Agency, Resilience and Coping: Exploring the Psychosocial Effects of Goat Ownership on Orphaned and Vulnerable Children in Western Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Despite an increase in goat donation programmes geared at orphaned and vulnerable children in sub-Saharan Africa, the social psychological effects of goat ownership on the lives of these children have yet to be investigated. To shed light on the ways in which goat ownership affects children’s psychosocial well-being, this paper presents a case study of a goat donation programme in Western Kenya, paying particular attention to children’s interaction with the goats. Informed by social psychological understandings of resilience and coping, we involved fifteen children (aged 12–17) in this qualitative study, using photographs and written reflections to describe the impact of goat ownership on their lives. The children also created daily routine diagrams and community maps and participated in two group discussions to explore their experiences further. The guardians of two of the participating children were also interviewed. A thematic content analysis of all our data revealed that goat ownership, within this social environment, enabled children to (i) generate income as a result of their participation in goat management, (ii) negotiate social support and (iii) create positive images of self and life – deriving emotional benefits. We conclude that goat ownership provides orphaned and vulnerable children with opportunities for positive social participation and community engagement that can facilitate children’s resilience. Copyright © 2011 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: orphans; agency; Africa; resilience; goats

INTRODUCTION

The acquired immunodeficiency disorder (AIDS) has left many children in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) orphaned and vulnerable. Community groups and non-governmental...
organizations (NGOs) throughout SSA are working in partnership to develop and implement community-based orphan support activities. One such popular activity is the provision of goats to orphaned and vulnerable children (Brampton Tanzania Trust, 2009; Danish Muslim-Aid, 2007; Hope for Kids International, 2008; World Vision, 2009). Despite the popularity of goat donations, the psychosocial effects of goat ownership on orphaned and vulnerable children are poorly understood. As such, using a participatory research methodology, we enabled goat owning children to report on the psychosocial benefits and limitations of goat ownership.

Why goats?

Goats have an ability to resist drought, utilize marginal lands, travel long distances, produce milk efficiently and reproduce rapidly – abilities which have made them reliable investments in resource poor areas for thousands of years (Boyazoglu, Hatziminaoglou, & Morand-Fehr, 2005). Additionally, not only do goat products have a variety of cultural uses, but the economic returns on small livestock are also particularly appropriate for financially insecure households (Lebbie, 2004). Goat rearing has therefore become an integral part of daily life in many rural communities in SSA and is seen by many community members as a viable strategy to support vulnerable and orphaned children. This is illustrated by Skovdal, Mwasiaji, Webale, and Tomkins (2010) who report on a large-scale orphan support programme in Kenya that provided rural communities with the funds to implement orphan support activities of their choice. They found that providing goats to orphaned children was the most common community-driven orphan support activity (ibid.).

While the benefits of goat rearing on food security, nutrition and poverty reduction are well documented (e.g. Haenlein, 2004; Peacock, 2005), the most significant are those that match the needs of children (Cutrona & Russel, 1990). As such, and for goat donation programmes to have an optimal impact on children, it is necessary to include children’s perspectives of goat ownership and listen to how they believe goats have an effect on their lives. An emerging field of work, which has sought to include children’s perspectives, has highlighted the active role of children in coping with adversity and mobilizing resources to meet their own needs (Evans, 2005; Skovdal, 2010; Skovdal, Ogutu, Aoro, & Campbell, 2009). As goats and goat ownership may provide children with an outlet and platform to exercise agency and cope with adversity, we draw on a resilience and coping framework to explore the processes and feelings that goat ownership elicit in orphaned and vulnerable children in order to shed light on the ways in which goat ownership affects their psychosocial well-being.

Children’s agency, resilience and coping

According to Ungar (2008, 225), in the face of either psychological or environmental adversity, ‘resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to health-sustaining resources, including opportunities to experience feelings of well-being, and a condition of the individual’s family, community and culture to provide these health resources and experiences in culturally meaningful ways’. This definition stresses the need for children faced with adversity to navigate towards and negotiate for sources of health (Ungar, 2008), highlighting an essential component of resilience: hope and agency.

Similarly, and drawing on Ungar’s definition of resilience, Skovdal et al. (2009) propose a social psychology of coping which argues that children’s ability to cope with adversity depends on their on-going negotiation with the community in which they live, influencing their identity and access to local support networks and resources. This negotiation depends on the quality of the community in which they live in and its ability to share resources as well as the children’s different abilities to negotiate community support. Skovdal et al. (2009) found that orphaned children in Kenya coped with caring for ailing family members by engaging in income generating activities, mobilizing social support and resources, and building positive identities. We draw on this framework to explore whether goat ownership enables similar processes and thus has the capacity to strengthen the resilience and psychosocial well-being of orphaned and vulnerable children.

METHODOLOGY

As we seek to explore the ways in which goat ownership may affect the psychosocial well-being of orphaned and vulnerable children, a qualitative methodology is applied. The study satisfies The British Psychological Society’s (BPS) Ethical Guidelines (2004) and received approval from the ethics review board at the Institute of Social Psychology, London School of Economics. Pseudonyms are used in this paper to protect the identities of the participants and the community group.

Study location and participants

This study was conducted with members of the Ogeni Widows and Orphans Group (OWO Group) in a small rural community in the Bondo District of Nyanza province in Kenya. The area is characterized by high levels of food insecurity and abject poverty, and at 15.3%, the HIV prevalence rate in Nyanza is over double the national Kenyan rate of 7.4% (NASCOP/MOH, 2008; UNAIDS, 2008). This combination has led to a surge in the number of AIDS-affected children and corresponding initiatives. One such orphan support initiative involved the OWO Group, who in 2007, facilitated by WVP Kenya (a local NGO), purchased 30 local dairy goats that were each given to an orphaned child as a means of supporting their livelihoods. We chose this group because of their proximity to the first author (RW)’s residence. Thirty out of 67 children registered for support with the OWO Group had at the time of the study received a goat. From the list of recipients, 15 participants were randomly chosen. This sample size was chosen in order to generate a variety of experiences whilst maintaining optimal levels of individual involvement in the research workshops (Matthews, Limb, & Taylor, 1998). Children unavailable to participate were replaced by the subsequent recipients on the list. The selection represented maternal, paternal and double orphans of both genders aged 12–17 (see Table 1).

Furthermore, two guardians of the participants volunteered to participate in the study. They enabled us to approach the topic from a different perspective, capturing a more holistic representation of children’s engagement with their goats (Gaskell & Bauer, 2000). Through our interviews with the adults, we also got a sense of their, and the community’s, roles and responsibilities in the goat donations programme.
In April 2009, RW facilitated by a local translator who worked for WVP and had research experience with children, conducted a series of workshops with the children involved in this study. The workshops took place during the children’s school break on the OWO group’s grounds and included activities such as Photovoice, written compositions, community mapping and the making of daily routine diagrams. The research methods used in this study were highly influenced by the view that social research should be done ‘with children rather than on or for children’ (Matthews et al., 1998, 312).

In the first workshop, children were provided with disposable cameras to take photographs that would elicit reflection and discussion regarding the goat’s impact on their lives. We used Photovoice, as a participatory research methodology to enable the children to share their life experiences, problems, expertise and knowledge in a fun and empowering manner (Wang & Burris, 1997). By entrusting the participants with cameras, the dynamic of the researcher subject relationship is changed (Matthews et al., 1998); the participant becomes the expert and feels empowered to guide and control the research environment (Wang & Burris, 1997). Given the historical imbalance of power between races in Bondo District, the use of Photovoice proved even more appropriate for the researcher-participant relationship in this study. The children learned how to use a camera and were encouraged to use half the roll of film to take photos for the study and half for personal use, of which they received two copies. They were briefed on the Photovoice methodology, and as a group, they discussed ethical considerations in photography, and brain stormed possible situations that were inappropriate to photograph or dangerous for the photographer (cf. Wang, 2006). They were each provided with a notebook complete with a consent form for signatures of those photographed and guiding questions. Over a period of one week, the children took photos guided by the following questions: ‘(1) What is your life like with your goat? (2) What is the relationship with your goat like? (3) What do you like about having your own goat? (4) What problems do you face with your goat?’ Once the photos were developed, we

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of goats within the household</th>
<th>Orphan status*</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Paternal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>Erik</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lianne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Max</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Robert</td>
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<td>Sarah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>Female</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Total orphan = child has lost both parents; Paternal orphan = child’s father has deceased; Maternal orphan = child’s mother has deceased; Social orphan = both parents are alive but can be sick and/or absent.

Data collection

In April 2009, RW facilitated by a local translator who worked for WVP and had research experience with children, conducted a series of workshops with the children involved in this study. The workshops took place during the children’s school break on the OWO group’s grounds and included activities such as Photovoice, written compositions, community mapping and the making of daily routine diagrams. The research methods used in this study were highly influenced by the view that social research should be done ‘with children rather than on or for children’ (Matthews et al., 1998, 312).

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had another workshop where the children were asked to pick at least 4 photos they felt were most important to discuss or liked the best. They then were asked to explore their photographs through a series of open-ended questions (Wang, 2006): ‘(1) What do you see here? (2) What did you want to show with this photo? (3) How does this relate to our lives? (4) Why does this situation, benefit, problem exist? (5) If the photograph concerns something bad, what can we do about it?’ The children were encouraged to write their reflections in their notebooks and share them in the workshops where common themes were identified (facilitating our subsequent analysis) and solutions to problems discussed. Because many of the children expressed feeling limited by the Photovoice methodology in capturing and exploring positive elements of owning a goat, RW proposed exploring these sentiments in short essays guided by two questions, which the children felt were easier ways of sharing their experiences: (1) ‘I like owning my own goat because...’ and (2) ‘How does owning your own goat make you feel?’ Depending on their preference, the children wrote their reflections in either English or Dholuo (the local language). These essays, along with the Photovoice reflections and recorded discussions, generated 60 photos and 31 pages of single-spaced, typed reflections.

At a third workshop, the children made individual community maps and daily routine diagrams (cf. Rifkin & Pridmore, 2001), totalling 15 maps and 30 diagrams, which they used to generate group discussions on challenges they faced whilst tending to their goats and strategies they adopted for better management. The discussions were simultaneously translated from Dholuo into English, recorded and transcribed. These additional methods enabled participants to express different experiences and perceptions and generated 9 pages of single-spaced, typed reflections.

The interviews with guardians lasted 60 minutes and covered the following topics: the programme’s history, goat rearing in general, and the programme’s problematic and beneficial effects on the recipients and their communities.

Throughout the field study, RW kept a field diary to record observations of dynamics between the participants, the translator and herself as well as informal conversations with community members and local WVP staff regarding the cultural, technical and historical context of the goat initiative.

Data analysis

The children’s written compositions and group discussions were coded in accordance with Attride-Stirling’s (2001) thematic networks analysis. A systematic, iterative process was employed to codify and interpret the data. It involved several stages: first, identifying text segments as codes; second, exploring issues discussed within the coded segments and thereby deriving basic themes; third, grouping basic themes under organizing themes; and fourth, grouping organizing themes under wider encompassing, global themes (see Appendix 1 for codes and thematic network). These stages were repeated several times in order to produce the most succinct, logical coding frame possible to accurately reflect the data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). This coding framework was then applied to the guardians’ responses to highlight similarities and differences between the children and guardians’ experiences. A total of 41 basic themes emerged from the data. From these 41 basic themes, 4 global themes were formed capturing the effects of goat ownership on orphaned children (see Figure 1). These global themes are connected to one another and provide the basis for the research findings and discussion.
As Figure 1 indicates, our study found that children given a goat actively participate in goat rearing and income generation, engage in social support, create positive images of self and life and were found to derive emotional benefits from their goat. We now turn to discuss and elaborate on each of the four themes identified from our thematic network analysis.

**FINDINGS**

*Children actively participate in goat rearing and income generation*

All the children spoke of their active participation in their goat’s management. Although some guardians described themselves as a part or prime caretaker of the goat, the children said they could spend up to 6 hours a day tending to their goats and performed a variety of tasks to take care of it.

It is upon you to make sure that your goat is eating well, drinking well and also having a good shelter [...] You have to make sure that the goat remains healthy by taking good care of it so that when it gives birth, it gives birth to a healthy kid. Andrew (14)

Conducive cultural and social factors enabled the children to exercise this agency and take on these responsibilities; it is culturally acceptable for children to tend to goats several hours a day, and given the popularity of goat-rearing with the community, there was ample support and appropriate facilities to enable the children to manage their responsibilities.
But as many of the children articulated, their efforts in caring for the goat stemmed from a personal desire to ensure the goat’s well-being and maximize their potential profits. In a few cases, however, incurred costs related to goat management proved burdensome. Some children described having to buy salts for the goat’s water, treatment for the goat’s illnesses and ropes to tether the animal as being problematic, which one of the guardians corroborated. An additional difficulty a few children experienced whilst tending to the goat was its destructive nature, which at times led to conflicts with neighbours and distressed the children.

The disadvantage of my goat is that it can make me have problems with people any time e.g. after eating people’s plants, people’s soap and even after taking people’s water. Margaret (13)

Despite these difficulties, these same children and one guardian found tending the goat a positive use of time. As Margaret, 13, explained, ‘I feel good for having my own goat because it can keep me busy so that I do not get involved in bad behaviours’. Actively participating in goat rearing demonstrates how children as active agents can engage in activities to create their own health-enhancing circumstances (Boyden & Mann, 2005).

By participating in goat management, the children developed useful skills. Most of the children, including those who described difficulties with their goat, anticipated such goat management problems and took precautionary measures to prevent them. For example, they requested help from family members for additional supervision, or they tied their goats.

I can see a goat and bushes. I wanted to show how I normally tie my goat far away from people’s garden. It relates to our lives in that when the goat eat somebody’s farms, people will fight and this might interfere with our lives but if we tie them far away from people’s farms, there is no interference. Lianne (13)

Children also foresaw potential problems with their goat’s health and took precautionary measures to protect them from diseases. They got their goats sprayed weekly by WVP to kill ticks and with the help of family and neighbours maintained a clean, warm shelter for them.

Similarly, when the children encountered challenges in fulfilling their goat duties, they were resourceful and devised strategies to overcome them. During the dry season, for example, when local dams dried up, the children secured new sources of water for their goat. These new sources were neighbouring dams that took several hours to reach, so those children who could, used a donkey or bicycle to save time. Similarly, during the rainy season, children employed timesaving strategies. They collected rainwater and ‘...because the goats fear cold water...[the children] put it in [the] sun to become warm so that the goats can drink it’. Translator, Group discussions.

In addition to problem solving skills, the children acquired time management skills whilst tending to their goats. Though a few children occasionally described tending to their goats as a time constraint, even making a few tardy for school, many children multitasked and followed schedules in order to manage their daily responsibilities.

...Taking the goats out to graze in the morning shows that we care for our goats and it also gives us time to do our daily activities in the course of the day. The situation is good because after tying the goats to graze on their own, you can get enough time to do your duties. Jack (17)
All of the children viewed goat rearing as a form of income generation. While a few mentioned goat products of value such as skin which could be used to make drums and manure which could be used as fertilizer, all of the children valued the goat as a source of financial security. The children felt that the better they tended to their goats, the greater the profits they would gain.

I can see a goat and its kid. I wanted to show the reason as to why I like my goat. When the goat gives birth, you can sell its offspring during times of hardship and use that money to solve your problem. The situation is good because when you take good care of your goat, it gives birth faster than a goat that is not well taken care of. Erik (14) describing Figure 2

Though at the time of this study, no goat or product had yet been sold as the goats were still too young to bear offspring, all of the children hoped to use potential profits to purchase goods they lacked and solve problems they encountered. In addition to financial security, goats were seen to provide food security. Children felt that the goat increased their access to food and improved their physical health, either directly by acting as a source of milk and meat, or indirectly, by generating profits which could be used to buy maize or other staple foods. Goats may also be used as a dowry for the boys to secure marriage prospects. This form of security was articulated by the eldest boy and may indicate another material aspect of goat ownership that poses a significant benefit to male recipients in similar cultural environments.

The children and the guardians described goat rearing as a relatively undemanding form of labour and as such, a preferred form of income generation. By actively participating in goat rearing, therefore, the children were able to engage in income generation that was less disruptive to their lives while developing skills and gaining access to potential resources that grant them greater agency in their lives.

Engaging in social support

Through goat ownership, the children in this study actively engaged in social support, using their knowledge, time and skills, to provide support to family and community members by helping them with their goat management.
I feel happy because when you own your own goat you can also train community members on goat-keeping. Sarah (13)

In addition to offering their skills acquired from their goat ownership, some children even intended to use the goat itself to help those in need. Many children described wanting to help fellow community members simply because they could and derived pleasure in doing so.

If someone has died I can volunteer to give them my goat. I can take it there and have it slaughtered so that those at the funeral can say “thank you may God bless you”. That is good so I like my goat. James (14)

The desire and the ability of the children to use their goat to help others are highly reflective of the children’s communities and culture. At funerals in rural sub-Saharan Africa, for example, the family of the deceased is often expected to provide meals to guests, which contribute significantly to funeral costs. In resource-strapped, AIDS stricken communities, funeral costs absorb upwards of 50% of a rural household’s annual income often causing families to acquire significant debt (Russell, 2004).

Because of goat ownership, children not only provided support but they also drew on support. Many of the children shared goat responsibilities with and secured resources for their goat from other children and adults, both family and community members. The children greatly valued this support and sought to capture it with their cameras.

In this picture there are more than one goat, this is because we are sharing the goat’s shed with Michael and my grandmother. I like sharing the goat’s shed because when one is away, the other person takes care of all the goats. Max (13) describing Figure 3

Interestingly, though many children depended on this support to manage their goats, not a single child expressed any difficulty securing help, which may reflect the condition of the families, communities and culture to provide such support.

I can see two children and two goats. I wanted to show children who normally look after my goat when I’m in school. It relates to our lives because it shows love among us. Lianne (13) describing Figure 4

Figure 3. Photovoice picture by Max.
One of the children, even mentioned the direct connection with WVP Kenya as a benefit of goat ownership: ‘The relationship with my goat is good because it relates me to WVP Kenya’ Michael (13). Though he did not elaborate as to why this link was beneficial, the guardians explained that the community’s partnership with WVP Kenya provides them with access to other resources, which can and are drawn upon by the children during times of need.

Creating positive images of self and life

Interpersonal relationships represent not only a potential source of social and material support but also psychological support. Individuals and the community at large have the potential to promote positive identities that the children foster. Given the high cultural and social value of goats, several of the children felt that because they owned a goat, they were respected and recognized within their families and community.

Sometimes my friends in school used to shout out their own properties and if they asked me about mine I can tell them about my goat. It also makes me feel that my property is recognised. Jack (17)

Not only did children feel that the goat increased their worth within their families and society, but they also felt it increased their self-worth: ‘I felt happy all the time because I am better than those who have none [no goat]’ Lianne (13). While comments like these suggest that goat donations could cause non-recipients to feel inferior, and therefore have a negative effect on the recipients’ social environments, none of the children – including the participant whose goat had died – made any comment to suggest this to be the case. This may be due to the fact that goats are common assets in Bondo; therefore, rather than afford a child a superior status, the community-driven strategy enables the child to be perceived as less disadvantaged amongst his/her peers, as Jack suggests. The guardians did, however, express concern that those eligible children who had not been selected previously to receive goats were ‘not happy with the others’ and that, therefore, all kin born to the goats would first be given to these children until all eligible children had received a goat.
In addition to pride and self-esteem, goat rearing and ownership fostered hope amongst the children. Many of them described their lives as ‘good’ and had an optimistic outlook on life because of their goats: ‘Owning my own goat makes me feel better because when I am owning a goat I know that every thing will be possible [and] no problems will defeat me’ Erik (14). As the guardians reiterated, because goat rearing is a culturally appropriate and viable means of overcoming poverty and low social status in Bondo, it nurtured the children’s hope of obtaining financial security as well as social prestige. Not surprisingly then, many of the children greatly valued and took pride in the skills and knowledge they acquired from tending to their goats and the training provided by WVP Kenya, and they hoped to use these skills to obtain future gains.

Maybe [if] I lack school fees and . . . [I will] not manage to learn up to high level I can change to be a farmer and keep as many goats as possible and I can be considered as a rich person because a learned person who reached up to university and is now a doctor will be forced to buy my goat when he will be going to pay dowry. Erik (14)

Many of the children even aspired to expand their enterprise into other forms of animal husbandry: ‘I like my own goat because I can sell the goat and buy even poultry to start poultry-keeping’ Sophie (13). The guardians also expressed hope with regards to their children developing skills, generating income to meet their own needs, and expanding into other forms of animal husbandry.

Because the children owned a goat, they were able to dream of experiencing its benefits. Many of the children valued goat ownership as they were entitled to the fruits of their labour: ‘. . . if I have somebody’s goat which he/she has given me to look after, I can look after or take care of it well but later it can be snatched from me before receiving even a young one then I cannot experience the benefits of that goat’ Erik (14). This entitlement also motivated the children to actively and happily participate in goat management. Ownership appears, therefore, a necessary condition to enable the children to exercise agency.

Many of the children also valued the control ownership afforded them in their lives; they could make decisions regarding the goat, their valued source of income, and they could use the profits to solve their own problems. One aspect of this control the children particularly valued was the freedom of making their own decisions without waiting for approval from others and without the fear of reprimand or conflict with others.

If I have my own goat I can solve school fees- for example, when the teacher sends me home, I can take the goat to the market immediately and if you don’t have your [own goat] you have to wait for your father and miss school. James (14)

Because the children owned their goats, they were in a position to know the most about the state of their goat. They felt privileged for being the authority on the goat’s life and accordingly, many also felt secure in their ability to make the most appropriate decisions regarding the welfare of the goat:

When I have my own goat, I feel good because I see every movement of my goat. . . . I can know problems it faces and correctly deal with the problems e.g. when my goat is suffering from ticks I would employ someone to spray chemical to kill the parasites. Christopher (12)

This peace of mind is important for the children given that their financial security and dreams depend on the health of the animal.
Deriving emotional benefits

In addition to the happiness and comfort the children derived from the positive meanings they created, as well as from engaging in social support, some of the children expressed having derived pleasure and comfort directly from their goat. Some children described encounters spent taking care of the goat as an escape from life that was stress-relieving or comforting.

When I’m alone with my goat, I feel very good and sit next to it. I used to remove ticks from my goat and at that time, my goat feels very nice and comfortable. Michael (13)

Some of the children also felt that their presence was valued by their goat: ‘I feel good when giving my goat water because when I do it alone, she takes more water than when a different person is giving water’ Max (13). These kinds of comforting perceptions contributed to the children’s self-esteem by bolstering their sense of self-worth and competence.

In addition to comfort, children described obtaining pleasure and happiness from their goat. Being theirs, some children described a special fondness for their goat, which contributed to their sense of pleasure in taking care of it. Many of the children also experienced satisfaction from fulfilling their goat related responsibilities and excitement in seeing the fruits of their labour. ‘When I am grazing, I feel so excited because I know the benefits of having a goat’ Sarah (13). A key element to their happiness was the ability to control. As Emily explained,

I’m a total orphan who has experienced many problems and therefore I’m very happy to have my own goat which I have control over. Emily (13)

Some of the children even described how this control gave them security, not just for their future well-being, but for that of their siblings, whom they looked after. By fostering a perceived sense of control and security amidst adversity, the children derived much happiness from goat ownership. Contributing to their happiness was the belief that having a goat and being able to tend to its needs was a sign of God’s blessing.

DISCUSSION

While we provide evidence to suggest that goat ownership strengthens certain psychosocial processes that have the capacity to bolster resilience, consideration must be given to the study’s limitations when interpreting the findings. The power differences inherent between the children and the Caucasian researcher and between the children and the translator from WVP Kenya, the NGO funding the goat programme, may have influenced the children and guardians’ responses in favour of generating either positive or negative accounts with the hopes of obtaining further support. We hoped to minimize the potential effects of these power dynamics by choosing research methods that were most empowering for the children. Although the findings show few differences in experiences of goat ownership based on gender, age, orphan status and the number of goats owned by the child’s immediate family, these factors, along with many others, may influence how a child benefits from owning a goat and merit further exploration in larger studies. Similarly, while we touched upon some of the community effects of this project, they merit further exploration from the perspective of additional community members, including eligible and
non-eligible children who do not own a goat. Finally, at the time of this study, WVP’s goat donation program had only been in affect for two years; the time span over which the outcomes were explored, therefore, poses a limitation.

Despite these limitations, our findings provide some important insight into how goat ownership in certain environments elicits and nurtures particular psychosocial processes and resources that may strengthen resilience among orphaned children. The children in this study actively participate in goat rearing and income generation, engage in social support, create positive images of self and life, and derive emotional benefits from their goat. It is important to note that conducive environmental factors such as familial support, resources for veterinary care and goat management, supportive and understanding neighbours, cultural values and social norms influence the ability of goat ownership to elicit these processes.

Given that the absence of productive parents exacerbates household poverty, orphaned children often engage in income generating activities to gain access to material resources. The children within this study actively participated in rearing their goat as a locally supported means of income generation, and in so doing, developed goat management skills, problem-solving skills and time management skills. These skills along with the ability to exercise ingenuity and foresight are effects of goat ownership that can enhance a child’s ability to cope by enabling them to identify and navigate routes to secure resources for health. The relative ease of goat rearing, its economic viability and the many cultural purposes goats serve in the community contribute to the reason why goat rearing is a more popular way for children to acquire these skills and income over other types of animal husbandry. Because goat ownership is viewed as a means of income generation, it nurtures agency as children believe that the better they care for their animal, the greater profits they will reap. While a few of the children discussed difficulties with their goat, which could potentially weaken a child’s psychosocial well-being, such as costs, securing water, and the goat’s destructive nature, all were able to overcome these challenges, often with the help from the community.

How children cope depends on their social participation. By virtue of owning a goat, children readily engage in social support, either drawing on it or providing it to others regularly. In providing social and material support generated from goat ownership to their families and communities, the children not only improve the ability of others to cope, but they also develop or strengthen social networks, from which they gain support when they are in need. Additionally, orphaned children who acquire goats have the potential to develop a relationship with the providing organization which can enhance the supportive context within which children navigate towards health-sustaining resources (Prilleltensky, Nelson, & Peirson, 2001). The opportunity to participate in and contribute to community life, which enhances psychosocial resources required for children to exercise resilience, such as perceptions of self-efficacy and control, however, is a reflection of the pervasiveness of goat rearing, the cultural uses of goats and the local perceptions of childhood. Furthermore, the opportunities for children to draw on support is again a reflection of the popularity of goat rearing as well as the community’s ability to provide both tangible and intangible forms of support.

Goat ownership in this cultural setting elicits the construction of positive identities and thinking that enhance a child’s psychosocial well-being. Children’s active participation and adoption of significant responsibilities as well as local meanings ascribed to goats and goat rearing nurture the development of the children’s pride and self-esteem, which enhance a child’s resilience. While owning livestock in general may elicit the construction of similar
positive identities and thinking in children, other forms of animal husbandry are less viable and more labour intensive in this environment and therefore may also elicit the construction of negative meanings. Furthermore, some positive constructions may be uniquely attributable to goat rearing due to particular cultural uses of goats, such as dowries. The findings also suggest that ownership, in particular, enhances psychosocial resources such as happiness, pride and hope; by ensuring the child’s access to profits, ownership seems to enhance a child’s agency by strengthening the child’s desire to increase future profits and use them to attain well-being and improve the well-being of others.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have presented findings into an area previously unconsidered in the literature on goats and development, and resilience among orphaned children. We provided ‘hard-to-reach’ children with a platform to participate in a study that provided us with a unique insight into the impact of goat ownership on children’s psychosocial well-being. Our findings suggest that goat ownership provide orphaned children with opportunities for positive social participation, enabling them to (i) generate income through their participation in goat management, (ii) access and contribute community support and (iii) live productive and socially valued lives from which they can develop positive social identities and derive emotional benefits – all of which facilitate children’s psychosocial coping and well-being. This conclusion mirrors the coping strategies of caregiving children in Kenya (Skovdal et al., 2009), further illustrating some of the ways through which opportunities for positive social participation can facilitate children’s resilience and well-being.

However, the extent and the kind of psychosocial effects that the goat relationship has on the child seem dependent on the social context. We therefore encourage others to develop our findings further in different contexts. Similarly, we encourage others to explore whether different forms of animal husbandry in sub-Saharan Africa elicit different psychosocial effects in orphaned children, and whether ownership is a necessary condition to elicit these effects. Our findings are of potential interest to NGOs supporting orphaned children in similar social, environmental and cultural contexts, as well as governments whose policies affect goat initiatives. Not only can goat rearing be a sustainable form of poverty reduction (Peacock, 2007), but as we have shown, it can also be a sustainable means of facilitating coping and resilience amongst orphaned and vulnerable children.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our gratitude to the children, guardians and mothers who participated in this study. We would also like to thank Cellestine Aoro, Vincent Onyango, and Ben Radley from WVP Kenya and those who helped finance this study: WestEnd Cameras, Jim and Lisa de Wilde, Megan Clifford, and Terence Winsor. A special thanks to Professor Catherine Campbell for being a continual source of inspiration.
**APPENDIX 1**

**Codes and thematic network**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Basic themes</th>
<th>Organizing themes</th>
<th>Global themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Tending to the goat’s needs 1. Children actively participate in goat management to ensure their goat’s well being.</td>
<td>Goat management</td>
<td>Participating in goat rearing and income generation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Caretaker 2. Children tend to their goat’s needs to ensure its health in order to optimize the benefits of having a goat. Caring for the goat is seen as an investment or a reciprocal endeavour, from which the child obtains benefits.</td>
<td>- Investment 3. Some feel that managing their goat is a positive use of their time.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Positive use of time 4. Some of the children find the associated costs of managing a goat burdensome.</td>
<td>- Incurred costs 5. Goat mismanagement can lead to conflicts within the community.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Goat’s destructive nature 6. Children anticipate goat management problems and take precautionary measures to prevent them.</td>
<td>- No problems 7. Children are resourceful and devise strategies to overcome challenges they face in acquiring water for the goat.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Disruptive 8. Some feel that managing the goat is a constraint on their lives and can cause them to be tardy for school.</td>
<td>- Time management 9. Children learn how to multitask and follow schedules to manage their daily obligations.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Time management 10. Children value and can benefit from a variety of goat products.</td>
<td>- Goat products 11. Children will sell their goat’s offspring to generate income and pay for school related costs, medical costs and things that they need.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Goat products 12. Children value generating their own income to enable them to solve their own problems.</td>
<td>- Financial security 13. Children believe that the better they tend to the goat, the more financial returns they will obtain.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Financial security 14. Families may be inspired by the donated goat program to purchase more goats.</td>
<td>- Positive demonstration effect 15. Children can use profits from selling a goat to buy food or they can milk or slaughter a goat to obtain food.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Positive demonstration effect 16. Impoverished children may use their goat as a dowry to secure marriage prospects.</td>
<td>- Food security 17. Children find rearing a goat relatively undemanding.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Food security 18. Children use their knowledge, time and skills to help manage the goats of family members and neighbours.</td>
<td>- Less disruptive 19. Some children intend to use the goat itself to provide food to others in need.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Less disruptive 20. Children share resources and goat responsibilities with other children and adults, both family members and neighbours, to help manage their goat.</td>
<td>- Helping Giving support Engaging in Social support</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sharing</td>
<td>- Sharing Drawing support</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Continues)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Basic themes</th>
<th>Organizing themes</th>
<th>Global themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Contacts</td>
<td>21. Some children are pleased that the goat has connected them directly to WVP.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Status</td>
<td>22. Children feel that because they own a goat they are respected and recognized within their families and community.</td>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>Creating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23. Children value the opportunity to prove their competence to the community by being successful in rearing animals.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive images of self and life</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Pride</td>
<td>24. Children are proud of their work.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>25. Children are proud of having an asset.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Self confidence</td>
<td>26. Children are confident in their ability to manage their goat.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Skills</td>
<td>27. Children value the skills and knowledge they have acquired from tending to their goats and the training provided by WVP and hope to use both for future benefit.</td>
<td>Hope</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Dreams and aspirations</td>
<td>28. Children aspire to expand their enterprise into other forms of animal husbandry.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>29. Children dream of successful goat rearing both for the wealth and the prestige.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Positive outlook</td>
<td>30. Children are optimistic about their lives with their goat.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Control</td>
<td>31. Children like having their own goat as they have a right to make decisions regarding the goat (their source of income) and a right to decide how the profits will be used.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Independence</td>
<td>32. Children enjoy the freedom of making their own decisions regarding their goat without fear of reprimand or conflict with others.</td>
<td>Agency</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Authority</td>
<td>33. Children are proud of knowing the most regarding the state of their goat.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34. Children like having their own goat because they are better informed of the goat’s state and can therefore make better decisions in goat rearing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Ownership</td>
<td>35. Children have a personal interest in the well being of their goat and are therefore motivated to tend to it.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>36. Children are entitled to the fruits of their labour with their own goat.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Feeling special</td>
<td>37. Some children feel that their goat values their presence.</td>
<td>Comfort</td>
<td>Deriving emotional benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Stress relief</td>
<td>38. Some children find tending to the goat is an escape that is stress relieving and comforting.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Companionship</td>
<td>39. Some children express a fondness for their goat.</td>
<td>Pleasure and happiness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Personal fondness</td>
<td>40. Children enjoy exercising control and fulfilling their responsibilities and as such are excited to see the fruits of their labour.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Excitement/joy</td>
<td>41. Children are grateful for their goat and feel blessed by God.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
REFERENCES


