Child Protection Committees (CPCs) and National Action Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (NAP for OVC) Phase I & II in rural Zimbabwe: issues yesterday, today and tomorrow.

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Abstract
The plight of orphans and other vulnerable children in Zimbabwe is one that behoves all stakeholders to come together for a common purpose to provide protective measures, care and support for the children. Thus the study sought to assess the experience of Child Protection Committees in the pre and during the implementation of National Action Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children I and II in Zimbabwe. Using qualitative methodology, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and secondary sources were used to solicit information from sample of 20 participants who included; village heads, health workers, police officers, and representative of child led Child Protection. Major concerns revealed during the study include; inefficiency communication system, poor coordination, pilings of unresolved child abuse case and lack of incentives among others. Each evolitional phase of Chid Protection Committees has its unique set of concerns but these rolled over to the other phases. Child Protection Committees, who must at the forefront in implementing child protection interventions at community level, are hoping for improvement in the future in terms of the challenges and concerns they have. It is the recognition of their recommendations that can allow the sustainability of child protection through addressing their concerns that sometimes trickle into risk factors in the success of child protection in rural Zimbabwe. The study concluded that the success of the child protection intervention is tied on vivacious Child Protection Committees structures.
Key Terms: Child protection Committees; NAP; OVC; Zimbabwe

Introduction
Zimbabwe long has been sensitive to the plight of children who recognised the need for care for OVC and put in place mechanisms for the protection and care of these. As far back as 1999, Zimbabwe had an orphan care policy which sought to provide guidance in the care and support of OVC. The National Orphan Care Policy (NOCP) became the pillar on which other successive programmes directed toward child protection have been anchored (Muchenje 2008, UNICEF, 2012). Putting children at zenith of national agendas became mandatory by government by developing national child sensitive policy
framework in form of National Action Plan for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children years later. Child protection refers to all efforts that can be applied to promote and protect children’s rights and welfare, and deter any unfair practices or influences against children including child labour, neglect, abandonment, service denial, drug and alcohol abuse, unfair treatment and any other forms of abuse and exploitation (Beckett, 2012; Muchenje, 2008). It is argued that worldwide, one hundred and forty eight million children have lost one or both parents, and millions more are vulnerable due to poverty, diseases, conflict, and diseases. Among other causes of vulnerability, the rapid acceleration of the AIDS pandemic affects children’s health education, living standards, and emotional well-being in ways the global community is just beginning to understand (National AIDS Council, 2004).

Child Protection Committees are locally-based, inter-agency strategic partnerships responsible for the design, development, publication, distribution, dissemination, implementation and evaluation of child protection policy and practice across the public, private and wider third sectors in their locality and in partnerships across Zimbabwe (Government of Zimbabwe, 2004). Their role, through their respective local structures and memberships, is to provide individual and collective leadership and direction for the management of child protection services in a community. Child Protection Committees at the various levels, provide the linkages between communities and children. They facilitate the implementation of and upholding of children’s rights within communities.

With such, CPCs were going to be a salient cog in the implementation of NAP for OVC as a child sensitive programme in Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe the development of Child Protection Committees passes 3 distinct historical but inseparable phases as reviewed below.

Overview of Child Protection Committees and NAP for OVCs in Zimbabwe

Phase 1: Child Welfare Forums (CWFs)

With continued rise in child protection concerns in Zimbabwe due to combined effects of HIV/AIDS which went unabated together with poor economic performance, National Orphan Care Policy was born in 1999 in Zimbabwe. UNICEF (2012) notes that setting up of national orphan care policy (NOCP) was a move which dawned new focus in addressing child protection in Zimbabwe. Contained in this policy, was a provision which mandated the development of Child Welfare Forums, acting as a multi-sectorial avenue to avail and discuss child protection issues in Zimbabwe. However, Chakaipa (2010) observes that at this time little has been realized on the importance including children to lead the process for themselves. The policy (NOCP) provided broad formal terms of reference (ToR) which included provision of advisory services to Ministry of Labour and Social Services on monitoring the situation of orphans and their circumstances in the community.

Review shows that after adoption of national orphan care policy, the Child Welfare Forums were formalized. Such operationalisation was mostly as result of individual effort of certain officers in the department of social services in some districts (UNICEF, 2012). Greatest shortfall of CWFs in Zimbabwe was that
its success in terms of resources was only hinged on meagre and stumbling national basket- funds. At this point only peripheral roles were performed by CWFs of only identifying beneficiaries from chief’s granary (Zunde Ramambo) (Muwoni, 2011).

**Phase 2: Evolution from CWFs to CPCs (NAP 1; 2004-2010)**

It was until the establishment of NAP for OVC 1 when the term Child Protection Committee in 2004 in Zimbabwe (Government of Zimbabwe, 2010). NAP 1 itself owes much of its origin from United Nations’ General Assembly on Special Session on HIV/AIDS which was held in 2001, and which aimed (goals 65, 66 & 67) call for the development of national policies and strategies to strengthen government, community and family-based capacities to provide supportive environment for children affected by HIV/AIDS. Demulder (2011) opines that, despite Zimbabwe has already existing child protection systems, there was not properly constituted coordination between different institutions involved in child protection issues. At this point of time, a great stride in paradigm shift took place where government engaged in active role to respond effectively to the scourg of HIV/AIDS crisis, and increasing number of the children in multiple deprivations. Among others, Children’s Act (5.06) was also called into operation for probation officers to devise strategies and measures responding to needs of children.

Regardless to lack of straight CPCs agenda, Zimbabwe development and adoption a National Action Plan (NAP 1) for Orphans and Vulnerable Children, which is premised on the various commitments to support children, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child gave hope to revival to already dormant CPCs. The NAP for OVC sought to, among other things; consolidate the support provided for children in need of care so that this support became standardized, systematic and coordinated. The plan envisioned the development of a national institutional capacity to identify all orphans and vulnerable children throughout the country (Government of Zimbabwe, 2012).

Through its Programme of Support (PoS), it emphasized a programme, which has turned out to be an extremely well-coordinated strategy for supporting especially disadvantaged children in Zimbabwe, had two main objectives, namely: to strengthen community level organizations providing care and protection for vulnerable children; and to put in place a mechanism to ensure increased and more predictable funding to organizations assisting these children (Demulder, 2011).

The most remarkable achievement of the NAP 1 was realization of importance of child participation as important aspect of protection in Zimbabwe was establishment of Child led Child Protection Committees in 2008. However, NAP for OVC in one of its goals aims to “increase child participation where appropriate in all issues that concern them from community to national level, considering their evolving capacities” (Government of Zimbabwe, 2010). With increasing need for coordination and child engagement, in 2008 proposal was developed to support child led CPCs. In each province of Zimbabwe, an NGO was identified to support child led child protection...
committees which were formed by core teams of adult led CPCs, with aim of fostering and guaranteeing strong child participation (Save the Children, 2008). This was a big welcome in child protection though in theory, with Coordinator Management’s books stating that “the CPCs must put in place mechanisms for guaranteeing the active child participation of children in coordination matters”. However, it was adult led CPCs who were tasked to lead this process by setting platform for them to participate in issues affecting them.

**Phase 3: Post NAP 1 into NAP 2 (2011-2015)**

Built on lessons learnt from NAP I, the National Action Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children Phase 2 (NAP II) is a government of Zimbabwe Child Sensitive Social Protection programme for ensuring that orphans, vulnerable children and their families have incomes and access to basic education, health, nutrition, birth registration services and are all protected from abuse and exploitation. The programme put in place mechanisms for better coordination and more intensified efforts by government, Civil Society, the private sector and development partners which was lacking NAP 1. The vision of NAP II is that, by 2020, all children in Zimbabwe live in a safe, secure and supportive environment that is conducive to child growth and development (Government of Zimbabwe, 2012). The goal is that by December 2015, the most vulnerable children in Zimbabwe will be able to secure their basic rights through the provision of quality social protection and child protection services. NAPII is anchored on 4 pillars namely: strengthening the household economy, child protection, access to basic services, and programme coordination and management. The unique emphasis was to create sufficient coordination among all institutions involved in child protection systems.

Coordination and strategic direction for the programme is provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Services (MoLSS), which has put in place systems for closer cooperation with various stakeholders like World Education through its Children First project. The NAPII takes cognisance of previously existing structures under the NAPI such as the Child Protection Committees.

**Roles of Child Protection committees (CPCs) in NAP 1and 2**

Child Protection Committees should be in a position to produce and disseminate important public information about protecting children. Among others, such type of information includes the following; raising awareness of child protection issues within communities, providing information about where members of the public will go if they have concerns about a child and what could happen, how the public should deal with the CPC in the case of the CPC failing to fulfil its role. Also to ensure the use of the village registers in targeting by all NGOs operating in the areas, act as the monitor for quality control of the programmes implemented by NGOs, monitor and ensure that beneficiaries of various programmes such as BEAM, cash transfers are indeed benefitting, and guard against corrupt tendencies in the community in the targeting of beneficiaries for programmes (Government of Zimbabwe, 2012). It is important to note that at community level it is where translation is done.
At community level CPCs must be proactive on behalf of less privileged children especially in ensuring they have access to social services such as birth registration, access to health facilities. As a result CPCs inform the community on the roles of different professionals in child protection system and be the resource links for those who have concerns about children they suspect to be abused. As noted in the NAP for OVC that there is a need of comprehensive child protection system on the ground. Muwoni (2011) argues that the rationale behind community based engagement and initiatives are crucial in generating buy-in, credibility and equitable implementation of child protection programmes. Child Protection Protocol of 2012 further substantiate that community based CPCs may advice on how the community can help in the protection of children and have strategies in place to do so, keep up to date with relevant legislation, research, good practice and guidance and agencies support them to do so. In order to realize such goals CPCs must be actively promote joint working through joint planning, training and monitoring arrangements with other bodies such as education committees and nutrition committees. General observation is that the success of CPCs in executing these roles has been scant and mostly remained in theoretical fashion.

Research Methodology

The study was done in three districts which include Kariba, Binga and Hwange. These places presented unique characteristics of rural communities. The study was directed at collecting information on three stages regarding child protection by considering major issues for each phase of Child Protection Committees. Combination of various data collection methods was used to understand key issues which informed three key evolulational processes of CPCs in rural Zimbabwe. The methods ranging from primary to secondary were utilized to gather information on the past, present and future of child protection committees. Quantitative information such statistics (percentages) was obtained from content analysis of previous reports and publications by government and other child protection agencies both at national and community level. Content analysis was mostly used to give background and issues which emerged in the implementation of CPCs since its inception. Qualitative design was dominant as the study was keen to understand the experiences of CPCs at every stages of its historical development. The sample was drawn from 20 participants who included; 4 village heads, 1 health worker, 2 police officer (Victim Friendly department), 8 Department of Social Services workers, 3 representatives from Child led Child Protection Committees (CLCPCs), 1 Save the Children Officer and 1 key informant in form of National Child Protection Advisor. Focus group discussions composed of village heads, health workers, police officers, and representatives of child led CPCs were conducted. In-depth interviews and Key Interviews were used to collect information from individual DSS officers and key informants respectively. Notably those who were part of DSS pre and during NAP 1 were more preferred to tap their experience on child protection committees. This was also done to ascertain the background of CPCs from practical experience. From ethical
perspective, informed consent was sought to respondents and the researcher explained to them that the study was academic. Confidentiality was also assured to the respondents.

**Results and discussions**

Experience is the great teacher. The evolution of CPC works in the pre and during NAP I and II was examined from the practical perspective. However, secondary data was also referred to complete the responses from primary sources of information. Major concerns raised during the research process include inefficiency in communication system, failure of coordination, pilings of child abuse issues that are not dealt with and lack of incentives among them. Each phase of NAP for OVC has its unique concerns although some roll over to the other phases. CPCs, who are at the forefront in implementing child protection intervention at community level, are hoping for improvement in the future in terms of the challenges and concerns they have. It is the recognition of their recommendations that can allow the sustainability of child protection through addressing their concerns that sometimes trickle into risk factors in the success of child protection in rural Zimbabwe. Success of the child protection intervention is tied on viable CPCs in rural areas.

**Child Protection Committees s in pre NAP-issues yesterday**

Child protection can be traced back since time immemorial. People had their own ways of protecting children even before the establishment of the child protection committees. In Goma in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), “although most traditional mechanisms have broken down, religious actors remain committed to serving their communities and serve as a powerful example of the kind of long-term protective mechanisms that existed before the arrival of external child protection actors, and that will most likely remain long after donor funds have ended” (War child UK, 2010). In the BaTonga people in Binga, Hwange and Kariba districts traditional family values included the provision of a healthy environment in protecting children. One District Social Services officer in Binga remarked that CPCs existed since time immemorial; children were protected from family level. Revolution of CPCs is not an overnight but rather a process drawn from a lot of historical narration. However, it is upon this background that it becomes crucial to trace the evolution of CPCs up to date. In Binga district the CPC focal person confirmed that “twaklikubeleka amitabi ili mbuli Save the children a Matabeleland AIDS council” (we worked together with Save the Children and Matabeleland AIDS council). Under the child protection programme CPCs (then child welfare forums) confirmed that before 2004 they got much support from implementing partners with their concerns addressed. However, little literature on child protection before NAP for OVCs pose a threat to the analysis of the effectiveness of community based structures and systems in protecting children. The multi-donor came as a supporting mechanism that although tried to address people’s concerns research revealed that more gaps were left not filled in pre NAP for OVC period.

At the eve of the implementation of the Nap I CPCs were revitalised and capacitated with skills on child protection. CPC members were provided with training.
at district level. One participant said that she joined CPC nearly a decade back where CPCs and OVCs were provided with blankets, bicycles, soaps, plates and other sorts of motivating incentives. CPCs by then were swimming in the glory of help which was given by NGOs operating in their communities. It is this kind of assistance that rolled over to affect the implementation of child protection interventions today after the government of Zimbabwe approved that CPC is a work on voluntary basis, where members should not expect any form of incentive. This is the reason why CPCs today disregard other implementing partners who are not able to provide all such assistance (Save the Children, 2013).

Communication challenges stood as one of the chief concern of focal persons in child protection. The problem of communication network spilt into the first phase of NAP I but not in the second phase. A CPC focal person in one ward said that “there was communication breakdown due to lack of communication network and mobile cell phones before 2004”. Up to 2008 CPCs faced a challenge of coordination of their work with other members. The scenario enabled them to travel door-to-door delivering messages on the meetings and other things to be done. Although there was no telecommunication services available, incentivisation of CPCs acted as a motivating tool in executing CPC roles. Comments from the Village heads concurred that their concerns were heard and addressed before and partly during NAP I.

Community leaders revealed that the first time they heard about child protection they worked together with teachers in schools (focal teachers). “Teachers are even surprised today to find out that they are not involved in child protection forums in the community”. By then trainings on child protection were held together with other wards. Muwoni (2011) concurs that 25% of CPCs (so called Child Welfare Forums before inception of NAP for OVC) activities were trainings and capacity building. OVC registers were given to teachers in order to use them in the selection of beneficiaries in terms of any assistance heading schools. Some community leaders however were worried that they were not working closely with teachers in schools. To the other extreme, such arguments are not there to create confusion and disharmony in CPC evolution but rather to show the differences in stages of evolution and ways of implementation from area to area.

Another crucial concern by CPCs was lack of funding on child protection. It is just in the late 1990s that the government of Zimbabwe strongly mandated the child protection concerns after consultation and subscription to international conventions and protocols supporting child protection. One lady provided that “we moved long distances to relay CPC information before cell phones became available here”. Although some revealed that training was regular, CPCs in other parts of the country confirmed that not all members of CPC were trained but rather only a few. This recalls the sentiments that child protection was less funded before NAP in Zimbabwe. This is consistent with Marongwe (2007)’s argument that lack of robust funding is failing child protection programmes in Zimbabwe such as BEAM (Basic Education Assisted Module).

Issues that were dealt with in pre NAP era include child labour, child education, child
abuse of various sort and the updating of OVC registers. However, despite the much support provided to CPCs in some areas than others, a lot of OVCs were left without much help. UNICEF (2010) confirms that “recently, however, social protection efforts have been under-resourced (in human and financial terms) and currently provide only limited support to vulnerable children and their families”. The amount of help could not tally with the much needed help. Meetings were held on monthly basis to address issues affecting CPCs. Of special consideration here is that the time lag between the adoption of child welfare forums and the coming of the NAP I and II is bulk with a lot of socio-economic and political flaws and instability. These could not spare impact on the operating environment of the CPCs which are structures of the government.

Child Protection Committees during NAP I and II- Issues today
NAP 1 and NAP 11 is characterised by CPCs demanding for incentivisation. This brings one to question of why they demand compensation and payment for their CPC roles. Reflexivity on this theme might reveal that activities are more externally-oriented by child protection actors or donors, rather than community-driven; adapted approaches might therefore be needed (War child, 2010). It would be fair to actually regard external assistance as a commendable coordinated approach to meet child protection goals. However, it is up to this turn of the millennium that the NAP II is reaching its terminal phase but CPC concern of wanting incentives not yet met. From the research, it was noted that there are some CPC members who are the tutors of second chance education of out of school children in Binga who receive monthly allowances of $30 each. Such volunteers are not satisfied and wish NGOs who are implementing partners to pour a lot of incentives for their roles in communities. Save the children (2013) notes that lack of incentivisation to child protection actors has derailed success of child protection programmes. This is consistent with reports that 33% of CPCS in rural areas are under-resourced by child protection stakeholders (Government of Zimbabwe, 2012). Thus focus must be also on motivating locally based child protection actors so that they fully commit themselves to child protection issues.

CPCs are community based structures mandated by the government of Zimbabwe to execute some child protection roles. The concerns they raise bring one to question on their viability. Are these structures really an important platform to execute child protection duties and addressing concerns? Lessons from elsewhere may assist one to come up with clear understanding. As a lesson obtained from a study in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the imposition of child protection structures risks setting up parallel systems, and does not contribute to locally-driven child protection mechanisms (war child, 2010). However, engagement of CPCs in the evaluation process in Zimbabwe appears to deduce a different situation. CPCs in the study were able to outline that “traditionally, children were kept under protection in the home”. On other hand, one focal person pointed it clear that “these CPCs are perceived to be structures for implementing NGOs and not for communities”. Such sentiments clearly indicate why CPCs continue to argue on
why the concern of receiving incentives is not met.

Some concerns of CPCs are brought by the confusion of many NGOs operating in the same area but with different programmes and ways of addressing issues and concerns. Although the research sought to find out on how the CPC concerns were addressed in the two NAP phases, it is equally crucial to find out on why the concerns were not addressed; including CPC perceptions on NGO supported programmes. There are also important inconsistencies between NGO actors in this regard; for example, in Uganda, War Child was unable to compete with Save the Children or IRC who paid members approximately £3 to attend activities. Such practices by child protection actors have meant that community-members are less likely to participate when they do not receive compensation (War Child, 2010).

Some of the concerns of CPC in NAP I and II are bound to legal control systems in the country. All CPCs that were contacted for the study concurred that “we are reporting cases but nothing is acted upon the cases”. At the same time Victim Friendly ZRP officer argued that “some of these reported cases are dealt but the complainants usually withdraw the cases after they negotiate with the accused persons”. Further investigations proved that the CPCs are not much aware of how the judiciary deal with the cases and hence raising such concerns. Effecting of cases is sometimes delayed by the police. The local statutory response mechanisms to child protection violations, Child Protection Committees (CPC) are sporadically functional and not appropriately responsive and there are no specialist justice services for children in Zimbabwe (UNICEF, 2013). An institutional capacity assessment of the Department of Social Services conducted in 2010 noted that there were fewer than 100 social workers available at district level to respond to cases, a ratio of 50,000:1 children to social workers (UNICEF, 2012). Statistics also portrays that in 2012 one social worker was taking care of 148000 children on average (Government of Zimbabwe, 2012). However, the Ministry of Labour and Social services officer by introducing the position of a case management officer. Although Case management officers were introduced in January 2015 in Binga, cases are coming out but the functionality of the case management office is not yet realised since it was newly incepted at the time of the study, and it is more of like a pilot in rural Binga. The introduction of the community case care workers was in track of inception at the time of study. Therefore, it is crucial to understand that CPC concern of dealing with cases is at the move of remedy.

CPCs raised concern of failure of coordination in case management. Save the Children (2013) posits that lack of coordination means that impact is fragmented and existing resources cannot be utilized to their full benefit for children. In some circumstances CPCs themselves thought they should deal with cases. The thinking brought them to conflict with the legislation as they are not the judiciary themselves but mere referral structures that act as a watchdog in child protection issues. All NGOs agree that referrals to other service providers and follow-up is essential to effectively address the multi-dimensional needs of vulnerable children. However there is not much evidence of effective referral, case coordination or
follow-up. In one instance follow-up is largely in the hands of the beneficiary – in other words if there are challenges with the referral the child must contact the organisation to seek their further assistance (UNICEF, 2012). Lack of coordination between the community and District CPCs causes fatigue and burnout by CPCs especially for cases that go unresolved. CPCs then complained that they refer cases but nothing is acted upon. One CPC member in Kariba district expressed that “we are tired of reporting cases and nothing is done for the community to be aware that child abuse is a criminal offence that is liable to legal action”. An officer of social services section at Binga rural district council ushered that “the continued and recurring absence of the police, judiciary, and ministry of primary and secondary education in district CPC meetings creates a major concern since they are key in child protection issues”. He added that, “until all stakeholders coordinate properly, child protection may continue to lose the war”.

Again, it was discovered that there is a great discord among child protection players at community level like the CPCs, community selection committees for BEAM assistance of OVCs, School Development Committees and school staff, and other people public institutions. Therefore, strengthening the referral system may help improve child protection in general and address CPC concerns at the same time. On the same note, village heads who are the village CPC chairpersons questioned on their judiciary role of traditional leadership. It was noted that some CPCs committee members highlighted that some chiefs preside over rape cases, which is far from their mandated roles. Thus lack of legal literature by CPCs was another major concern that was raised during the focus group discussions with local leadership in Binga district.

Commitment of village heads in child protection has been questioned a lot by other CPC members during the focus group discussions. One local leader noted that “village heads lack commitment to put much effort in child protection affairs”. CPC focal person in Lubanda ward concurred that “village heads only attend workshops where they know they can get and eat food but abscond meetings”. CPC concern referred to here is the lack of support from local leadership which then mitigates the efforts to coordinate properly for improved child protection. During NAP 11 efforts are put and extended to capacitate local and traditional leadership on child protection issues. In some wards in the rural district, traditional leaders and other local leadership highly supported other CPC members. With help from the department of social services (DoSS) and local NGOs, capacity building in other parts of the district yielded positive results. Reports indicate that 25% of child protection was on capacity building activities. However, child protection intervention is not evenly done in rural Zimbabwe with some areas lacking child protection platforms. This creates a challenge by CPCs to properly address the child protection need. Today, however most but not all local leaders are in support of the CPCs and allow them to execute their mandated roles.

CPCs during the two phases of NAP for OVC, talk of the concerns from traditional cultural perceptions of the communities. One of the participants in Hwange district
said that “Child protection intervention is a tide against culture”. There appears to be disenchantment between what CPCs try to address and what communities expect. Again, one less senior social services officer noted that “communities have huge expectations from implementing partners with some of which are impossible and will never be met”. Furthermore, child abuse is not viewed as abuse by other members in communities as indicated by sentiments like “early marriages allowed parents to receive bride price which is not received now”. However, the idea one may argue that early marriage has never been a plausible solution to obtain bride price. Although measures were put to unveil the traditional and cultural issues, some societies remain stagnant in support of such kind of things.

The study indicated the fear that CPCs have in the communities. Some parents do not understand child protection issues. It is taking long for the traditional communities to understand and accept an empowered child. In Muchetu ward the focal person reviewed that “bazali balaabana bajatwa buzike ngabayandakulwana andiswe…alubo swebo tuyooowa kulowegwa” (parents of abused children raise hostility upon us…we also fear to be bewitched). In actual sense, some CPCs feel insecure to execute their functions in communities that do not accept children’s rights in the name of their children being “destroyed “rather than being constructed. In concurrence, UNICEF (2010) notes that less than 7 % of child protection committees are supported by local and traditional systems. This is further aggravated by fact that less 32% of people in rural communities are aware CPCs duties (Muwoni, 2011). Although most are alert on child protection, some are accepting child protection at a very slow pace.

Selection of CPCS under for OVC is one of critical component that need proper redress. One of the participant noted that “some people are removed from CPC on annual basis…this happens at a time when they are still to gain experience on handling child protection issues”. This confirms the mandated term for the CPCs which is one year. In other areas it is however a different scenario. Communities themselves are given the platform to select CPCs on their own. Hence, there are high chances of returning all members except where others are failing to work or migrated to other areas for a long period that disturbs CPC work. The DoSS then proved that “the CPC protocol outlines that the committee should be selected by the community on annual basis…if however the community still needs them they can be retained”. Therefore, as a means to address the concern the communities are given discretion to select CPCs together with their local leadership. Other partners come in to support and just guide them on how to best select. Therefore, clarification on selection of CPCs must taken into account with urgency.

Main child protection issues dealt with today (NAP 1 and 2) include child abuse, cash transfer issues, cascading knowledge to local communities and educating on children’s rights. Generally, CPCs ensure that children’s rights are upheld. These are dealt with in much detail. National reports indicate that 14% of activities of CPCs is for advocacy, 8% for meetings, 17% for case follow up, 6 % resource mobilization,
11% capacity building, and 6% for resource mobilization (Government of Zimbabwe, 2012). Today, CPCs are taking a role of making awareness to communities on children’s rights. Almost everyone in Binga district is aware of children’s rights, alert on child abuse and many other child protection issues. However, the levels of understanding and distinguishing child abuse from child rights and responsibility leaves voids that need to be covered in communities. One village head commented that “nkaambo kazyeelelo bana baabulwana abazyali tabachi mvwisisiyi pe” (because of this issue of child rights children are now hostile to parents and lack respect). Another participant said “mitabi yatujeela bana muzina lya zyeelelo…bana tabachilayiki pe…tabachizi chilatonda pe” (NGOs have destroyed our children in the name of child rights, children have lost morals. CPCs therefore face resistance in communities as they execute their roles as a result of such sentiments. Some are even insulted by parents of the abused children.

Geographically, CPCs in rural Zimbabwe face a challenge of accessibility. CPCs have to walk a long distance to respond to child protection issues in their wards. Some areas are not easy to reach due to their remoteness and rugged terrain. Even implementing partners hardly reach the areas. One CPC member expressed a concern over the ignorance by implementation of child protection interventions in the fishing areas like Mlibizi which is currently a tourist resort. Resort areas are claimed to be much infested with child protection concerns.

The study showed that child led CPCs equally know their roles and functions. A CPC focal person in Manjolo ward said that “meetings are held monthly at ward level and village meetings held thereafter”. In some wards no meetings are held until an NGO or any other organisation comes for a meeting. CPCs rarely hold meetings on their own, especially the child led Child Protection Committees. CPC members are tied up with own livelihood work and spend much of their time there than in child protection where they are neither paid. In other words, CPC members find it difficult to perform CPC roles at the expense of performing own livelihood affairs. “chimwi chiindi do twatamba bantu tabasiki pe kumuswaano”(when we invite people for meetings at times they rarely attend).

Child led CPCs (CLCPCs) mark part of the structures to enhance child protection during NAP 1 and II. The study showed that child led CPCs equally know their roles and functions. A CPC focal person in
Saba ward of Binga commented that “child led CPCs are necessary and should not be removed although they face a web of challenges”. Child participation is a necessity in any issues dealing with child protection. “Things brought for us without us are not for us”, the slogan that children use at their platforms. The study established that it is difficult for children to participate on their own until an adult comes to help them. However, empowering children may help enhance their participation. Among the major things that are supposed to be considered for children to be in CLCPC is age of birth. In one of the wards it was discovered that one girl child who represents children with disabilities in adult led CPC was in grade 1. This brings a question on the extent to which a grade 1 child, aged 6 can fully participate and voice in child protection issues. Mostly outlined is the concern of children spending much of their time at school and hence little time is left for them to execute child protection activities. CLCPCs also lack much needed support from parents. At school they are even not much supported by the school authorities, except where they interact in other child related platforms. One district social services officer said that “children are not supposed to engage in income generating activities in their CPCs as this can disturb them in their school activities”. At the same time, adult CPCs encourage CLCPCs to be in income generating projects. At school, through the Boy/Girl Empowerment movements (BEM GEM) clubs children are taught entrepreneurial skills. Such different sentiments create confusion in the minds of young children who still need guidance on what to do. Therefore, understanding a child’s capacity is also critical to ensuring that the time, emotional commitment and effects of participation are appropriate (Fanelli et al, 2007).

Child Protection Committees- the future

Challenges and concerns faced by CPCs in the three phases of pre NAP, NAP 1 and NAP II needs future focus in a bid to improve the response and intervention in child protection for greater impact. Generally, a multi-sectoral and well-coordinated approach was called for by CPC members and local leaders without sparing some district stakeholders. Need for future enthusiastic child protection structures in rural areas must be drawn from what CPCs reiterated, and also checking on the operating environment in rural setups which in itself is a barrier to any interventions aimed at developing the areas. As NAP for OVC tries to collaborate with locally based child protection structures, future must see a well integrated system of child protection committees from community to national level.

The child protection literature provided to CPCs during NAP II is not enough for the execution of day to day duties. The participants requested for future interventions to provide ample literature on child protection in general and CPC work in particular. A focal person in one ward advised that “there is need to provide us with enough literature on child protection CPCs including some handouts and other legal documents”. The provided literature should be translated into the local language to enhance understanding and hence keeping updating on some amendments. This may help address CPC concerns and at the same time enhancing the viability of the CPC structures.
Mzingili (2014) concurs that little has been done in rural communities on publicising the importance of child protection in the society. In this case, literature on CPCs and child protection in generally is assumed to be enhanced in future for rural communities. Improvement in the coordination of child protection work was highly anticipated by the CPCs in post NAP II period. This was raised due to failure of coordination between the ward and district CPCs. Strong coordination is also called for at community level. A CPC member recommended “that there is need to have focal teachers in schools who should work with CPCs”. Sharp et al (2006)’s study in Ethiopia revealed that less than 7% of rural CPCs are properly coordinated across the country. There have been missing links between CPCs and other stakeholders in communities during and before NAP II. Also, CPCs in rural Zimbabwe advised for an improved and robust reporting systems in child protection issues. Village heads may be provided with a lot of capacity building initiatives through refresher trainings on regular basis. CPCs wished to have trainings at their villages. According to Marongwe (2007), empowered communities have high expectations and demands from the systems and institutions. It is therefore prudent that any local government community empowerment policy has an element of capacity building in future of all stakeholders to ensure that viable and sustainable links among key child protection actors. Tomorrow’s national child protection policy or programme in Zimbabwe will prioritise much on the need to strengthen capacity of CPCs; training justice and probation officers, Zimbabwe Republic Police Victim Friendly Unit (ZRP VFU), and many other stakeholders interested in child protection. This is due to failure of coordination which is attributable to some concerns raised by the CPCs. According to War child (2010), the engagement of local leaders is essential in efforts to change attitudes and behaviours, to reduce stigma, and to respond to and prevent further abuse and exploitation of children. Their involvement may therefore provide an important multiplier effect for desired child protection outcomes. Therefore, traditional leaders who are an effective communication tool given their hierarchical nature (chief, headmen, VH) and their spread must be effusively utilised. They are present in all parts of rural Zimbabwe and they have constitutional obligations in Zimbabwe. Their support is, therefore, invaluable (Chakaipa, 2010). Participants in this study noted that the number of focal persons per ward have to increase so as to reduce the burden of their roles which are put on one or two focal persons in each of the wards. Others could not resist recommending to be given bicycles to increase mobility and management of CPC roles in communities which are not accessible by the implementing partners. Other things that CPCs wish to have in future include phoning allowances, visibility (information, education and communication) IEC items and stationery for use by CPCs from implementing partners. It is however important to note that too much dependency from supporting partners risks failure of sustainable approaches in child protection. Rather, communities may have to come up with own projects to further support the community structures like CPCs.
More sustainable approach in supporting the CPCs will be essential in future programming and interventions. Wessel (2009) observes that support to child rights groups and child protection committees (CPCs) have aimed at increasing knowledge and awareness on children’s rights issues, monitoring and reporting violations of children’s rights, and conducting advocacy and sensitisation on child protection priorities. Therefore, supporting CPCs and addressing their concerns can help further improve child protection in rural areas in Zimbabwe and abroad. To avoid confusion brought by a multiple of organisations, Miller et al (2008) advises that it would be important for child protection actors to come to agreement in each area of operation to aim towards a consistent approach to community-based work, especially regarding payment and the provision of other material support. Save the children, a major player in child protection provides the following: 

Despite some remarkable developments, overall progress has been too limited and too slow – partly because the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) framework failed to address children’s protection and wider human security issues. Contrary to the Millennium Declaration – which recognised the human rights dimension of development and the importance of protecting children from conflict, violence, abuse and exploitation – the MDGs do not include a goal of protecting adults and children. This has resulted in a lack of donor and government attention, and has sent a signal to the international community that child protection is not a priority. Save the Children is, therefore, advocating for the post-2015 MDG framework to include child protection. (Save the children, 2013).

Therefore, this calls for policy development that further supports the CPCs in terms of considering their concerns. Understanding and considering the CPC challenges and issues in the NAP I and II is worth consideration than ignored in future.

**Conclusion and recommendations**

The study presented and discussed host of issues pertaining Child Protection Committees in pre, and during NAP for OVC programme in rural Zimbabwe. Child protection committees passed through three evolutional stages in Zimbabwe, guided with different child protection policies and issues. The dawn of National Action Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children as child sensitive programme gave a complete change in the direction of CPCs. The cases that were dealt by child protection committees included; child abuse cases, awareness, advocacy, resource mobilization, case follow up, capacity building among others. Chief challenges noted in three evolutional phases of CPCs in Zimbabwe were; lack of resources, poor coordination among partners, lack of commitment of community leaders, insufficient inclusion of children in the process, geographical location (Distances), conflicting interests among key stakeholders, poor incentivisation, and poor communication. Although the future of CPCs was discussed above, the following key recommendations are important in today operations. In terms of membership, issues of diversity like power, gender, income, and age should be taken into account as well as possibilities of true child participation in order to support the overall
effectiveness of CPCs structures. It is also proposed that CPCs must undergo regular rigorous monitoring and evaluation including self monitoring by committee members, government and other child protection partners. Local knowledge within communities should also taken into account to tight knit some of diverse rural and cultural diversities in area of implementing child protection programmes. Finally it maybe proposed that inclusivity of key stakeholders remains a cornerstone for success of the child protection programmes.

Acknowledgements

The study was made possible by the unwavering support from the participants who provided information to fulfill the objectives of the study. Correspondingly significant to this study was Binga District Office who made it possible for the researchers to reach the target population. Staunch support also came from my workmate who encouraged me to pursuant of this study.

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