

Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Cash Transfer Programme for Orphaned Children in Zimbabwe

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KEYWORDS Institutional Care. Child-headed Households. Vulnerable Children. Interventions. Economic Needs. Household Poverty

ABSTRACT Zimbabwe has adopted a comprehensive response to the needs and challenges of orphaned children. The support for orphaned children has seen the collaboration and synergy between government, non-governmental agencies and communities. This article focuses on the results of an evaluation conducted to assess the effectiveness of the cash transfer initiative for orphaned children in a peri-urban district of Zimbabwe. The aims of the evaluation were two-fold: (1) to assess the effective implementation of the cash transfer programme, and (2) to draw up some lessons and recommendations that can improve the implementation and delivery of existing and future initiatives designed for meeting and addressing the needs and challenges of orphans and other vulnerable children in Zimbabwe. Face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions were the main methods used to collect data from children who were under the care of a local palliative care organisation. The results of the study showed that the cash transfer system is useful in addressing a host of challenges being faced by orphaned children.

INTRODUCTION

Recent studies and statistics tend to suggest that the number of orphaned children is increasing in sub-Saharan Africa and these children continue to experience severe challenges in society. Prior research on the problem of orphans in Africa have shown that most orphaned children end up being victims of sexual exploitation, abuse and neglect (Sabbaro et al. 2001). There is agreement in literature that the problem of being orphaned is associated with a lack of food and other material resources, and exclusion from school due to the non-payment of school fees and levies (Chandiwana et al. 2005). The exclusion of orphaned children from school is reportedly forcing a significant number of these children to live in the streets where they end up being victims of crime and abuse. A significant percentage of children have been orphaned mainly because of HIV/AIDS. In many parts of Africa the impacts of HIV/AIDS on children have been severe and emerging evidence tend to show that children who have been orphaned by AIDS may be forced to engage in

prostitution or survival sex (Salaam 2004). The number of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS is reportedly on the increase. The United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) estimated that more than 25 million children were orphaned by HIV/AIDS in 2010 and 82% of these affected children were living in sub-Saharan Africa. Against this background, the plight of orphaned children in most African countries is increasingly gaining greater attention from government agencies and the donor community. The continued increase in the number of orphans is proving challenging and devastating for governments in sub-Saharan Africa given the limited availability of resources and capacity to address all such problems (Salaam 2004). In most countries in Southern Africa including Zimbabwe, there have been various interventions and strategies aimed at addressing the plight of orphans and other vulnerable children populations. However, the economic decline in Zimbabwe which started around 1997 has been startling some of the major efforts aimed to address the challenges faced by orphaned children. Most of the interventions in existence in Zimbabwe have remained heavily underfunded and thereby failing to cope with the increasing number of children who are made orphans mainly by HIV/AIDS. There are various challenges that the government of Zimbabwe is faced with which are closely associated with the increasing number of orphaned children. The major

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challenges for most Southern African governments include surging street children populations, child prostitution, an increasing number of orphaned children dropping out of school, and the exploitation of orphaned children in different spheres and sectors of society (Salaam 2004).

Household Poverty and Child-headed Families

HIV/AIDS has serious impacts on family systems and structures across the globe. The rise and emergence of child-headed families is a noticeable and drastic impact that HIV/AIDS has had in many families in sub-Saharan Africa. Previous studies conducted in many parts of Southern Africa show that there has been a significant increase in the proportion of children who are double orphans due to HIV/AIDS (Meinjes et al. 2009; Mhaka-Mutepfa 2010). These double orphans are children who have lost both parents and as evidence tend to show in Southern Africa, these children are living on their own and rarely receive any form of support from extended kinship networks. The prevalence of child-headed families in Zimbabwe is reported to be increasing steadily. The average number of children who are living without parental care and supervision in Zimbabwe was estimated to be above 100 000 in 2010 (UNICEF 2010). Recent studies have also concluded that there are more than 50 000 child-headed families across Zimbabwe (Chigwenya et al. 2008; Mhaka-Mutepfa 2010).

Child-headed families besides having to live without parents, are faced with many problems and poverty remains the greatest challenge. Prior studies conducted in the different parts of Africa have shown that orphaned children from child-headed families live in poor conditions than other children who have living parents (Meinjes et al. 2009; Breda 2010). These studies suggest that child-headed households are more economically vulnerable than adult-headed families. There is consensus in literature that poverty, child destitution and orphanhood are closely intertwined (Abebe 2009). The absence of parents in child-headed families meant that most of orphaned families are faced with hunger, malnutrition, destitution and economic exploitation. In orphaned families, children are forced to prematurely look for work

opportunities as a way of meeting their day-to-day economic demands. Most of the children in families where parents are absent face the burden of taking care of the family financially (Abebe 2009; Van Breda 2010). Such a need to take care of the family has resulted in cases where some of the children end up being victims of crime, economic exploitation and prostitution (Abebe 2009). It can be argued that most of the challenges that orphans face particularly in Southern Africa are poverty-related. The challenges include a lack of access to food, medical care, education and social marginalisation (Abebe 2008, 2009; Meinjes et al. 2009). There is mounting evidence that in many sub-Saharan countries orphaned children cannot afford to continue schooling and are forced to look for alternative means of eking out survival (Walker 2002; Richter 2004). A cross-sectional study conducted in Zimbabwe showed that close to 40% of school age children in child-headed families were not attending school because they simply could not afford to pay the required fees, books and uniforms (Walker 2002).

Street Children and Exploitation

Over the past decade the number of children living on the streets in African towns and cities has sharply increased. The increasing number of such children is largely attributed to the day-to-day survival and economic hurdles faced by orphaned and other vulnerable children. The only possible alternative following withdrawal from school for most of the children is to embark on a new life on the street. Previous studies conducted in South Africa, Malawi and Zimbabwe have revealed that household poverty is the major factor forcing orphans and other vulnerable children groups to live on the streets (Walker 2002; Masondo 2006; Meinjes et al. 2009). Besides, orphanhood, there are other reasons forcing children to run away from home. Peer influence has been identified as a major factor in making some children abandon their homes in pursuit for life on the street. Children who are vulnerable to street life include also those who have been abandoned or abused by their families and those living in dysfunctional families.

There are various detrimental effects of street life on children. The unstable lifestyle associated with street living, lack of medical care and

poor living conditions increase children's susceptibility to chronic illnesses and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. Studies being conducted in different parts of the African continent continue to show that most of the children living on the streets end up being sexually exploited. In the case of teenage girls, they are forced to enter into sexual transactions which pose them with a risk of being infected with HIV/AIDS (Abebe 2009). The use of dangerous drugs has also been associated with children living on the streets. Given the several challenges that children face on the streets, the use and misuse of drugs is viewed as the only way to deal with the pain and hardship associated with life on the street (Abebe 2009). It is quite clear that street life affects mental, emotional and social growth of children mainly because of the conditions street children find themselves living under (Masondo 2006).

Given the different challenges faced by orphaned children, many governments, non-governmental organisations and the broader civil society have adopted different approaches and interventions aimed at addressing and responding to the needs of this vulnerable population. What remains to be seen is whether such interventions are effective in addressing all the challenges given that the number of orphans in most countries continues to grow dramatically.

Objectives of the Study

- (a) To evaluate the effectiveness of the cash transfer programme in addressing the challenges of orphaned children in Zimbabwe.
- (b) To identify the different challenges affecting the effective implementation and delivery of the cash transfer programme.
- (c) To provide recommendations that can improve the implementation and delivery of existing and future initiatives designed for meeting and addressing the needs and challenges of orphans and other vulnerable children in Zimbabwe.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research methodology. The use of qualitative methods in programme evaluation is not unique and it is well documented in literature (for example

Patton 1997; Denzin and Lincoln 2000). There are several advantages that qualitative research methods offer when doing a programme evaluation. Patton (1997) argues that the most distinct advantage of qualitative evaluation methods is that they tell the "program's story" mainly through the capturing of the narratives and experiences of the programme participants and staff. Qualitative research is usually "naturalistic" and does not tend to manipulate the setting of the programme. Thus, the researcher had to work with the programme as it was and interacted with participants in their own natural setting. This was done for the purpose of giving the researcher an "emic perspective" or "insider's viewpoint" (Barbie and Mouton 2001) on all issues related to the cash transfer programme. The qualitative data collection instruments used in collecting information in this study are:

(a) Focus Group Discussions

A total of eighty (8) focus group sessions were held with the participants. Focus group discussions were used to gather the views of the participants on the cash transfer programme. Focus group discussions offer the researcher the best option of yielding thick insights or descriptions from the participants. Morgan (1988:12) argues that "the hallmark of a focus group is the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data insights that would be less accessible without interaction found in the group". It is through group interaction that thick descriptions are captured.

(b) Individual Interviews

In addition to focus group discussions, the researcher also individually interviewed all the thirty (30) participants. The purpose of this form of semi-structured interviewing was to allow each participant a chance to freely express him or herself outside the group set-up. All responses were audio-taped and later on transcribed.

Participants and Sampling

The participants in this study were drawn from six different children's groups under the care of a Harare-based non-governmental organisation. The children's groups were formed by social workers and nurses working for the

organisation as a way of offering psychosocial and empowerment support services to children. The children comprised of those who have lost both parents. Children were purposively sampled from each group to form part of this study. There was no knowledge on whether the selected participants were infected by HIV/AIDS or any other terminal illness. A sample of 30 participants was drawn and selected for inclusion in the study through purposive sampling technique.

Data Analysis

Data collected through focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews was analysed through thematic content analysis. Thematic content analysis proceeded through breaking the information collected into themes which were emerging from the data. The researcher identified trends and patterns emerging in the data. Trends and patterns emerging were coded and classified into different categories and then used to make inferences on the effectiveness of the cash transfer intervention in Zimbabwe.

RESULTS

Using Cash Transfers to Meet the Social and Economic Demands of Orphaned Children

The use of cash transfers in addressing the various social and economic hurdles faced by orphaned children is one of the most laudable and useful interventions in existence in Zimbabwe. The majority (68%) of the participants in this study revealed that cash transfers have made a significant impact in helping them address mainly the economic challenges associated with being orphaned. These participants highlighted that they use the money they receive from this programme to meet their day-to-day survival demands. Evidence gathered in this study shows that the greater chunk of the money that orphaned children are receiving from the cash transfer programme is used for the purposes of buying food, clothes, school stationery and other essential household commodities. The use of cash transfers is viewed by the participants as the only means giving them access to purchase the most basic and essential commodities for immediate household consumption. A partici-

pant revealed that, *“the cash we receive through this programme has been useful in providing us with all the basic commodities we need as a family. We buy cooking oil, sugar, rice and maize-meal with the proceeds from this programme. The programme has made a significant impact in our lives as my two sisters and I receive US 20 each”*.

Results of this study highlight that the introduction of the cash transfer programme specifically for orphaned and vulnerable children in Zimbabwe will go a long way in improving the lives of orphans and the conditions that they live under. One participant highlighted that, *“I used to beg for food and money before I was enrolled for the programme. My life has changed and improved significantly for these few months I have been receiving this money”*. Basing on the evidence gathered in this study, it is quite clear that the cash transfer programme is meeting its overall intended objective. Reducing household poverty and meeting the daily social and economic demands of orphaned and vulnerable children remains the chief objective of Zimbabwe’s cash transfer programme. Participants in this study have reported significant changes in their lives attributable to the cash transfer programme.

Perceptions on the Implementation and Administration of the Cash Transfer Programme

Evidence gathered in the study showed that the majority of the participants (73%) were satisfied with the manner through which the cash transfer programme was being implemented and administered. Participants revealed that since their enrolment into the cash transfer programme, they all have been able to easily access their money at the end of each month. One significant feature of the cash transfer programme as gathered through this study is that there are no stringent conditions on how the money should be used. This has allowed individual households to make decisions each month on how they should use the money. The findings of this study suggest that the beneficiaries of the cash transfer programme have not experienced any major hurdles associated with the day-to-day implementation, management and administration of the programme. This is supported by one participant who revealed that, *“we have*

not experienced any difficulties in accessing the money each month. This has enabled us to buy all the necessary and basic household commodities we use in our home. It might be too early to judge but I am quite impressed with how the programme is being managed by the government."

However, some participants revealed that the process of getting registered to become a beneficiary of the programme is often cumbersome and requires the children to go through various screening and bureaucratic procedures. Such hurdles and processes are perceived as contributing towards the stigmatisation of orphanhood within some sections of the Zimbabwean society. A participant asserted that, *"I experienced humiliation when I was going through the process of being registered as a beneficiary of the programme. I had to go through several procedures which I think should have been avoided in the first place. This might be the only downside of this useful and feasible programme"*.

Evidence gathered in this study shows that the use and relevance of the cash transfer programme in Zimbabwe cannot be underestimated. The cash transfer programme remains one of the few empowerment support interventions considered as providing a means of survival to orphaned children particularly those living in child-headed families. The effectiveness of the cash transfer system is seen in its ability to enable orphaned children to meet their immediate consumption needs.

The Cash Transfer Programme and the Educational Needs of Orphaned Children

The results of this study showed that Zimbabwe's cash transfer programme is a useful and effective means of meeting the survival demands of orphaned children. On the other hand, basing on the findings of this study there is very little evidence linking the cash transfer programme to the educational improvement of the beneficiaries. Most of the participants also revealed that they use the money they receive from the programme mainly to cater for their monthly household needs. A participant asserted that, *"...we use the money only for the purpose of buying food and paying other monthly bills. As you might know the money is not that much which makes it difficult for us to buy other things which might be needed at*

school. So far, I have not used this money for school-related purposes or needs". The overall concern shared by all the participants in this study is that the US20 dollars they receive every month is not sufficient to cater for all their needs particularly school-related expenses. One participant had this to say, *"I appreciate all the efforts that have been put in place to empower us and other children in our country. I think this programme will yield more positive results if only the money is reviewed. I find it difficult to buy all the necessary basic household commodities with the money. I cannot even buy all the things that are required at school because they money goes towards my survival and sustenance"*.

As evidence from this study suggest, it is quite clear that the benefit of the cash transfer programme is considered as its ability to cater for the most basic survival or consumption needs of households with orphaned children. The US20 dollars received by the beneficiaries each month will not meet and address the various challenges faced by orphaned children particularly those related to the educational life of these children. A notable recommendation emerging from this study is the urgent need of the amount received by the orphaned children to be reviewed with the possibility of increasing it. Reviewing the amount is perceived by the participants as essential in enabling them to also address other needs which are not related to their day-to-day survival / consumption needs. One participant reasoned that, *"Once the amount is increased we can be able to concentrate on our school work without any worry. Besides contributing towards meeting our household needs, we can also use the money to meet our educational needs"*. The findings of this study highlights the need for the US20 dollars to be reviewed so that the cash transfer programme can make a meaningful contribution in meeting the various needs of orphaned children.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study have established that the cash transfer programme in Zimbabwe is useful and effective in addressing the social and economic demands of orphaned children. Research participants revealed that they have noticed improvements in their general well-being since being beneficiaries of the cash transfer

programme. These participants highlighted that the money they receive through the programme is solely for the purpose of buying commodities for household consumption. The findings of the study have also shown that the cash transfer system is the best possible mechanism of addressing the social and economic hurdles faced by orphaned households. This is consistent with the findings of previous studies conducted in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa. There is increasing consensus in literature suggesting the feasibility and usefulness of the cash transfer system in addressing household poverty in orphaned families (Salaam 2004; Marera and Boule 2009; Mushunje and Mafico 2010). In this study, the use of the cash transfer system as a social protection measure is considered by the participants as cushioning them from poverty and other threats such as hunger and malnutrition. The results of this study have shown that the cash transfer programme in Zimbabwe is effective in meeting its overall objective of providing orphaned children with a means of survival and basic consumption. Previous evaluation studies conducted in countries such as South Africa, Mozambique and Malawi have also shown that cash transfer programmes provide orphaned children and poor households with disposable income to buy food and other basic household commodities (Walker 2002; Masondo 2006; Meinjes et al. 2009; Mushunje and Mafico 2010).

Evidence gathered in this study also highlights that the cash transfer programme is being effectively implemented. A majority (83%) of the participants expressed their satisfaction with how the government is administering and implementing the programme. However, some of the participants raised concerns regarding the initial process of getting registered or admitted to the programme. Bureaucratic constraints were cited as a major issue that needs further attention so as to enhance the effective delivery of the programme. This finding is not unique as most government initiated programmes in sub-Saharan Africa are hampered by long bureaucratic processes and procedures (Nyawasha 2006).

The effectiveness of the cash transfer programme in meeting the educational needs of orphaned children was also assessed in this study. The results of the study showed that the cash transfer programme in Zimbabwe falls far short

in addressing the different educational needs and demands of orphaned children. This is so mainly because the US\$20 dollars that the children receive is not sufficient and is only used to cater for the day-to-day household survival needs of orphaned families. This finding is also consistent with prior studies conducted in Zimbabwe that have shown that the cash transfer programme is failing to address other needs orphans have outside of their day-to-day survival needs (Nyawasha 2006).

CONCLUSION

The study has shown the relevance and effectiveness of the cash transfer programme in addressing household poverty in orphaned families. The cash transfer programme is considered essential in cushioning orphaned families from hunger and malnutrition. Thus, the cash transfer programme provides child-headed and other orphaned families with a basic means of survival. This study has also revealed that the cash transfer programme is being effectively implemented and the beneficiaries experience no hurdles in accessing the money each month. However, study findings have also highlighted that the cash transfer programme has a limited capacity of meeting the various educational needs of orphaned families. The major contribution of the cash transfer programme is that of providing a means of consumption to orphaned children and their families.

RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) Reviewing the Monthly Allowance

The participants of this study recommended that for all their needs to be addressed there is a severe need for reviewing the US\$20 dollars they are currently receiving with the purpose of increasing the amount. All of the participants in his study were of the view that increasing their monthly allowance will enable them to direct some of it to mainly their educational needs and demands.

(2) Addressing of Bureaucratic Procedures

The general concern shared by the participants is that there is a need to eliminate the bureaucratic processes associated with the cash

transfer programme. Addressing such processes is seen as a possible way of making the programme easily accessible to all intended beneficiaries and also making it effective in addressing a host of challenges faced by orphaned children in Zimbabwe.

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