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Perspectives of stakeholders on the implementation of the Basic Education Assistance Module in Zimbabwe

JOICE KANENGONI[1] AND EDMARIE PRETORIUS[2]

ABSTRACT

This article is based on a study conducted on the contribution of the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) in enhancing access to education in Gutu District, Zimbabwe. The aim of the study was to explore the perspectives of stakeholders on how the Zimbabwean BEAM enables Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) to access education. A qualitative research approach and a case study design was employed in this study. Purposive sampling was used to sample eight stakeholders who were involved with the implementation of BEAM on a local level. The method of data collection was audio-recorded face to face interviews. A semi-structured interview guide was used in the process of data collection. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The study findings revealed that BEAM facilitates access to education in the Gutu District. The focus is on the education of girl children as there is high prevalence of school dropouts among girl children in Gutu District. Active participation of community members and involved stakeholders are characteristics of the BEAM implementation process. However, the inconsistent and low budgetary allocations that characterise BEAM compromise its effective implementation. To enhance the effectiveness of BEAM an improved and consistent budgetary allocation is required. To raise awareness on BEAM community workshops on BEAM must be implemented and the establishment of feeding programmes for beneficiaries of BEAM is recommended.

Keywords: BEAM, education, social protection, vulnerable children, Zimbabwe.

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Introduction

High rates of poverty characterise Zimbabwe. In 2019, there were approximately 5.7 million impoverished people in Zimbabwe; 1.6 million of them were children (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency [ZIMSTAT] & United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF] 2019:8; World Bank [WB], 2020:96). The World Bank (2020:97) identified high rates of HIV/AIDS and poverty as significant causes of the prevalence of Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) in Zimbabwe. Approximately 1.4 million Zimbabweans were living with HIV/AIDS in 2019; 76 600 were children (United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS [UNAIDS], 2020:1). An estimated 6.2 million people in Zimbabwe were living in extreme poverty in 2022 (World Bank [WB], 2022:96). The 2022 global statistics on HIV/AIDS revealed that Zimbabwe ranks fifth in the world, with an estimation of 1.3 million Zimbabweans living with HIV/AIDS (WB, 2023:96).

High rates of HIV/AIDS and poverty continue to compromise access to education for OVC's. The implementation of BEAM and Harmonised Social Cash Transfers (HSCTs) (Kurevakwesu et al., 2022; Mtetwa and Muchacha, 2013) bridge this gap through enhancing access to education. Education equips individuals with skills and knowledge which enable them to secure employment, thereby facilitating economic and social development, thus education is a tool for poverty alleviation (Mihai et al., 2015). BEAM is a social protection programme that provides education benefits for OVCs in Primary, Secondary, and High schools (Government of Zimbabwe [GOZ], 2015). The Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) established BEAM in 2001 to alleviate poverty (Harvey et al., 2012). BEAM is one of the social protection strategies implemented in all 59 Districts of Zimbabwe, and the benefits are school and examination fees (Gandure, 2009; Maushe, 2014; Nyatsanza and Lincoln, 2014). BEAM was revised in 2020 with the intention to expand the benefits to also provide school uniforms (Kurevakwesu et al., 2022), however, it is unclear whether this has been implemented. Moreso, BEAM is insufficient and inconsistent in covering large numbers of eligible

children, in 2018, GOZ had an outstanding figure of US$ 82 million of BEAM funds which accumulated since 2014 and required US$ 33 million for the year 2018 (WB, 2018). In 2021, GOZ allocated ZWL$2 billion on Beam followed by allocation of ZWL$4.1 billion in 2022 (Harris, 2021:1).

African countries which implemented programmes aimed at facilitating access to education for OVCs include South Africa, Ghana and Nigeria. The Child Support Grant of South Africa (CSG) provides monthly benefits of R740 for an estimated 12 million beneficiaries who are living below the poverty line (South African Social Security Agency., 2021:1). On addition The Care of People (COPE) of Nigeria, established by the government of Nigeria in 2007, is aimed at reducing poverty among marginalised members of society (Nwaobi., 2023). COPE benefits are provided on the condition that children attend school on regular basis, benefits range US$10 to US$33, depending on the number of children and vulnerable adults within a family (Akinola., 2016:1). The Livelihood. Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme of Ghana was established by the government of Ghana in 2008, with the objective of increasing school enrolments among OVC's, LEAP Benefits range between US$ 7 and US$ 12, depending on the number of beneficiaries per household (Ministry of Finance, 2023:5)

The rationale of the study

The aim of the study was to explore the perspectives of stakeholders on how the Zimbabwean BEAM enables Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) to access education. The first objective of the study was to explore educators' experiences on operationalising BEAM in the Gutu District, Zimbabwe. The second objective of the study was to determine the perspectives of government officials on the implementation of BEAM in the Gutu District, Zimbabwe.

The focus of this article is specifically on the perspectives of educators and government officials as stakeholders on the operationalisation and implementation of BEAM as a social protection strategy in Gutu District, Zimbabwe.

Gutu is a rural District situated in Masvingo Province, characterised by high rates of school dropouts, lack of adequate access to education, and attendance to educational needs, mainly due to poverty (Hamandawana et al., 2005; Wekwete, 2010). BEAM seeks to address high poverty rates in Gutu District by enabling children who have never been to school or are vulnerable to dropping out of school and those who have dropped out of school to access education (GOZ, 2014). Regardless of BEAM being recognised as a poverty alleviation strategy, there is dearth of literature on beneficiary and implementers' voices (GOZ, 2016; UNICEF, 2019).

A brief overview of BEAM, and the theoretical frameworks that informed the study are discussed. The research methodology applied, followed by a discussion of the findings on data collected from two stakeholder groups are presented. The final section provides conclusions and recommendations to enhance the implementation of BEAM in the Gutu District of Zimbabwe.

The Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM).

BEAM was a component of the Enhanced Social Protection Project (ESPP) which GOZ established to enhance the wellness of children and adults suffering from poverty and inadequate access to health and education services (Gwirayi, 2010; Mtapuri, 2012). Legislative frameworks that inform the provision of BEAM include Article 27 (1) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, which mentions that primary education should be compulsory, accessible, and free for all (GOZ, 2013). In 2020, a developmental approach to the provision of social welfare services in Zimbabwe was adopted. The Department of Social Welfare changed to the Department of Social Development (DSD). BEAM is one of the

programmes and services offered by DSD. However, because there is no clear framework to guide how this approach will be implemented outside the National Social Protection Policy Framework (NSPPF) (MOPSLSW, 2016) it is uncertain how it will affect the budget and monitoring and evaluation of BEAM. Furthermore, the Children's Act [Chapter 5: 06] of 2001 (Bhaiseni, 2016) provides guidelines for protecting children's rights in Zimbabwe. Additionally, the National Orphan Care Policy formulated by GOZ, provides guiding principles for providing social protection benefits for OVCs (WB, 2015).

Children who qualify for BEAM benefits include single and double orphans, abandoned children and children under the care of the elderly, unemployed or chronically ill individuals (GOZ, 2015). Parents who wish to apply for BEAM present themselves at their children's schools and complete application forms which they submit to educators responsible for BEAM (GOZ, 2016a). The selection process occurs within schools after submitting all application forms (GOZ, 2015). The Community Selection Committee (CSC) and community members are responsible for selecting BEAM beneficiaries at community level (Mutasa, 2015). The CSC consists of community members who are informed about the living conditions of BEAM applicants.

The inclusion of community members as part of the CSC during the selection process ensures the social inclusion of communities in the programmes to enhance economic development (Mutasa, 2015; UNICEF, 2012). Because community members dwell in the same vicinity, the living conditions of prospective applicants are known to them. Therefore, their participation in selecting BEAM beneficiaries is valuable as they assist in selecting children who deserve BEAM (GOZ, 2016a). Maternal orphans have a higher probability of qualifying for BEAM because the belief is that compared to men, women are more concerned with the general well-being of children, and their absence place children at a higher risk of not attending or dropping out of school (GOZ, 2014).

BEAM contributes toward primary and secondary education attainment among OVCs in Gutu District. However, challenges, including late allocation of BEAM funds and the narrow approach to providing benefits, render the programme less comprehensive (Chinamasa, 2016; Manyanye, 2012; UNICEF, 2012). In addition, BEAM does not make provision for other educational needs, including textbooks and school uniforms; therefore, the programme does not allow provision for all the basic educational needs of OVCs (Integrated Regional Information Networks [IRIN] 2004; Nyatsanza and Hlatywayo, 2014; Smith et al., 2012). Unfortunately, donor funding for BEAM has been inconsistent since 2012 (Mutenga, 2014). The inconsistency in donor funding has resulted in extreme underfunding of the programme due to GOZ's fiscal challenges in financing social protection programmes. As of 2018, GOZ had a balance of US $ 82 000 000 of unpaid BEAM funds (WB, 2018). The United Nations Children Fund (2022) reported that the social protection sector in Zimbabwe is severely underfunded as it was allocated 0.7% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022.

Theoretical framework

The study was rooted in neoliberal theory and social development theory. Neoliberalists view education as a private service (UN, 2018). The neoliberal theory is based on the notion that the wellness of individuals can be best enhanced through limiting government intervention in all systems of trade, the government only intervenes to facilitate access to basic needs such as health and education for marginalised members of society (Peck et al., 2018). The neoliberal theory is relevant to this study because neoliberal principles inform the provision of BEAM (WB, 2018). In this context, providing for children's educational needs is placed on primary caregivers. In contrast, the state only provides minimal assistance when individuals fail to fund their children's education or children under their care (Hodge, 2017). BEAM is inclined to neoliberalism because the programme employs a

minimalist approach to providing social protection benefits. BEAM does not cover all education-related costs but provides the essential support needed for beneficiaries to attain primary and secondary education. BEAM pays school fees and part of examination fees and since 2020 the intention is to pay school uniforms and other education needs, like books, and stationery, however it is not clear if this intention has been realised yet.

The social development theory is initiated through the implementation of various strategies aimed at facilitating economic and social development (UNICEF, 2019). Midgley (2014) argues that social development is a process which is focused at addressing social ills including lack of access to education. BEAM enables for active participation of beneficiaries during the selection process, hence the implementation of the programme is informed by the social development principle of participation (Patel, 2015). The social development theory is relevant to this study as it explores BEAM, a social development programme that promotes social development goals by providing educational benefits to OVCs. The overall goal of social protection and social development is to eradicate and alleviate poverty through enhancing access to social services (Patel, 2015; UN, 2018). As a social protection programme, the main objective of BEAM is to alleviate poverty. In addition, social development and social protection programmes promote human rights, particularly the rights of individuals vulnerable to extreme deprivation (Sano, 2000; UN, 2018). As mentioned earlier, BEAM promotes children's right to education by providing educational benefits for OVCs. The social development theory and the neoliberal theory complement each other as they are both focused on the need of government intervention in addressing poverty and in enhancing education access for OVCs.

Research methodology

An exploratory and descriptive research study was conducted in Gutu District in Zimbabwe. Gutu District is largely rural and

characterised by high rates of HIV/AIDS, poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to education and health facilities (UNICEF, 2016). A qualitative research approach and a case study design was employed during the study. This approach and design facilitate the gathering of thick data from the perspectives of the participants. The explorative and descriptive nature of the adopted research approach enabled the researcher to explore and describe the perspectives of stakeholders and to gain in depth insight of the implementation of BEAM in Gutu District, Zimbabwe. A sample of eightstakeholders was selected using purposive sampling. stakeholders consisted of 4 deputy principals, 2 principals and 2 educators who managed the implementation of BEAM on a local level within the selected 3 Primary Schools and 2 Secondary Schools and one High School. Two stakeholders s from Government consisted of the Head of the Department of Social Welfare now the Department of Social Development) and the District Remedial Tutor because both were involved with the implementation of BEAM on a district level. All the stakeholders were deemed to be knowledgeable about BEAM as they had been facilitating its implementation for at least two years.

Data were collected using face-to-face interviews guided by a semi-structured interview guide. The researcher audio recorded the interviews with the participants' consent. The researcher used thematic analysis in analysing data and categorised data in terms of identified similarities and differences. Thematic analysis entails summarising the collected data and presenting it in a manner which communicates the most significant features (Braun and Clarke 2006). Six steps namely, familiarising yourself with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report were employed in analysing data (Braun and Clark., 2013: 219). Ethical considerations in this study were informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality, and avoidance of harm/ non-maleficence (Berg & Lune, 2017: 46-48). Ethics Clearance

from the Wits Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) was sought prior to undertaking the research. The protocol number is H18/02/16.

Trustworthiness was achieved by adhering to the four constructs: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability, as argued by Shenton (2004) in line with the views of Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility enhances the extent to which the findings of the study correspond with reality (Korstjens and Moser, 2018). Credibility was achieved ensuring that the research findings represent the original views of participants, more so credibility was achieved through using research methods successfully adopted in qualitative studies (Merriam, 2009; Shenton, 2004). Dependability denotes the extent to which research findings are consistent, repeatable, and reliable (Yin, 2014). The researcher ensured the study's dependability by employing rigorous research techniques that have been successfully employed in qualitative studies, additionally, dependability was achieved through providing a detailed description of the research methods used in the study (Shenton, 2004). Transferability is the extent to which the findings of the study can be applicable to other contexts (Shenton, 2004). The researcher enhanced the transferability of the study by providing detailed information regarding the context in which the study was conducted, the research methods used, and the study population (Morrow, 2005). Additionally, methods adopted in collecting data and developed themes were clearly explained (Korstjens and Moser, 2018). Confirmability is the extent to which study findings are informed by participants' responses, and not the researcher's interests. Confirmability of the study was achieved by presenting the findings of the research in a way which confirms that the study findings are corresponding with the responses given by participants (Gasson, 2004).

Findings of the study

This section provides the study findings according to the themes that was developed through the analysis of the data collected. The findings of the study are presented in relation to the two study objectives.

The first objective of the study was to explore educators' experiences on operationalising BEAM in the Gutu District, Zimbabwe.

The second objective of the study was to determine the perspectives of government officials on the implementation of BEAM in the Gutu District, Zimbabwe.

The researcher selected educators who were responsible for managing BEAM at a local level as they were informed about and involved in the implementation of BEAM. The government officials were selected because they managed BEAM at district level, they had comprehensive knowledge and in-depth information on the implementation of BEAM. The direct quotations of the educators are referred to as E1to E8 and those of government officials are referred to as O1 and 02.

The first objective sought to explore educators' experiences when operationalising the BEAM to beneficiaries, and perceptions of government officials about the implementation of BEAM in Gutu District, Zimbabwe, were explored by the second objective.

The five central themes and subthemes that developed from the analysed data are presented in Table 1 and discussed below.

Table 1. Themes and sub-themes that developed from the

Main Themes	Sub-themes
Poverty Alleviation	• Relationship between education attainment and poverty alleviation
Gender Equity	• Social inclusion of women • Education of girl children
The Implementation process of BEAM	• Community involvement • Main stakeholders involved in the nomination and selection process of beneficiaries of BEAM • Fairness and transparency in the BEAM process
Benefits and shortcomings of BEAM	• BEAM benefits and categories of eligible children • Inconsistency and inadequacy
Community awareness about BEAM	

Poverty alleviation

Relationship between education attainment and poverty alleviation

The subtheme that from the first central theme was that educators and government officials viewed BEAM as a programme focused on alleviating poverty and enhancing access to education in Gutu District. One educator explained the objective of BEAM and said:

> The main objective of BEAM is to ensure that students from poor backgrounds can have access to education. In doing so, the programme is also alleviating poverty in our District (E1). Similarly, one government official noted: Poverty can be linked to one's level of education, so the moment a child gets access to education, the vulnerability of that child is less as he/she has an opportunity of attaining a better future (O1).

The objective of BEAM is to alleviate poverty through enhancing education access for OVCs (Gandure, 2009). The responses indicated that the main objectives of BEAM were to alleviate poverty and enhance access to education. Enabling impoverished

children to access education reduces child poverty. It facilitates the education attainment of children whose primary caregivers cannot afford to send them to school. The World Bank (2020) stated that high rates of child poverty in Zimbabwe require a greater need for social protection initiatives that emphasise the challenges faced by OVCs in accessing education. BEAM is a significant element of the National Action Plan (NAP) for OVCs established by GOZ to address high child poverty rates by enabling them to access education (GOZ, 2016a). The World Bank (2015) noted that social protection programmes address poverty. The Zimbabwean BEAM alleviates poverty by enabling children from disadvantaged backgrounds to access education. Education attainment is a way of escaping poverty as it enables BEAM beneficiaries to become self-sufficient. Upon completing secondary education, beneficiaries can seek employment and support their families. Henceforth, BEAM contributes toward eradicating poverty in Gutu District.

Gender equity

Social inclusion of women

The first subtheme that emerged from the second central theme, gender equity, was that women and men were equally involved in selecting BEAM beneficiaries. The reasoning behind the promotion of women's participation was to enhance the social inclusion of women in the decision-making of issues related to the implementation of BEAM. One educator explained the involvement of women in the Community Selection Committee (CSC). She stated:

> We always make sure that 50% of the CSC are women because we consider women as individuals who have children in their hearts; they are concerned about the wellness and education of children. One government official shared similar views and said: We always encourage women to be actively involved in the CSC, [and] we prioritise their involvement in children's matters because they are always concerned about the wellness of

> children. We also believe women are more informed about the needs of children, and they understand the challenges faced by children better than men. Thus, their involvement in the selection process is critical (E2).

BEAM seeks to break gender-related issues that impede the equal involvement of women in society's social and economic development (GOZ, 2016a). Therefore, as stated by the Government of Zimbabwe et al., (2016b), to promote the involvement of women in development initiatives and to promote gender equity, 50% of community members selected as members of the CSC should be women. From the mentioned responses, it can be noted that women are more concerned about children's education, and their involvement in selecting BEAM beneficiaries facilitates the effective implementation of BEAM. Historically, women play the role of providing primary care for children, and they are more involved in child protection programmes when compared to men (UNICEF, 2014). Thus, the involvement of women in the implementation and provision of social protection programmes is vital as this enhances the smooth operation of such programmes (Jones and Holmes, 2011).

Education of girl children

Another subtheme that emerged from the gender equity central theme was that BEAM focuses on promoting the education attainment of girl children. One educator explained:

> One of the main principles of BEAM is to empower the girl child. Therefore, we always make sure that we take more girls than boys every year (E3). Another government official noted: We always ensure gender balance when BEAM beneficiaries are selected. If it is not 50-50, we always ensure that more girls than boys are on the programme (O1).

Responses given by stakeholders indicated that BEAM seeks to promote the education of girl children. High school dropouts

among girl children in Zimbabwe are prevalent. School dropouts are attributed to poverty, arranged marriages, forced marriages, and child marriages (UNICEF, 2006; UN, 2015). BEAM reduces the probability of school dropouts among girl children by ensuring that at least 50% of BEAM beneficiaries are girls (Barbier, 2016; GOZ, 2015). Concerning the Sustainable Development Goals Report (UN, 2021), BEAM is honouring Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) four and five, which support promoting equal access to education and the involvement of women and girl children in the social and economic development of their communities. Thus, poverty alleviation and the promotion of gender equity are key considerations in the implementation of BEAM.

THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF BEAM

Community involvement

Community involvement in the nomination and selection of BEAM beneficiaries emerged as a subtheme theme from the third central theme identified in the study findings. It was evident from the collected data that implementation of BEAM at a local level allows for and depends on community involvement. One government official highlighted the following:

> Community members are the ones who nominate and select the deserving participants. They reside with each other in the same community and are aware of those households living in poverty and cannot send children to school(O2).

Educators perceived community involvement in the implementation of BEAM as of paramount importance because their input in selecting beneficiaries facilitated the realisation of BEAM objectives, namely poverty reduction and improved access to education. One educator said:

> It is vital to involve the community in the selection process. They know each other's living conditions better than anyone else; they are in a better position to make decisions regarding children living in poverty and those who should

be given priority when shortlisting the beneficiaries (E4).

The responses mentioned above revealed that the knowledge possessed by members of the Community Selection Committee and primary caregivers aided in ensuring that children whose applications became successful were from families that required priority. It is clear that the implementation of BEAM at a local level supports the active involvement of the community in the development of their communities (GOZ, 2016a). Therefore, community participation enhances the social inclusion of vulnerable members because community members have a platform to participate in the nomination and selection of BEAM beneficiaries (Paes-Sousa et al., 2013). Kaseke (2004) claims that the effective implementation of social protection programmes is enhanced by promoting community participation. It enables beneficiaries to state their own needs and suggest the best ways of addressing such needs. Community involvement in implementing social protection programmes effectively empowers community members and ensures that they take ownership of their development (Devereux, 2017).

Main stakeholders involved in the nomination and selection process of beneficiaries of BEAM

Another subtheme related to the third central theme was that stakeholders involved in BEAM beneficiaries' nomination and selection process are mainly community members, community leaders, and the Community Selection Committee. One government official noted:

> So, we leave the honour of driving the selection process to the community, and we allow the community to be fair upon itself. They are best informed about individuals who deserve to be on BEAM and those who do not deserve the benefits (O2).

The government official also highlighted the involvement of the following stakeholders in the selection process:

> The ward counsellor [who] stands as the local authority

> representative at the ward level, Villages Heads and Chiefs [and] Local NGOs.

The government official noted that social workers are also involved.

> However, …as social workers, our role is to ensure that the correct procedures are followed in selecting beneficiaries (02).

Similarly, one educator confirmed:

> Community members and parents are the most critical stakeholders during the whole process, this is because they know the backgrounds of these children, they know the families that need educational assistance, and they know the families that are struggling more than other families within their villages (E5).

It is evident that while various stakeholders participated in the nomination and selection of BEAM beneficiaries, community members played prominent roles in the nomination and selection of eligible children. In addition, the Government officials noted that the involvement of community members in nominating and selecting BEAM beneficiaries made the implementation of BEAM easy. One government official explained:

> The ranking of prospective beneficiaries is also straightforward to implement because it is done by community members who know the living conditions of applications (O1).

On a similar note, another government official stated:

> … the involvement of parents and guardians in the selection process enables us to enhance fairness and transparency in selecting the beneficiaries (02).

The responses mentioned above indicate that the involvement of community members in nominating and selecting BEAM beneficiaries facilitated the smooth implementation of BEAM. Community involvement ensures the selection of eligible children for the programme (Nyatsanza and Lincoln, 2014). As indicated by Paes-Sousa et al., (2013), the involvement of community members

in selecting eligible beneficiaries is the most efficient way of avoiding exclusion and exclusion errors that may exist in selecting beneficiaries of social protection programmes.

According to the BEAM beneficiary's selection criteria, educators and social workers are the other stakeholders participating in the BEAM beneficiaries' nomination and selection process. One educator explained:

> As teachers, we also nominate children we consider requiring educational assistance. I spend most of my working hours teaching these children, so it is effortless for me to pick up children living in extreme poverty (E6).

One government official echoed the same sentiment and said:

> There have been cases in which the social workers from the Department of Social Welfare recommend children who should be on BEAM (O1).

The above responses indicated that in instances whereby primary caregivers did not take the initiatives to apply for children who met the eligibility criteria for BEAM, educators and social workers took the responsibility and applied for BEAM on behalf of such children. The primary role of the educators and social workers in the selection process is to oversee that the correct procedures are followed.

Fairness and transparency in the BEAM selection process

This subtheme confirmed that the selection process of BEAM beneficiaries was fair and transparent as argued by educators and government officials. One educator noted:

> The selection process of BEAM is very transparent and fair. Firstly, children and parents are given application forms for BEAM, and then they fill in the application forms and submit the forms to the schools. Then several meetings occur as the community members and the involved stakeholders nominate children who should be given first preference (E3).

One government official explained the selection procedures of

BEAM beneficiaries and said:

> …after a meeting with the parents and community members, the nomination of beneficiaries happens. All members who attend the meeting have fair chances to express their views and nominate the neediest children who require assistance from BEAM. After that, in a CSC meeting, they come up with the final list of beneficiaries of BEAM (O2).

The responses above indicate that the eligibility criteria for selecting BEAM beneficiaries are fair and transparent. It allows for the nomination and selection of eligible children for BEAM. The Government of Zimbabwe (2016a) stated that the selection criteria of BEAM beneficiaries are designed to eliminate the probability of including undeserving children in BEAM. Kaseke (2012) indicated that social protection benefits are provided to those individuals living in extreme poverty and unable to access basic needs. Henceforth the fair and transparent selection criteria used in selecting BEAM beneficiaries are of paramount importance as it enables children from impoverished families to access education. Part of the BEAM implementation process is a grievance committee responsible for addressing grievances that arose during the selection of BEAM beneficiaries. One educator noted:

> We have a grievance committee that is mainly concerned about addressing the queries that people may have regarding the selection process or any issues that people may have regarding the implementation of BEAM (E2). Similarly, another educator mentioned: We have had many cases in which members of the Community Selection Committee are accused of abusing their power by selecting their children for BEAM benefits, even when they do not meet the requirements to be on BEAM, or instead, are not living in chronic poverty (E1).

Therefore, the grievance committee is beneficial in assisting with resolving such issues. The selection of ineligible children for BEAM was one of the issues that led to a misunderstanding during

the nomination and selection of beneficiaries. According to educators, the grievance committees enabled the sound implementation of BEAM by ensuring that the selection process adheres to the selection criteria used in nominating and selecting beneficiaries of BEAM.

BENEFITS AND SHORTCOMINGS OF BEAM

BEAM benefits and categories of eligible children

One of the subthemes that emerged from the study was that benefits provided under BEAM are only school and examination fees. One government official explained factors considered when selecting BEAM beneficiaries and the nature of BEAM benefits and said:

> The benefits under BEAM include school and examination fees (O1).

The provision of BEAM is primarily informed by neo-liberal principles (WB, 2018). Neoliberalists view education as an individual's responsibility; therefore, providing for children's educational needs is the responsibility of primary caregivers. According to Hodge (2017), minimal assistance by the government is provided in situations where individuals fail to fund their children's education or children under their care. One of the government officials mentioned that;

> Eligible children for BEAM include, double orphans, maternal orphans, paternal orphans, children who are living with HIV/ADS and other chronic illnesses, disabled children, children who dropped out of school, children living in child-headed households, neglected children and non-orphans whose primary caregivers may be old aged, unemployed, or living in poverty (O2).

Another government official shared the same sentiment and added:

> We also consider children living with disabled parents or caregivers (O3).

This confirms that BEAM is provided for children living in extreme deprivation and unable to meet their education needs

through their primary caregivers. Therefore, the government intervenes to provide the needed support (Maushe, 2014). BEAM is focused on enhancing access to education by enabling OVCs to attain primary and secondary education (GOZ, 2014).

Inconsistency and inadequacy

Another subtheme that emerged was that BEAM was inadequate and inconsistent. One government official mentioned:

> If I were in charge of BEAM, I would improve on the nature of benefits [by expanding] the benefits. For example, the programme should not only focus on providing school and examination fees; sometimes, beneficiaries do not have school uniforms and stationery. In addition, the programme only covers five core subjects when it comes to examination fees. I would also improve the budgetary allocation for BEAM. It is very low; as a result, most of the children who deserve to be on BEAM are not benefiting from the programme (O1).

The provision of BEAM is informed by the neoliberal theory, based on the notion that governments' assistance should be provided on a minimum basis (Peck et al., 2018). The provision of minimum benefits is to avoid a situation in which beneficiaries become overdependent on social protection benefits (Tansel, 2017). BEAM benefits are minimum because the programme does not cover all educational needs of beneficiaries. To a certain extent, this contradicts social development and social protection programmes concerned with promoting human rights, particularly the rights of individuals vulnerable to extreme deprivation (Sano, 2000; UN, 2018). Another government official shared similar views and said:

If I were in charge of BEAM, I would improve the disbursement of funds to schools and ensure that funds are being paid on time. BEAM funds are very inconsistent. The last time we received BEAM funds in primary schools was in 2017, and in secondary schools, BEAM payments were last made in 2016 (O2). This

inconsistency in paying school and examination fees comprises the programme's effectiveness. Many children end up dropping out of school because of this. Kaseke (2012) stated that social protection benefits in Zimbabwe are inconsistent and inadequate due to the financial difficulties that GOZ has faced.

One educator shared the same sentiment: Some children come to school without eating, affecting their well-being. Therefore, apart from school and examination fees, I would also ensure that children under BEAM are provided with uniforms, school shoes, and stationery (E4).

Although alleviating poverty is the main objective of BEAM, stakeholders revealed that the effectiveness of BEAM in ensuring that OVCs remain in school is compromised because BEAM only provided school fees and a limited amount for examination fees. BEAM ignores other needs like school uniforms and stationery. In addition, due to inconsistencies in the payment of BEAM funds, beneficiaries drop out of school.

Community awareness on BEAM

The final theme that was developed from the study was a greater need to raise community awareness of BEAM. The educators indicated a need for creating awareness and educating community members by conducting workshops to equip community members with knowledge to have an adequate understanding of BEAM and its intended impact on alleviating poverty. Educators argued that such workshops would be beneficial in ensuring that communities are educated on the benefits associated with educating children and the categories of children who qualify for BEAM. One educator said:

> There is a need to educate community members about the importance of BEAM and its benefits in our District (E3).

Another educator noted that;

> It would be essential to arrange meetings in which

communities are educated about BEAM and its goals (E5). Education on BEAM would empower community members with knowledge regarding social protection initiatives that seek to alleviate poverty within their communities and the country. Educating community members empowers communities with the knowledge to enhance their understanding of BEAM and its objectives. As stated by the World Bank (2018), community empowerment is vital in providing social protection programmes as it enables socially excluded individuals to participate in their communities' social and economic development. In addition, community empowerment enables marginalised members of society to be co-creators of the social protection programmes implemented to enhance their well-being (Ngwerume, 2011; Mutasa, 2015).

Conclusions

The main conclusions on experiences of educators and perceptions of government officials indicated that BEAM enabled beneficiaries to access and attain education in the Gutu District. Educators and government officials viewed BEAM as a poverty alleviation strategy that GOZ implements to enhance access to education among OVCs. Accessing education is viewed as escaping poverty as attaining education enables beneficiaries to have a better chance of becoming financially independent. The social development theory informs the conclusions reached in this study as it states that social development involves all strategies employed by governments to alleviate poverty and vulnerability (UNICEF, 2016).

Educators and government officials indicated that BEAM encourages gender equity through promoting the active involvement of women in the implementation of BEAM and in promoting educational access for girl children. Women were actively involved in the nomination and selection process of

BEAM beneficiaries and as members of the Community Selection Committee. The selection process of BEAM focuses on gender equity and ensures there is a gender balance between male and female beneficiaries.

The study revealed that BEAM promotes community participation and empowers community members, educators, community leaders, and social workers to become active citizens and take responsibility for nominating and selecting BEAM beneficiaries to assist the Community Selection Committee. In addition, government officials indicated that the involvement of community members in the selection and nomination of BEAM beneficiaries facilitated the sound implementation of BEAM.

Additionally, the nomination and selection process of BEAM beneficiaries is a fair and transparent process that allows for selecting eligible children. Grievances Committees are part of the process and available to intervene in instances of misunderstandings regarding nominations and selection of BEAM beneficiaries.

The study's findings indicated that BEAM benefits were in the form of school and examination fees for OVCs in the Gutu District. The inconsistencies in the provision of BEAM and unmet needs of beneficiaries of BEAM were discussed as a hindrance to the realisation of BEAM objectives. While the objective of BEAM is to alleviate poverty, this objective is compromised because BEAM employs a minimalist approach in providing educational benefits for OVCs and jeopardises the intention of BEAM as a poverty alleviation strategy.

Findings from responses given by educators indicated that there is a need to raise community awareness of BEAM. This would provide a platform on which community members are provided with education regarding BEAM and its objectives. It would also educate primary caregivers on the importance of sending children to school and the positive impact of education on the development of their communities. In addition, it will also empower primary

caregivers to question the implementation of BEAM and hold the government accountable for the inadequacy and inconsistency of the BEAM implementation.

This study contributed to the existing literature on the education of OVCs, and the insight from the study provides recommendations on possible avenues of enhancing the capacity of social development initiatives in addressing the educational needs of OVCs. This study contributes to an enhanced understanding of the experiences and perspectives of stakeholders responsible for implementing BEAM at a local and district level.

Recommendations

The study findings related to the two relevant objectives allow for the following recommendations.

1. The budgetary allocation for BEAM should be reviewed and improved to ensure that the educational needs of beneficiaries are met in a comprehensive manner. An improved budgetary allocation would ensure that educational needs, including books and school uniforms, are provided on BEAM. More so, the increased budgetary allocation for BEAM will reduce the probability of beneficiaries dropping out of school due to unpaid school fees and increase the educational levels of BEAM beneficiaries.
2. School feeding programmes should be implemented in conjunction with BEAM within schools. This will ensure that the health and educational needs of BEAM beneficiaries are met and provide them with the opportunity to perform to the best of their ability in school and yield good educational outcomes. In addition, this might result in productive citizens who are independent and able to provide for themselves and their families.
3. The Department of Social Development in Zimbabwe should conduct community workshops to educate primary caregivers on BEAM and its role in alleviating poverty in facilitating access to education among OVCs. It is

anticipated that providing community members with such knowledge will enhance literacy and empower them to hold the government accountable and voice their opinions about BEAM and the inconsistent and inadequate implementation thereof. Hopefully, this will lead to an effort by the government to be more consistent and expand BEAM benefits to BEAM beneficiaries. In turn, this might result in improving access to and attainment of education in Zimbabwe and in decreasing levels of poverty among low-income families.

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