



Beyond Differences: A Shared Mission of Christians and Muslims to Combat Child Labour in Bukoba, Tanzania

Author

Aminiel Mugorozi Kaimukilwa 

Author's email: icmlmr501922@spu.ac.ke

St. Paul's University, Kenya.

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Abstract

This article explores the joint efforts of Christian and Muslim communities in Bukoba, Tanzania, to tackle the persistent problem of child labour, influenced by poverty, family breakdown, and limited access to education. Children in the area face serious risks, such as dangerous working conditions and harmful physical and psychological effects. Despite both faiths strongly condemning child exploitation, the absence of a coordinated interfaith initiative allows child labour to continue and weakens social unity. Using a qualitative research approach, the study incorporates documentary analysis and interviews with religious leaders, teachers, and parents in Bukoba, conducted in Swahili for clarity. Results show that cultural norms and educational obstacles worsen child labour, though both the Bible and the Qur'an highlight children's dignity and rights. Leaders from both faiths recognise their shared responsibility to protect children. The research suggests that interfaith cooperation can effectively raise community awareness and influence policies aimed at addressing the root causes of child labour. By uniting around values of compassion and justice, faith institutions can play a crucial role in advocating for children's safety and rights. Recommendations focus on enhancing educational opportunities and promoting community involvement through awareness campaigns that capitalise on the strengths of both faith communities, aiming for a comprehensive approach to creating lasting change for vulnerable children. Additionally, this can help strengthen relationships between Christians and Muslims.

Key terms: Child labour, Christians, Muslims, and shared mission.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Child labour is a global phenomenon and a crime against humanity. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), child labour is when a child between 5-11 years is economically active or when a child between 12-14 years is engaged in economic activity for 14 or more hours per week, children between 12-17 years of age engage in financial activities classified as the worst form of labour (ILO, 2025). According to Momen (2020), child labour is defined as the employment of children under the age of 18, involving tasks that can have negative consequences for their physical, mental, social, and educational well-being.

Additionally, it significantly affects their welfare and cognitive development, denying them their fundamental rights. According to the ILO and UNICEF (2024), statistics, an estimated 120,000 children in Africa are child soldiers, messengers in armed conflict, cooks, and victims of commercial sexual exploitation. At the same time, others are engaging in domestic labour. Christian and Muslim missions in child protection significantly promote children's well-being and rights across various contexts. Their collaboration fosters an effective child protection system that benefits children and their communities (Karam, 2018).

Tanzania also has a history of child labour, which decreased during the rule of President Julius Kambarage Nyerere, who established the Arusha Declaration in 1967, "*Sera ya Ujamaa na Kujitegemea*" (Policy of Egalitarianism, Socialism, and Self-reliance). This policy promoted social rights for Tanzanians but failed around the 1980s, and now child labour is escalating. The primary factor contributing to child labour is poverty, meanwhile, the situation in rural areas is worse than in urban ones.

In Bukoba, the collapse of *Ujamaa* policies in the 1980s and the HIV/AIDS crisis increased the number of orphans and drove child labour. That pandemic killed many people, and children became orphans and thus engaged in child labour to earn an income. The situation led many children to migrate from areas with poor living conditions, particularly in rural areas, to more economically stable places (Mmari, 2005). This issue of child labour, rooted primarily in poverty, continues to strip children of their fundamental rights. Recognising this problem, Christians and Muslims in Bukoba must come together, setting aside religious differences, to forge a shared commitment towards eradicating child labour and fostering a brighter future for the community's children.

The lack of a shared mission to oppose child labour among Christians and Muslims in Bukoba can result in ongoing child exploitation, worsening poverty, limited educational opportunities, diminished social cohesion, and a loss of human capital. Both religious communities must unite, set aside their differences, and collaboratively work with society to tackle this urgent issue for the benefit of their current and future generations. To address this issue, the study explores the context of child labour in Bukoba, its impact on children's well-being, and the perspectives of both the Bible and the Qur'an on children's rights and protection. It further examines the shared mission of Christians and Muslims in combating child labour and promoting the dignity and welfare of all children.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section surveys the literature on child labour and cites the work of previous scholars and researchers. The review is organised according to four leading research aims: the context of child labour in the area, the effects of child labour on children's well-being, the teachings of the Bible and the Quran regarding children's rights and protection, and the shared mission of Christians and Muslims in fighting child labour.

The Context of Child Labour in the Area

The ELCT – Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania report (2024) states that children working on farms use sharp tools or chemicals that are inappropriate for their age. They work in hazardous conditions for a long time, whereas in agriculture, it is a significant sector where child labour is prevalent. According to Anti-slavery International (2024), children of Bukoba, like other areas in Tanzania, particularly domestic workers, experience physical and sexual mistreatment from their employers. Most employers do not have a formal work contract, and children often receive lower payments, sometimes no payment at all for their work, or no schooling.

The Impacts of Child Labour on Children's Well-Being

There are several impacts of child labour on their well-being, as various scholars have noted. Njeri (2018) highlights that child labour leads to school absenteeism and low academic performance due to poor concentration and fatigue. Children who work tend to miss classes, struggle with assignments, and ultimately face cognitive delays, loss of knowledge, and increased likelihood of repeating grades. In general, the study indicates that child labour affects children's education.

Swarnalatha and Anuradha (2016), on their side, insist that the biggest killer in the agriculture sector is pesticide poisoning; almost 40,000 children die every year globally because of this problem. Tiredness, malnutrition, HIV/AIDS, and other STDs are also challenging because of the number of girl children being forced into prostitution, even unwanted pregnancy, drug addiction, and mental illness are also faced by child prostitutes.

The Teachings of the Bible and the Quran Regarding Children's Rights and Protection

The Teachings of the Bible

According to McKinney et al. (2015), a more in-depth analysis of child labour and the Church's response, informed by Biblical principles, is required. In this case, representing Christianity through the Catholic social teaching by distinguishing between child labour and child slavery. According to them, not all work done by children is child labour because some of the work done by children builds their health, which is different from child labour, which destroys children. To them, child labour is the work that deprives children of their fundamental rights.

The Catholic Church, using the "Doctrine of the Church" (2004), in the Apostolic letter of Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, and the Bible (The Gospel of Joy and the Bible), provides the teaching about family fellowship, states that:

In the family, which is a community of persons, special attention must be devoted to the children by developing a profound esteem for their dignity and a significant concern for their rights. (p. 4).

I agree with the writer's explanation and the Bible teachings about children's rights, that it is not only unacceptable from a Christian point of view, but also socially unacceptable because it is against God's purpose of taking care and developing His creation.

Bunge (2006) agrees with McKinney et al. To him, Biblical teaching on children is drawn from Jesus's interaction with children in the New Testament. He blessed and healed them, embraced, touched, laid hands on them, and prayed for them. Not only that, but also rebuked those who wanted to expel, stigmatise, and abandon them. He did not want them to suffer (Mark 10:10-16), so protecting and caring for them is part of the responsibility of maintaining God's creation.

The Teachings of the Quran

The Quran and Hadith, as the primary foundations of Islamic law, prohibit any child employment that affects the welfare of the children. Hadith Number 2164 narrated by Ibn Majah says that "*Prophet Muhammad gave a wage to the children to help them not to be exploited*". Islamic law also prohibits child labour and calls on the Government, parents and society to protect the children. It also noted that children under 18 years should not go to battle.

Anjum and Wani (2019) provide a perspective on the Islamic religion's stance on children's rights, the challenges they face, and the responsibilities of parents and society, as outlined in the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. They noted that children are exposed to all types of violations, including child labour. Their study states that according to Islam, children must be given the best attention. "*The best of you is one who gives a good education, intellectual and moral, to his children*", and "*Seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim*" (Hadith 224: By Sunan Ibn Majah). Then, about child security, Islam strictly forbids taking the life of children, as Allah says, "*And you shall not ever kill your children for fear of indigence. We provide for them and you. Indeed, the act of killing them is an enormous sin*" (Surat Al-Isra 17:31).

Generally, child crime is prohibited in Islam, so parents are ordered to provide proper upbringing of children without gender discrimination, and Prophet Mohammad's saying promises the paradise life to the good parents, "*He who provides good upbringing to 3 daughters shall go to paradise*" (Hadith 1692: By Sunan Abu Dawood). Islam gives fundamental rights to children; on the other hand, Islam does not allow burdening life "*Allah does not give human beings too much pain which is more than their capacity*" (Surat Al Baqarah, 2:286).

Looking at the contents above of the Christian and Muslim views on child labour, it is evident that, based on the Quran and the Bible, both religions reject child labour.

The Shared Mission of Christians and Muslims in Fighting Child Labour

The conviction that every human being, including children, has intrinsic worth and dignity lies at the heart of Christians' and Muslims' standard duty to combat child labour. Faith-based actors, due to their moral authority and community influence, are uniquely positioned to mobilise public opinion and shape attitudes toward child labour. This approach is consistent with Namakula (2009), who emphasises that unity and collaboration among diverse religious and community groups are essential in addressing the systemic drivers of child labour. Namakula notes that "faith communities possess the tools to mobilise public

engagement and elevate the moral conscience of society in matters concerning child protection.” Her research suggests that religious cooperation promotes greater trust and engagement across social divides, thereby making interventions more sustainable and impactful.

Furthermore, ILO and UNICEF (2021) assert that awareness is one of the most effective initial steps in reducing child labour, mainly when supported by community-level advocacy. Their joint global report highlights the importance of tailored messaging, delivered through faith channels, community radio, and religious gatherings, as a strategy for reaching families with limited formal education or access to digital media. For Cerchiaro (2019), he strives to organise joint gatherings about interfaith dialogue, especially between Christians and Muslims, to oppose racism and child abuse in the community.

It's important to keep in mind that different people may have diverse interpretations of religious texts and practices. Nonetheless, the fundamental tenets of Islam and Christianity are similar in their concern for the welfare and defence of children, offering a solid basis for a joint campaign against child labour.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research approach, utilising both documentary analysis and interviews as primary methods of data collection. The documentary analysis was conducted in accordance with Bowen's (2009) methodology, which encompasses skimming, reading, and interpretation of texts. Primary data sources included pertinent empirical studies, interfaith policy documents, reports from child welfare organisations, and religious texts. Additionally, interviews were conducted with purposefully selected Christian and Muslim religious leaders, three educators, and five parents in the Bukoba Districts. The participants were selected based on their positions in child welfare and their impact in the community.

Also, the researcher ensured the confidentiality of the respondents. In this regard, no one was forced to participate in the study, and respondents were kept anonymous without mentioning their correct names. The area was selected due to its high incidence of child labour among children aged 5–14 years, especially in economically disadvantaged households. Swahili was used in interviews to ensure clarity and accessibility. The documents reviewed and testimonies collected were examined with a critical eye to assess authenticity, credibility, and relevance, in line with Bowen's (2009) caution that documents, while rich sources of data, must be handled with analytical scrutiny.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Context of Child Labour in Bukoba

The inhumane practice of child labour is rampant in the Bukoba community in Tanzania, making the children hopeless and devastated. The article is born from the number of children hawking on the streets instead of attending school. Children are engaged in all forms of labour to earn a living, and the most rampant and visible is that of children hawking on the streets and bus stations to make some money. Some children selling on the streets, especially the girls, have babies on their backs. Most children on the streets look devastated and malnourished, with dirty clothes and uncombed hair; some move barefoot. The primary cause of child labour in Bukoba is poverty (economy); however, there are other contributing factors as well, including marital and family disputes, cultural norms, lack of social protection, and lack of educational opportunities. Some children work in hazardous settings, some work beyond their age and

strength limits, and some take breaks from their academics. Many families depend on income generated by their children to meet basic needs (Kakuru, 2008).

Urgent intervention is necessary to combat child labour; otherwise, the community risks losing its future generation and remaining trapped in poverty, insecurity, and underdevelopment. Kakuru (2008) emphasises that peace and development cannot be achieved in Bukoba as long as child labour persists. This situation urgently calls for collaboration between Christians and Muslims to end this inhumane practice in the Bukoba district.

Implications of Child Labour on Children's Well-being

The implications of child labour in the Bukoba district are far-reaching and affect various aspects of society. Here are some key implications:

Educational Impact

Children who engage in labour often miss school, leading to lower educational attainment, and the quality of education suffers due to overwork; those who struggle to work are not performing well academically. Regarding the impact on education, Njeri (2018) states that many children never register for school, and even those who are registered are still involved in child labour. The outcome is often school absenteeism and low academic performance, which can sometimes lead to academic failure. There is poor concentration during class lessons and a lack of completion of assignments because students spend more time working outside of school. Often, pupils who are involved in work have their participation in class decrease because of fatigue. Other impacts include preventing pupils from acquiring knowledge, depriving them of skills, and causing class repetition. The absence of another income source for households makes children participate in earning activities to raise money for school fees. In general, the study informs that child labour affects the education of children. Njeri's thoughts are true. If you compare them to the Bukoba area, you see that there is a correlation between schooling and child labour, as it is among the factors contributing to a declining standard of education in primary schools. Similarly, during an interview, one of the public primary school teachers was quoted as saying:

Child labour is a serious problem at the school where I teach, and it has a detrimental effect on the education of the pupils. Distractions, frequent absences, and exhaustion are common among children engaged in labour, which impairs their ability to study and focus in class. Their academic performance decreases as a result, which restricts their educational success and prospects for both the community at large and themselves. (Personal communication with School Teacher, February 19, 2025)

Health Risks

Children in vulnerable environments are facing health risks, exploitation, and a lack of oversight for their safety. This includes Physical Injuries: Many child laborers work in dangerous conditions, increasing their risk of injuries and long-term health problems. Kaur (2019) mentions the challenges of child labour, which are the physical harm and mental health of children because it deprives them of fundamental rights like freedom and future development. Those working in industrial places are suffering from threatening diseases, because of glass blowing, electroplating, match works, brassware, and stone excavating. He insists that many children between 5 – 14 years who engage in child labour are the primary victims

because they work for long hours and often get health problems in dangerous conditions, fatigue, malnutrition, and they get problems in their chests and backache. For that reason, even diseases increase the risk, so work that relates to hazards can lead to permanent disability and premature death.

Other Related Challenges

Other challenges include a lack of vitamin B complex, iron, and protein, as well as physical and intellectual development disorders, biochemical function disorders, irregular hormone secretion, conduct problems, night blindness, a weak yellow form, cracked lips, and some organs that do not function well due to fatiguing work. The outcome of these challenges is a stagnation of child growth in Bukoba. Correspondingly, another of the school teachers shared her experience of how the situation is; she highlighted:

Child employment exposes students to a variety of health risks, including exhaustion, respiratory disorders, accidents, malnourishment, and mental health issues. After a day of hard labour hauling stones to earn money for his family and school supplies, one child, for instance, found it difficult to continue his education because of a lack of school supplies. Their well-being is negatively impacted, and their educational opportunities and prospects are impeded. (Personal communication with School Teacher, January 15, 2025)

The Bible's and the Quran's Teachings about the Rights/Protection of Children

The Bible and the Quran both emphasise the importance of protecting children and recognising their rights. Below are some key teachings from each of them.

Biblical Teachings

The Bible emphasises the value and rights of children through various quotations. Inherent Value of Children: The Bible teaches that children are a gift, a blessing, and a treasure from God the Creator, and therefore, they should be valued and given the proper care. Doing so is honouring God. This teaching is emphasised in Psalm 127:3, which states, "*Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him.*" This verse underscores the significance of children as valuable blessings bestowed by God.

Protection and Care: Children are a gift from God, received through His grace, and they deserve to be cared for and protected, thereby continuing God's creation. The Lord Jesus emphasised this importance when He mentioned it in the Gospel according to Matthew 18:10, saying, "*See that you do not despise one of these little ones...*" This suggests the need to protect and care for children, reinforcing their value in the eyes of God. During the interview with religious leaders, one of them elaborated on the emphasis of the Bible that the persecution of children is a sin, so it is forbidden. He quoted Bible passages to emphasise the care, protection, and upbringing of children, saying:

The Bible condemns the torture of children, as seen in Colossians 3:21, which advises fathers not to discourage their children, and in Matthew 18:6, where it warns against causing little ones to stumble, stating it would be better for such a person to face severe consequences. These verses emphasise the protection of children from harm. (Personal communication with Parent 1, January 13, 2025)

Teaching and Guidance: The Bible also emphasises providing children with teachings and guidance that will enable them to grow up obedient to God, while also promoting a good upbringing that takes into account social values. This teaching is emphasised by Proverbs 22:6: "*Teach children the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it.*" This underscores the importance of education and moral guidance for children. During the interview, one of the respondents elaborated:

The Bible offers valuable parenting advice, emphasising the importance of a healthy upbringing. According to 1 Timothy 5:8, anyone who neglects to care for their family is worse than an unbeliever. Unfortunately, some parents mistreat or abandon their children. Ephesians 6:4 advises parents to raise their children with care and protect them from misleading teachings. (Personal communication with Religious Leader, March 15, 2025)

Compassion and Support: Jesus' welcoming attitude toward children emphasises their worth and the importance of nurturing them. "*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*" Mark 10:14: Jesus' welcoming attitude toward children emphasises their worth and the importance of nurturing them.

Justice and Fairness: Furthermore, the Apostle James also mentions practising justice and righteousness towards children, emphasising that doing so is putting faith into action (James 1:27): "*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress...*" This encourages care for the vulnerable, including children without families. During the interview, a guardian expressed deep concern about caring for the orphans, saying:

Taking care of orphans and their belongings is our duty. If this obligation is not met, there could be divine punishment. In light of Biblical teachings that highlight the significance of such activities, I refer to this from the book of Exodus 22. 22-24 "Do not oppress an orphan or oppress him. If you oppress him and he cries out to me, I will surely hear him" (Personal communication with Guardian, March 17, 2025)

Respect: Luke 18:16: When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*" Similar to Mark 10:14, these passages reiterate the value of children and the importance of treating them with respect. These teachings and findings collectively reflect a Biblical perspective that upholds the rights of children, emphasising their dignity, need for protection, and the importance of nurturing their development. In addition, certain authors have written works that draw from Biblical teachings and values.

Hania et al. (2015) provide a deeper analysis of child labour and the response of the Church using Biblical principles, in this case representing Christian teaching. They differentiate child labour from child slavery. According to them, not all work done by children is child labour because some of the work done by children builds their health, which is different from child labour, which destroys children. More grievous is child slavery, which goes further to deny the child the right to live with the family. Also, they stress that children involved in armed conflicts very much represent child slavery.

Hania et al. (2015) acknowledge that sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between the lines that divide child labour from child slavery. This is true because, in some areas, child labour is facilitated by family members, and to this extent, we can look at child labour as child slavery. The core aspect is the condemnation of child labour by the Bible and the Church in general. This article discusses the extent to which the Church condemns all forms of child exploitation and slavery through Catholic Social Teachings. The response of the Church is structured in three areas:

Strong commitment to raising awareness and identifying the extent and the effects of child slavery and child labour; second, the Church draws on the Christian understanding of the dignity of the individual and her/his rights to challenge child slavery and child labour and third, a call to action, to intervention, on whatever scale, to support the efforts to eliminate slavery and child labour. (Hania et al., 2015, pp. 3-5)

Utilising significant Church documents and proclamations such as the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (2004), the apostolic letter of Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, and the Bible. Pope John Paul II apostolic letter on November 22, 1981, teaching about family fellowship states that:

In the family, which is a community of persons, special attention must be devoted to the children by developing a profound esteem for their dignity and a great concern for their rights. (John Paul II, 1981, p. 4)

Moving further to demonstrate a strong concern for the Christian view on children, the writers trace the responsibility back to the teaching of Jesus Christ who placed the children at the heart of the Kingdom of God: *“Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the Kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14)*. The explanation of the writers on child labour is true, that it is not only unacceptable from a Christian point of view, but also socially unacceptable because it is against God’s purpose of taking care of and developing His creation. In addition, it is against human rights.

Looking at the argument advanced by the authors on the attitude of the Church towards child labour through the activities of the Catholic social teachings communicates very well that Christianity condemns and rejects child labour/child slavery. The Church, according to the authors, is not only condemning the practice but doing something about it, which involves raising awareness, building a culture of respect for human dignity using Christian values, and calling upon various stakeholders to action. This is something good that the Church in many places is doing. However, we don’t want to forget that there are instances where the Church has been accused of child abuse, but we hold it strongly that individuals who have acted in such a manner acted as individuals and went against the teachings of the Church or Biblical teachings. What do other writers say about this point?

Bunge (2006), in agreement with McKinney et al., emphasises that Christianity, through Biblical teachings, strongly condemn child labour and instead places great responsibility on parents, the Church, and society to safeguard children's rights and well-being. He stresses the importance of children's education, faith formation, and religious instruction as key avenues for nurturing their holistic development. His work highlights that children are not only central to theology and social sciences but also integral to wider ethical debates, as seen in various international conferences and academic projects dedicated to

understanding the role of children in religion and society. By positioning children as a gift from God and as bearers of dignity, Bunge underscores the theological and moral imperative to treat them with respect, protect them from exploitation, and provide environments where they can thrive in accordance with Biblical values.

Nonetheless, Bunge's interpretation that equates the presence of children with divine blessing and the absence of children with a curse is problematic and potentially harmful. Such a perspective risks stigmatising childless families, suggesting divine disfavour where there may be medical, social, or personal reasons for childlessness. More critically, this understanding can create conditions where adults who feel "cursed" project their frustrations onto children under their care, possibly leading to neglect, exploitation, or child labour as a way of compensating for perceived divine judgment. A more theologically sound position is that children are indeed a blessing, but their absence should never be construed as a curse. Christian teaching should instead affirm that every family, with or without biological children, remains within God's blessing, and that all children, regardless of their biological or social ties deserve dignity, care, and protection from harmful practices such as child labour.

Another interesting idea is that the Christian and Biblical teaching on children is drawn from Jesus's interaction with children in the New Testament. He blessed and healed them, embraced, touched, laid hands on them, and prayed for them. Not only that, but also rebuked those who wanted to expel, stigmatise, and abandon them. He didn't want them to suffer, Mark 10:10-16, so protecting and caring for them is part of the responsibility of keeping the creation of God.

Religious traditions globally emphasise care and protection for children, who often suffer from war, disease, and injustice. Interreligious dialogue is vital to foster collaboration on children's welfare beyond doctrinal divides. Child abuse cannot be attributed to original sin but must be addressed through compassion, guidance, and instruction. The Church must reject violations against children, including within its own structures, while supporting global child protection initiatives. Bunge's view aligns with Biblical teachings that condemn child labour, calling on the Church and other religions to educate, act, and influence parental behaviour in safeguarding children's rights.

A contrary position by Koonar (2014) states that the activities of missionaries, such as the Basel Christian Mission in Ghana, promoted child labour. This suggests that missionary activities portrayed a negative view of the Christian perception of child labour. Koonar situates the history of child labour in Africa, particularly in Ghana, West Africa. Christian mission provided education as a reward for those who accepted to be converted to Christianity. The majority of young people who were interested in education were enrolled in children and youth education centres, but at the same time, they were also given hard work. The missionaries who represented Christianity promoted child labour. Under the Christianisation umbrella, the missionaries used the children to raise their income. The children were used for construction, maintenance, and cooking for little or no pay, and the work enabled the Basel Mission to achieve its goal of the Mission project.

Missionaries were associated with some African social rulers in the exploitation of children for low payment, and child slaves who were liberated from colonists were forced to live in the mission camps as liberated slaves; however, they did the same work to cover the costs spent to free them. Children were

tortured to do housework and agricultural activities, and the missionaries concentrated on growing coffee and cocoa to get foreign markets for their benefit. These crops required many labourers; therefore, children were used for the work in the mission camps. According to the argument given by Koonar, the mission work required money, which in turn depended on the work done by children and youth, some of whom were underage. This work separated them from their families and exposed them to harsh conditions. It is distressing to read that the missionaries who brought Christianity to Africa themselves went against the Christian scriptures in promoting child labour. This act of the missionaries has been interpreted as a way of promoting child labour within Christianity. The acts of individuals and Church leaders toward children can indeed be interpreted against Christianity as a religion and the Bible, because religion does not exist in isolation. These teachings collectively reflect a Biblical perspective that upholds the rights of children, emphasising their dignity, need for protection, and the importance of nurturing their development.

Qur'an Teachings

The Quran provides several teachings that highlight the rights of children, emphasising their dignity, protection, and well-being. Here are some key points:

Right to Life: The Quran emphasises the purity of life, including the lives of children. It teaches that every human life is valuable and should be protected. The Quran prohibits the killing of children. Surah Al-Isra (17:31) states that killing children out of fear of poverty is a serious sin, affirming the sacredness of life. Therefore, the Quran condemns the practice of infanticide, which was prevalent in some cultures.

Food and Care: Parents and guardians are commanded to provide for their children's physical and emotional needs. Surah Al-Baqarah (2:233) emphasises the responsibility of parents to ensure their children's welfare and spiritual needs. In addition, they are encouraged to care for and nurture their children.

Rights of Children: Children have rights that must be respected, including the right to life and protection from harm. The Quran advocates for justice in dealings with all, including children. An open letter issued by the Commissioner for Social Welfare in Tanzania (2023) agrees with the teachings of the Quran regarding children's rights, saying:

The Ministry strongly condemns violence against children because it causes them suffering, humiliation and deprives them of their dignity. Children have the right to be protected, loved, and developed, and to be fully involved in all other human rights. (Commissioner for Social Welfare, 2023, September 19)

Right to Education: The Quran does not mention education openly, but the pursuit of knowledge is highly valued in Islam, and Hadith literature supports the idea that educating children is essential. Hadith 224 of Sunan Ibn Majah states that the Prophet Muhammad said, "Seeking Knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim." Another Hadith 495 of Sunan Abi Dawood says, "Teach your children and your families to pray, for they will grow up knowing it." Similarly to the Hadith, a Muslim parent during an interview emphasised:

Good upbringing for children is to provide them with both education, education for the hereafter and education for this world, so that they grow up knowing Allah but also gain knowledge in this world (Personal communication with Parent, April 18, 2025)

Right to Love and Compassion: The Quran encourages kindness and compassion towards children. Surah Al-Tahrim (66:6) calls on believers to protect their families, including their children.

Right to Inheritance: The Quran grants children the right to inherit from their parents, ensuring their financial security. This is addressed in Surah An-Nisa (4:11-12). **Protection from Abuse and Exploitation:** The Quran promotes the protection of children from harm, reinforcing their dignity and rights, urging caregivers to treat them with respect. These teachings reflect a commitment to nurturing, educating, and protecting children, ensuring their rights are upheld within families and society. In addition, other authors have written works that draw from Quran teachings and values.

Monawar and Hossain (2016) note that child labour is an ethical problem and a common phenomenon globally, where some parents send their children to work for economic survival. They give facts that there exist several laws and policies prohibiting the exploitation of children in many countries, but such laws are on paper and have not been put into practice.

The Islamic religion opposes children participating in dangerous, harmful, and unethical work. Monawar and Hossain analyse some Islamic teachings from the Quran and Sunnah, which confirm that child labour is not acceptable in the Islamic religion. Islam deals with children properly to ensure that they get their rights to life, health care, proper nutrition, education, security, and peace, and enjoy dignity and protection under their parents and community. They explain how, after childbirth, parents are expected to utter the word Azan – “the call for prayer” in the ears of a child, and immediately a connection is established between the Creator and the child.

Muslims consider Islam a way of life because it speaks on every aspect of life, so when they face any dilemma, they use revealed knowledge from God, which is the Quran, to solve a problem. This is true because the main factor of this problem is poverty, which can lead them to engage in child labour. However, they can still find a solution by following their teachings on work ethics and children’s rights. From an Islamic perspective, work is *ibadah* (worship), important, and must be honoured, but work that affects the children’s health mentally and physically is not acceptable according to Islamic principles. Monawar and Hossain (2016) stress these points by saying:

In the case of setting working hours, employers are told not to force employees to “work beyond their capacity” and if the workload is “excessive”, then they are told to “share the burden”. The necessities of an employer and employee should be the same, and the number of “working hours should be fixed according to the capacity of each worker. (p.20)

It is interesting to note that Islam recommends that parents shorten prayers to give care to a child who needs help. It can be understood that in the Islamic view, children have special status and rights; therefore, harmful and unlawful works are prohibited. Child labour from the Islamic view is known as “*Umaalah*” – the

exploitative work which is exposed to health hazards, inflicting hardship and harm; therefore, *Umaalah* is forbidden. To prove this statement, during an interview, one of the Islamic religious leaders noted:

As Islamic leaders, we must actively work to eliminate child labour and promote an environment where children can thrive, learn, and grow under Islamic values. Because "Umaalah" is an Islamic perspective that teaches an essential to prioritise the welfare and rights of children, as they are considered a trust from Allah. (Personal communication with Religious Leader, April 23, 2025)

Quran and Hadith, as the fundamental foundations of Islamic law, prohibit any child employment that affects the welfare of the children. Hadith Number 2164, narrated by Ibn Majah, says that Prophet Muhammad gave a wage to the children to help them not be exploited. Islamic law also prohibits child labour and calls on the Government, parents and society to protect the children. It also noted that children under 18 years should not go to battle. Based on the arguments given by Monawer and Hossain, Islamic law opposes child labour. Justification of this has been provided in the Quran, Hadith, and Islamic law. The safety of the child is at the heart of Islamic teachings. Let's see what other writers say about the Quran's teachings on children.

Anjum and Wani (2019) offer a perspective on the Islamic view of children's rights, the issues they face, and the responsibilities of parents and society based on the Quran teachings and the commands of the Prophet Muhammad. Children are subject to various violations, including child labour. They emphasise that, according to Islam, children deserve utmost care. "*The best of you is one who gives a good education, intellectual and moral, to his children*". Regarding child security, Islam strictly prohibits taking the life of children, as Allah states, "*And you shall not ever kill your children for fear of indigence. We provide for them and you. Indeed, the act of killing them is an enormous sin*" (Surah Al-Isra 17:31).

In Islam, children should not be forced to marry until they reach the age of marriage and decide for themselves. This statement is acceptable to all Sunni schools of thought that consider forced marriages to be vigorously forbidden in Islam. Child crime is prohibited in Islam, so parents are ordered to provide proper upbringing of children without gender discrimination, and Prophet Mohammad's saying promises the paradise life to the good parents, "*He who provides good upbringing to 3 daughters shall go to paradise*" Islam gives fundamental rights not only to adults but also children, on the other hand, Islam does not allow burden life "*Allah does not give human beings too much pain which is more than their capacity*" (Surat Al Baqarah, 2:286). During the research, when a Madrasa teacher was interviewed, he concurred with this Quran quotation, emphasising:

This verse underscores Allah's mercy and acknowledges the limitations of human capacity. It advocates for the rights of children, asserting that the work they engage in to support themselves should not be a source of suffering or exceed their abilities, but rather that they should be assigned tasks that are appropriate for their age and capabilities. (Personal communication with Madrasa Teacher, May 26, 2025).

On this argument advanced by Anjum and Wani on the rights of children, the Quran and Hadith speak well that Islam discards child abuse. In doing that, they raise alertness to build a habit of respecting human

dignity and fearing God by obeying His orders, but also calling on parents and society to take deliberate actions to eradicate child abuse. What we find interesting is that Islam believes the family is a basis of social unity, so the relationship between parents and children is a necessity. That is why Islam condemns marriage conflict, because when divorce occurs, the main victims are children. Parents should remember that children are the ones who will take care of them when they grow old. This is true because even the Quran insists on caring for the family, it says, " *Fear Allah in whose name you ask each other (for your rights), and fear (the violation of the rights of) the womb-relations. Surely, Allah is watchful over you*" (Surah-An-Nisa 4:1).

Moreover, Saul (1984) presents a situation where young boys in the Quran schools were asked to work as labourers on farms for long hours. They used the school to Islamize people and spread the Islamic religion, but the pupils lived a life of suffering in the school camps. They worked for a long time but for very little payment, perhaps without payment or with less food. Sometimes they escaped and entered the village to beg for food, which indicates that they lived a difficult life. The children ate leftover food, and during farm season, the pupils spent more time on the farm than studying. During farm season, the larger farmers rented workers from Quran schools, and a payment agreement was made between the students and the farmer, but the one who benefited from the payment at a high level was the schoolmaster instead of the workers. During the harvest season, children worked on their school master's farms but lived in deprivation and poverty, particularly during the dry season.

Though the boys were learning the Islamic religion in the Quran schools, another aim of putting in place the school was to use those boys as labourers for the benefit of the schoolmaster. This action of the Quran School is against the Islamic teaching of child protection. Looking at the contents above of the Christian and Muslim views on child labour, it is evident that, based on the Quran and the Bible, both religions reject child labour, but some individuals and institutions have undermined the teachings of the Holy Scriptures. How can the teachings of the Holy Scriptures be enforced to influence the attitudes of parents/guidance to prevent them from sending out their children on the streets to make money? These teachings and findings reflect a commitment to nurturing, educating, and protecting children, ensuring their rights are upheld within families and society.

The Shared Mission of Christians and Muslims in Fighting Child Labour

Shared Mission: Refers to the collaborative and unified effort of Christians and Muslims to address the issue in society. Additionally, there are the moral imperatives that bind different religious traditions in their pursuit of justice and human dignity (Volf, 2006). The shared mission of Christians and Muslims in fighting child labour in Bukoba, Tanzania, focuses on several key principles:

Child Protection: Both communities advocate for the rights and safety of children, ensuring they are free from exploitation and abuse. This corresponds to one of the respondents, who, during an interview, stated:

On my side, I can say: Collaboration between Christians and Muslims in advocating for children's protection can foster unity and understanding across different faiths. By working as a team, we can create a safer and more just world for children, ensuring they grow up in environments free from abuse and neglect. This shared moral imperative underscores our

common humanity and the value we place on the next generation. (Personal communication with Community leader, April 19, 2025)

Promotion of Education: Emphasising the importance of education, they work to provide children with access to learning opportunities as a pathway out of poverty. Community Awareness: promoting understanding on the negative impacts of child labour, fostering a culture that values children's well-being and development. Another interviewee also noted:

As a party involved in promoting Christian-Muslim relations, community mobilisation is essential to combating child labour. The detrimental effects of child labour can be brought to light by planning educational programs that include seminars and workshops for parents, religious leaders, and young people. Art, music, and storytelling that highlight children's significance in society can foster interfaith cooperation and a culture that appreciates them. (Personal communication with Social Leader, May 16, 2025)

Collaborative Efforts: Engaging in joint initiatives to tackle the fundamental reasons behind child labor, including poverty and inadequate resources.

Advocacy for Policy Change: Working together to influence local and national policies that protect children's rights and prevent exploitation. Through these efforts, Christians and Muslims aim to create a secure and more nurturing environment for children in Bukoba.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The study concludes that child labour in Bukoba District is deeply rooted in socio-economic hardships, cultural practices, and systemic neglect, which collectively undermine children's rights to education, health, and a secure future while impeding broader societal progress. Both the Bible and the Qur'an affirm the dignity and sanctity of children, framing them as divine gifts deserving of care and protection. This shared moral foundation creates opportunities for interfaith collaboration in addressing the problem. By uniting Christians and Muslims around the common values of justice and compassion, religious institutions can play a transformative role in combating child labour through awareness campaigns, community education, and advocacy. The study further emphasises the importance of policies that ensure free and quality education, economic support for vulnerable families, and stronger partnerships among the Government, civil society, and faith-based organisations. Such coordinated efforts, anchored in both faith and social responsibility, hold significant potential to eliminate child labour and advance the protection of children's rights in Bukoba and beyond.

Recommendations: The article analyses the collaborative efforts between Christian and Muslim communities in Bukoba to combat child labour. It highlights the importance of interfaith dialogue in addressing social challenges and emphasises the pursuit of common objectives over religious distinctions. The recommendations include fostering community engagement by encouraging participation that empowers the community to tackle issues such as child labour.

The article inspires a holistic approach that encourages cooperation between these religious communities to bring about long-lasting change for children who are at risk.

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