bank it. From there you don't know even where the money goes."

"But an effect, negatively, on that, some of these kids, especially the young ones, the parent may say you when you go there, and write on that thing that you've received the gifts that you use the gifts for this and this, the parent may tell that, you say you bought a dress. Yet that child did not buy the dress."

"If the parent tells you 'say you bought this', when you didn't, and then you say 'no I didn't buy it, the parent tell me to say this'. What if they will react towards the parent? Parents in Africa are so stubborn enough, they can send you out of the home, someone like me. I cannot risk my parents. However much I get, I tell what my parent has told me … other than putting my parent at risk. I favour my parent, blood is better than water. "

Children's solutions

The second part of the assignment children in the focus groups received was intended to invite them to discuss what they thought would be the best way to overcome the difficulties related to gifts from the sponsor that they identified during the conversation. Especially in one group this evoked a long discussion about whether to share gift money with friends or siblings, whereby children had many different opinions. I will present a short overview of viewpoints put forward in this discussion first, after which I continue with some other suggestions on how to solve the problems related to sponsor gifts.

Some children feel that sharing gift money with other project children should be done by everyone. According to one girl, doing this will add more blessings to them from God so that perhaps next time the sponsor will increase the amount on money he/she sends. Most think that it is good to have at least a "spirit of giving". Those children who are more or less against sharing gift money argue that it is unrealistic divide a sum that is usually not that big (sponsors are bound to a maximum) amongst every child in the project (over 200) because then nothing will remain for each individual. And when sharing only with friends, the risks happens that a child may use money to "socialize" – giving it to children who they want to be friends with, while at the same those who are not shared with could feel hurt because they are not considered to be this child's friend. Another argument for not sharing gift money is that this may not be pleasing or even upset the sponsor who may have intended the money to be just for the sponsored child. In order to avoid these problems, one boy thinks that it would be a good solution not to tell anyone that you received a gift, but the other children feel that this is not an honest thing to do.

Children also came up with some suggestions on how to spend the gift money within the family. First of all, it was suggested that "the project should come up with a proper discussion between parent and child on how to spend the money given" whereby they could for example advise parents to put money on a saving account for their child. When this saving account is opened, children suggest that parents should ask permission from the project to withdraw the money and should present receipts to show accountability. Next to putting it on a saving account, it is also suggested that gift money should be put into small investments like keeping birds, which in time can raise money to pay for the sibling's school fees. In either case, children agree that they should be included in the decision making process and that they should have at least a small part of the money spend on an asset for themselves which can remember them of the gift they once received.

It becomes apparent from this discussion that the practice of sponsor gifts can lead to certain problems for the children, especially concerning their social relationships. When jealousy or guilt arises as a consequence of receiving such gifts, these relationships might be damaged to some extent. On the other hand, their ideas about investments and saving accounts also show their capability of financial management, something which they may have learned from the practical experience of dealing with gift money.

6.7 The Role of Religion

6.7.1 Advantages of Including Religion in the Project

Children mentioned a great number of advantages about including religion in their project. This girl (citation below) gives a good summary of the general opinion of the children during all three focus groups on this topic.

> "It's [the Christian faith] of a great role. Because it doesn't only influence the economical, or the social part of it, but even it, it somehow… influences every aspect of life. Because you see the spiritual, the moral standards of somebody, the emotion, every part, every aspect of life is influenced, and in a positive way, no matter your background. So I support it would be in the project, because it's of great use."

Throughout the whole discussion, children mentioned a number of norms and values that were considered to be Christian, and were perceived to be important in their daily lives. These were the following: respect, honesty, humbleness, self-control (being determined, knowing your principles), self-esteem (what you think about your body), faithfulness,

obedience, assertiveness, patience, creativity, being pitiful, sharing with others, associating with others, loving others, and helping others. I will continue this section by elaborating on some of the most often mentioned functions of the Christian religion in the project. Although these functions often show some overlap, I will present them separately for clarity purposes.

Learning to help and care for others

> "As we read the bible, you see Jesus helping others eh? So if they use that Christian faith in, in the project, it will help the children, also have a heart, which can help the others... (...) They are told the Christian faith, because the Bible has all the aspects of helping one another that kind of thing. So if they pick up that thing eh? It will help them, it helps them help the others in the future 'cause the project is something which is based on helping the others."

> "It also brings about care, as in… people cared for like, they choose leaders [at the project] and, if you're a leader, that means you're Christian. You have that faith in you. You have to care about others, the young ones mostly."

Children learn about helping others from the Bible and experience a faith-based motivation for helping and caring for others at the project. This regards both the help they receive from the project (staff and sponsors), and the help they can give to other (including younger) children in the project. This helping is not limited to within the project, since many children express their wish to help their friends and family members outside Compassion.

Practicing social and communication skills

> "Like here we are told to interact with others. So, in this case, when you go out, like you go back to your villages or somewhere else, because of that character of interaction you, when you interact together with others, you share experiences, you share your values, so this helps you to at least have good terms with others."

> "It has helped us to learn how to share with others (…) and express yourself."

The first citation above was part of the children's answers to my question about what the most important values they learn from Christianity in the project are, and how they are practicing these values outside Compassion. The second citation was a response to my question about what would be the specific benefits of having a Christian project. Learning to interact and share with others is thus linked to Christianity. As will become even more obvious later in this section, it appears that the children view Christianity as an important connecting factor. Because the Christian faith brings them together as a group, it provides them with good opportunities to learn social and communication skills.

Expanding children's social networks

> "If this Christian character was not there, I think we wouldn't have made many friends like we have, because if it was just like any other program, they just give you help, they don't come together, but the Christian program, character helps us to come together, we learn together, we make new friends."

> "And also to know more people, I think because for example in our conferences, you get to know many, many people."

> "It has helped us to know each other, from different families… and even tribes."

As mentioned above, Christianity is seen by the children as a connecting factor. It "helps them to come together" so that they can "make new friends". These friends include not only those who belong to their own social groups or live in their own area, but show a variety of social and tribal backgrounds as well as geographical locations (at the 'conferences' that are frequently talked about, children from different areas in the country are gathered to explore Christian themes). Because of this, children are able to develop rich social networks.

Creating relationships between children with diverse religious backgrounds

> "So according to me, Christian's faith creates relationships between different religions, you know between religious people eh? Whereby we come together (…) from different religious beliefs. We come together from the Muslims, Catholics, Protestants, even the Born-agains. So that we come together, helps in creating relationship, eh?"

> "Me I think, it also brings about love, 'cause they always emphasize that, love others as you love yourself. And I think this helps us to get exposed to people we don't even as in, we come from different backgrounds so when we come here we gather, to get to know each other, so this creates good relationships between, among people."

Children argue that "good relationships" can be created between children with diverse religious backgrounds that are united at the project. They agree that without the project, they would not be likely to form such close relationships to each other, an advantage already mentioned to be important in relation to the community impact of the program (section 6.5). Developing certain relationships may give them the opportunity to learn to understand differences between people so that prejudices and conflicts may be avoided, and may help them to become more open to others' perspectives.

Promoting equality

> "Me I think it helps them about equality, 'cause being a Christian, according to God, everybody's equal. And this brings about love and peace in the project."

> "Me I think, since Christianity is a religion of equality, so it will help many people. Even if they are not Christians, it helps them to get in touch with those who are Christians, so that they can live together."

Several children mentioned that being in a Christian project promotes a sense of equality among them, which in the words of the girl cited above "brings about love and peace in the project". This is especially important considering the manifold of social, tribal and religious identities of the children. Moreover, because children in the project come from relatively poor families, this message of equality may enhance their feelings of empowerment and self-confidence, which is particularly useful when they are confronted with people occupying higher social positions in their society. Especially girls, who may have a lower social status than boys, may benefit from this.

Fostering respect

> "I also think, about respect among people, 'cause when we come here we hear at different leaders. (…) So these people tell us respect each other. This helps us to… organize issues in the project. 'Cause every Christian has to respect each other, you get it?"

Respect is, like equality, also seen by the children as something characteristic of a Christian project. They are encouraged to respect each other, and have ample opportunities to practice this in the social environment of the project.

Strengthening family relations

> "You know, I also think it helps to bring about respect. Because when you, as you hear what they teach us, how to respect our parents... (…) So when you go back home, you're this kind of person who are so badly behaved or (?) by your friends, you start to come to light, to what you're doing is not good. And then you change your life, you can… reconcile with your parents, so you start respecting them."

> "I think it also helps to bring about love. As in you can get home, you have a brother, whereby you, kind of your followers, you know such things, though they take them as in, to be above each other. You're not higher than me, I'm not below you such things. So those people, they're always having disagreements. So when you hear about love, you start as in, you start coming to light. Such things bring, as in you go back you go in such... so it brings about love."

> "Another thing maybe, it prepares us for the future, because you see, in most families where you have religion eh, then it's a good family because, there may be no conflicts between the man and the woman, and the children because of religion. So it helps us, it prepares us for the future."

In relation to children's families, several ways were mentioned in which Christian values learned at the project could positively influence their family relations. Among these are respect for parents, equality among siblings (not feeling "below or above each other"), and reduced conflict in the family. While respect and equality were mentioned several times, reduced conflict because of religion was mentioned only once in the way that it could "prepare [them] for the future".

Changing attitudes and social practices

> "According to me, I think this Christian faith helps them to change their modes of conduct. Because if you don't have faith in you, and you don't know anything about God then there's no way your mode of conduct will change. Otherwise you'll be to enter to… destruction."

> "The Christian faith enables people to separate between the good thing and the bad thing, here among the project we see that those who didn't, OK to the standards of following the Christian faith, at once you find problems. Once we got pregnancy, I mean pregnant, those who have taken drugs let me say…"

> "Even it has changed most of our lives. Some of the children who joined in the Compassion, at first they were immoral, but now they have changed. (…) OK their behaviours, they had abusive words, they didn't respect the elders, but now they were disciplined, for example in the morning they greet the teachers, which was not the case before. So I think they have helped us to change our lives. Because they counsel us."

As already became clear from section 6.4, Christianity is seen by the children as a necessary factor in order to change their social practices, as it helps them to "separate between the good and the bad thing". Although their conceptions of being "immoral" may sound somehow conservative from a Western perspective, it does offer them protection in a society where as loose sexual behaviour is risky or generational conflicts may have severe consequences, only to give some examples. Nevertheless, a negative side-effect of such an attitude may occur for girls who have become pregnant by force. Although I did not observe this myself during the period of field work, these girls may be likely to face undeserved moral judgements of their age mates.

Fostering self-value and self-control

> "I think the Christian character that is in Compassion, helps us outside Compassion to value ourselves. As in when someone comes to you, let's say a friend of yours, and they want to involve you in something that's ungodly, you can tell them about what you think about your body, for example it's the temple of the Holy Spirit, so if you value it you can't go in... go into that thing."

> "Like for the case of self-control if you are outside the project, you know your desires, you know your goal, you know your principles. So it helps you to be determined, for what you want to become. If you are outside Compassion."

The citations shown above were children's responses to my question about how they can practice the Christian values they have learned in Compassion in their life outside the project. With regard to self-value, the Christian teachings they receive encourage them to view their bodies as something holy. Because they are valuing their bodies in this way, they may for example refuse to engage themselves in risky sexual behaviour. Self-control is related to this, and is a value that according to this boy helps them to act according to their principles and to be determined, which may include avoiding certain harmful social practice in order to reach their future goals.

Discovering children's talents

> "Some time back we used to have discovering your talents. Plus some time back we used to have music, dance and drama. Then I have a friend who was here, (…) but now he's a good musician. He discovered his talent from here."

> "Another thing, maybe it will help us to expose our talents like singing, preaching… Even physically, for example sometimes we play ball games."

The citations above were again part of the children's responses to my question about what would be the specific benefits of having a Christian project, including how it would help them in their life outside Compassion. Discovering their 'talents', or things they are good at, was mentioned several times in the focus groups as well as the individual interviews. Although discovering one's talents may not be limited to a Christian project, the various Christian practices that are part of the daily schedule in the project such as singing, dancing, and drama, can give children good opportunities to discover and develop their creative or other talents.

The projects' functioning without religion

On my question whether the project would function without including religion (Christianity) in it, children came up with a range of arguments for keeping Christianity in the project, which included connectedness, expanding social networks, creating good relationships, avoiding conflicts and corruption, and behaving in a socially accepted way. All of these desirable factors would, according to them, be more difficult to obtain if the Christian character of the project was to be omitted, as the citations below are illustrating.

"If this Christian character was not there, I think we wouldn't have made many friends like we have, because if it was just like any other program, they just give you help, they don't come together, but the Christian program, character helps us to come together, we learn together, we make new friends."

"Me I think, if the program would function without the Christian character, I think there would be very few students in the program. Because Christianity at least tries to bring people together."

"Me I think ehm... they've had many wars, conflicts here. Because, the Bible says that, we should love one another. Since for them they so should love one another, shall create good relationships, but if there wasn't Christianity here, I would hate anyone."

"I think it will bring about corruption, because if there are aunts [project staff] who are not Christians, I don't think they would care about each of us so, such things you know as in the diet, everything they give us, I don't think they would have provided everything to us if they were not sincere. I mean, as in you're a Christian, you have to be sincere to each other."

"I think if the project was to go without the Christian thing, these children would adopt other characters, eh? Other bad character traits from the world. 'Cause you would find that, if they are told about the Bible, listen to Christian things (...), this would somehow decide on which way to take. But if it wasn't, a Christian based thing, they would somehow bring in the other character traits from the world."

Comparing religious with non-religious projects

The citations below were children's reactions on the same question as mentioned above, which addressed children's views on how the project would function if religion was not included. However, because the following statements follow a line of argumentation that includes a more specific comparison between religious and non-religious projects, I decided to present them separately.

"The spiritual side is good because it would help you physically, to some extent. But there are those organizations which don't help in the spiritual thing, and I would say that, I wouldn't love to but then, I would say that, to some extent they're helpful tot the individuals who know what they want."

"But then, the spiritual organizations are better to that, I say that they help in all aspects. Because in the spiritual you learn about the physical, social, economic, all that kind of thing. Instead of the other, non-religion based organizations."

"[Non-Christian sponsorship organizations] would work to some extent for the individuals, let's say. Cause somebody may not be loving the Christian thing, and the help will only be enough for that person. So, why should you teach him the Christian thing if he doesn't like it? And then and the help is enough for him."

"[The Christian teaching] has a great impact on every individual. 'Cause even if you're not Christian, you'll at least stick on something good, get something good from its message, from the Christian teaching."

These quotations show some disagreements among the children about whether the project would work without religion. Some children thought that it wouldn't function at all, while a majority of children seemed to be of the opinion that non-religious sponsorship programs can function to some extent because they can at least help in the physical aspects of life. According to one girl, "someone not loving the Christian thing" may not need a Christian project to be helped, while another girl argues that even for someone who is not a Christian, the Christian message can be valuable. However, the children themselves preferred to be in a program whereby religion is included because it offers spiritual help next to other forms of aid, and thus includes more aspects of life.

Reducing the Christian message to basic Christian values

The following two citations are children's responses on my question whether the project would work if only the basic values from the Bible were taught, but not the message of Jesus. Children's had quite different opinions on this issue, as is reflected in the two statements below (of which the first one was expressed by a boy with a Muslim background, and the second one by a Christian boy).

"That one would also be good, 'cause according to me, I don't despise any religion. 'Cause I believe that every religion has… has motives, eh? Which could be good for everybody. I don't mind listening to Muslim person 'cause I believe, that I'll pick something good from that person. So, with the role of, with the Christian thing, it's all upon the individual, it's upon the way it's, it's graded on the way you pick some, you pick ideas, from somebody. 'Cause when somebody

says something it doesn't mean that you have to go and do each and everything he says. You have to pick out the main issues."

"I don't think it would work, when you don't have Jesus in you, there's no way you… you're behaviours would change. Unless if you copy from someone who's as Jesus."

The boy with the Muslim background thinks that teaching Christian values without including its message would work. Christianity is not a necessity for him, and he says to be open for ideas from other religions as well. The Christian boy has another opinion. He is convinced that hearing about the values only doesn't do any good because a person cannot change without having a belief in Jesus and seeing him as an exemplifying figure. However, it is difficult to say anything about the number of children that adhere to each of these views, or perhaps have a standpoint somewhere in between.

6.7.3 Potential Conflicting Situations

Muslim children's views

"For example for my case let me see, so there are two sides, now the Christian side and the Muslim side, so, I'm just there now to see what, OK like I'm me a case study, I go to the Muslim side I see what they preach, then I'm coming back to see what they preach. So I'm now… still suggesting let me see, when I would… change, OK, I'm there seeing which religion is the right one."

No conflicts are mentioned between children's own religious backgrounds and the project. The children with a Muslim background that participated in two of the focus groups on the topic of religion (four children in total), say that they haven't experienced having to do anything that is against their religion. None of them say that they feel forced to become a Christian, like this girl: "It does not force someone. It's from the heart". They argue that they feel comfortable because the project accommodates people from all sorts of backgrounds. When asking the children how their Muslim parents are feeling about them being in a Christian project, they all replied that that their parents don't feel bad about this.

When asked whether they would feel better to be in a Muslim project, most of them surprisingly argue that a Muslim project would not function as well as a Christian. First of all they noted that if the project was not Christian but Muslim, they would not bring in children with various backgrounds, or if children with other religions were admitted they would have changed everybody into a Muslim. Other arguments for preferring a Christian over a Muslim project were that Muslims don't value education for girls that much, that a bigger percentage

of the local people is Christian, that Mosques are not easily accessible for people with other religions, that a Muslim project would require obedience to certain strict rules such as not eating pork, and that Muslims allow certain practice (such as polygamy) that the children disapprove of. The degree to which these children's disapproval of (certain aspects of) Muslim culture is caused by their participation in a Christian project is difficult to assess.

The possibility of social pressure

> "Me I think eh, as in the way I take it, here in this project, I think everybody has to be a Christian. Though you're a Muslim you, anyway as in your religion, at your home, I think I, everybody has to be a Christian."

> "So for me on my side I think that, if most of us, our sponsors are Christians. (…) When your sponsor is a Christian and you are a Muslim, then the contact or relationship it would not be very fine."

Although none of the children in the focus group with Muslim children expressed feeling forced to become a Christian, some children in a group with Christians only mentioned that project teachers always emphasize that everybody has to be a Christian (I have seen some teachers who indeed talked like this). The girl cited above is even of the opinion that everybody has to become a Christian. In the same line of argument, the second citation shows one boy's concern that a good relationship between child and sponsor would be difficult to attain if both are of a different religion. However, this concern was not expressed by any other children. In sum, while children are not thus actually forced to accept the Christian religion, they might have to endure some social pressure by teachers other children in the project.

6.8 Contrasting Individual with Community Sponsorship

6.8.1 Advantages of an Individual Approach

I will start this section by looking at what advantages of individual child sponsorship were mentioned by the children, when compared to a more community-based approach in which available resources would be divided among a much larger group of people.

The most important reason for preferring individual sponsorship over community sponsorship appears to be that with individual sponsorship, children are gathered on a regular basis. This enables them to form relationships and share ideas with children from diverse backgrounds, receive training, and develop their leadership abilities. The advantage of being

able to get to know other children and expand one's social network was mentioned repeatedly in both focus groups, which may indicate that children consider this to be one of the most important aspects of the program:

> "Like for our case here, (...) also individual sponsorship, we don't come from the same places, we come from different areas. We come here we socialize, we share ideas, which would not be the case as in community sponsorship. Because there people would only come by… they only gather when they come maybe to receive some gifts for what, but here you come to get friends, to share ideas, you learn a lot. I think that's an advantage."

> "With sponsoring people from different areas, you can say that this one is maybe wiser than me, and that one maybe has another spiritual view than that one, so we learn from each other."

In addition, it is seen as a sign of equality to select children from poorer families around a larger area. Focusing on a particular village would be selective too. This way of working would also cause a better spread of the knowledge children receive at the project:

> "Another advantage I think, it gives a chance to all, OK to most of the poor. It gives them a chance to be educated. 'Cause if they say that, we are sponsoring just a village, you can find that if they sponsored… children from Seeta, us who come from Joggo village, we would not get this chance of being catered for. So I think it was very good when they say that, let us pick one child from each family 'cause we also got that chance. It is a sign of equality."

> "And then, an advantage I would say about individual child sponsorship, if it isn't based on a village thing. One child would come from Joggo, OK let's say about five about ten, as they come to the project. They would study things, and after one day study they'll have to go to get back to their villages. So they'll share with the others. It somehow helps the others to get the knowledge these ones get."

In addition, children explained that within a village there are very different needs. It would not make sense to sponsor a child from a rich family, so one has to be selective anyway:

> "When you're basing on a village, it will be so hard to keep everybody in. So it will be upon one's… let's say, they are different of need, because somebody will be needing the basic things, the other one school fees, the other might need... You won't have to cater for all those, you have to pick out some important things, let's say the fees thing the basic thing, so it will be better to do the individual thing."

> "And another point, even among these ones [the children in the project], is that… there is some income inequalities, for example some people are very rich and others are very poor. So why can you sponsor a poor child with a rich one, the rich

one can afford everything, can afford books, can afford school fees. So you sponsor you may the poor, who can't even afford books, yet you give them only the school fees, so I hope, maybe instead of sponsoring a rich one you can even buy for this one books instead of school fees only."

Next to that, children mentioned that it wouldn't be manageable to sponsor all children in a village, at least not when every child should be guided individually:

"The advantage I see here is that, if you sponsor each and every child, you have a problem of management. You cannot manage every child, they come with different behaviours. They are not manageable. The children, especially the grown ups. You cannot follow each and everyone, so if you… Just take an example, if this Compassion is sponsoring the whole of Seeta, what would you to do then? You end up with bad behaviours, peer groups, 'cause many children come with a different behaviour. So I think it's better to sponsor individual."

Finally, children think that it would be difficult to mobilize people when a whole village is concerned:

"If it comes to community sponsorship, like a village, me I think it would be difficult to mobilize them, like maybe if you would want to pass on to them some information. (...) Mobilization would not be easy, because they're kind of scattered."

6.8.2 Disadvantages of an Individual Approach

Now I will look at the disadvantages of individual child sponsorship that were mentioned by the children. Many of these problems were related to the children's position within their family. First of all, according to this girl it can be pretty challenging to be the only one in the family attending school:

"The disadvantage I see here is that, we still are living, with uneducated people. Because, for example when you're with six at home, you're the only one who read, and you go back home you're the one to read the books, each and everyone is making noise, they are doing their own things, no one bothers about your books. You have no one to discuss with, or share experiences with for school, because they're uneducated."

Being the family's only child receiving help can in some cases also provoke jealousy and the experience of neglect, as the following quotation illustrates:

> "A disadvantage eh? I would say is that it maybe, as you're helped, you're given everything and let's say you're from a family and you're one person in the project, and you're getting the help. As you get the gifts and all that kind of things as you get home, your brothers and sisters will be like, eh! You've got this and all that and they'll be like: lucky you eh! They'll have some kind of pain within them, as they haven't achieved what you've got. And it somehow keeps them low, in a way that they'll sometimes neglect you."

It should be noted that this problem was hardly mentioned when asking about family relations in the individual interviews (see section 6.4). This may illustrate that this problem is not so widespread among the children, but the difference may also have something to do with the methods used. In a semi-structured, one-to-one interview it may be more difficult to tell about negative experiences than in a group setting where children were more specifically invited to reflect upon critical aspects of child sponsorship. The next quotation shows that the problem of neglect by others may not be limited to siblings, but may be true for parents as well:

> "Certain even the parents they can do so, 'cause for example they can pay for you the school fees, and yet, and then the parent is left with the responsibility of buying the books and the pens. So if for example the Compassion pays for me the school fees, then my parent will say that, for you have a chance, they have paid for you the school fees, I have to first pay for this one the school fees. You find it hard to ask for some things… for example the books or the pens, or even the clothes. Because she says that for you, at times they give you money, for example the Christmas gift they give you money, you find it that, your mum or dad at times, she or he may not buy for you some things."

The girl cited above explains that it can be hard for a sponsored child to ask its parents for something he or she needs like books, pens or clothes, because the parent feels that the sponsored child is already receiving enough help. This problem was only true for one girl in that particular focus group. The following girl notes that in a particularly poor family with several children, the help received from Compassion is not only limited to one sibling:

> "When I was young, in those days when we were registered eh? A parent could bring about five kids, you register one, and then the person registering will be like, how many kids do you have mother? And she'll be like, I have five kids and you see that she's really needy, then sponsoring one child would be like, you've not even tried to help her with half of the baggage, how should I call it, of the… responsibility she will be carrying. Because she will have to remain with the four to cater for them also. But, what I remember was that they will tell you to bring a whole three, so that they leave you with the two, to help them. It wasn't so much based on one kid per family."

If this is indeed the way in which certain cases are handled, it would make occurrence of the three problems mentioned above (living with uneducated people, jealousy by siblings and neglect by parents) less likely. Next to problems within the family, children also mentioned difficulties concerning relationships with not-sponsored peers. These problems were addressed in section 6.5.2, so I won't elaborate on this here.

6.8.3 A Difference between Ideology and Practice

As a reply to the disadvantages of individual child sponsorship that were put forward in the discussion, children considered the advantages of an alternative approach whereby a whole community would receive some benefits. First, it was mentioned that community sponsorship would be more likely than individual child sponsorship to bring about general involvement among the people:

> "We try to look at let's say... community sponsorship as a whole. I think to me it can bring about general involvement in the people, unlike individual sponsorship because there an individual is involved as one, but if it is a whole, people will all be catered for. They will be catered for and provided services like... bore holes. (...) But with individual sponsorship, most people would be left out."

Next to this, it was said that the available money would be divided more equally among the people, as people are not linked individual sponsors who may send more or less:

> "I think what a sponsor would send you, it would depend on what he earns. But in, when it is as a whole, they would try to give at least something which is uniform. But here, as in individual sponsorship, it would depend on the sponsor's income."

Upon asking whether it would be better or worse to divide the money received from sponsors among every needy child in the community including those not in the sponsorship program, children replied that this would be better on the condition that it would be enough to satisfy each need:

> "If the money was a portion to each need, OK it would not bring about jealousy, because if it was to one person, many other people would feel jealous but this one has got it as an individual, but if it was to... as a whole, where each one has been given a portion at least... according to his need. So it would be better."

However, children realize that dividing the little money that is available among many people, would eventually leave everyone with a negligible amount. Therefore most children agreed that focusing on a smaller number of individuals is more worthwhile, as this boy puts it:

> "I think it's better to sponsor individual, because the money wouldn't be enough of course. You can't get 70.000, and you divide it into like seven people, than everyone would get 10.000. 10.000 is… it can't even buy only books, so what for! I think it's better you sponsor one child."

This illustrates the dilemma between an ideal situation in which help is divided more equally, and a practical situation in which limited resources make it only possible to financially support a selected group of individuals. A community based approach would involve more people, while an individual based approach enables children to receive more comprehensive support including the regular gatherings where children meet and learn:

> "Both have negative sides. Because if it's a whole, it would be difficult to teach them like... the teachings we get here. They will just provide the services. I don't think which works out better."

> "Me I think it's better this when the whole of them are here, into it. But at the other side there's a difference that you can't teach children more than seven hundred. There are too many, to be maintained."

Also the relationship between a sponsor and a child has advantages as well as disadvantages. On the one hand this relationship it may cause imbalances, while on the other hand it is much appreciated by the children (see also section 6.6):

> "You can try to compare this individual child sponsorship, with the community as a whole. Eh... there will not be imbalances, OK, as in gifts. Here your sponsor would send to you a gift as an individual. (...) [But] in individual child sponsorship, at least there is that, let me say it relationship maybe. With your sponsor. At least you know some details about him."

In spite of the negative sides of individual child sponsorship as well as the positive sides of community sponsorship that children came up with, the extensive social and educational opportunities and the personal relationship with a sponsor made that eventually each of the participating children preferred an individual approach over a community approach.

6.9 Future Expectations and Goals

One youth spoke about his future expectations and goals with regard to four dimensions: educationally, socially, spiritually, and economically. His educational goal is to reach university and learn to become an engineer, his social goal is to be "a respectable person, a model", his spiritual goal is to be an active person in Sunday School, and finally his economical goal is to support his family, how challenging this may be in a Ugandan context. Not all children spoke about their future in an equally extensive way, but generally the following trends were observed.

When first asking about their expectations for their life in the future, children usually started by mentioning what occupations they would like to have. Because some children mentioned more then one occupation, the total number of occupations is higher then the number of interview subjects. The following were mentioned: teacher (3x), doctor (2x), lawyer (2x), accountant (2x), nurse, pilot, engineer, businessman, judge, radio presenter, and astronaut. Several children gave specific reasons for choosing their particular occupation, which included the following.

"I want to be a teacher, in order to reduce on people's ignorance."

"I want to be a judge. (...) You know in Uganda we have tribes. But you may find that if a president comes into the power, he doesn't favour other people's tribes. He cares only for him and his tribes. So that's one reason which is forcing me to study about the laws, and even to become a judge such that I can maintain justice in the country."

"I hope to work on the radio. (...) I thought about that when I was at my school (...), we didn't have the freedom of speech at our school. They didn't allow us to talk on our own, and the headmistress was so, dictative. So, when I saw that, I dreamed about becoming a radio presenter."

The examples above illustrate that children's reasons for choosing a specific occupation are, if mentioned at all, based on a desire to improve the situation in which people surrounding them are living. Besides this it seems that not only the type of career, but also the money earned by having a job is expected to be used to help others.

"I expect to help other children in the village like those ones [pointing to the children standing outside the house], 'cause most of them are not schooling due to lack of school fees. So when I get a job, I think I'll help them."

"I have that thought that if I myself grow up, I'll also at least pay for (...) some children. 'Cause they really show eh... love to us. I've learned to extend that love to those people in need."

"As I learned from Compassion that, they help the needy, like me. So I hope after finishing my studies, for sure I know, in God's name I'll get a job, and when it's a paying job, I plan to help my… There's my sister who gave birth to a little kid who has been here with me, and I feel like, because her dad died, and as for now she can't look after her well, but if I gain money in the future I'll look after her. And when they are not relatives to me, those people, I think I hope to help them, as I have been helped, also."

When speaking about the role of Compassion in reaching children's future goals, the following was mentioned (ordered by number of times mentioned explicitly). First, Compassion enables them to get an education by providing school fees, study materials and help with choosing subjects (10x). Second, being in the Compassion project gives them the opportunity to practice leadership skills, teaching skills or other skills that are useful for their future professional lives (3x). Third, Compassion helps them to plan for their future by helping them to make a personal report called 'My plan for tomorrow' containing future goals and practical steps to reach these goals (2x).

Chapter 7 – Summary, Concluding Discussion and Recommendations

This study's leading question has been: "What are children's experiences with international child sponsorship?" In this chapter I will summarize my findings for each of the seven sub-questions, and discuss these in the light of the theoretical perspectives and empirical studies presented in the second chapter. I will finish with some recommendations for future research and practice.

The importance of child sponsorship: theoretical reflections

I started by addressing the importance of child sponsorship in individual children's lives by focusing on children's narratives, which were obtained during individual interviews with fifteen children. From these narratives it became clear that being admitted to the program has given a positive turn to the children's lives. From a life in poverty with little opportunities, the sponsorship program helped children to move towards a better life. Religion, education, and a widened social network are seen as important factors contributing to this positive change of life. Participating in the sponsorship program has not only changed children's lives here and now, but has also altered their perspectives on the future: children looked forward to a secure future, and felt empowered to reach their personal goals.

Because of the rich data material contained in these narratives, I will use them as a point of departure for discussing this study's theoretical perspectives, which include the social constructedness of childhood, viewing children as social actors, and children's rights. When illustrating the social constructedness of childhood, I looked at the adverse effects of using a global, un-contextualized definition of 'orphan' by international aid organizations as mentioned by Meintjes and Giese (2006), Abebe and Aase (2007) and Ennew (2005). According to Compassion International's policy, the admission of orphaned children should be prioritized (Compassion International, 2008). Consequently many of the children admitted to the Compassion project, including Lucy, John, and David, are defined as orphans because they lack the care of at least one parent. In addition to children labelling themselves as orphans, others in the community did the same (see section 6.5.2). Admission on the basis of a child's status as orphan instead of a neutral assessment of children's actual needs can thus provoke a negative reaction from the community, especially if two-parent families living in severe poverty are faced with a reduced chance of receiving help for their children.

I continue by reflecting on the view of children as social actors, with a special focus on how they are coping with poverty. It became clear that the children are no passive agents restricted by their poverty, but are actively contributing to the improvement of their situation. This result fits with the observations of the earlier mentioned authors writing on children living in poverty, e.g. Boyden and Mann (2005) and Ansell (2005). While Compassion offers children opportunities, the children themselves are responsible for using these opportunities to achieve a positive change of life. Especially the possibilities to expand their social networks are used by the children: Lucy developed helpful friendships by attending a church choir, John used the Compassion conferences to discuss life challenges with age-mates, and David practiced his leadership skills at the regular project gatherings. Being actively part of a social network thus made the children able to be more resilient in the face of adversities. This resilience is strengthened by the way in which these social networks are embedded into a religious (Christian) context, as religion can cause a strong sense of belonging and offer both comfort and encouragement.

Finally I would like to look at the children's narratives from a children's rights perspective. As mentioned earlier, researchers within the field of childhood studies have put much emphasis on the category of participation rights within the UNCRC. It has been argued that improvement in children's living conditions and their perspectives is only possible through children's own active participation (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998, in Qvortrup, Corsaro & Honig, 2009). While the approach of Compassion International may be focused more on realizing children's protection and provision rights, children can also be said to exercise their participation rights since they actively used the opportunities offered by the project to change their life situation, as illustrated above.

Furthermore, it can be argued that taking on responsibilities for one's life and the lives of others is also a form of participation. Article 31 from the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Organization of African Union, 1990) outlines children responsibilities, and begins by stating that "The child (...) shall have the duty to work for the cohesion of the family, to respect his parents, superiors and elders at all times and to assist them in case of need". The presented narratives clearly illustrate that children show responsibilities, both in their daily lives and in relation to their expectations for the future: Lucy shows great responsibility by taking care of a younger brother and expects to continue helping relatives and other children in the future, John feels responsible for maintaining justice in his country, and David wants to act as an example for others and wishes to become a "responsible self" in the years to come. Because children's ways of participating in their lives here and now are

shaped by their plans and expectations for the future, they show to be both beings and becomings at the same time (Lee, 2001; Kjørholt, 2004). Attempts to discuss the realization of children's rights should therefore not be limited to either of these perceptions.

The project's family impact

I continue with my second sub-question, which addressed the impact of the project on children's families. First, children mentioned that the project reduces the financial burden of children's parents. School fees are a significant burden for Ugandan households, so when one child is supported in this way a parent may be able to contribute to remaining siblings' school fees. In families where school-aged siblings of the sponsored child have the opportunity to attend school, there is less reason for jealousy to arise between siblings. Although jealousy was not directly reported in the individual interviews, it was mentioned as a potential disadvantage in the focus group dealing with advantages and disadvantages of the approach of individual child sponsorship. Perhaps this shows a tendency for sponsored children to experience at least some rejection by siblings because of their privileged position. Nevertheless, the current data do not give enough support for stating that individual child sponsorship is divisive (Stalker, 1982), creates family rifts (Shaw, 1989), or has "immense potential to inspire jealousy" (Bornstein, 2001).

Second, sponsored children mentioned that they are distributing what they learn at the project to their siblings. This includes teaching practical skills like sewing mats (mentioned in the focus group on community impact), helping siblings to plan for their future, and passing on behavioural values like being obedient, well-disciplined, assertive, and honest. Some of these values are clearly dependent on culture: obedience towards adults, for example, was seen as a high virtue by the children. Even though the UNCRC (article 12) expresses children's rights to have their opinion heard and taken into account, Ugandan children may prefer to adhere to the cultural norm of being obedient towards parents and the elders, meaning that they are expected to do what an adult asks of them. Adhering to this norm can be beneficial to them because it is likely to result in appreciation by their family members.

Third, children expect to be able to help their families in the future with the money they would earn later on. Although it will take many years before children may be able to get a sufficiently paying job and the employment rates in Uganda are currently quite low, this expectation clearly shows that children consider themselves to be social actors who are able to make a real difference for their families.

The project's community impact

My third sub-question was concerned with children's thoughts on the community impact of the project. I started by presenting children's ideas on how their community can benefit from their participation in the sponsorship program. The children mentioned that they were acting as examples of 'good behaviour' to others, that they provided counselling to fellow teenagers experiencing difficulties in their lives, that others in the community gave them certain responsibilities because they had obtained their trust, that they used or aimed to use the leadership skills acquired at the project on a community level, that they taught acquired livelihood and academic skills to their siblings and friends, and that they involved themselves in community work such as cleaning around people's houses. Interestingly, they also mentioned that the community benefits from the sponsorship program because it unites people from different religions. Even though the project is Christian, it supports children from various religious backgrounds and gives children the possibility to create relationships that would be unlikely to develop otherwise.

In spite of the positive contributions children can make to their communities, they also identified some problems in the relationships with children outside the project. These problems included feeling shame when thinking of the many children who didn't get the same chances as they did, and being concerned for these children's well-being. A few children also experienced some humiliation because of their assumed status as a needy orphan (see my theoretical reflections above) and neglect by school mates because of their privileged position. However, unlike authors like Stalker (1982) and Shaw (1989) have suggested, this didn't seem to affect the children in a very serious way and appeared to be of a temporary nature only.

Moreover, because sponsored children attended the same educational institutions as other children in their community, it is more likely that positive effects of children's participation in the sponsorship program can spread out to their peers. Being able to mingle with non-sponsored peers at school would provide children with the opportunities to guide and support their 'fellow teenagers' in difficult situations, or encourage protective behaviour. In the case of Compassion International, providing for individual children's education does thus by no means isolate them from family and friends, as was observed by Shaw (1989). Neither do the sponsored children plan to take away their skills away from the community that needs them (Ibid.), as my results showed that children expressed a great feeling of responsibility towards the community in which they were born and raised.

The child-sponsor relationship

The fourth sub-question in this study addressed how children experienced the relationship with their sponsor, focusing on the letter exchanges and sponsor gifts. In general, children reported a positive relationship with their sponsor, characterized by a mutual concern for each other's well-being. As far as I could assess, they did not express a feeling of inferiority towards their sponsor because of being on the receiving side of the relationship, as was suggested by Stalker (1982) and Shaw (1989). What children liked most about the letter exchanges was the comfort and encouragements expressed by their sponsors, whom they looked upon as friends. Citations from the Bible were particularly appreciated, as these connected well to most children's own religious practices. Moreover, it was found to be important that sponsors come with quick and relevant responses to the issues addressed in the children's letters. Like Herrell (1986) suggested, is seemed beneficial for the children to have someone who cares about them, in spite of the geographical distance.

The same author also argued that these letter exchanges can provide an opportunity for cross-cultural education and understanding for both child and the sponsor. However, the educational value of the letters children received from their sponsors was not emphasized by the children when speaking about what they liked most about the letters. This may indicate that the cultural exchanges between child and sponsor are indeed limited, like Stalker (1982) and Shaw (1989) had observed. However, this assumed absence of educational value does not mean that letter exchanges between sponsor and child are useless or even harmful, but rather illustrates that children may attach more importance to the simple fact that their sponsors expressed love and care for them, and supported them in their personal development.

There is, however, a downside of these letter exchanges. It was noted by the children that those who never or rarely receive any letters from their sponsor may feel personally rejected by their sponsor, whom they think does no longer care about them. It was reported that in certain cases, these children may feel so disappointed that they no longer become interested in attending school or project activities. The relation between correspondence and children's school performances was already observed by Herrell (1986), but is also confirmed by a recent study carried out by Compassion International on the effects of correspondence on sponsored children's development (in Compassion Nederland, 2010). While meaningful correspondence with a sponsor can thus increase children's motivation to work actively for the improvement of their situation, a lack of correspondence can reduce it. Therefore the practice of letter exchanges can have positive as well as negative effects.

Next to letter exchanges, I also looked at children's thoughts concerning sponsor gifts. This practice was seen as more problematic than exchanging letters. I started by presenting a number of difficulties related to the unequal distribution of gifts among the children in the project. Similar to what was said about the letter exchanges, children who rarely or never receive sponsor gifts may loose interest in attending project activities. They may even interpret the absence of gifts as sign of not being blessed by God, which can have a negative impact on their religious beliefs. Furthermore, like Bornstein (2001) observed, the possibility of receiving extra gifts from sponsors is may give rise to feelings of jealousy from those who receive little or nothing towards those who receive big gifts. Nevertheless, it is difficult to assess to what degree these problems actually occurred at the project.

I also presented the difficulties that were mentioned in relation to spending gift money within a child's family. When a child receives a sponsor gift, a decision has to be taken on how this gift money is to be spent. Here the interest of a child's family may be in conflict with he child's personal wishes, which may lead to the development of feelings of mutual distrust between parents and child. The children mentioned that there may be a risk that parents use the given money in improper ways, after which parents can ask their children to give the project staff a false report about the how the gift has been used. However, when parents would not be included the decision process, this may reduce their purchasing power and authority, like Bornstein (2001) noted. In one way or the other, the possibility to receive sponsor gifts may give rise to some conflicts in a child's family.

The role of religion

My fifth sub-question aimed to assess children's perceptions on the role of religion in the project. I started by presenting what the children considered to be advantages of including religion in the project. These advantages covered a wide range of the children's experiences. To begin with, the Christian faith encouraged them to help and care for others, like the biblical figure of Jesus did. Next to this, children viewed Christianity as an important factor contributing to the development of their social and communication skills. Furthermore, it helped them to expand their social networks and served as a connecting factor for children from diverse backgrounds. Related to this was the possibility to create relationships between children from different religious backgrounds, as was already mentioned as a factor contributing to the community impact of the sponsorship project. Fifth, the Christian religion promoted a sense of equality among the children. Like equality, their faith also helped children to show respect to others. Next to this, being taught about Christianity in the project

was seen to have a positive influence on children's family relations. Furthermore, it was viewed as a necessary factor enabling children to change their attitudes and social practices, meaning that that it helped them to avoid behaviour seen as risky or unwanted. Next to that, it helped them to value and control themselves, whereby self-control was understood as remaining faithful to their principles and staying focused on their life goals. Finally, children reported that practicing the Christian faith helped them to discover their talents, as they had the opportunity to express their faith through activities like singing, dancing and drama. These data support the assumption that religion is "a source of inspiration for those concerned and a social support in the provision of basic services" (Klein Goldewijk, 2007, p. 325).

When asked how they thought the project would function without including religion in it, most children agreed that it would not function equally well. A project not including religion would, according to them, miss the important spiritual aspects of their lives. As Tripp (1999) observed, many people participating in development projects consider the spiritual aspects of their daily lives to be at least equally important as the physical aspects as food, water or health care. In order to respect these people's culture, she argued that acknowledgement of the spiritual aspects of their lives is needed. Because Compassion International includes these aspects and works through local religious structures, its approach is closely connected to the everyday lives of the children and the environments in which they live (Klein Goldewijk, 2007). At least in a Ugandan context, such an approach may pose an advantage compared to non-religious approaches like that of Plan International. Assumptions regarding the undesirable effects of NGOs including religion in their programming (e.g. Bradley, 2005; Stalker, 1982) should therefore not be generalized.

Including Christianity in the project has clearly shown to have beneficial effects on the children. Although Christianity is still by far the biggest religion in Uganda, other religious minorities should not be forgotten. In a society where religious differences still contribute to conflict, it is important to question what being in a Christian project can do with children's capabilities to become an adult in a religious diverse society. It was interesting to find that children with an Islamic background showed appreciation for the Christian character of the program and did not report any conflicts between their own religious practices and those of the project, it contrast to what Shaw (1989) suggested. However, while all children emphasized the Christian project's ability to unite people from different religious backgrounds, some of them expressed the wish that all project children would become Christians. Therefore the possibility that Muslim children experience some social pressure should not be rejected completely.

Advantages and disadvantages of individual child sponsorship

My sixth sub-question concerned children's views on individual child sponsorship as a means to alleviate poverty. Here I asked them to compare this individual approach with approaches directed towards a village or community as a whole. I started the presentation of my findings by mentioning the advantages of an individual approach. It seemed to be very important for the children to be able to meet in a group-setting on a regular basis. In this way they could form relationships and share ideas with children from diverse backgrounds, receive training, and develop their leadership abilities. Compared to a village-based approach, they considered individual-based sponsorship to be "a sign of equality". An interesting explanation was given fort this: an approach of selecting children from poor families around a larger area would cause a better spread of the project's benefits than in a case where efforts would be limited to one village, whereby not every family is equally in need of support. Furthermore, they noted that is administratively difficult to support and provide personal guidance to all children in a village, and pass on information to them.

When speaking of the disadvantages related to an individualized approach to reducing poverty, most of the problems children came up with were related to their family position, including living with uneducated people, and being envied by siblings or neglected by parents. However, because the children participating in focus groups on this topic were specifically invited to discuss negative sides of individual child sponsorship, it is difficult to assess to which extent these problems are a part of children's daily experiences.

Next to advantages and disadvantages of an individual-based approach, children also came up with advantages of a community-based approach. One of these was that such an approach can create general involvement among the people. However, as Herrell (1986) suggested, this may also be true for individual-based sponsorship, under the condition that the needs assessment and planning are done locally by the client community. This focus on individual children's needs would according to him make people aware of the longer-range development needs of the area. Another mentioned argument in favour of a community-based approach was that money (including gifts from sponsors) would be divided more equally. However, knowing that the available resources would only support a limited group of people, children thought it to be more worthwhile to use it to support those who need it most.

Not mentioned by the children was the assumed inability of individual-based approaches to address the root causes or political factors of the children's poverty (Cansave, in Taylor, 1984; Moir, in Stalker, 1982). Although it is difficult to make any statements about this, an individual approach may indirectly result in addressing some root causes or political

factors in the long range. Because children who experienced severe poverty by themselves are individually guided towards occupying a leading position in their community, they may be especially motivated and equipped to influence their community's situation, even on a political level. An example of one of these children showing such ambitions was John, whose narrative was presented earlier. That sponsored children may be able to contribute to the alleviation of poverty in their communities is also believed by Compassion International (2008). The assumption that child sponsorship organizations are forced to use an individual approach in spite of their wish to carry out community-based approaches (Ennew, 1996; Duncan, 2004) may thus count for some of these organizations, but not for Compassion International.

Future expectations and goals

Finally I was interested in learning about children's expectations and goals for the future. Unlike authors like Stalker (1982) and Shaw (1989) had put forward, children did not show false expectations about a being taken away to their sponsor's affluent country, although some of them, like John, expressed an appreciation for the way in Western societies are organized. Most children had clearly in mind what kind of occupation they wished to have in the future. Hereby it was interesting to find that children's choices for a specific occupation seemed to be motivated by a wish to improve the situation for their families and the communities in which they lived. They felt that the Compassion International project could help them to reach these goals by providing them with an education, giving them opportunities to practice skills to prepare them for their later professional lives, and helping them to keep track of their progress by means of a personal report.

Recommendations for future research and practice

The current study addressed children's experiences with an international child sponsorship program in a broad way. However, in order to get a deeper insight into the way in which these experiences are shaped by the specific cultural and religious context in which the program operated as well as the particular approach used by Compassion International, further research is required. It would be of special interest to undertake such research in countries or geographical areas in which Christianity is not a religion practiced by the majority of people. This would make it easier to assess whether a Christian project would create conflicts in the children's lives or exclude children from eligible families who are uncomfortable with the Christian religion, as Plan International assumed.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to carry out longitudinal research in order to assess what happens to the children after they have completed the sponsorship program. Hereby it would be particularly relevant to find out whether children's future chances are related to the religious social networks they developed while participating in the sponsorship program. Did the children manage to uphold these networks and use them to improve their lives? Furthermore, did any of them acquire leading positions in their community or did they fall back into the margins of society? According to Compassion Nederland, a number of their formerly sponsored children in Uganda have indeed gained positions enabling them to exercise political influence (oral communication, 22 February 2010). It would be helpful to assess these questions in a systematic way.

Finally, it would be useful for future research to include perspectives of sponsored children's siblings, parents, and unsponsored age-mates. Although the sponsored children themselves have given useful insights into the project's influence on their relationships with others, looking at the other side of these relationships will give an even more complete picture of how individual child sponsorship affects other involved parties.

I would like to end by making a few recommendations for further practice. First, in order to avoid problems of stigmatization and inequality, it should be made sure that admission to a sponsorship project for children in poverty is in the first place based on the assessed degree of a family's poverty, not on the child's status as an orphan. Second, in order to prevent negative consequences for children who don't receive letters from their sponsors, sponsorship organizations wishing to uphold the individual relationship between sponsor and child should encourage donors to get involved into letter writing to the maximum extent possible, whereby it is most important that these letters contain expressions of care and encouragement. Third, as the practice of sending gifts to individual children or families was seen as problematic by the children, it may be more suitable for sponsors to make financial contributions to the project as a whole. Finally, this study's results give reason to recommend that faith-based child sponsorship organizations should remain to include religious aspects into their programs dependant on their suitability for the contexts in which they operate. In this way they may be able to connect more closely to the children's lives and increase children's motivation to work on a better future.

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Appendix A – Standard Observation Sheet

Date/time/place of session:

Tool used:

Number/sex of participants:

Data number sequence:

Are the data possibly affected by...

-Place:

-Interruptions/distractions:

-Weather:

-Researcher:

-Child(ren):

Other remarks:

Appendix B – Story Sheet

Hi!

My name is Irene and I am a student from the Netherlands.
I will be here during the next weeks to learn about your experiences in this Compassion International project.

But first I would like to learn a bit about who you are. It would be great if you could introduce yourself to me by writing a short story about your life. You could write for example about the place you are living, your family, school, or church. You could also choose to write about how a day in your life usually looks like.

If you don't want to do this for any reason, you should feel free to refuse. But if you decide to write something for me, you can be sure that it will be read by no one else but me. Please fill out your name and age so that I can get in touch with you later.

Your name:

Your age:

Your story:

Appendix C – Focus Group Guide

Focus group 1

Topic: Community impact

Assignment: Discuss concrete ideas on how your community can benefit from your participation in the sponsorship program. Include in your discussion the situation of other children in your community that are poor, but are not sponsored.

Focus group 2

Topic: Gifts from the sponsor

Assignment: Discuss the difficulties that may arise when some children and their families receive gifts from sponsors while others don't. Then discuss what you think are the best ways to overcome these difficulties.

Focus group 3

Topic: The role of religion

Assignment: Discuss what according to you should be the role of the Christian faith in the project. Also discuss how you think the program would function if it did not have this Christian character.

Focus group 4

Topic: (Dis)advantages of individual child sponsorship

Assignment: Discuss what you think are the advantages and disadvantages of individual child sponsorship, if compared to approaches directed towards the community as a whole.

Focus group 5

Topic: Ideas for improvement

Assignment: Discuss your ideas on how the sponsorship program might be improved.

Appendix D – Interview Guide

<u>Purpose</u>

The purpose of this interview is to learn about how your participation in the Compassion project has shaped your life.

<u>Narrative part</u>

To begin with I would like you to tell me the story of your life. You can start your story with the day you were born and finish with the present day. You can tell me as much as you remember and you can take all the time you need.

<u>Semi-structured part</u>

1. Introduction

Possible questions:

-Do you remember the day you were chosen to be in the project? If yes: What happened and how did you feel?

-How did you get registered in the project? Or: How did you (your family) find out about Compassion?

-Why do you think have you been selected to be in the project?

-How does it feel to be sponsored? Why?

2. Life changes and empowerment

Possible questions:

-What do you think are the most important changes in your life since you entered the project?

-What is the most important/useful thing you have learned from being in the project?

-How has your participation in the project affected the way you think about yourself (and your abilities)?

-Do you feel that being in the project gives you certain opportunities for your life? Which?

3. Family impact

Possible questions:

-How has your participation in the project affected your family (parents, brothers & sisters), in both good ways and bad ways?

-What ideas/plans do you have to help your family with the things you are learning in the project?

4. Relationship with the sponsor

Possible questions:

-Can you tell me something about your relationship with your sponsor?

-Do you often get letters from your sponsor? What do these letters mean to you? Or: What do you like most about these letters?

-Have you ever received a gift from your sponsor? What did you use the gift for?

5. Religion

Possible questions:

-What does it mean for you personally to learn about the Christian faith in the project?

-Has the Christian character of the program affected your family in some way?

-Do you have a favourite memory verse from the Bible? Which?

6. Future expectations

Possible questions:

-What expectations do you have about your life in the future, after you have left the Compassion project (study, job, responsibilities)?

-What role could your participation in the project play in reaching your future goals?

7. Closure

Possible questions:

-Would you like to say anything more before we finish the interview?

Appendix E – Camera Assignment

"One day in my life"

Make a photo report of one common day in your life, using all the 27 pictures on the camera. You can try to make about 2 pictures every hour, making the first picture when you get up in the morning and the last picture before you go to bed in the evening. You can include pictures of places (in and outside your home/school), people (yourself, your family/friends), objects (your bed, the food you eat), or anything else that is important to you. Also include some pictures that are related to your participation in the Compassion project. Please write down for every picture you take what it is about, using the numbers 27 to 1. Take good care of your camera, and bring back it to me as soon as you've finished. Good luck!!!

Appendix F – Children's Photos

Early in the morning
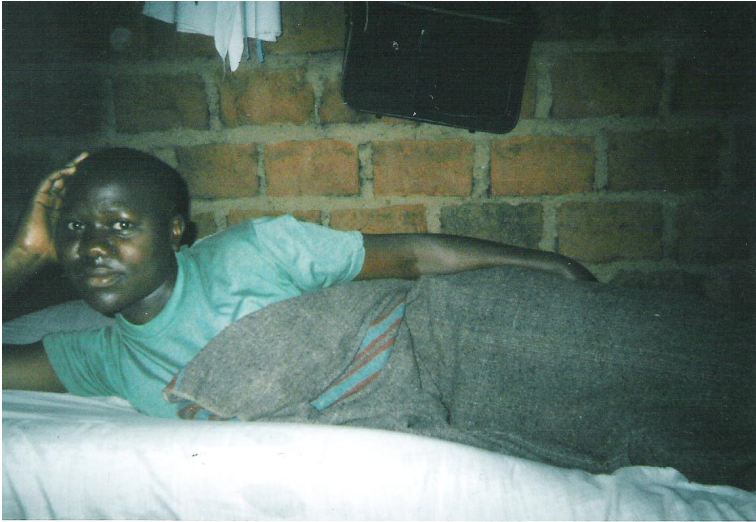
Waking up in my own bed.
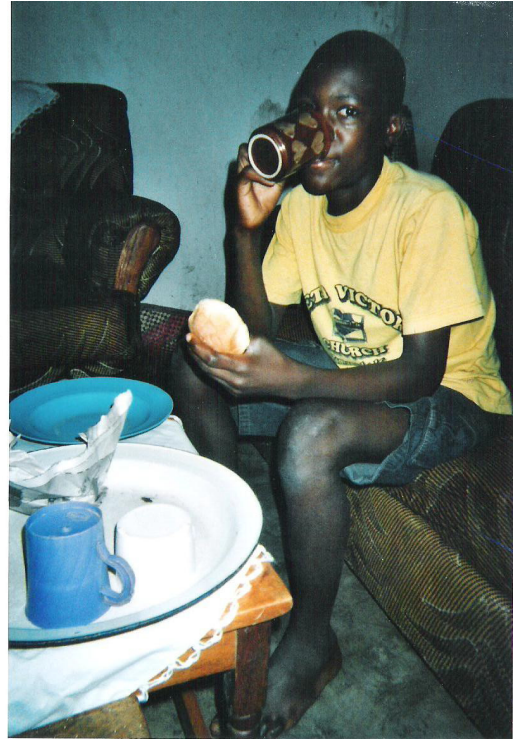
Taking breakfast.
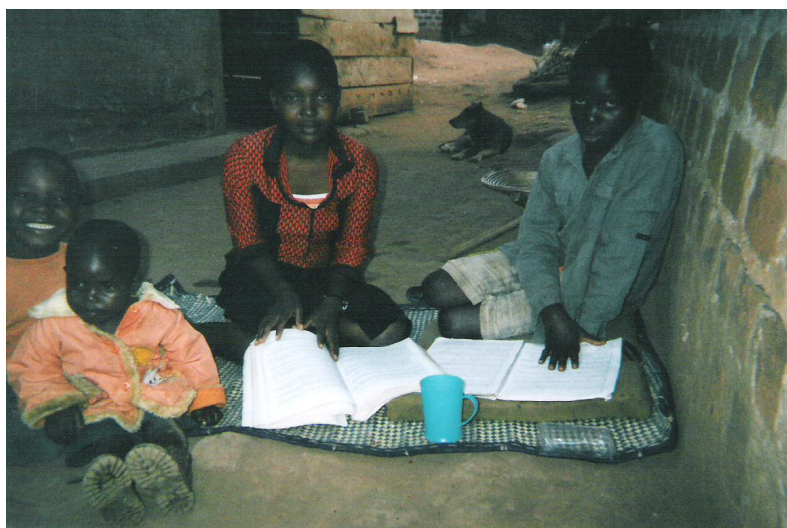

Cleaning the utensils.

Cleaning the sty.

School and church activities

The compound of my school.

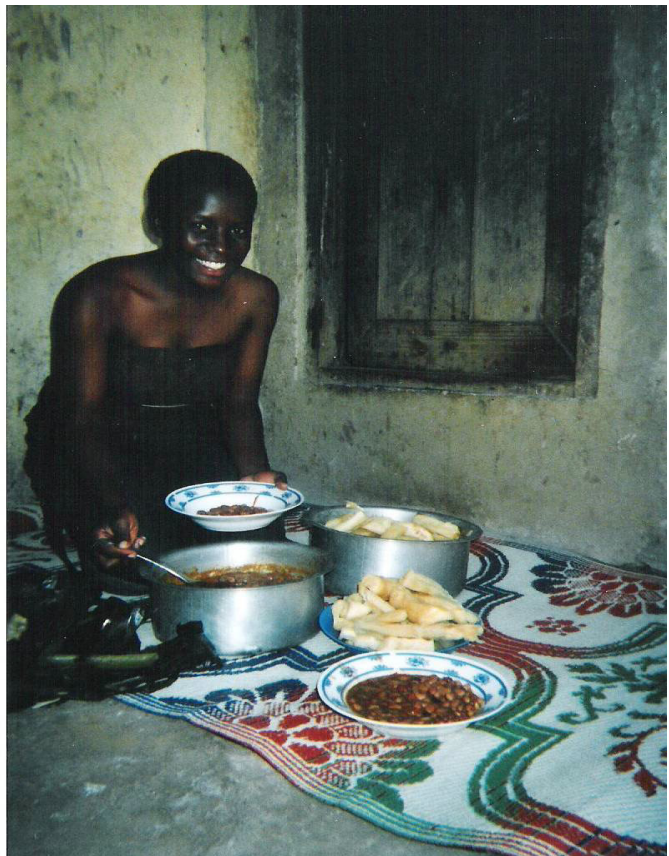Revising my books with my brother.

Returning from church (in my choir uniform).

Time to eat

Taking lunch with my family.

Serving the food which we eat.

Tasks in and around the house
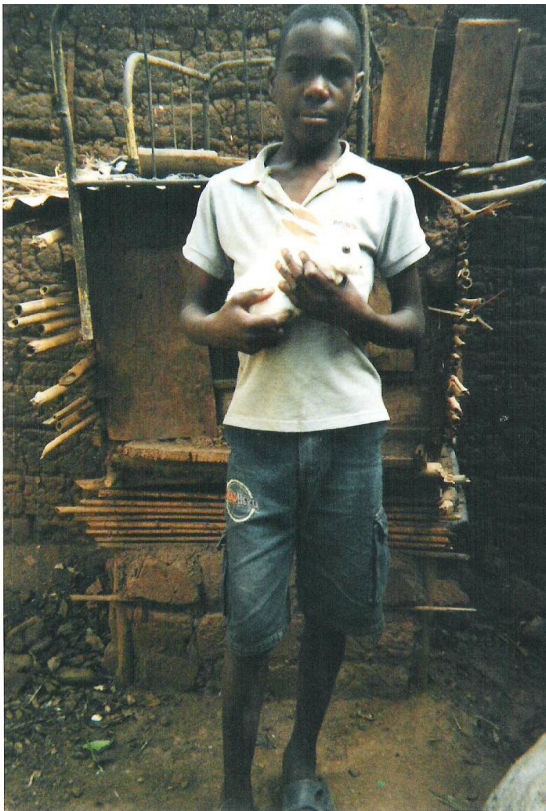

My brother at the bore hole with other villagers.

Digging in the sweet potato garden.

Caring for my friend's little brother.

Ironing with my neighbor.

Looking after my chicks.

Looking after my rabbit.

Afternoon- and evening activities
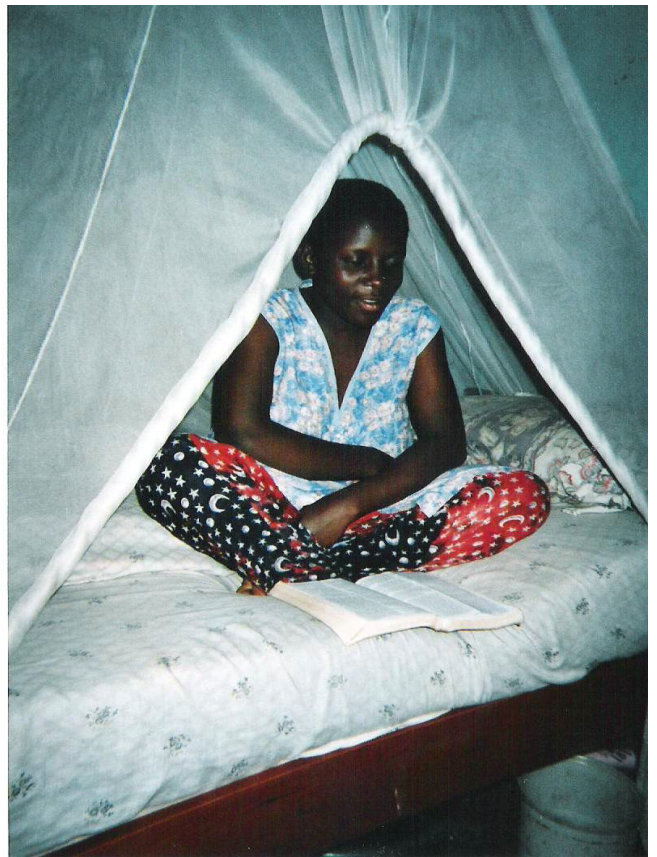

Reading the Bible with friends.

Playing soccer with friends.

Praying before going to bed to sleep.