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Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Child Protection Committees in Zimbabwe

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Abstract:

The study aimed at satisfying the following objectives; to determine the knowledge levels of children on roles of Child Protection Committees in relation to offering services for children on the move, to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of Child Protection Committees in dealing with children on the move and to develop recommendations that influence policy in dealing with children on the move and offer appropriate guidance in dealing and handling child migrants. The study was influenced by the functionalist theory and therefore sought to assess the roles of Child Protection Committees in relation to children on the move in Zimbabwe using a case study of Chipinge district. The choice of Chipinge district has been occasioned by its proximity to Mozambique and South Africa and the massive movement of children to these countries despite the existence of Child Protection Committees. A descriptive cross section study design was employed with mixed methods for data collection. Purposive sampling was used to select participants from thirty-eight (38) Child Protection Committee members and thirty-eight (38) Child returnees who constituted the study population. The child returnee's ages ranged from 12 to 18 years. These were drawn from the thirty-eight (38) wards of Chipinge district. Structured interview schedules were used in conducting the study and the District Department of Child Welfare and Probation Services Officer was also interviewed as a key informant. Whilst 67 participants (80%) noted that there are Child Protection Committees in the communities are ineffective in their roles of curbing child migration. The study revealed that there are limited capacities and competencies amongst the members of Child Protection Committees in dealing with issues of child migration leading to compromised service delivery. Attributable factors to the ineffectiveness included poor knowledge on child protection issues, lack of training and mentorship for continual learning, resource constraints, and lack of motivation and unstandardized selection criteria of committee members. The study recommends implementation of sound management strategies such as stakeholder participation and capacity enhancement for Child Protection Committees to curb child migration.

Keywords: Child Protection Committee, Children migration, Capacity Enhancement

1. Introduction

The UNCRC is an internationally recognised framework for the promotion and protection of rights of the child. It outlines the states' obligations in the enactment of appropriate legislature and standards for the protection of children worldwide. Setting up of structures like the Child Protection Committees (CPCs) is one of the many progressive milestones of the UNCRC. At international level the international mechanism for child protection is represented by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Despite these commendable developments children continue to suffer violence, abuse and exploitation.

Regionally, the UNCRC was domesticated to suit the African context because of the diversities in socio-economic, cultural, traditional and developmental circumstances of Africa. The ACRWC of the Organisation for African Unity (now African Union) of 1990 is a framework that has borrowed a lot from the UNCRC. At regional level the ACERWC are the regional child protection mechanisms.

Zimbabwe has also taken strides in formulation of legislation for the protection of children. In addition to legislation, the child in Zimbabwe is protected through the implementation of a number of national, international and regional polices and conventions. Furthermore, National programmes have been developed to protect children and translate legislation and policies into action that include the NAP for OVC, ZNOCP and BEAM. These programmes provide a child and family-centred institutional structure where the child in the family is at the centre surrounded by the CPCs.

The NAP for OVC recognised that local communities play a significant and critical role in the protection of their children. Child Protection Committees find their origins in 1999 firstly as child welfare forums. In 2004, the child welfare forums were redefined and

renamed Child Protection Committees, (Ministry of Labour and Social Services 2010). In Zimbabwe the mechanism for child protection is represented by the WPO which in essence is the National Child Protection Committee.

The high level of child migration in Chipinge despite the existence of CPCs shows that there is a gap. CPCs can and should be among the foremost champions of child protection. Given this background they should be active in the curbing of child migration as children are subjected to violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect during child migration. These lead to shortened lives, poor physical and mental health, and educational problems including dropping out of school and homelessness among other serious child rights violations.

Whilst efforts have been made to curb this phenomenon the extent of child migration continues to rise despite the fact that CPCs are in existence. The study aimed at exploring the factors that influence the effectiveness of child protection mechanisms in their child protection roles in relation to the issue of children on the move.

2. Materials and Methods

This study used descriptive cross sectional design. This design enabled the researchers to use mixed method to gather data from a number of individuals and get a better understanding of child movement as the returnees narrate their experiences. A sample size of 77 participants (38 child returnees, 38 members of the CPCs from the 38 district wards and 1 key informant) was selected using purposive sampling to attain equal representation of study participants from each ward that meet the study inclusion criteria and hence could provide the specific information needed for this study. Child returnees (12- 18 years) from South Africa and Mozambique and members of the Child Protection Committees constituted the study population. Child protection committee members were included to assess their contribution in relation to issues associated with this phenomenon (child migration).

Two structured interview schedules were used for data collection (one for the child returnees and the other one for the CPCs and the key informant). Open ended questions were used to solicit information from the child returnees and CPC members on the roles of CPCs so as to arrive to a conclusion. These were very flexible and accommodative and gave room for the interviewer more information without restrictions and include such information within the scope of the questions. Interviews and direct observation were also used for the purposes of triangulation. The study also used secondary data to supplement the information provided by participants especially that which was not covered by the questionnaire and the interview guide.

To ensure validity and reliability, study instruments were pre-tested in 2 other districts namely Masvingo and Chiredzi which share a lot of similarities with Chipinge on child migration. Quantitative data were obtained primarily from the secondary sources, as well as direct field observations. Qualitative data such as participants' perceptions, child migration patterns and problems were obtained mainly from interviews and field questionnaires. Triangulation was employed in order to reduce bias and increase the reliability of the information. It took the researcher a period of two weeks to collect the data.

Data analysis techniques consisting of coding frameworks, thematic and content analysis were used to give a deeper understanding of the issues under consideration. The categorisation, coding and content analysis further enabled the analysis of interconnection between the child returnees and the child protection committees' accounts. The data was analysed to identify emerging themes and to provide depth of the experiences of child returnees and child protection committee members. The themes developed from the interviews and compared and similar patterns identified, in order to link some of the accounts from the child returnees and Child Protection Committee members. The descriptive research statistics were used to give a detailed description of the situation under study.

2.1 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was sought and granted an approval by the Africa University Research Ethics Committee. Local authorities such as the District Administrator were appraised of the study, the objectives and the benefits of the study to the district. The same was done at community level to ensure that the authority and autonomy of the communities in the district were duly respected and that they were made aware of proceedings in their communities. Permission was sought and granted by the Department of Child Welfare and Probation Services to interview children by virtue of their being minors. Child Protection Committees also fall under this Department. All the informed consent was obtained from all participants before interviews. A consent statement explaining the aims, use and intentions of the study was read and explained to each respondent before the interview or discussion. Names of interviewees and other identities were not to be included on the questionnaire to ensure confidentiality. Briefing was done to the participants regarding the questionnaire. Confidentiality was considered greatly throughout the study proceedings and participants' data was kept under lock and key.

3. Results

Table 1 below highlights the response rate for the study.

Group of participants	Population	Research instrument	Response	Non response
Returnees	38	Structured Interviews	All 100%	0 0%
CPC members	38	Structured Interviews	All 100%	0 0%
Key Informant	1	Structured Interview	All 100%	0 0%
Total	77		100 100%	0 0%

Table 1: Response rate
N = 77

Table 1 reflects that all child returnees managed to respond giving a 100% respond rate. All Child Protection committee members managed to respond giving a 100% respond rate. The key informant also responded. This translates to 100% representation of all the sampled participants.

3.1 Demographic Profile of Participants

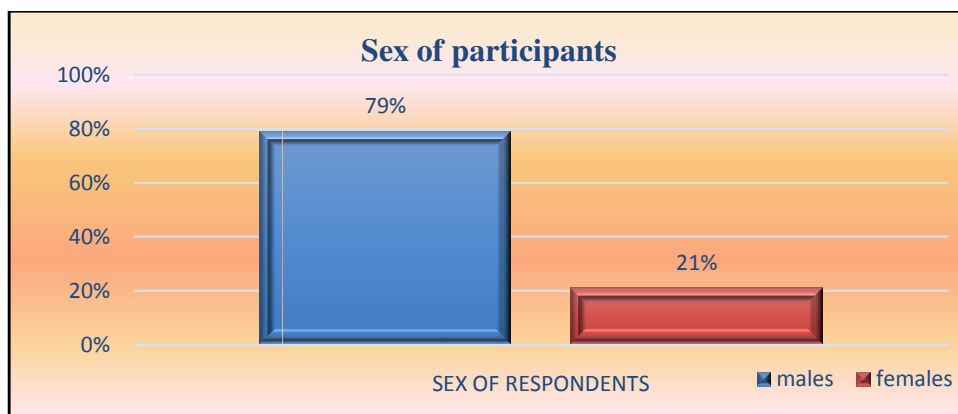


Figure 1: Sex of participants
N = 77

Figure 1 shows that the survey had a total of 77 participants. Among the participants 79% (60 participants) were men and 21% (17 participants) were women. It was observed that most of the families were female headed, most of the men had already migrated and were not permanently staying at their homes. This also explains why boys migrate more as compared to girls.

3.2. Age of Participants

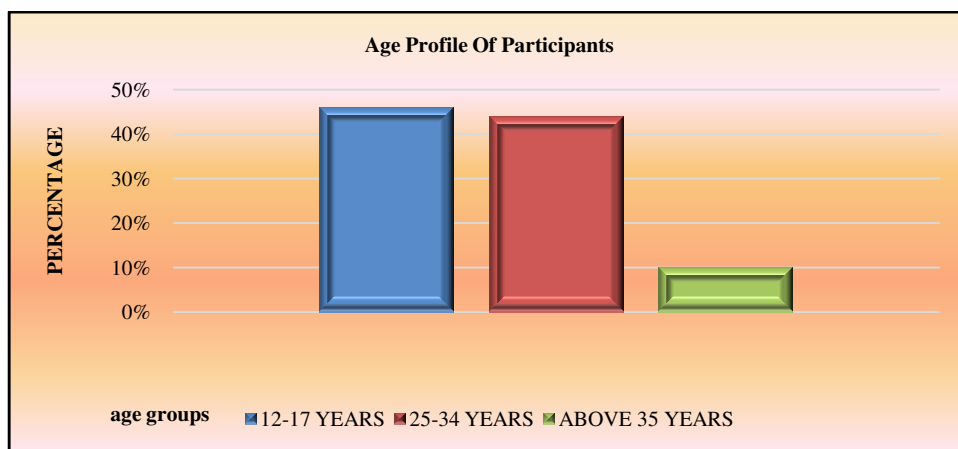


Figure 2: Age of Participants
N = 77

The percentage of returnees with age range of 12-17 years was 46% (36 child returnees). For the CPCs 44% of the participants were adults between 25-34 years old. 10% of the participants were older than 35 years. This shows that of the selected 38 returnees close to half the number are among the most vulnerable group of children.

3.3. Marital Status of Participants

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Single	34	44.0
Married	36	46.0
Widowed	3	4.0
Living together with partner	2	3.0
Separated	2	3.0
Total	77	100.0

Table 2: Marital status of Participants
N = 77

Table 2 indicates that 34 (44%) of the participants were single. Close to half of the participants who took part in the study were married giving 46 %. A total of 4% of the participants were widowed after the death of their husband or wife. A few, 3% of the participants stated that they were living together with a partner. 3% of the participants have separated from their partner.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
School dropouts	54	70
Post high school education	23	30
Total	77	100.0

Table 3: Level of Education of Participants

Out of 77 participants 54 participants (70%) went to primary school, and failed to go for secondary school. They were dropouts who left school for work in Mozambique and South Africa. The major reason was failure to raise enough financial resources to fund their education. Most of them were orphans who never went to school. Some highlighted that they were now working and are enjoying better living standards compared to those who went to school. 30% went to high school with a few completing a diploma or an apprenticeship. One child returnee cited the level of education of the CPC members as a contributing factor for their dropping out of school and migrating. He stated that the members are not role models and there is little they can offer for the children's protection. Another member of the CPC also highlighted that their capacity levels to curb child migration are low as evidenced by number of members who proceeded far than high school.

3.4. Responses by Child Returnees

Given an option, 78% of the child returnees pointed out that had it not been the economic realities challenging the country they would opt to stay in Zimbabwe than migrate. They are in dire need of continuing with education. They felt that there is need to support education initiatives for them to attend school. The children cited that the CPCs lacked the necessary capabilities to curb child migration. Child returnees highlighted that people who should be parenting them are on the forefront in abusing them. They also noted that there are officials including police, home affairs, border officials, church officials, social workers, staff at shelters and family members who were abusing children. They pointed out that there is need for people to listen to their stories and feelings and then help them feel better about their lives and have hope for future.

3.5. Roles of Lower Level CPCs

The study revealed that Child protection agencies at district level have supported setting up of lower level CPC structures at community levels. Their roles are to ensure that children are protected. They raise awareness on child rights issues among a lot of their activities.

3.6. Factors influencing effectiveness of CPCs

It was ascertained that factors that are influencing the effectiveness of CPCs include availability of adequate financial and human resources for the action, strong networks and linkages between the government, NGOs and the community in raising awareness on child rights and availing space for child participation. It was noted that, concerning the above initiatives discussed all participants (100%) interviewed agreed that the resources available for child protection activities are inadequate. Participants highlighted that the efforts were a drop in the ocean considering the amount of work that needs to be done in Chipinge district in reducing illegal child migration and enhancing effective child rights implementation at grassroots level to the top.

A significant number of participants 70 (92%) came suggesting that resources could be used more efficiently in the future by conducting CPC workshops at village and ward levels, and to ensure the conducting of vocational training for young people at local schools which already have the facilities.

It is worthy to note that all actors in child protection effectively carry out their activities in full consultation with a considerable number of stakeholders in the District Child Protection Committees (DCPC) which include the government's Department of Social Services, the Victim Friendly Unit (VFU) from the Zimbabwe Republic Police, the Ministry of Primary and secondary Education to mention but a few. This successfully enables progressive sharing of experiences and great expertise in dealing with children and the communities from which they hail from.

From the discussions it strongly appeared that there is a need to inform community leadership which includes chiefs, headman and ward councillors on the importance of child protection. It however emerged that for full realisation of child rights CPCs should have buy in from the community leadership. CPCs members unanimously agreed that the community leadership felt that whilst they are not clamouring for positions in the CPCs they should be included and involved in the CPC activities. This was also cited by the key informant who felt that involving the community leadership in child protection initiatives would help curb the cultural practices which in some cases are perpetrated by these leaderships mainly because of ignorance that it borders around violation of child rights.

3.6.1. Knowledge on CPCs

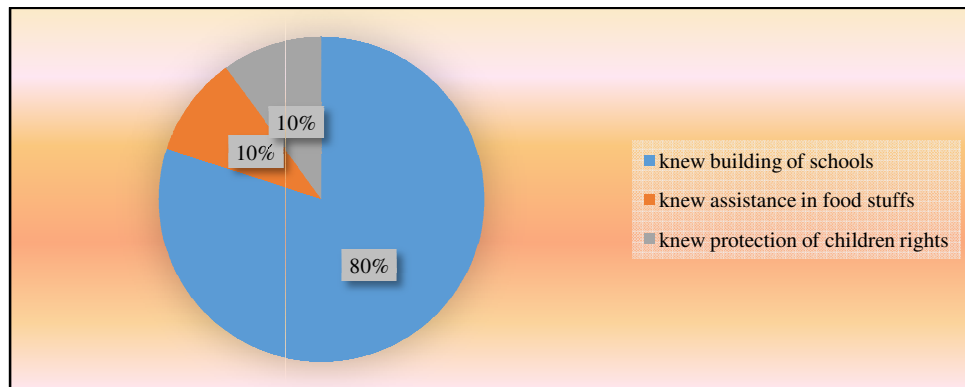


Figure 3: Roles of NGOs in Child Protection?

It is worthy to note that CPCs are known less for conducting awareness campaigns on child rights and their responsibilities, lobbying, and handling or referring reported cases of child abuse and migration in order to offer counselling.

3.6.2. Knowledge of Child Protection Committees

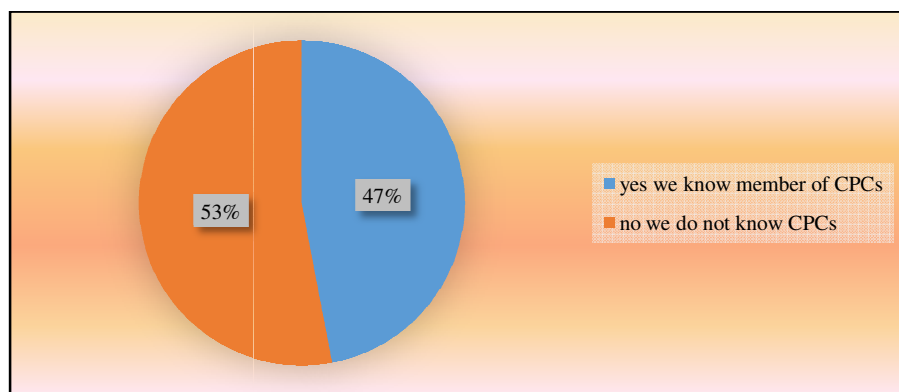


Figure 4: Knowledge of Child Protection Committees in your area?

Figure 5 shows that there were 36 (47%) participants who acknowledged that they knew some members of the CPCs and child rights. 41 (53%) vehemently showed ignorance of any knowledge of who CPC members are in their areas

3.6.3. Platforms for Children’s Concerns

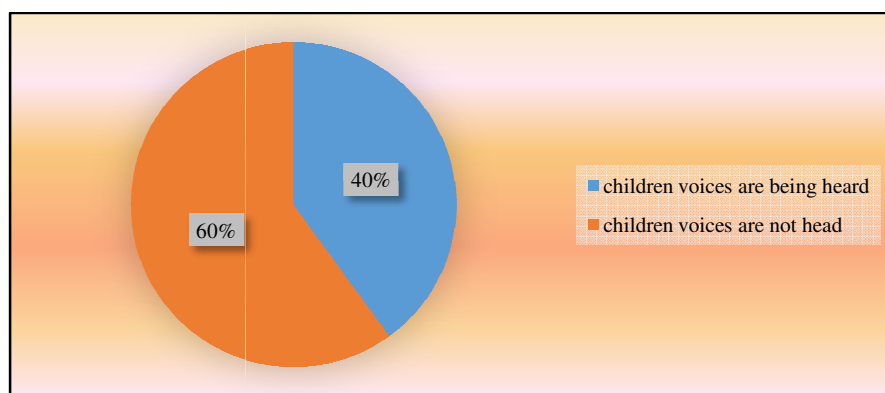


Figure 4: Are children’s voices/concerns being heard?

About 30 (40%) of the participants acknowledged that voices of children are heard, which they identified as rights to; food, education, freely express their views, shelter, parental care, protection from any form of abuse. More participants noted that children’s voices were not being heard since most were leaving their homes for greener pastures outside.

4. Discussion

The study aimed at assessing the factors that influence the effectiveness of Child Protection Committees in their roles of dealing with issues of children on the move using a case study of Chipinge District. This study examined and evaluated the challenges and problems in the roles of CPCs in ensuring child protection especially those on the move. It also established the knowledge levels of CPCs in addressing issues of children on the move. In this regard the research determined the knowledge levels of children and roles of child protection committees in relation to offering services for children on the move.

4.1. Influence of socio-demographic factors on effectiveness of CPCs

The study recruited a total of 77 participants of which 60 (79%) were men and 17 (21%) were women. This was an indicator of the gender disparity that exists in Zimbabwe with regards to both child and adult migration. It was observed that most of the families were female headed as most men had already migrated and were permanently staying away from their homes. Forty-six percent of the participants were child returnees 12-17 years clearing bringing out the level of vulnerability the children who cross borders are exposed to. Level of education and socio-economic factors came out strongly as predictors of a child's decision to migrate. Seventy percent of the participants on went as far as primary school. This low educational level had a bearing on the effectiveness and functionality of CPC members since most of them failed to deliver their expected duties.

4.2. Other Factors that Influenced Effectiveness of CPCs

4.2.1. Stakeholder Support

One of the major challenges faced by CPCs was lack of stakeholder support especially from the government and local community. Limited support from major stakeholders such as government, communities, NGOs and traditional leaders was observed. Interventions on Child Protection are still being implemented in a fragmented style with duplications and poor segregation of duties. This result in some critical areas being left out and other dimensions of child protection oversubscribed. The study noted that there is a great need for a coordinated approach to deal with issues of children on the move. Traditional leadership as the gatekeepers of the communities are very instrumental in the protection and passing of by-laws that assists in minimizing child migration. Passing of deterrent measures to parents and guardians can be useful in ensuring that parents, guardians and child protection structures carry out their mandate in the protection of children. As noted during the study resistance from local chiefs and traditional leaders can be a fuelling agent for child migration. It is high time the traditional cultural beliefs of encouraging child migration are strongly discouraged. Local community has a greater part to play in ensuring reduction of child migration to nearby countries and other regions.

4.2.2. Knowledge Levels of CPCs in Addressing Issues of Children on the Move

The study revealed that child migration has been worsened by the limited knowledge that exists on Child Protection Committees. Of the 38 CPC members interviewed, 47% of the participants proffered ignorance of Child Protection Committee membership composition. The majority of the committees observed had very limited knowledge on the characteristics and level of movement. The knowledge deficit that exists among the majority of these committees resulted in them conducting very few or none of the expected advocacy campaigns and other different modes of community social mobilisation on Child protection. Low self-esteem and self-efficacy in articulation of child protection issues became the greatest deterrent. A child's best interest is of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child. Children are entitled to adequate protection by the courts, in particular by the High Court as their upper guardian (The Zimbabwe Constitution, 2013).

4.2.3. Knowledge Levels of Children on Roles of CPCs in Curbing Child Migration.

Children as the key customers of the Child Protection Committee services also showed ignorance on the roles of these committees for their own protection. Poor knowledge resulted in low utilisation and uptake of child protection services at their disposal for the purposes of empowerment. This could also be attributed to poor publicity on the existences of such structures and their role/significance in a given community. The study concluded that there are low knowledge levels among children on the roles of CPCs. The returnees showed that they were aware of the existence of members within their communities who are in CPCs but could not articulate their roles. As result children were not aware of whom to approach for pre and post migration services. Some returnees also ascertained that they had not encountered a day when CPCs had held an awareness campaign on the dangers of child migration. According to Hope (1996) child safeguarding is a responsibility that civil societies Organisations have to uphold for protection of children. In this regard the Child Protection Committees showed that they were not carrying out the mandated roles to ensure that children are safe guarded. Their roles could be easily noticed and children being aware of where to find services were they active in carrying out activities that curb child migration. Children should take a leading role in their own protection processes. Child led Child Protection Committees can be effective ways of information dissemination amongst peers. This can be efficient and effective in bridging the gap amongst children on knowledge levels on where to access services aimed at curbing child migration.

4.2.4. Capacity and Competencies of the CPCs

Whilst these committees are in existence their functionality is compromised by their lack of capacities to carry out their roles. Religious-cultural and sociological factors also posed as inhibitive factors resulting in derailing the efforts of the CPCs. The CPCs seems to lack the capacity to find ways to approach the harmful practices that encourage the violation of children's rights. CPC members interviewed highlighted that they had not received any training on child protection. Lack of consistent training, continuous mentoring

and supportive supervision for fostering skills had a strong bearing on the effectiveness of CPCs. CPCs should strictly adhere to confidentiality when dealing with child protection issues. CPCs should not widely advertise confidential issues of child protection. This should be clearly expressed as a requirement in the CPCs. This further strains their capacities to share information more so given the nature of child migration as an emerging trend in child protection. Compounded with this lack of training, of the interviewed Child Protection Committee members only 30% had proceeded to post high school education. Given the emerging trends on child migration this lack of training and low level education compromises the CPCs to execute their duties to curb child migrations. This is in disagreement with the UNICEF Report (2004) which states that Child Protection Committees are structures, measures in place to ensure that children are protected from violence, abuse and exploitation. Due to their ineffectiveness these committees cannot fulfill their mandate to protect children.

On affording children a platform to air their views and concerns, 40% (30 participants) appreciated the need for children to be active participants in their own protection. This is mainly because the CPCs have limited capacities to unleash the potential in children to be active members of the society in voicing their concerns. This gives children little space to find alternatives ways of survival rather than opting for cross border movements.

4.2.5. Resource Constraints

The major challenges faced by CPCs were lack of funding. The key informant highlighted that budget constraints/limited funding was the major problem facing CPCs in dealing with issues affecting children on the move. Financial constrains compromised service delivery with regard to addressing issues of children on the move. In as much as some CPCs showed commitment in wanting to raise awareness they were affected by financial resources. This was resulting in higher incidences of unrecorded child migration flows. CPCs don't have social mobilisation packages and stationery to carry out their campaigns. There is need to prioritize issues of child migration through availing of financial resources to fund child protection initiatives. Agencies in child protection and the Government should seek more funding from donors so as to enhance the technical capacity by CPCs to help address issues of child migration. The funding is essential for strengthening the CPCs and local communities' abilities to protect children. Capacities of children also require development and enhancement so that they play a pivotal role in their own protection initiatives. Hart (1992) recognizes child participation as a stage where children and adults share decision making .This is achievable when capacity levels are enhanced to take a leading role in issue affecting them.

In the same vein that funding should be availed for CPC activities the study recommends that resource mobilisation be done at all levels starting with the CPCs themselves, Government, local and International NGOs. It is one of the CPCs' roles to resource mobilize rather than waiting for resources to be availed for their activities. In as much as there are limited resources to deal with issues of children on the move, CPCs should consider community grown initiatives that ensure that children are safeguarded from engaging in cross border movements. Low cost high impact measures like utilizing platforms like community gatherings can assist CPCs to raise awareness on dangers of child migration.

4.3. Limitations

The instruments designed for this study were used for the first time by the researcher. This could have led to inaccurate information gathered for validity purposes. To overcome this limitation pretesting of the tools to ensure that the researcher gets the clear meaning of the questions and how they are interpreted by the participants was done. This ensured that quality and consistent data was collected. The purposive sampling of child returnees and child protection committee members had its own share of limitations .A very small number (38 Child returnees) purposively chosen participants gave generalised results for a larger population. This was further compounded by the fact that this study was done in one district of Zimbabwe and this could not be a full representation of the situation in the country. This was inadequate coverage to influence policy changes. However, this limitation was catered for by the use of secondary data which fed up the collected data by additional information from previous researches.

5. Conclusions

Child Protection Committees have an important role in child protection as "champions for children" in rural communities they operate. Effective functionality and strengthening of this community structure involves proper planning, objective selection of members, capacity building of the structures and continual monitoring and supportive supervision to attain meaningful outcomes. Roles of CPCs should be clearly defined and funding should be availed for carrying out activities .Once these measures are put in place the CPCs become visible and play a major role in curbing child protection issues. Standardization of training and performance monitoring framework will ultimately improve the outcomes of CPC programs by standardizing the operations of each CPC in line with the national/international policies and strategies. Applying and integrated and collaborative approach with all stakeholders at different levels will go a long way in ensuring that children are accorded their rights in their totality.

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