

ABSTRACT

The situation of Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) has been a global concern. It is estimated that there are 2.4 million OVC in Kenya out of which 1.15 million are due to HIV and AIDS crisis and escalated poverty levels in affected households. In order to strengthen the capacity of families and communities to protect and care for OVC, the Kenyan government introduced the Cash Transfer Programme for OVC (CTP- OVC) in 2004. Ikolomani sub-county registered a poverty incidence of 71% justifying the need to invest in social protection programmes. In spite of existing guidelines on involvement of children at all levels of programming, there is little evidence to show that the CTP-OVC was designed and implemented with the participation of children who are the intended beneficiaries. This study sought to assess the extent of OVC participation in CTP-OVC and its implications for social protection in Ikolomani sub-county, Kenya. Specifically, the study examined the nature and extent of OVC participation, the extent to which the programme met the social protection needs of OVC, analyzed challenges faced and explored the potential of enhancing OVC participation in CTP-OVC in Ikolomani sub-county. Social construction theory by Berger & Luckmann (1966) and children's agency by Prout & James (1997) and Qvortrup (1999) were used. Social constructionism explains how people's attitudes towards childhood are influenced by the dominant belief systems of a given society while children's agency emphasizes children's ability to act independently. The study adopted a cross-sectional design with mixed methods. Yamane's (1967) formula was used to obtain a sample of 400 OVC selected using simple random sampling from a total of 2220 OVC beneficiaries of CTP-OVC. Purposive sampling was used to identify 13 key informants. Both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were employed. Quantitative data from structured questionnaires was analyzed descriptively using percentages and frequencies. These provided information on the distribution of the responses as well as numerical estimates of the variability in the distribution. Cross tabulation using Chi-square (χ^2) was used to test for the significance of associations between variables. Qualitative data obtained from focus group discussions, interviews, semi-structured questionnaires and observation was organized into emergent themes through content analysis. The results showed that 80% OVC were not involved at all in the programme's activities. OVC needs were hardly met by the funds due to delayed disbursement and misuse by caregivers, non consideration of OVC special circumstances in beneficiary households and lack of beneficiary input in programming. Cultural beliefs perpetuated practices that infringed upon children's rights and competence. Consequently, there is a need to embrace participatory approaches at all phases of programming. This study provides a basis for enhancing policies regarding participatory approaches to child protection. It also provides information to guide practices for scaling up child rights-based programming for OVC in Kenya and other sub-Saharan African count