

Summary

The project conducted with MCT/FAPE and University of Edinburgh took place between May and July 2017. Entitled 'Community Perspectives on Child protection in Taroudant', it sought to understand the ways in which the community perceived childhood and child protection via focus group interviews and activities with adults and children in the community. Earlier studies argue that listening to the community and enhancing community ownership of projects is key to putting in place effective systems of child protection. Other studies have also pointed to the fact that involving the community in development initiatives is not always as straightforward as it is made out to be. The results of the project suggest the following:

- The community and the opinions of its members are not homogenous
- Adults and children have very different views on childhood, threats to children, and the role of different actors in child protection
- Adult members of the community consider rape to be the greatest threat to children in Taroudant
- Children are more worried about everyday violence
- Adults are mistrustful of formal actors including the police and teachers. Some adults also consider the community a bad influence on child protection initiatives
- Children consider the police very capable of protecting children
- Family members are considered extremely important in child protection, with the efforts of NGOs also considered highly valuable in child protection by both adults and children
- In coming up with solutions to child protection, the community seems more inclined to rely on formal actors rather than informal actors
- Adults' views are general more oriented towards 'child-saving' whereas children's are more in line with 'child rights'

Next steps:

Considering the findings obtained through this project, there are a number of things MCT may consider in terms of their next projects:

- Unifying community sub-groups
- Enhancing critical consciousness on the negative effects of silence (in terms of rape, as well as generally the importance of allowing children to speak out and speak freely)
- Campaigning and awareness-raising about child rights
- Increasing communication and links between formal and informal actors
- Normative change on attitudes towards sex and 'hshuma' culture
- Communicating the views expressed as part of this project to formal bodies to instigate structural change
- Increase listening to and the inclusion of children's viewpoints in future initiatives

Seeking to listen

The Paradoxes of Community-led Development: Community Perspectives on Child Protection in Taroudant, Morocco

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Abstract

The turn of the last century saw an increased demand and appreciation for community-based initiatives in development. The community has also been identified as a key actor in the safety and protection of children. Community perspectives are therefore to be taken into account in development programmes that aim to identify solutions to child protection issues. Despite positive rhetoric, in practice this is not as straightforward as one may assume. The following paper highlights this position in light of a recent research project on community perspectives on child protection in Morocco.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank The University of Edinburgh and Moroccan Children's Trust for the wonderful chance to participate in this project.

I especially want to thank Hanane Hendaoui, for being both a great colleague and friend, without whom I would have been lost during my placement in Morocco. I am also in eternal gratitude to Sophie Booth, for offering so much valuable support and advice during and after the project. It has been a pleasure working with both you. Special thanks to Adeel Belorf and Oliver Roy too, for always helping out and saving the day when things became too hectic.

I am very thankful to my supervisor, Jamie Furniss, for his academic support.

I also want to thank my parents and friends, for helping me with everything that has contributed towards me handing this paper in on time. You are loved.

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Introduction

The recent decades in international development have been characterised by a marked shift from neo-liberal top-down approaches to a new paradigm promoting ‘sustainable development’ with its emphasis on inclusivity, participation and community values – the so-called ‘development with a human face’ coined by the United Nations (UN) in the late 1990s. Indeed, many scholars¹ agree that taking community perspectives into account increases the chances of success in development projects and initiatives as opposed to expert-driven solutions. As Amartya Sen has highlighted, it is increasingly important to move development “practice towards seeking to listen rather than to tell” (Rao and Walton 2004, p.19) – that is as Da Costa explains; “letting people decide what they have reason to value.” (2010, p.511) It is this notion that local knowledge is valuable and that community perspectives ought to inform the work of development practitioners and NGOs working in the that the following study addresses.

Informed by Michael G. Wessel’s 2015 study on bottom-up child protection in Sierra Leone, the project conducted in Taroudant, south-west Morocco, aimed to learn about the community’s views on child protection, and to find possible solutions for strengthening existing child protection mechanisms based on community-produced knowledge and suggestions. The long-term goal of the project is to generate information that will be used to plan and develop formal child protection structures that integrate community mechanisms both in Taroudant, as well as at provincial level in Morocco. The host organisation, Moroccan Children’s Trust (MCT), hopes to use the findings outlined in this paper as an evidence base to advocate for formal actors to take into account the perceptions and participation of the community in child protection.

The importance of taking community perspectives into account not just in development in general, but specifically in the realm of child protection, has been endorsed by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in their recent paper outlining the ‘Systems Approach’ to child protection (2010). The systems-based approach argues that child protection systems that are ‘highly contextualized’, embedded in normative contexts, and supported by informal actors, such as the family and the community, are both useful and highly efficient in “assuring children are free from violence, abuse, exploitation, and other forms of maltreatment” (2010, p.3). If this is the case, then it is indeed important as Sen has suggested and as MCT has attempted to implement as part of their project, to *seek to listen rather than to tell* communities how to best protect children, and incorporate these views into development initiatives that aim to better safeguard children in a manner which “moves beyond the top-down development” (Da Costa 2010, p.501) and values local ownership while also enhancing collective empowerment (Wessels 2015).

However, as the project in question and others before it (e.g. Kruger’s 2014 study in South Africa and Bhaird’s 2013 investigation in Kolkata, India) have demonstrated, local community perspectives do not always correlate with the norms and values set by the international community, such as those outlined by the UN under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). When this is the case, are we to trust the experts “armed with international conventions, a body of knowledge and specialists, media spectacles and an array of symbolic goods” (Nieuwenhuys 2010, p.292) or follow the advice of scholars such as Wessels, who remain loyal to the assumption that community-driven approaches are the most “effective in promoting positive outcomes for children” (2015, p.19). Moreover, in terms of practical efforts for those in the field - what is in a non-governmental organisation (NGO) to

¹ Freire 1974, Bronfenbrenner 1979, Schrader Macmillan and Burton 2009, Kruger 2014 and Wessels 2015 to name but a few in the field of development and child protection

do when local views clash, not only with international standards, but within themselves? What if the community is resistant to taking on child protection as its own responsibility?

As the following paper will demonstrate, questions such as these become all the more complex when children's own opinions are added into the decision-making process. Even if development efforts manage to surpass the didactic top-down narrative of dictating to communities what should be done, becoming instead more active listeners, the question that persists is who *decides* who should be listened to, and thereby which suggestions are ultimately successful in reaching the decision-making level when considering strategies for child protection in local contexts? These are some of the important, albeit confusing, questions that this paper shall attempt to address while participating in the larger debate on the usefulness of community-based approaches— a debate which is not as clear-cut as one might assume, as this paper hopes to demonstrate.

Structure

The following paper is divided into four chapters. The first outlines the paradigm shift from top-down 'telling' to bottom-up 'listening' in development, and discusses the role of the community as an important actor in child protection with reference to relevant case studies and theory. The role of children as meaningful actors themselves within the community is also touched upon.

The second chapter provides an overview of current child protection measures in place in Morocco, as well as a synopsis on the methodological framework and details of the research project conducted as part of this paper.

The third chapter explores the views expressed by adult community members on child protection, thereafter comparing these to the responses of the child participants. In light of these findings, international development theory and relevant scholarly literature on child protection is cited.

The last chapter addresses pertinent problems which arise from the material of the research project, and considers them as analogies of paradoxes that may occur in community-based development initiatives.

The conclusion cedes that in terms of protecting children, methods need to converge at both the formal and informal level, as neither approach is able to address the problems posed by threats to child protection on its own. Communication is offered as a tool to begin the process of cooperation.

Why bottom-up? Why children?

The following chapter briefly outlines the background behind the shift from top-down to an appreciation for more bottom-up forms of development and offers arguments in favour of the community-based approach. The relevance of bottom-up and community-based is discussed in terms of child protection, highlighting the importance of listening to local views, as well as those of children.

From top-down to bottom-up: A new era of International Development?

Wolfgang Sachs famously attested towards the end of the 20th century that

“The idea of development stands like a ruin in the intellectual landscape. Delusion and disappointment, failures and crimes have been the steady companions of development and they tell a common story: it did not work.” (1992, p.xv)

‘Top-down’ here refers to the model of development that has been characterised by neo-liberal intervention promoting free trade, free markets and minimal government during the 1980s and 90s, informed by the theory of modernisation². Heavily criticised by post-development scholars, such as most notably, Arturo Escobar (1988; 2004), who argued that not only was development exploitative towards those it claimed to be helping, but that development interventions forcibly imposed Western structures and ideals onto beneficiaries at the expense of traditional modes of living. This fuelled two points of criticism; one, that development, as such, assumed a cultural superiority over local cultures and knowledge in claiming and attempting to ‘fix’ problems the paradigm itself had identified and ‘created’, and second, top-down development often served to do more harm than good via its interventions.

With development quickly losing its credibility due to the implicit ‘paternalistic message’ which top-down practices were accused of imbuing, “that the way people are living is ‘wrong’ and that their judgement is inadequate” (Bhaired 2013, p.392), the turn of the century saw a “demand for community-led approaches and the proliferation of terms such as participation, empowerment and community-ownership” (ibid., p.389) With this turning tide, economic growth became replaced with human rights³ in development initiatives, development experts with local communities, and the universalism of modernity with the particularism of localism⁴ (Da Costa 2010). This new paradigm was hailed as ‘Development with a Human Face’ (Mehrotra and Jolly 1997) and placed a higher emphasis on so-called ‘human factors’ of development, such as the ‘happiness index’ (GNH) as opposed to calculating development based on mere economic success (GDP). Inspired by Amartya Sen’s ‘capabilities’ approach, development now became understood as ‘freedom’ – “the freedom of individuals to live long and live well” (1999, p.5)

In the midst of this shift, development achieved perhaps one its greatest success stories of all times: the adoption of the CRC by UN General Assembly in 1989, ratified today by all countries except for the United States (Human Rights Watch 2014). The treaty contains 54 articles outlining the “civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that all children everywhere are entitled to” (UNICEF UK). Is it ironic that such a universal agreement was reached during a time when development

² Based on W.W. Rostow’s ‘stages of economic growth’ (1960) and Talcott Parson’s ‘pattern variables’ (1937) whereby societies transition from a ‘traditional’ state to more ‘modern’ one economically and ideologically.

³ The set of moral norms and principles that people are entitled to as human beings, commonly understood as universal and ‘inalienable’ (UN OHCHR).

⁴ That which prioritises the local, the opposite of ‘universal’ (Hare 1963, Dancy 2004).

programmes were increasingly beginning to promote the role of local values and culture as part of their projects? Stammers (1999, referenced in Reynolds et al 2006) notes the following;

“As is the case with human rights, children’s rights are permeated with high-flung ideals of social justice. Dealing as they do with strong and often competing normative frameworks, their coverage, relative weight or even precise content has sparked intense debate between proponents and opponents.” (p.293)

The question is, do children’s rights enhance bottom-up efforts of development by including “those who are excluded within the community and political structure” (Freeman 1997, referenced in *ibid.*), or take away from them by imposing a universalistic vision of children from the top down at the expense of local views and initiatives? It seems that, as Reynolds et al interestingly point out, often what is assumed is

“that the children’s rights frame will by definition, clash with local cultures and values. In approaching local ideas of good and wrong as deeply antithetical to a belief in children’s rights, critics exclude the other from the rights framework altogether, unwittingly attributing to the West the monopoly of the universal” (2006, p.294).

This is where it becomes ever more important for development to shift from its previous norm of *telling*, to that of *listening* when looking to safeguard “children worldwide against all sort of abuse” (*ibid.* p.291) Several studies have shown that the community is indeed a key element in child protection (Bronfenbrenner 1979, Belsky 1980, UNICEF 2010, Wessels 2015), and that successful systems of child protection rely on the cooperation of actors from both top-down *and* bottom-up (UNICEF 2010, Bhaird 2013, Wessels 2015). It is thus not a question of whether community-based initiatives of child protection are useful or not, but *how* they can help improve already existing mechanisms, and if there are factors within the community that hinder the safety of children, *how* can these be changed through the community’s own efforts? Taking the community as a central component in child protection, the next sections consider some of the challenges and advantages of community-based interventions.

From telling to listening: the value of bottom-up approaches

A bottom-up approach refers to development that takes into account the views of local actors in decision-making processes, to allow and create opportunities for participation in the creation of strategies and solutions to problems that directly affect them. The approach draws on Paulo Freire’s theory of critical consciousness (1974), whereby problems must be defined by the community itself and solutions arrived at in a manner which is both suitable and compatible with local culture and normative values. ‘Normative’ here pertains to that which is judged to be either good or bad according to prevailing cultural norms and traditions. ‘Community’ refers to a group of people living in a given setting at a given time. Bottom-up approaches thereby promote community-based knowledge over foreign imported mechanisms, which have been attacked by the likes of Escobar who theorises that development is a form of ‘violence’ (2004), since international development initiatives often clash with and even harm local structures and ways of life. The assumption is that it is better to solve problems from the inside out, rather than through interventions instigated from the outside in, with the objective being “to use local knowledge to shift the existing architecture of power” (Escobar 1988, p.439) from the top towards the bottom.

Identifying and finding solutions to problems from within accords with Sen’s idea of development as ‘freedom’ – that is, people’s capacity “to lead the kind of lives they value – and have reason to value” (1999, p. 18). The remedy according to a community-based approach is thus to *listen*, and not

tell others what they should value as important and which areas warrant improvement in their own lives.

Nevertheless, despite the advantages of accepting local opinions, behaviours, and ways of life, others have identified complications in allowing problems to be defined solely by local actors. One such issue arises in the writings of Foucault (1980), who averts us to the ways in which local perceptions may be sometimes flawed due to the internalisation of oppressive representations of groups being taken as a given, thereby reinforcing context specific power relations. In such cases, power does not shift from higher echelons to the lower ones as projected by Escobar, since community members either do not recognise or are unaware of the sources of their own hardship. This predicament is also called ‘false consciousness’ (Engels 1932) – a state in which “people fail to recognise inequities in their society” (Moghaddam 2006, referenced in Bhaird 2013, p.391). Such may be the case particularly in settings where vulnerable groups are treated, and consider themselves as, inferior to dominant groups. This is a problem which was highlighted in Schrader McMillan and Burton’s 2009 study of a parent education training programme in Guatemala utilising Latin American liberation psychology (an approach which considers economic, social and cultural structures as a means to understand psychological problems among members of oppressed and impoverished groups (Martín-Baró 1996)) in which certain participants exhibited “unconscious and internal resistance to knowledge” (p.206) surrounding violence, gender discrimination, and child maltreatment due to an internalised sense of inferiority. Another problematic issue may be that local opinions are often assumed to be heterogenous and communities to be living together in harmony (Asthana and Oostvogles 1996, referenced in Bhaird 2013 p. 391) when this may not in fact be the case. This, much like false consciousness, poses the danger of maintaining existing power relations and inequalities or even further exacerbating them. Such was the case in a women’s empowerment initiative in the Kolkata slums of India, where attempts to challenge men’s patriarchal power over women as a result of critical consciousness raising and participatory action programmes were met adversely and actively resisted by the men of the community, thus further jeopardising the position of women (Bhaird 2013).

If we are to avoid Engel’s ‘false consciousnesses’ and other possible obstacles when taking community views into account, it is important not only to look into whose opinions are being valued in decision-making processes, but further, as Da Costa probes, how those opinions have been formed: “who assigns value, how and for whom?” (2010, p.511). To initiate positive change in the spirit of development, an antecedent ‘push’ is usually required from the outside, so that critical consciousness in the form of ‘conscientisation’ (Freire 1974) – “the discovery of that which is good, not just for oneself but for others as well” (Schrader McMillan and Burton 2009, p.201), can be achieved. This is also called ‘phronesis’ in Aristotelian ethics, and can allow communities to critically reflect on and recognise those areas that are to be improved upon for reaching the aim of living well overall (Aristotle 1566). Where bottom-up approaches inform us that “conscientisation and collective action cannot be forced or imposed by outsiders” (Schrader McMillan and Burton 2009, p.209), then a top-down approach informs us that the critical reflection needed to bring about conscientisation cannot be attained in the absence of an outsider to act as an instigator for the process. This can be “a teacher, animator or facilitator who enables the reflection to take place” (ibid., p. 201). If we are to take Sen’s vision of development as “improvement, promoting more just societies, and decreasing injustices” (2010, referenced in Bhaird 2013, p.399), change – indeed *development* – is required to instigate the transformation. It is therefore important for development actors to *listen*, as well as observe, learn, and understand, before attempting to tackle both real and perceived problems when they enter communities with the aim of improving the wellbeing of children.

Bottom-up approaches and child protection: the importance of the community

In his 'ecological framework' perspective, Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) theorised that children are influenced by everything in the world that surrounds them. This includes their social relationships with other humans, and the effect rendered can be either positive or negative. According to Bronfenbrenner, influences are set out on five levels; the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chronosystems. The child itself is imagined as the starting point of the system with his or her sex, age and level of health taken into account (also known as the 'bioecological model', Bronfenbrenner and Ceci 1994). Within the microsystem are included all the actors that a child is most closely in contact with, such as parents, other family members and children and teachers and so on. These actors profoundly influence how the child grows into an individual – for example the more nurturing a mother, or the more encouraging a teacher, the better the development of the child. Echoing Bronfenbrenner's theory, UNICEF's study on the adaptation of systems theory (the organisation of phenomena, and their interdependency) on child protection confirmed in its findings that:

“When it comes to protecting children, the family (including kin) plays a central role [...] Children are also part of a broader community [...] For this reason, protecting children is both a public and a private matter” (2010, p.5)

Furthermore, the paper posits that:

“For a wide variety of reasons, children are not always sufficiently protected. Sometimes the risks are present within the family sphere, when parents and other family members are either unwilling or unable to protect their children. Other times, the risks are found in the economic, social, and political externalities of the communities in which families live. [...] In each of these situations, it is possible to protect children, but doing so requires a deliberate, coordinated effort on the part of the involved actors.” (ibid.)

Several research projects on child protection have confirmed the above findings, such as Wessel's 2015 study on bottom-up approaches to strengthening child protection in Sierra Leone, which found that child protection principles took root and had a much larger impact when initiated by community actors themselves. Following Bronfenbrenner's theory and UNICEF's findings, it is clear then, that the family, as well as the community, have a very meaningful impact on the wellbeing and growth of a child. In terms of development initiatives, it is important to distinguish family and the community as 'informal' actors, whereas the government, its policies and those that it employs such as the police and social workers are defined as 'formal' actors (Wessels 2015). In development terms, the informal translates to 'bottom-up', whereas the formal are considered 'top-down.' Development itself, embodied by international conventions such as the CRC and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, such 'Gender Equality' (Goal 5) and 'Peace and Justice' (Goal 16) and their related targets⁵, are even further removed in terms of the influence they exert on children themselves, and their development, perhaps only somewhere in the level of the macrosystem on Bronfenbrenner's schema. In acknowledging that the family and the community play such an immediate and integral role in relation to children, the international development agenda should actively promote bottom-up, community-driven approaches in its plight to protect children. However, as Wessels has pointed out

⁵ Consider SDG targets 5.3 – 'Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early, and forced marriages, and genital mutilation', and 16.2 – 'End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against children' (UNDP 2016)

“Non-formal actors – including children, families, and communities – are important parts of child protection systems, although too often they are portrayed simplistically as beneficiaries or as part of the problem” (Wessel 2015, p.9)

While local knowledge is celebrated under the UN paradigm of ‘sustainable’ and ‘human’ development, it is still the very same organisation that defines what childhood is and who is to receive protection under the category of ‘child’, as well as what such protection should entail and how it is to be undertaken. For example, the notion that a child becomes an adult at the biological age of 18 (UNCRC Article 1), or that children under a certain age should not work (UNCRC Article 32), have been widely debated. Again, rather than opting for a purely top-down or bottom-up method, it is not only essential, but useful to find ways for the two approaches to coalesce, in order to challenge threats to child protection more effectively. While it may be agreed upon that community-based child protection is indeed, the most effective way to bring about changes that will affect a child’s development and wellbeing in a manner which is more concrete than idealistic, there are still challenges in arriving at ‘that which is good’, both for communities and the values they ascribe to, and children as a group which is both separate and different, yet inextricably linked to the community. As the UNICEF paper on child protection systems concludes;

“communities need to know when the rights of children are being violated, how best to respond, and whether rights and violations are being addressed equitably” (2010, p.26)

A brief exploration into the ways in which this can be done, as well as the meaning of ‘child’ and their central role in any action which portends to be working in favour of their ‘rights’ and wellbeing, follows.

Listening to children: children as members of the community

In her 2010 essay, Olga Nieuwenhuys posits the question as to why study children, and moreover, why study them as a subgroup that is separate from others. Is this not to essentialise childhood and take part in the activity of seeking difference and ‘otherness’ in children as opposed to adults? On one level, such questions resonate with Escobar’s writings about development’s fixation on the “production of labels” (1988, p.435), whereby the organisation of people under groups such as ‘children’ and its amalgamations (e.g. ‘street children’ or ‘vulnerable children’) provides the development industry with a set of ‘clients’ to “treat and reform” with appropriate programmes (ibid.). On another level, and attesting to Escobar, Nieuwenhuys argues that it is artificial to treat children differently

“in contexts where children are not set collectively apart because they are children. Or to tag a young person who is already a family head ‘child’ because she or he is (presumably) still under 18. This [...] results in decrying these young people’s ‘lack of childhood’ [...] as if this is *something* that cannot only be ‘given’ to them but is also what they would passionately desire.” (2010, p.294)

If, on the one hand, we are to understand ‘childhood’ as made-up and artificial – a ‘social and historical construction’ (Alanen 2000), on the other, it is a relevant characterisation, albeit one which should be used in “the plural form ‘childhoods’” (Nieuwenhuys 2010, p.294), as opposed to a singular universalising (and often ‘Western’) definition of ‘childhood’.

In firm favour of the latter concept, UNICEF has declared that “every child has rights, whatever their ethnicity, gender, religion, language, abilities or any other status” (UNICEF UK). Although many have, and continue to, criticise a ‘universal’ understanding of children (e.g. Reynolds et al 2006 and

Nieuwenhuys 2010), UNICEF's 'Systems Approach to Child Protection' (2010), offers some concessions. While the UN does impose a rather universalising and arbitrary concept of children ("a child means every human being under the age of eighteen years", UNCRC Article 1), the systems approach concedes that while child protection must concern *all* children *everywhere* equally, the *ways* that children can be protected are multiple and different – i.e. there is no 'one' child protection system (UNICEF 2010), although the goals of every system should be in line with those stated under the articles of the Convention. If we follow the UNICEF doctrine and agree that "childhood confers a special status upon children, including recognition of their vulnerability and protection" (2010, p.5) but that it should be provided in multiple and different *ways*, then bottom-up approaches to child protection and development become highly useful. Although informed and facilitated in the form of top-down by the UN ideology of children having universal rights (known as the human rights-based approach (HRBA), United Nations Development Group 2003) that must be granted and upheld in any given context, a bottom-up method can help in finding the best and most appropriate ways of safeguarding these rights in particular contexts. The systems-approach to child protection offers a credible form of reconciliation between top-down and bottom-up forms of development, and resonates with Sen's interpretation of development, where it is

"the ends that make development important, rather than merely some of the means that, inter alia, play a prominent part in the process" (1999, p.3)

However, when thinking about communities, it is important to be aware of the fact that children themselves are also meaningful members of the community. Therefore, when advocating bottom-up approaches to child protection, it is also important to listen to children themselves and take their views and opinions seriously – a principle which is also enshrined in the UNCRC under articles 12-14⁶, as well as the conceptualisation of development as freedom;

"the exercise of people's freedoms, through the *liberty to participate* in social choice and in the making of public decisions" (Sen 1999, p.5 emphasis added).

This can be done in a number of ways, such as adhering to 'child-friendly' participatory methods when conducting research with children, including drawing, theatre, play and focus groups "designed to make research 'fun' and 'relevant' to children" (Hunleth 2011, p.82), as well as being attentive to the fact that children too, "are competent research participants and their views deserve to be taken seriously" (Hardman 1973, referenced in *ibid.*). Allowing and creating the space for children to be included in making the decisions that directly affect them is not only empowering, but an important component of holistic development⁷, which allows for the 'self-actualisation' of people (Maslow 1962) – the improvement of every aspect of people's social lives, very much in line with the definition of development as 'freedom' – the "process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy" (Sen 1999, p.3).

The next chapter discusses the use of such methods in more detail in the practical context of the research conducted with community members in Taroudant, Morocco. The research project and its outcomes will be the focus of the remaining sections of this paper.

⁶ Respect for the views of the child (Article 12), Freedom of Expression (Article 13) and Freedom of Thought, Belief and Religion (Article 14) (UNICEF UK)

⁷ Derived from the concept of 'holism' by Jan Christiaan Smuts (1927), whereby systems and their properties are taken as a whole, not separately as a collection of parts (Ackoff 1971).

Methodology

Research context: Child protection in Morocco

Situated in Northern Africa, Morocco is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy (IndexMundi 2017a), ranking 105th out of 167 countries in last year's democracy index with an overall score of 4.77 according to their five measurements of democracy⁸ (The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) 2017). Although it has been hailed as an exemplar of Arab democracy (Arab Reform Initiative 2017) thanks to constitutional reform undertaken in 2011⁹, Morocco "remains a hybrid regime" (EIU 2017, p.43), meaning that it is neither fully democratic nor strictly authoritarian, with the rule of law being typically "weak" under this type of regime (ibid., p.54). Its main religion is Islam, with nearly 100% of the population identifying themselves as Muslim (IndexMundi 2017b). Children comprise about a third of the country's population (ibid.).

Morocco signed the CRC in 1990 followed by ratification in 1993 (United Nations Treaty Collection 2017). Although Morocco has taken steps to improve children's rights in compliance with the articles under the CRC, the latest UNCRC Committee periodic report of Morocco (2014) found several areas to still be lacking in terms of upholding children's rights in full as set out by the Convention. For example, the protection of children from violence and sexual abuse remains problematic, even in view of a 2004 update of the Moroccan Penal Code, which raised the age of entitlement to special protection from 12 to 15, along with the 2014 repeal of Article 475 of the Penal Code, which conferred impunity for perpetrators of rape if they married their victim (UNCRC 2014).

In view of the above, and with the encouragement of the Ministry of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social Development (MSFFDS), as well as UNICEF, the government adopted its first national child protection policy, *La Politique Publique Intergrée pour la Protection de l'Enfance* (PPIPEM) in 2015 (MSFFDS 2016). This project aims to "ensure to all the children in Morocco an effective and durable protection against all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect" through the provision of "a harmonized and federated framework, implementing an integrated system for child protection" (ibid.). In particular, the document highlights the need for participatory and collaborative approaches to improving child protection, thus endorsing the involvement of children in its planning processes, in accordance with the CRC. However, despite the initiative, there have been no procedures addressing how the policy will be eventually implemented (UNICEF 2016). As of such, unfortunately, there is still some way to go on the path to fully securing the enjoyment of rights and protection of children in Morocco. Further research and knowledge exchange on the issues affecting children in Morocco is thus required at both formal and informal levels.

Host organisation and project details

Moroccan Children's Trust is a small British charity that works together with a local organisation – *La Fondation Amane Pour La Protection de l'Enfance* (FAPE) to support vulnerable families and promote the rights of children in Morocco using a holistic approach (MCT 2017). They are based in Taroudant in the Souss-Massa-Draa province of Morocco, operating their services from the *Centre Amane* community centre. The project proposed by MCT in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh was envisaged in light of the introduction of the PPIPEM. Entitled 'Community Perspectives of Child Protection in Taroudant', the project aimed to learn about the ways in which the community in Taroudant safeguards its children with the goal of emboldening bottom-up child protection mechanisms by encouraging internally driven change. By taking into account community perspectives, the project wishes to find ways in which to protect children from risks, reduce the

⁸ Electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; functioning of government; political participation and political culture (The Economist Intelligence Unit 2017, p.52)

⁹ The reform announced by King Mohammed VI aims to strengthen areas such as freedom of expression, women's rights and political participation (Leyne 2011)

number of unreported cases of child abuse, and provide effective responses for children in need of protection that are both contextually relevant and based on the actual needs and concerns of the community. In the long-run, information collected as part of the project is intended to feed into the development of formal child protection structures.

Design and participants

Research was conducted on location in Taroudant over a 9-week period working together with a local research assistant. Using mixed ethnographic and participatory methods, the project attempted to find the answers to the following questions:

1. How does the community in Taroudant safeguard children?
2. How can the community play a part in the development of a child protection system?

Qualitative data in response to the above questions was produced via separate activities with adults and children. A representative sample of adults from pre-existing community groups was calculated by MCT and FAPE staff and group representatives contacted in order to ascertain willingness and permission to participate in the research project. Participant responses were recorded, translated and transcribed for analysis. Interviews were also conducted with MCT and FAPE staff to gain further information about the community groups involved.

Adults: Focus Groups

Open-ended questions relating to child protection and the community (See Appendix A for full questionnaire) were used to elicit responses and gather information from participants during six rounds of focus groups. Four groups consisted of women only, and two groups contained male and female participants of mixed age. While the research assistant presented the questions to the group and facilitated the ensuing conversation, my role was to observe participants and take notes of their group dynamic and reactions. Focus groups lasted between 50-90 minutes, with a mean of 70.5. All conversations were conducted and audio-recorded in Moroccan Arabic (Darija), and translated into French by the research assistant after the sessions based on recordings. These were then transcribed and further translated into English, with the research assistant having checked their accuracy.

Children: Interactive Group Activities

Five rounds of creative group activities using child-friendly methods were conducted with children between the ages of 5 and 16. The activities were divided into two parts; the first a group art activity, the second creating a short piece of drama or a dance. The activities were designed to help children answer adapted versions of the adults' questions (See Appendix A). The children were divided into groups of mixed ages and gender and encouraged to work as a team during the activities. Children's activities were conducted both in French and Darija, with the research assistant providing translations from Darija into French and vice versa for groups when and if needed depending on the children's proficiency. The activities took between 2 and 4 hours depending on the children's enthusiasm and the detail with which they responded to the research questions. Audio-recording was used to record the children's answers to the first two research questions, and video-recording for documenting the plays and dances devised by the children in response to the third research question. Photography was also used to document the children's finished drawings.

Ethics and Consent

The research team introduced themselves and the purpose and aims of the project explained in the local language at the beginning of each activity. Consent to participate was obtained via pre-

designed consent forms, and the terms of confidentiality explained to all participants before signing. Signatures were acquired either in written form, or via recording if participants were unable to write. For the children, consent was first acquired through adult gatekeepers, as well as orally from each child by asking them whether they felt comfortable being recorded, filmed, or photographed before taking part in the activities.

The data and information acquired from the focus groups and activities has been held in confidence by myself, as well as the host and partner organisations. All information and responses have been fully anonymised, and the signed consent forms and lists of participants kept separate from the data.

The project has also considered and adhered to a child rights-based approach¹⁰ while working with children from varying social backgrounds, as well as the principle of 'do no harm' – meaning that the best interests of participants have been upheld via ensuring their safety, privacy and comfort at all times during and after taking part in the project.

Prior to beginning work on the research project, the research team also received training on child protection and appropriate modes of conduct separately by MCT and FAPE staff.

Limitations

Due to language barriers, the original raw data in the form of audio-recordings has been subject to several processes of translation: first from Darija into French in summarised form for transcription purposes by the local research assistant, and later by myself from French into English for the purposes of this paper. This required conferring a high level of confidence in the belief that the research assistant has provided translations from the original that are both accurate and detailed to the best of their knowledge, although it is likely that in the process of multiple translations the meanings and intentions of what was originally said may have become severely modified in the transcription stage. While this limitation was somewhat overcome thanks to an open and trusting working relationship between myself and the research assistant, it nevertheless must be borne in mind that possible subtleties or hidden meanings present in the original audio-transcripts that may have proved useful for analysis are lost.

The uneven numbers of participants in both adults and children's groups also presented a limitation which affected the overall quality of data collected in some cases. This was especially the case with groups that were much larger than planned (original samples being 15 for adults and 9 for children), where participants tended to either talk over each other during discussions, leading to poor quality recordings, or losing their interest and focus before the completion of planned activities due to the sessions taking a very long time to conclude with extra participants.

The Muslim observation of Ramadan¹¹ significantly affected both the planned timeframe of the project, and the willingness and availability of participants to participate. Unfortunately, this meant cancelling the participatory action research (PAR)¹² element of the project, thus severely

¹⁰ Same as the HRBA, while also "taking into account the CRC principles at all times (non-discrimination, best interests, life, survival and development, and the right to be heard)" (UNICEF 2009).

¹¹ Islamic holy month during which "Muslims must observe "sawm", which entails fasting from dawn until dusk, abstaining from food, liquids, smoking or engaging in sexual relations" (Menziez 2017). Ramadan was observed in Morocco between the 27th of May and 24th of June in 2017.

¹² A form of research involving participation, reflection and action by the community to improve self-defined problems via self-designed steps (Freire 1968, Chambers 1994, Wessels 2015).

compromising the level of community ownership over the project. As of such, the credibility of bottom-up initiatives to child protection is questioned in the conclusion of this paper.

In terms of analysis, the project generated much more data that can be covered as part of a single paper, causing many interesting and possibly important portions of data to become side-lined in favour of other portions. The fact that this project dealt with qualitative data produced by human subjects was also considered in terms of uneven reliability.

Finally, although my role as a visibly foreign researcher in a local Moroccan context had the potential to produce certain limitations in terms of access to community groups, reception, and the responses given by participants, such barriers were successfully overcome with the help of the local research assistant. Nevertheless, privacy and confidentiality were limited in some cases where other outsiders assisted focus groups (a member of FAPE staff was present at two of the adults' focus groups, and children's parents or group leaders were present during most of the children's activities), all likely influencing what the participants chose to disclose to us.

Analysis

Thematic coding analysis (Robson 1993) was used to code segments of transcript with interpretive labels in order to discern and pinpoint recurring themes within the qualitative data. The data was then revisited on multiple occasions prior and during write-up, and the codes refined to extract and narrow down an initial 58 codes to 11 'organizing themes' (Attride-Stirling 2001). These themes were then organised into thematic networks, tables and mind maps leading to 5 'global themes' (ibid.). These global themes are built upon as part of the discussion in the following paper, tying in with relevant scholarly literature and theory.

Diverging opinions

Data presentation

As part of the 'Community Perspectives on Child Protection'-project the research team listened to the views of over 100 adults and children relating to child protection in their community. In analysing the data, an array of opinions that far from being uniform, were instead intensely varied and in some cases contradictory, quickly became apparent. However, one common thread was to be

distinguished in the adults' responses to the question 'What risks and harms exist for children in Taroudant?'. Although citing altogether over 25 possible risks and harms to children (See Appendix B for full list), all six adults' groups answered 'rape' among their immediate responses. This common stance became the starting point to build upon further themes and issues that arose from the content of the adults' discussions. The passages italicised in the following chapters are segments of the transcript that represent the translated quotes made by participants during focus groups and activities.

Adults

Why did the adults hold such a deep conviction that rape is a greater threat to children in Taroudant than any other risk? Half of the groups spoke about a particular man named 'Hadi'¹³ – an incident which has clearly left a vivid imprint in the collective consciousness of the community and their perceptions of what threats children face, as well as what they need to be protected from. A quick consultation of recent news headlines in Taroudant also revealed a worrying number of articles related to child sexual abuse and rape¹⁴, showing that the adults' preoccupation with the issue of rape and children is likely valid, despite Hadi himself having been convicted of his crimes over a decade ago. The topic of rape also triggered further conversation around other problems and threats to children's safety. Half of the groups said that there is a 'lack of laws' in Morocco concerning both sexual abuse and children¹⁵, and adults expressed their dissatisfaction over this condition. In addition, participants in half of the groups accused formal actors such as the police and school teachers of being potential child rapists. In terms of there being 'no law', the women's groups lamented the difficulty of pressing charges against offenders in cases of rape, which also acts as a deterrent for families and victims to pursue cases in the first place (see Footnote 15 below). This was justified on the basis of participants perceiving there to be "no punishment" for criminals who commit offences against children¹⁶. This belief led participants in several groups to conclude that little can be done in terms of protecting children from rape;

There is no fair punishment. As of such there are no results and therefore crimes do not stop, but keep on continuing.

The above conviction suggests that the community does not perceive it has the power to protect children from rape, and in their efforts to come up with solutions as to the problem of rape, many suggested relatively simple solutions such as 'keeping an eye on children at all times' or 'accompanying them everywhere', thus assigning the responsibility of protection from rape mainly on adult parents or carers. Some groups did express the opinion that, in view of there being 'no

¹³ Abdelali Hadi was convicted in 2004 for the rape, mutilation and murder of nine children in Taroudant (Aujourd'hui le Maroc 2004)

¹⁴ Between 2015 and 2016 there have been at least four reported cases of child sexual abuse in Taroudant (Le 360 Maroc 2015, Qacimi 2015, Chabaa 2016a, 2016b)

¹⁵ Laws do exist, but they do not work in favour of victims of abuse/rape due to the criminalisation of sexual relations outside of marriage under Moroccan law (Article 490 of the Penal Code). According to the UNCRC, this causes "girl victims of sexual abuse to be considered as offenders and dissuades them from lodging a complaint against their abusers" (2014, p.10) Morocco is yet to adopt a 'Children's Code' to replace the current 'Family Code', which critics accuse of maintaining gender discrimination (e.g. UNCRC 2014).

¹⁶ Participants may not have been aware of the removal of Article 475 of the Penal Code in January 2014 (ibid.) However, the UNCRC recommends the further repeal of Article 490 to "ensure that all children subject to any form of sexual exploitation and abuse are treated as victims and are never subject to criminal sanctions" (2014, p.10). Furthermore, prosecution for physical abuse against children remains 'rare' according to Human Rights Watch report (2012a), "punishable by imprisonment from [only] one to three years" (Save the Children 2011, p.37)

laws' for punishing offenders, the community itself should be the one to decide upon these laws and put them in place;

The community is also responsible for punishment. The community should apply the rules of fair punishment to offenders.

While this proposition removes power and responsibility away from formal bodies such as the government and courts, extending it instead to the community in a radically bottom-up way, the exact definition of what the community deemed as 'fair' in terms of punishment was not discussed. However, one group of women expressed their readiness to use very violent methods as a response to harms committed against children;

All the things that touch the child touch the mother as well, for example if someone assaults the child or hits him. If someone touches the child it cannot be tolerated, even if it is the father, the mother will hit that person. She will kill the person who touches her child.

While the lack of laws and cooperation at the formal level in cases of abuse is clearly a problem for community child protection efforts, ceding the duty of punishment to informal actors runs the risk of exacerbating existing problems in the absence of formal mechanisms.¹⁷ As Bhaird has noted, "the more participatory and community-led an intervention, the less predictable it becomes." (2013, p.389).

UNICEF has outlined in its systems approach to child protection that

"normative standards (laws, culture, religion) may shape how members of a community choose to protect children and the choices may well affect the very nature of childhood" (2010, p.5).

In the adults' groups, the Moroccan normative notion of 'hshuma' appeared as a recurring theme when participants were asked to describe people's reactions when a child is exposed to harm. To understand 'hshuma', it can be

"compared to Western concepts of guilt and shame: guilt is internalized self-punishment, but shame is imposed on one by others. In Morocco shame (hshuma) is the most common means of control of behaviour, whereas guilt is of little importance. [...] Such methods lead directly to feeling only shame, imposed from the outside." (Schaefer Davis 2002, pp.30-31)

Noever (2005, p.191) further elucidates:

"In everyday life, local moral norms, without being directly verbalised, are mainly articulated negatively through the notion of 'hshuma'."

Adults frequently reported that people refrain from speaking out when children become victims of rape. Although they did not explicitly attribute this choice to 'hshuma', it can be presumed as having a strong influence over the ways in which adults react to harm to children, as the following excerpts highlight:

People will keep quiet and not talk about the topic because they are ashamed and afraid.

¹⁷ This was the case in Bhaird's 2013 study, where women were triggered to engage in vandalism and physical violence as a result of a community-based participatory intervention (p.400).

Other families also do not speak up in cases where rapists do not receive punishment because families do not want to cause a fuss or a scandal.

If a child is raped, usually the child will not speak up about it and just keep quiet because of fear of being punished and receiving the blame¹⁸. for the rape. This will also cause psychological problems.

The combined problem of rape and 'hshuma' strongly suggests that broader law reform is required from the top-down to improve the protection of children against rape, and to ensure that it is indeed offenders, and not victims that are punished for sexual offences. However, this does not discount the propensity of the community to address the negative implications of victim-silencing as influenced by the social norm of 'hshuma', and engage in community-led normative change, for example via increased dialogue and awareness-raising around sexual behaviour¹⁹. Indeed, many participants spoke of various negative knock-on effects that silence has on child victims, namely psychological damage, being cited by five out of six groups as an effect of exposure to rape;

Children who are raped will get mentally ill, will be unable to trust anyone, and their parents will suffer as well. They might also drop out of school, become lonely and might consider suicide²⁰.

Participants also spoke of the connection between rape, psychological damage, and recommitting crimes experienced in childhood as an adult²¹:

The child will have psychological problems and lead a more complicated life. He will repeat the injustices committed to him when he is older as revenge.

If you do not receive psychological help it will lead to problems in the future.

It seems that the negative effects of rape on children's safety are imposed both from the top-down (lack of adequate laws) as well as at the level of the community (silence due to societally and culturally-imposed notions of 'hshuma'). Gaad et al (2006) outline that "the ability of system functions to be faithfully executed rests, in large part, on system structures" (p.291) – that is "laws, policies, standards, regulations, mechanisms to facilitate coordination across service sectors" (UNICEF 2010, p.13). If the formal system is flawed, what can be done at the level of the community to improve the informal one?

Although having overwhelmingly agreed on the harms and risks to children, when contemplating community-based solutions to overcome these harms, is when the adults' opinions largely diverged. Their opinions can be roughly divided into two main viewpoints: whether they see the community as a positive or negative influence in terms of child protection. While half of the groups ceded that the community can either be 'good or bad', four out of six groups expressed views that were predominantly wary of the community. In particular, some of the women's groups were highly mistrustful towards the community, and depicted it principally as a source of harm. For example, if a child had fallen victim of rape, the community was seen as an engine of gossip, thus negatively affecting the child's chances of recovery and leading a happy life:

¹⁸ See Footnotes 15 and 16

¹⁹ A measure suggested for example by the UNCRC Article 47 (2014, p.12)

²⁰ This response may have been prompted by the case of Amina Filali, who committed suicide in March 2012 after being ordered to marry her rapist (Human Rights Watch 2012b)

²¹ Responses were again, strongly influenced by the case of Abdelali Hadi

People will always remember what has happened to the child and they cannot forget, so they will not leave the child alone. If people did not talk, the child could perhaps forget the thing that happened when he is an adult, but if the people always talk about this topic the child cannot forget and he will be marked by the incident forever.

In addition to 'hshuma', the community's penchant for gossip thus also presents itself as a possible source of harm to children at the societal level. Furthermore, those groups that viewed the community negatively considered it to 'be without pity' and to not be predisposed to helping protect children:

There are 'good' people and 'bad' people. Good people tell other children not to do bad things, bad people just let it happen. For example, if a mother has a problem with another mother, and she sees that mother's son doing something bad, she will just think to herself that the other mother deserves it, and not help the child.

The unfavourable views of the community thus present a problem to the very idea of a community-led child protection initiative. Groups that were mistrustful towards the community also strongly advocated the creation of new NGOs as the solution to child protection, thus placing the responsibility on formal actors to correct obstacles deemed 'unsolvable' by the community. In essence, this condones top-down forms of intervention as opposed to the bottom-up objective of fixing things from 'within'. Other groups however, had a more positive view on the ability of the community to protect children, envisioning cooperation among members of the community as reinforcing efforts to safeguard children: 'if we work together we can help each other'. It seems then, as Bhaird (2013) astutely points out, that in advocating community-based approaches to child protection,

"recognising heterogeneity and power struggles within target communities is crucial to designing effective interventions. It may be necessary to direct resources towards unifying community subgroups before planned interventions can proceed." (p.397)

This heterogeneity, despite being already very present among the adult members of the community, becomes even more pronounced when children's views and opinions are added to the considerations, as the following section will demonstrate.

Children

Whereas adults rated rape as the top harm threatening children, children themselves expressed a greater concern over the threat of general violence. This became evident in their plays, of which two thirds depicted child-on-child physical violence (See Appendix C for examples of plays). In contrast, only two out of six adults' groups cited violence as a harm to children in Taroudant. Even among these groups, violence was not seen as an act that children themselves were party to, but as something that adults, for example the police or teachers, inflict upon the children themselves.

What does this reveal about the community's perceptions of children and childhood? While to some extent, children may have chosen not to portray rape in their plays because of their young age, as well as feeling embarrassed due to the difficulty of the subject matter, what this does suggest is that as Mauthner et al (1993) have pointed out, children have the ability "to discuss topics which have significance in their *day-to-day lives*" (referenced in Thomas and O'Kane 1998, p.343, emphasis added). Rape is undeniably a terrible thing for a child to experience, but on a scale of harms that children encounter on a regular basis, bullying and fighting are arguably far more common.

Furthermore, that adults considered rape as the most imminent threat to children as opposed to the

children's reality of facing casual acts of violence is telling of the fact that children are indeed, as Thomas and O'Kane (1998) suggest, capable and competent in identifying and discussing the things that affect them most. On another level, the adults' concerns of children as victims of rape portrays children both as innocent and in need of protection from 'bad' adults, whereas the children's plays conveyed an image of children as the opposite of innocent; being capable of inflicting harm themselves, and in many cases, dealing with this reality in their own terms – by employing violence against violence, without the presence of adult figures such as parents to 'protect' them²². Thus, it seems that in contemplating matters relating to children, adults have a tendency to "deflect the question of culpability [of children] by focusing on the innocent subject" (Wells 2008, p.246). The idea of children as 'innocent' was also clearly distinguishable in the adults' answers to questions of 'who is a child' and 'who needs protection', with commonly recurring words including 'innocent', 'weak' and 'needing' – be it protection, care, or looking after, the overarching idea being that children 'cannot defend themselves'. In contrast, while equally referring to 'needs', such as needing a family, protection, or basic needs, children's responses were more likely to include words such as 'important', 'responsible' and 'little'. This conveys that while children perhaps consider themselves 'little' in terms of being physically smaller than adults, as well as dependent upon their families to an extent, they also consider themselves to be rational beings capable of making decisions and carrying out meaningful actions. (O'Kane 2008, Wells 2008, Nieuwenhuys 2010). Among all the children's groups, the idea that a child is "just a human being" like any other echoed the loudest.

The notion of children as human beings aligns with the position put forward by the CRC whereby children embody the same human rights as adults (see Footnote 10). Indeed, children mentioned the word 'right' in their answers much more than the adults did. This speaks volumes about how adult members of the community may still have a 'child-saving' frame of mind, whereas children themselves can be seen as following a view that is more in line with the 'child rights' approach, whereby

"the former evokes the child as in need of protection, the latter invokes the competent child demanding what is rightfully theirs" (Wells 2008, p.235)

Furthermore, while all children and adults cited 'parents' as being responsible for child protection (in line with the CRC under Article 5), the children's plays showed that when faced with imminent harm, children perceive formal actors such as NGOs, and especially the police, as being more capable of protecting them than informal actors. For example, when answering the question 'who protects children', one boy explained that 'the policeman is the first one who can protect him'²³.

In terms of promoting community-based and bottom-up systems of child protection, we are presented with many conundrums. Multiple questions ensue; for instance, why were children's views and opinions more closely linked with top-down approaches of rights and children as rational individuals? Which opinions are to be taken into account when promoting a bottom-up approach to child protection, or further, development in general? While these are questions which remain largely unanswered in both literature as well as this paper in question, they nevertheless require further consideration.

²² See Appendix C

²³ Adults on the other hand largely perceived the police to 'not be performing their job properly'

The paradoxes of community-led development

Discussion

A paradox is defined as

“a statement or proposition which, despite sound (or apparently sound) reasoning from acceptable premises, leads to a conclusion that seems logically unacceptable or self-contradictory” (Oxford Living Dictionaries 2017a)

According to Reynolds et al (2006) and others, the development industry is plagued with paradoxes. The questions that have come about as part of this study, and the problems that arise in attempting to answer them, will be discussed in this section as a set of three paradoxes.

The first paradox

Cultural norms and practices have been identified as being sometimes counterproductive to the goal of child protection (UNICEF 2010). In this paper, the culture of 'hshuma' and the resultant process of victim-silencing in cases of child rape may be considered a potentially harmful cultural practice. In such cases, the systems approach dictates that "somehow new goals and values will have to be introduced" (ibid., p.11) – usually via normative change. While this may be instigated via NGO-led projects aimed at raising critical consciousness around the negative impacts of victim silencing, or increased pressure by international child protection bodies, such as the UNCRC, for Morocco to update its laws concerning rape and sexual misconduct²⁴, we are faced with the inevitability of falling back onto the didactic top-down approach of *telling* communities what their problems are, and how they should deal with them. This paradox was alluded to in the first chapter, whereby in real-life contexts, NGOs seeking to support children via community-based methods may in fact have to "adopt the very same categories it seeks to criticize" (Reynolds et al 2006, p.295), i.e. claiming that the 'universal' need to protect children overrides the discourse of taking into account local particularisms by imposing a Western perspective of the rights and needs of the child. Further, it supports "the Western mystification of an abstract universalism as the only possible way of thinking in terms of universals" (Bourdieu 1997, p.87). Notably, while one participant conceded that;

There is no 'sex' culture in Morocco. People are ashamed to talk about these things, so it is rare to find a father who will discuss sexual relations with his daughter. People must become more openminded and talk about these topics and not be ashamed of them. In other countries, these topics can be discussed because 'sex culture' exists, but in Morocco this does not happen.

another highlighted that the sensitivity around cases of child rape is not a particularism specific to Morocco;

Other areas of the world have the same problem, such as Europe, but the difference in these places is that fair punishment is in place for offenders, but in Morocco there is no fair punishment.

Can the rape-'hshuma' dyad thus be adequately addressed by a community-based initiative? The paradox would seem to be not if it can – or not - but whether the community is in fact willing and ready to do on its own, as opposed to lapsing into familiar role of beneficiaries of top-down development programmes.

The second paradox

The community-based approach instructs that development initiatives are more likely to take root and inspire positive change when there is a high level of community ownership (Wessels 2015). However, as this study showed, the community may itself be opposed to a community-led method and place a higher level of trust in formal actors (adults; NGOs, children; the police) to solve the problems identified. This places in question the very validity of bottom-up approaches. While many development initiatives do use a mix of both top-down and bottom-up methods, the ideal of self-

²⁴ See earlier footnotes in preceding chapter

sustainability becomes difficult to achieve (Bhaird 2013). Furthermore, in paradoxical fashion, it seems that listening to the communities, and the resultant views expressed, in fact legitimise the top-down rhetoric of 'expert' superiority that development has been so vigorously criticised for. Indeed, when inviting participants to give recommendations as to how the problems they had identified could be solved at the level of the community, many exhibited exasperation:

The community is bad, health is bad, the schools are bad, all of Morocco is bad and it needs to be fixed.

If there aren't any charities then there isn't any protection for children. For example, if you see a homeless child and there are no charities to look after him, there is nothing you can do.

Developed countries as examples of how problems ought to be dealt with were also frequently brought up by the adult participants. It becomes difficult then, as Bhaird avers, "to reconcile the optimistic discourse around bottom-up participation and community-leadership" (2013, p.402) – a question to finally address next.

The third paradox

Bhaird showed in her 2013 study that far from being a homogenous entity, communities often display clashing values and opinions;

"In reality, there is often disagreement as to the precise nature of the problem, the appropriate course of action, and the resources required." (p.402)

The study in question showed difference in opinion according to past and lived experiences, social status, age, education. The third paradox we are presented is thus two-fold; in complying with the bottom-up approach of 'listening to communities', who exactly do we listen to? And after having listened, who decides on the appropriate next steps?

O'Kane has argued that

"the biggest challenge for researchers working with children are the disparities in power and status between adults and children" (2008, p. 126).

The same can be said for development initiatives that aim to improve child protection by taking into account community perspectives by also involving children's own views. If adults' and children's opinions on how they can be best protected differ, then which opinions should take precedence?

Herein lies the paradox of following Sen's advice of listening and not telling; the notion of listening, whether implicitly or not, glazes over the all-important act of *deciding*. As Reynolds et al (2006) have warned;

"It may be advisable to acknowledge that the very invitation to express views (hear others' views) may underscore the presence of a listener, a higher, who will decide" (p.294)

After having listened, this role often falls on researchers, such as myself, who pick and choose the themes and ideas they find the most relevant in support of their argument, and making suggestions to development bodies as they see most appropriate. Although indeed having extensively listened, it is still ultimately an outsider who adopts the role of *telling* NGOs, academics, or indeed the community, what could and ought to be done. In the process of telling, the researcher or development practitioner is ultimately inclined to value those opinions that they themselves

understand and relate to. As Schrader McMillan and Burton have attested, the role of the 'listener' is actually "never neutral" (p.201).

O'Kane further highlights this problem in asking, "If we are not children, how can we understand and convey children's experiences?" (2008, p.126). While this paper does not aim to provide any definitive answers to the problems outlined above, it does suggest that more research about children's own views needs to be done, in order to allow more space for their voices to be heard on matters that affect them, and to ultimately, conceive of more efficient and democratic ways of protecting children.

A possibility for convergence?

Without wanting to end this paper on too many unanswered questions, it deserves highlighting that participants in all groups brought up communication as a possible means of ensuring better protection for children. Whether it was adults who suggested that matters that are traditionally considered 'hshuma' to be discussed more openly in general, or increasing the level of communication between schools and parents as well as parents and children, or children simply wishing to be communicated with 'nicely and in a friendly way', it can be suggested, at the expense of sounding frivolous, that mutual respect and communication among all stakeholders is a definitive first step towards making sure that children are being protected. And respectful communication is indeed about both listening *and* telling, not merely one or the other – "the imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium" (Oxford Living Dictionaries 2017b). Therefore, in terms of child protection, it is imperative that, as one elder female adult participant asserted;

We must speak up about things that go on. Even bad things such as rape, we have to talk about them in order to protect children.

This means discussing and challenging the notions of 'hshuma' in order to address adults' fears over child rape. It also requires becoming more aware of the fact that children have different, although equally meaningful points of view, and making more room for these views in child protection initiatives as listeners *and* deciders, in order to "understand the other's perspective when that other is a child" (Reynolds et al 2006, p.300). Overall, development efforts should concentrate efforts into finding ways in which to increase dialogue not just between NGO workers and the "children they seek to support" (ibid., p.295), but among community members themselves, since

"To speak and be heard is to have power over one's life. To be silenced is to have that power denied" (Ahrens 2006, p.263).

In Morocco, informal actors such as parents and children may already begin this process by simply talking to each other more openly. And when thinking about speaking to children, even about the 'bad things', I would like to conclude on a completely separate, yet apposite voice on children's issues, in the words of the famed children's author J.K. Rowling:

*"One mistake that adults used to make about children's books, is to think that children's books deal with trivial things. Little things that please little minds, and little concerns about little people. And, so, *nothing* could be further from the truth. [...] People underestimate children so hugely. [...] Unless you can really really really remember what it felt like to be a child, you've really got no business writing for children." (BBC Television 2001)*

While her widely popular Harry Potter-series, admired equally by both adults and children alike, has in contemporary times challenged the concepts and precepts of what is conventionally considered

'adults' or 'children's' genre in literature, her advice to aspiring children's authors could also be of importance to researchers, development practitioners and community members alike when thinking about ways in which to address child protection issues, and how include children themselves in these considerations. In response to the question posed by O'Kane (2008) in the previous section, I personally think it is something that anyone working with children should strive to keep in mind.

Conclusion

The following study has, while attempting to listen to community perspectives on child protection as part of a bottom-up initiative, somewhat paradoxically pointed to the possibility that community-led interventions may not always be the best, or even desired, path of action by communities themselves. At one level, this is because the community itself wishes its problems to be fixed by NGOs or other powerful actors through formal mechanisms. On another, it is due to the paradox that even when promoting a bottom-up, community-based initiative, an outsider is usually required as a 'listener'. Furthermore, when dealing with children and adhering to the UNCRC's mandate of

respecting children's views in matters that concern them (Article 12), differences among the perspectives of target communities become ever-more pronounced. As actors in yet another paradoxical power imbalance, researchers and development workers thus find it challenging to implement the principles of participation and community ownership in practice, despite good intentions.

While this paper by no means wishes to discount the importance of listening, it merely concedes that child protection is best achieved when the top-down and bottom-up, and formal and informal, work together. Although not a comprehensive solution, this cooperation may be initiated by way of more frequent and open communication – that is listening, telling, as well as deciding together as a collaborative, on what the best steps of actions are towards the mutual goal of children leading safe and happy lives.

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Appendix A

Research Questionnaire – Adults

1. Who is a child and who needs to be kept safe?
 - a. Who needs to be protected/safeguarded?
 - b. In what circumstances do children need to be cared for differently?
2. Who is responsible for keeping children safe?
 - a. Who is responsible if these people don't keep children safe?
 - b. How do non-family members keep children safe?

- c. What role does the community play in keeping children safe?
- d. Who else in a position of authority plays a role in keeping children safe?
- 3. How are children best kept safe?
 - a. How does this change in different circumstances?
- 4. What risks and harms exist for children in Taroudant?
 - a. What happens when a child is exposed to a risk?
 - b. How do people react to crimes against children?
- 5. What things worry people the most in terms of the safety of children in Taroudant?
 - a. What are the challenges that people confront in trying to keep their children safe in Taroudant?
 - b. How can the community help keep children safe better?

Research Questions – Children

Group art activity

- Who is a child?
- Who protects children?

Drama activity

- How do children help keep other children safe?

Appendix B

Harms to Children

The following table represents the harms and risks cited by adults in response to 'Research Question 4' (See Appendix A), in the order that they were mentioned during focus group interviews.

Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Focus Group 4	Focus Group 5	Focus Group 6
Drugs	Rape	Rape	Rape	Rape	Drugs

Rape	Sexual harassment	Kidnapping	Murder	Murder	Juvenile crime
Begging	Juvenile crime	Drugs	Fathers (who are rapists)	Kidnapping	Rape
Psychological problems	Perversion	Juvenile crime	Kidnapping	Violence (verbal and physical)	Kidnapping
Mothers who are too busy	Drugs	Bad influence of community	Organ harvesting	Parents who are too busy	Organ harvesting
Loneliness	Peer pressure	Non-intervention of adults	Car accidents	Family problems (divorce)	Forced labour
Tired parents	Gangs	Internet and media	Violence (in schools)		Accidents
Streets			Crazy people (Due to violence and murder)		School dropout

Appendix C

Children's example plays

Example A – this play demonstrates both how children see violence as a threat, and how violence is used as a solution against harms to children

One girl wants to hit another girl. A boy comes to help the girl and defend her from the hitting girl using violence.

Example B – this play shows children relying on the police to break up fights

A boy has hit a girl's little sister on the street. A policeman sees the children fighting and he asks the children what they are doing. "Why are you fighting?" asks the policeman. "Because he hit my little sister", says the girl. "You must make up", says the policeman.

Example C – this play depicts an NGO worker helping children overcome risks

Two homeless girls are being talked to by the president of a charity. The homeless girls are using drugs, and the representative of the charity says that they will take them to the centre to look after them, and teach them, and then the girls can go to school. She also says that the charity can protect them from violence and from being abused by others. "You will live in safety and we will help you deal with your addiction."