



POLICY BRIEF No. 10/2012

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN UNDER ZIMBABWE'S NAP FOR OVCs.

Introduction

This research examined the role of local government in improving access to education for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) under the National Action Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Zimbabwe (NAP for OVCs). The numbers of OVCs in the country have been on the increase mainly as a consequence of the impact of HIV and AIDS which has increased vulnerability of children in the process affecting their access to education at all levels. At independence in 1980, Zimbabwe declared education a basic human right.

Background

Currently the providers of education in Zimbabwe are: Government, Local Authorities, Church Organizations and Trustees/Board of Governors. Majority of schools in the country are owned and run by local authorities through the Ministry of Local Government, National Housing and Public Works. Therefore local government plays a very significant role in provision of education at both primary and secondary level as majority of schools in the country are run by local authorities through rural district and urban council authorities with the remainder being run by the government, churches and Trustees/Boards of Governors (National Action Plan Of Zimbabwe Education For All Towards 2015, 2005, 14).

Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study was to examine the role of local government in improving access to education of Orphans and Vulnerable Children under NAP for OVCs in Zimbabwe. The specific objectives were to:

- Examine the strengths and weaknesses of the current National Action Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children in facilitating access to education of OVCs.
- Assess the difficulties experienced by orphans and vulnerable children in accessing education in Zimbabwe.
- Identify and discuss best practices of NAP for OVC programmes from other countries.
- Recommend how local government under NAP for OVCs can improve access to education for orphans and OVCs in Zimbabwe.

Methodology

- Desk review of policy and legislative instruments regarding Orphans and Vulnerable Children.
- Consultative workshops/Focus Group Discussions, key informative interviews organized by NANGO in the following regions namely Bulawayo, Gweru, Masvingo, Harare and Mutare.

Study Findings

Strengths of NAP for OVCs

- NAP for OVCs aims towards increased enrollment and retention of vulnerable children at the primary and secondary school levels.
- Selection principles of beneficiaries of BEAM are in place to ensure transparency and accountability in the selection of beneficiaries.
- On paper the selection criteria for BEAM committee members is notable.

Weaknesses of NAP for OVCs

- There is no proper policy on the implementation of BEAM at the school level.
- Beam does not pay for “*extra lessons*” for OVCs.
- NAP does not seek to measure quality and consistency of attendance of OVCs at school as it is mainly focusing on enrolment rates.
- Major challenges of focusing on enrolment rates are that children may be enrolled at school but not learning because they are hungry or;
- They are being asked to “*face the back*” while others are learning because they have not paid their fees
- Children may also be unable to concentrate due to anxiety at home or;
- Missing classes to look after their family members.
- NAP is not taking care of Early Childhood Education and Care needs of OVCs.

Difficulties experienced by OVCs in accessing education in Zimbabwe

- Educational needs of OVCs born with HIV and AIDS are being ignored.
- OVCs miss out on lessons due to the perennial late disbursement of BEAM funds.
- BEAM beneficiaries in one year are being dropped from the scheme in subsequent years.
- Lack of easier access to civil registration affecting access to education for OVCs.
- Politicisation of BEAM affecting access to the scheme across the political divide.
- Subject selection for orphans limited as BEAM only paying for six subjects at O’ Level.
- OVCs are struggling to get early access to ECEC.

Best practices of NAP for OVCs programmes from other countries

- In Afghanistan where HIV prevalence is low, the government has linked birth registration to its polio campaign which has managed to reach almost every household in the country.
- In Brazil and South Africa where social transfers have been introduced these have proved effective in improving household security.
- The Zambian government has implemented a pilot project that aids 10 per cent of households in a chosen region that are critically poor and incapacitated (i.e. households with sick or deceased breadwinners, no able-bodied workers and high dependency ratios). Observations are showing that if scaled up to cover the whole of Zambia the programme is projected to cost an estimated 0.5 per cent of the country’s gross domestic product.

Key recommendations

- Ministry of Local Government needs to liaise more with other key stakeholders so that OVCs are not disenfranchised. For example this could be achieved by establishing inter Ministerial committees to look at the needs of OVCs as the needs of OVCs are cross cutting and cannot be realistically addressed by one Ministry.
- As local authorities are the major providers of education in Zimbabwe they need to reduce the distance children are walking to school in the rural areas through construction and adequate resourcing of satellite schools as some of the distances travelled by very young children are much more than the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture recommended radius of 3 kilometers from the nearest school.
- Local authorities need to ensure that nutritional support for OVCs is provided at the community level or through supplementary food assistance at the household level rather than only at school point as is currently the norm as some OVCs not in the immediate school environment as well during holiday time are missing out on nutritional support.
- Local government needs to play an active role in facilitating access to ECEC as OVCs are struggling to get access to ECEC and therefore their counterparts end up having a head start ahead of the OVCs. Therefore it is recommended that local government needs to provide quality community-based early childhood care in the rural areas.
- It is also recommended that other associated costs of access to education in the form of paid “*extra lessons*” need to be removed as these appear to be disadvantaging children coming from limited resource backgrounds (in most cases the OVCs). There is need to address the underlying factors that are creating an environment conducive for “*extra lessons*” like poor remuneration of teachers.
- If “*extra lessons*” are not to be abolished therefore it is recommended that acceleration and catch-up programmes for OVCs also be considered for example through peer and community support networks and parent teacher associations.
- There is need to increase awareness on the level of decentralization of the civil registration system and also to empower more local authorities to take on this role. Therefore local governments should be given authority, resources and accountability to improve registration levels in their area.
- It is also recommended that the Zunde/ Ramambo needs to be strengthened as it could prove effective in providing the first port of call for providing feeding schemes to OVCs in the community.
- Since *Section 31 of the Councils Act* provides for maintenance allowances for aged persons, mentally or physically handicapped persons, *orphans* and indigent persons it is recommended that in instances where the allowances for orphans have been discontinued these need to be resuscitated to ensure that local authorities take care of the OVC living under their jurisdiction.
- Since the BEAM Community Selection Committee (CSC) guidelines explicitly state that local government leaders that include councilors and traditional leaders are not supposed to be part of the CSC, therefore in order to ensure impartiality, independence and de-politicisation of BEAM, local authorities need to monitor CSCs to ensure these guidelines are adhered to.
- In instances where local authorities own schools they could provide direct subsidies by substituting fees payment as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

NB. This policy brief is a summary of the policy monograph on the role of local government in improving access to education for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) under the National Action Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Zimbabwe (NAP for OVCs) written by Ignatius Gutsa. The policy monograph was developed by the National Association of NGOs (NANGO), the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) from the University of Zimbabwe and Progressio-Zimbabwe with the financial support from the European Union. For more detailed information on the policy monograph contact Mr. Marongwe Machinda at NANGO offices in Harare at machinda@nango.org.zw or Mr. Mweembe Christopher at Progressio Zimbabwe in Harare at chrismweembe@yahoo.com