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## Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Integration in Orphanages and Home Based Facilities, and Barriers to African Government's Initiatives: Lessons from Zambia

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### ABSTRACT

About 58 million of the world's estimated 150 million orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) are in the sub-Saharan African region. The number has been increasing over the years mainly due to Poverty, AIDs and other pandemics. OVC in the streets experience many deprivations, including a lack of emotional support, an appropriate living environment, quality health, and educational services. Efforts have been made to integrate the vulnerable children in safer places. However, the integration of orphaned and vulnerable children in orphanages and Home-based care facilities in Zambia and other African nations continues to face significant challenges. It is from this background that this study aimed to investigate the barriers to African government initiatives in integrating the vulnerable and orphaned children in orphanages and home-based care facilities. The study used the qualitative research approach. The study purposively picked Only 20 key informants from the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services. Open ended questions were used in the study, allowing the participants to offer clarifying questions at any time. Lack of adequate finances, unregistered orphanages, NGOs working in isolation, cultural factors, and altitude of the vulnerable children were found to be huge barriers to African government initiatives.

### INTRODUCTION

Providing care and support for orphaned and vulnerable children has been one of the biggest challenges the Zambian government faces today, as there have been growing numbers of orphaned and vulnerable children overwhelming available resources (Center for Global Health and Development and Institute of Economic and Social Research, 2009). Globally, it is estimated that there are approximately 153 million children who have lost either a mother or a father. About 58 million of the worlds estimated 150 million orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) are in the sub-Saharan African region (Sewpaul & Matthisa, 2013; Pillay, 2014; Mercy projects, 2014). This figure is believed to be an underestimation since it does not take into consideration the orphans and vulnerable children who live on the streets, those who are trafficked for sexual exploitation or child labour, or are recruited as child soldiers (Darvas, 2014; Faith to Action Initiative, 2014). AIDs, high levels of Poverty, and disintegrated families, have contributed to the increasing numbers (UNICEF, 2020).

In the 19th century, religious organizations in America played key roles in establishing orphanages which provided care and support for orphaned and abandoned children, often with an emphasis on religious education (Harris, 2004; Mkojera, 2015). Europe likewise, saw a significant increase of orphanages and child care centers in the 19th century, which were run by religious institutions, particularly the Catholic Church. These early orphanages were often attached to monasteries, convents, or cathedrals that aimed at providing education care and support for orphaned and disadvantage's children and this is still the current situation (Browne, 2017).

During the colonial period, various missionary organizations and colonial authorities established institutions in Africa to provide care and support for the increasing number of orphaned and vulnerable children (Save the Children, 2019). Sub-Saharan Africa has more than 15 million Orphans, and it is estimated that the number of orphaned and vulnerable children will have tripled by 2025. In Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Malawi and Zimbabwe, it is estimated that in each country, there are more than 5 thousand orphans (Mutiso & Mutie, 2019). Sherlock (2017) argues that Social, economic and, culture factors have contributed to the increasing number of vulnerable children in Africa. AIDs and Poverty are among the key contributors to OVC incidences in Zambia (Center for Global Health and Development and, Institute of Economic and Social Research, 2009). This is similar with Tanzania, Lesotho and Botswana (Republic of Lesotho, 2020; Republic of Bostwana, 2019; Meli, 2015). Overtime Health crisis, such as epidemics and pandemics, have historically also contributed to an increase of vulnerable children in developing countries (Mutiso & Mutie, 2019).

After Zambia gained independence in 1964, the government took on a more significant role in child welfare and social services. This included the establishment of government-run orphanages and child care centers, often referred to as "reception homes" or "children's homes," which provided residential care for orphaned and abandoned children. Over the years, Zambia has gradually shifted towards alternative care options for orphaned and vulnerable children, such as foster care and community-based care. This shift reflects a global trend toward prioritizing family-based care over institutional

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care (MCDSC, 2025).

Children's integration in orphanages is a growing concern across many African countries, including Zambia, where economic challenges, HIV/AIDS, and social instability have contributed to increase numbers of orphans and vulnerable children. Orphanages in Zambia, as in many other African nations, have become a vital safety net for these children, yet they often face criticism regarding their effectiveness in providing adequate care and integration into society. Research indicates that institutional care, while offering immediate support, may face two or more challenges, hindering their effectiveness (McCall, 2011). However, the Zambian government, in alignment with international standards, has adopted initiatives aimed at reducing children's the number of vulnerable children in streets. Zambia, with an increasing number of orphaned due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and poverty, has increasingly relied on orphanages to support vulnerable children (UNICEF, 2020). Through the ministry of community development and social services, the government is monitoring how more than 6,500 vulnerable children in 178 child care facilities are being taken care of (MCDSC, 2025). The formulation of the adoption act was meant to integrate the vulnerable children into families. These initiatives align with the African Union's "Call for Accelerated Action on Child Survival and Development," which emphasizes the importance of placing children in family environments to ensure their holistic development (African Union, 2009). Despite these efforts, the integration of orphaned and vulnerable children in orphanages and Home-based care centres in Zambia and other African nations continues to face significant challenges. According to Gage & Ali (2005), institutional and structural factors have obstructed government interventions to improve child welfare. More than 5000 OVC are still in the streets in Zambia. Pillay (2016) reveals that OVC in streets experience many deprivations, including, lack of emotional support, appropriate living environment, quality health and educational services. Increasing their integration in orphanages and Home-based facilities is an option. However, the barriers to government initiatives in facilitating the integration of children in orphanages and Home-based facilities is not clearly understood, though such information would be important in facilitating government efforts in helping many vulnerable and orphaned children in communities and streets.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Factors behind the integration of orphaned and vulnerable children in orphanages and Home-based care facilities

The integration of children in Home-based facilities and orphanage's is caused by different social and economic factors. Some of these factors include poverty, lack of access to education, disability, natural disasters and gender discrimination (Nazeer & Khurram, 2017). Poverty, not lack of caregivers, is often cited as the reason for placing

children in orphanages. Parents and other caregivers struggling to provide for their children may feel compelled to use orphanages to address an immediate problem. In many regions where material poverty is prevalent, evidence demonstrates the "pull factor" of residential care as the means of meeting such basic needs as food, access to education, and other services for children (Browne, 2017; Decierdo *et al.*, 2025).

Health related factors are also one of the major causes of children's placement in Home –based care facilities and orphanages. In most developing countries, the death of both or one parent due to diseases such as HIV/AIDS has contributed to the increasing number of children in orphanage's (UNICEF, 2019). With most developing countries having inadequate healthcare systems the number of orphaned children has significantly increased. A study conducted by Foster (2000) revealed that the prevalence of diseases such HIV/AIDS led to surge of orphaned children requiring to be placed in Home-based care facilities or orphanages. A study on orphanages in Ethiopia found that the most commonly noted reasons for children being placed in orphanages were parental HIV and AIDS status or other chronic illness and poverty. In Rwanda, poverty, together with the death of a parent or abandonment of a parent, are among the reasons for placement in an orphanage in 40 % of all cases (Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, 2012). Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development & UNICEF (2013) found similar findings in Malawi. According to (*Save the Children*, 2009) economic hardships, particularly in impoverished areas, also drive the enrollment of children in orphanages. Families in some instances feel incapable of providing the necessary adequate care due to financial constraints, leading them to place their children in orphanages.

The other contributing factor to children's placement in orphanages is to child abandonment which is caused by stigma associated with disabilities or unwanted pregnancies (Johnson, 2017). In some instances, children are removed from homes due to child neglect, abuse or substance abuse among parents, resulting in their placement in orphanage's (Dozier *et al.*, 2012). In war-ton regions conflict and displacement have contributed to the rise in orphanage's enrollment, as many children are separated from their families during migration or conflict (Browne, 2009).

### Challenges encountered by vulnerable children in orphanages and home-based care facilities

Despite the pivotal role in helping the vulnerable and orphaned children, orphanages and home based care facilities face a number of challenges. Many orphanages operate with limited funding, which results in overcrowding, inadequate nutrition, insufficient staff and poor living conditions for children (Rosa, 2016). The lack of financial resources also limits access to proper healthcare, education, and emotional support for the children, often impacting their development and well-

being (Zeanah *et al.*, 2011).

Children in orphanages and residential care face several difficulties such as poverty, poor physical health, attachment disorders, inadequate social skills, and mental health difficulties. Making it worse to this, is the loss of one or both of their parents, which makes it very much difficult for children to be psychologically fine (Atwine *et al.*, 2021). The effects normally manifest in the future. These findings were similar to the findings by Murray *et al.* (2013) who revealed that orphaned and vulnerable children are subjected to multiple and ongoing stressful and traumatic life events such as abuse, neglect, parental loss, sexual abuse *et.c.*

Christopher and Mosha (2021) argued that Shortage of educational materials was another problem that faced children at the institutions. The study revealed that orphaned children in four institutions had a limited supply of educational materials such as exercise books, text and, reference books. In Tanzania, an examination of exposure to violence and mental illness in an orphanage and an evaluation of an intervention programme in the same orphanage revealed that exposure to outbursts of anger and violence in the centre impacted enormously on child mental health (Hermenau *et al.*, 2011).

Many orphanages in sub-Saharan Africa and South East Asia depend on donations and international volunteers, and children are also used as a commercial entity to attract funds and may be sent out to beg or perform on behalf of center's (Browne, 2017). In some instances, children are kept in destitute or unhealthy conditions to attract donors and volunteers. Evidence is already pointing to alarming irregularities, including recruitment of children for international adoption, "child laundering" through altering and forgery of records, inducement of birth parents to relinquish children, and extortion of funds from prospective adoptive parents (Cheney & Rotabi, 2014).

Van Doore *et al.* (2016) revealed that some home bases facilities unregulated; the staffs are poorly trained, recruited without background checks, and unaccountable (Van Doore *et al.*, 2016). He further states that Children, who are abused, neglected or subject to violence have no recourse to legal or civil reparations. The most common forms of abuse reported are physical violence such as beatings from caregivers as punishment, sexual violence by peers of staff, being neglected, poor nutrition and bullying (Sérgio Pinheiro, 2006). Different forms of exploitation are also experienced. A further form of exploitation is the trend for orphanages to recruit vulnerable children from their families as a profit making enterprise (Van Doore *et al.*, 2016).

Many orphanages lack trained psychologists and social workers who can provide the necessary emotional and mental health support (Johnson *et al.*, 2006). This as a result of financial constraints. Staff recruitment of specialized experts in the field of psychology is something most orphanages cannot afford and hence negatively affecting emotional and psychological well-being of orphans is a

challenge. MCDSC (2025) revealed having worked with NGOs to train care givers in these facilities.

Van IjZendoorn *et al.* (2011) argue that Children who enter orphanages have often experienced trauma, whether through the death of a parent, abandonment, or abuse, which can lead to emotional and behavioral problems. Browne (2009) children raised in orphanages are at higher risk of developing cognitive and emotional delays due to the lack of individualized attention and stimulation compared to those raised in family environments (Nelson *et al.*, 2007). Institutionalization, especially in the absence of adequate caregivers, is often associated with attachment disorders, leading to long-term difficulties in forming relationships later in life (Van IjZendoorn *et al.*, 2011). While the challenges experiences by vulnerable children in these facilities have been mentioned by various scholars, this does not underscore the vital roles orphanages and home-based care institutions play in helping the vulnerable institutions.

### Measures designed to encourage children integration in orphanages and home based care facilities

Several measures have been put in place by Governments and Non- governmental organizations meant to place OVCs in safer places. Non-governmental organizations and charitable organizations play an important role in promoting children's placement in orphanages by providing free education and healthcare services. For example, organizations such as Save the Children and World Vision are well known international organizations that work with the government in orphanages and home based facilities to ensure that vulnerable children have access to health care services and education (Save the children, 2019). Some NGOs and Governments have been providing grants to orphanages. For example, countries heavily affected by HIV/AIDS, orphanages are supported through grants, ensuring that basic needs such as nutrition, education, and healthcare are provided for the children (Roby & Shaw, 2006)

Bunkers *et al.* (2014) argued that public awareness campaigns in some instances have but in place to promote the integration to home-based care centres. According to a study by Cantwell (2005), advocacy programs that highlight the importance of child welfare and protection have contributed to increased awareness among communities and greater trust in institutional care settings. Additionally, a number of outreach programs are done to identify vulnerable children, often working in collaboration with community leaders and local agencies. Some orphanage's work with local governments to develop referral systems that ensure children in need of care are directed to institutions (Bunkers *et al.*, 2014).

International organizations such as Save the Children and UNICEF partner with government agencies in creating awareness campaigns that highlight the importance of enrolling vulnerable children in orphanages rather than leaving them unattended or at risk of exploitation (Williamson & Greenberg, 2010). In some instances,

orphanage's offer outreach programs to identify children in need of care, especially those in impoverished and isolated communities where knowledge of institutional support may be limited (Mulheir, 2012). Orphanages sometimes directly work with health and educational institutions to identify children who are not receiving the adequate care and may benefit from institutional integration (Berens & Nelson, 2015). This ensures that children in unsafe conditions such as those living on the streets or in abusive environments are placed in safe child care facilities.

Guru (2012) reveals that governments in developing countries in some cases, offer subsidies to families as a way of reducing their burden and increasing enrollment in orphanage's. According to Tolfree (2003) in some regions, governments have implemented policies mandating the registration and integration of orphans or abandoned children in certified institutions. For instance, the Zambian government has adopted children act and the Adoption act (MCDSC, 2025).

### Theoretical framework

The discussion in this article is guided by the assumptions of the Ecological systems theory, developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the 1970s. The theory emphasizes the influence of multiple environmental layers on human development (Rosa & Tudge, 2024). Bronfenbrenner proposed that human development is shaped by interactions between individuals and their environment at various levels, including the immediate environment (family and community) and broader societal structures (government and the global systems) (Tong & An, 2024). In line with this assumption, we expect changes in government policy (macrosystems) that reduce spending on childcare can directly impact the availability, affordability, and, quality of service offered to vulnerable and, and orphaned children. Similarly, social factors (mesosystems), such as changes in Home based care campaign system by child welfare agencies, orphanages and local communities, can create gaps in service delivery, further exacerbating difficulties in enrollment of vulnerable children in home based facilities.

The theory also assumptions that children are active participants in their development, but their growth are shaped by external factors (Pinar, 2016). Through this assumption, we believe that children's active participation in their own development is constrained by systemic factors. Though government might want to assists vulnerable children, it is assumed from the theory, that the level of support is dependent on the vulnerable children active participation and wiliness. In addition, the theory states that Broader Societal and Cultural Contexts (Macrosystem) Have a Significant Impact on the Child's Access to Resources and Opportunities (Evans, 2013). Based on this assumption, we expect larger societal and cultural contexts such as national policies, economic systems, and cultural beliefs play a crucial role in determining vulnerable children placement in home-

based centrer and orphanages in Zambia and other African countries.

The theory is useful in understanding how various contexts hinder government initiatives in ensuring that vulnerable and orphaned children's integration in home based care facilities and orphanages.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSC) served as the study area for this study. Qualitative research approach was utilized to obtain a holistic and deeper understanding of the barriers hindering government initiatives in enrolling orphaned and vulnerable children in orphanages and child care centres. In-depth analysis is necessary for the synthesis of qualitative evidence, according to Ames *et al.* (2019). The study purposively picked only 20 key informants from the department of Social welfare at the MCDSC. Open-ended questions were used in the study, allowing the participants to offer clarifying questions at any time. Using this method allowed the researchers to pose questions that had not thought of before, but added even more value to the investigations. According to Berg (2009), Ryan *et al.* (2009), these kinds of patterns are likely to provide accurate and valuable information. Both content and thematic analysis techniques were used during data analysis.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Strategies undertaken to integrate vulnerable and orphaned children in orphanages and child care facilities

According to UNICEF (2019), Lusaka alone has more than 30,000 street children. It is estimated that there are more than 50,000 street children in Zambia. African Volunteer (2025) argues that this number is an underestimation of the actual number of street children in the country. Over the years, the Zambian government has developed programmes aimed at integrating vulnerable children into safer places.

One notable strategy is the strategically development of the department of social welfare, under the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services. The department of Social Welfare is mandated under the Juvenile Act Cap 53, of the laws of Zambia to provide protective and care services to the children in need or in conflict with the law. Social welfare officers undertake various roles as Juveniles inspectors, probation officers, Guardian Ad-Litem (MCDSC, 2015). Key informant 4 stated that:

*'As a ministry, we conduct regular inspections of child care facilities, to ensure that they are habitable for the vulnerable children'.*

In order to encourage vulnerable children in the street return to their parents or accept being placed in orphanages and child care facilities, it is important for the ministry to ensure that these facilities are habitable. Juvenile inspectors have over the years played critical roles in ensuring that there is compliance with the set

Minimum standards of Care and, other provisions of the law. Currently, the ministry of community development through the department of Social welfare is providing supervisory support to 178 child care facilities with more than 6,500 vulnerable children throughout the country (MCDSC, 2025).

Government alone cannot manage the agenda of ensuring that every vulnerable child is out of the street. It is in this regard that the government has over the years strategically collaborated with different partners such as: Faith Based Organizations, Community based organizations, both Local and International Non-Government Organizations, opposition political parties' e.t.c. Through collaborative efforts, the government has been able to provide educational and outreach programmes to raise awareness about the risks and consequences of children living on the streets and help families understand the importance of providing a safe and stable environment for vulnerable children (Garutsa, 2023).

Similarly, MR3 (2023) revealed that through collaborative efforts with the local businesses and community leaders, the Zambian government has been able to launch skills training programmes for street children in Zambia. This initiative equips them with marketable skills such as carpentry, tailoring and agriculture, enabling the vulnerable children to earn a livelihood and escape the cycle of poverty. By Fostering entrepreneurship and self-reliance, government strives to reintegrate these children into society as productive members. In 2021 the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services launched the 'Child Safeguarding Framework' with the financial help from UNICEF (UNICEF, 2023). In 2025, the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services launched the 'Street Outreach Guideline Programme', aiming at providing a comprehensive support to vulnerable children and ensure their protection from, harsh realities of street life (Tshindaye, 2025). These programmes have been very instrumental in serving the vulnerable children from substance abuse, poverty, prostitution, and early marriages.

Financial support from the government has been critical in integrating vulnerable in orphanages and child care facilities. In 2023, the government allocated over K400, 000 for the integration of street kids and the monitoring of welfare children in central province (Lusakatime, 2023). Such financial assistance when constant, play critical roles in helping the vulnerable children.

The government also facilitates foster care services, which play critical roles in securing the committal orders for the children under the Juvenile Act Cap 53 of the laws of Zambia. Key informant 2 stated that:

*'As a Ministry, we have worked extremely hard to ensure that vulnerable children are placed in foster care, so as to provide them an opportunity to grow and develop in a suitable family environment.'*

Foster care is temporal care provided to a child who has been legally places in the care of a responsible person who is either a non-relative or a relative for a specific period upon recommendations to the Court by the Social

Welfare officer. To ensure that that foster parents have the necessary skills to care for these vulnerable children, the government organizes training programmes on how to take care of these children. These services have been effective in some areas, while in other areas they have failed due to lack of wiliness on the part of foster parents to undergo thorough training (Badat, 2024).

A firm legal framework governing children's rights, and protection has also been developed, among them include; Juveniles Act, Adoption Act, Probation of offenders Act, Affiliation and Maintenance Orders Act, Anti-human Trafficking Act, Anti-Gender based violence Act. The framework has provided the necessary guide to both the Government and Non-state actors on how to integrate the vulnerable children in safer places (MCDSC, 2025). The enforcement of this legal framework brings about order in streets while implementing the social protection programmes.

### **Barriers to African government initiatives of integrating orphaned and vulnerable children in orphanages and Home-based facilities**

#### **Lack of adequate funds**

Most orphanages need the financial support from government and NGOS. However, lack of adequate finances has made it very difficult for African governments to play this significant role (Garutsa, 2023). USAID (2009) revealed that the demand for services in child care facilities is far greater than available resources and capacities; with inadequate funding being the greatest constraint for most governments in Africa. During one interviews, key informant 2 stated that:

*'The ministry has a clear vision and strategic plans in place to assist orphanages and child care centres, however, the biggest challenge for ages, has been lack of adequate financial resources.'*

The cost of running and orphanage or any child care facility can be very costly with huge. In Uganda for example, the operating cost for institutional care were found to be fourteen times higher than those in community care. Considering the dire economic situation that most orphanages operate in, this cost is not only unrealistic, but also most likely impossible (Meli, 2015). Vedasto *et al.* (2023) argued that orphanages in some parts of Tanzania are not good residence for orphan's psychosocial wellbeing because of the shortage of funds. In Botswana, There has been a decrease in the number of vulnerable children in orphanages in the last 15 years, from about 80,000 in 2010 to a fewer than 65,000 in 2017. Republic of Botswana (2019) attributes the success in Botswana's to ART program, which in keeping people living with HIV alive, resulting in fewer children being orphaned. Lack of adequate finances also affects salaries and wages for caregivers (Christopher & Mosha, 2021). This lowers the moral of caregivers, resulting in to poor service delivery to the orphans. These findings are similar with the findings by Adejoh (2021), who revealed that Lack of funding results in caregivers being demolished and begin to search for employment in places where

they are properly supported. Then, those who choose to remain in these centers may render poor services simply because of their contractual employment duties rather than passion. Due to poor service delivery in some child care facilities, vulnerable children refuse to integrate in the, hampering government efforts. Local authorities can play huge roles in helping street kinds leave the street, However, most local authority do not have adequate finances for this noble cause (Sililo, 2021).

### NGOs and Government work in isolation

The integration of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) into orphanages and child care facilities is a multifaceted issue that requires a coordinated and collaborative approach from both government bodies and non-government organizations (NGOs (Garutsa, 2023). However, a critical weakness in the implementation of activities aimed at encouraging OVC enrollment is orphanages is the lack of coordination between NGOs and government. As Loudon (2010), points out, the isolation between government agencies and NGOs significantly impedes efforts to effectively support OVCs and integrate them into care institutions. Key informant number 7, during an interview, reinforced this issue by stating that:

*'Lack of coordination between the government and NGOs has made it difficult to encourage OVCs to enroll in the orphanages. At times the NGOs do not coordinate themselves on OVC activities'*

This Disjointed approach creates confusion for OVCs and their families, who may be uncertain about where to seek help or which institutions they can trust for support. On a global scale, the creation of international networks and agreements could significantly improve the coordination of OVC- related activities. In particular, the collaborative agreement between funding partners like USAID, UNICEF, UNAIDS, and the World Food programme demonstrates the potential of global cooperation in improving the quality of services for OVCs. The cooperation led to better services in orphanages and encouraged some vulnerable children to enroll in these facilities.

### Lack of Political will

Another major barrier identified is lack of political will to address the plight of orphans and vulnerable children, particularly when it comes to ensuring their enrollment in orphanages and child care facilities. This lack of commitment is evident in the behavior of some political elites, who, despite being aware of the challenges faced by vulnerable children on the streets, remain silent in parliament on the matter of integrating these children into safer environments (Garutsa, 2023). They may be fully cognizant of the hardships that children experience on the streets, but still choose not to raise the issue or push the necessary action. Instead, they defer responsibility to the Ministry of Community development and Social services, or the Ministry of Youths and sports, as though the integration of vulnerable children is the solely the

responsibility of these ministries. Without the backing and advocacy of political elite, these line ministries struggle to secure the resources and attention needed to implement programs aimed at integrating the vulnerable children into orphanages. Meli (2020) argues that with the right political will government agencies would have access to the resources, support and political clout necessary to ensure the successful integration of vulnerable children in to safer places.

### Lack of adequate training among caregivers in the orphanages and child care facilities

Inadequate finances have resulted in some orphanages having untrained personnel to care for the children. This is because trained staff normally look for well-paying jobs, leaving only a few trained staff (Meli, 2015). Continued training and improved knowledge among social workers and other caregivers in these orphanages are essential for the wellbeing of the vulnerable. Well-trained caregivers are aware of the current trends and development around child and adolescent mental health and, therefore formulate the necessary mechanisms (Porter & Porter, 2020). One major factor contributing to orphanage's having unskilled personnel has been the increasing number of volunteers who are brought on board without proper training. Bile (2019) argued that social workers and care givers, who lack proper training, discourage vulnerable children from staying in orphanage's and child care facilities, as they fail to understand the needs of the vulnerable children (Save the Children, 2019).

### Cultural, religious, and social resistance

Some people refuse to take vulnerable children to orphanages due to cultural, religious and social reasons. The joint family system is prevalent in the rural society. Family affairs are managed by the father as head of the family. The family exercises great influence and control on the behavior of the individuals(Ojurongbe, 2024). The family demands might not allow vulnerable members to be placed in an child care Centres. African culture demands family members to take care of extended vulnerable and orphaned children, unlike surrendering them to orphanages. For example, one of the significant traditional care practices among the Basotho people in Lesotho is the extended care for orphaned children (Republic of Lesotho, 2020). Despite government efforts to integrate vulnerable children in safer places, some vulnerable children resist child care facilities due to the to the unease feeling with the idea just being raised in such environments (Shawar & Shiffman, 2023) .Social resistance towards orphanage's and child care facilities has been shaped by the perspectives of children's and families themselves. Shawar and Shiffman (2023) argue that some teenagers normally dislike the idea of coming from an orphanage, because they consider them not appealing.

### Personal Commercial interest by care givers

While government and other well-wishers work extremely

hard to ensure that vulnerable children are enrolled in orphanages, some commercial interest care gives not the resources intended to benefit the orphans (Shawar & Shiffman, 2023). Cheney and Ucembe (2019) argue that orphanage tourism has compelled most vulnerable children to refuse being integrated in the orphanage. Most vulnerable children fear what, what Lumos (2021) called orphanage trafficking. Nhep and Van Doore (2023) argue that evil men indulge in the business of transferring, or recruiting vulnerable children for exploitation. It must be mentioned that this argument cannot be generalized as there are genuine people with the desire to support government and non – government efforts in orphanages (Rosenthal, 2021). However, it is important to note that the behavior by a segment of evil people involved in orphanages activities with profit motives tend to act as barriers to both the government and non-government organizations initiatives.

### Poor implementation of the legal framework

While the legal framework play an essential role in supporting the integration of orphans and vulnerable children in care facilities, the failure to implement these laws effectively presents a substantial barrier to the welfare of these children. Despite the existence of the laws such as the Juveniles Acts, Adoption Act, probation of offenders Act, Affiliation and Maintenance Order Act, Anti-Human Trafficking Act, and the Anti-Gender-Based Violence Act, a significant gap between legislation and enforcement persists (Shawar & Shiffman, 2023). This lack of enforcement has resulted in multiple challenges, including the inability to safeguard the rights of children in orphanages. Some caregivers, NGOs and even government personnel have failed to consistently adhere to these laws, undermining the very objectives these frameworks were designed to achieve (Garutsa, 2023). Without robust legal frameworks and their effective implementation, the orphanages can become places where children are not only deprived of their basic needs but also subjected to further vulnerabilities such as neglect, abuse, or exploitation. Consequently, these children are forced to flee in search of safety, thereby compounding their already precarious situations.

This situations contrast with the example of India, where the government introduced the Orphans (Reservation of Post in the Government Establishment and welfare) Act, 2018. The Act has thus contributed to making orphanages and child care facilities more attractive and accessible to children in need, showing that when a legal framework are effectively designed and implemented, they can significantly enhance the welfare of vulnerable children. The Act has thus contributed to making orphanages and child care facilities more attractive and accessible to children in need, showing that when legal frameworks are effectively designed and implemented, they can significantly enhance the welfare of vulnerable children.

### Unregistered childcare centres and orphanages

In Zambia, the law mandates that orphanages must be registered with the government to ensure they operate with the established legal and regulatory framework (MCDSS, 2025). Despite this requirement, a number of orphanages have failed to secure the necessary government Licenses, even though they care for a significant number of vulnerable children. Key respondent number 3, during an interview stated that:

*'The government has struggled to provide adequate assistance to unregistered child care facilities, as they fall outside the scope of formal oversight'.*

This lack of registration not only prevents orphanages from receiving government support but also limits their access to resources that could improve the care and welfare of the children they serve (UNICEF, 2015). Moreover, the absence if registration undermines the state's ability to monitor these institutions effectively which could lead to a situation where standard of care compromised. Similarly, in Thailand, a significant proportion of child care facilities remain unregistered which presents similar risks. According to a report by Alternative care Thailand (ACT), there are 679 private institutional care facilities in the country, with 289 of them registered and 390 unregistered (CRC Coalition Thailand, 2016). The unregistered facilities are left to operate independently, without the benefit of government inspections or regulations. If the orphanages and child care facilities are not regulated or fail to meet established standard, these children may view them with skepticism, fearing further harm. As results, the failure to implement proper registration and monitoring can directly contribute to a reluctance or refusal by children to integrate into the very system designed to protect them.

### Lack of accurate information for Key decision making

Although valuable research has been conducted on orphaned and vulnerable children in Zambia, significant gaps remain. USAID (2009) estimated that almost 300 OVC care and support programs have been established in the country, and the country has close to 3 million OVC. This information is an underestimation of the current number of OVC centres in Zambia, making it a little bit difficult for the Zambian government to formulate and implement good policies. USAID (2009) admitted that lack of accurate information is hindering program leaders and policy makers from making well informed decisions about the path forward. One reason attributed to lack of accurate information is the inadequate financial resource needed to undertake proper research for this noble call. There is need to acknowledge institutions that have made significant efforts in generating information on OVC, USAID, Center for Global Health and Development, World Vision, University of Zambia, Institute for Economic and Social Research, MSYCD, MCDSS, MLGRD, among others. But it is also important to accept the fact that, there is still significant gap in information

provided to policy makers needed to facilitate good policy formulation and implementation (Kaluba *et al.*, 2025). USAID (2009) emphasizes that the greatest impact on research will come from addressing fundamental gaps in information. Establishing these critical building blocks will be essential in addressing gaps in care, improving child care systems, and enhancing the integration of orphans and vulnerable children into safe and supportive environments.

### Lack of adequate monitoring mechanism for orphanages

The number of orphans in orphanages has continued to increase, making it a little bit difficult for care givers to provide the necessary care to orphanages (Meli, 2011). It is the responsibility of government to ensure that they document the number of orphanages in each orphanage and also ensure that these vulnerable children are provided with good physical infrastructure, medical facilities and schools materials. Key Infomart number 5 stated that:

*'Lack of adequate finances, it difficult to monitor the environment orphans are subjected to in child care facilities'.*

Due to different reasons, the physical infrastructure in orphanages and child care centres do not support the physical challenged children, and governments are not aware about the situation the special needs children face in orphanages. There is need for government to ensure that only orphanages with adequate physical infrastructure for children with special needs should be allowed to enroll such children.

The findings highlight critical issues regarding the living conditions of these child care facilities. Without proper funding and monitoring mechanisms, child care facilities may tune into deplorable states that might leave a lot to be desired. According to Rosenthal (2021), the right to adequate shelter is fundamental for protection, privacy, dignity and well-being of the children. However, findings revealed that some child care facilities lack adequate finances, and this has resulted into failure to maintain the infrastructure, leaving some child care facilities with issues such as leaking roofs and damaged walls. These conditions expose children to environmental hazards and health risks; undermine their sense of safety and stability (Meli, 2015). Key informant 4 stated that:

*'Some of the child care facilities have shelters which are not decent. some of the shelters have walls that require repair'.*

Such environments not only forces government to advise such facilities to be closed but also forces OVCs to run away from such facilities. Addressing these challenges requires prioritizing the renovation of facilities, ensuring proper funding, and enhancing oversight. Furthermore, the government must need to implement policies that ensure the consistent provision of a safe and dignified living conditions for all OVC. Without a comprehensive, multi-stakeholders approach, the barriers to improving OVC welfare and their integration to safer places will

persist, perpetuating their marginalization (Garutsa, 2023).

### Vulnerable and orphaned children running away from orphanages

In 2018, they were pronouncement and commitment by the Zambian government to continue cooperating with strategic partner, and launch a US\$10 million programme to remove children from the streets under a programme dubbed 'Saving effectively and efficiently vulnerable children and, adolescents'. Government envisaged ensuring vulnerable children were placed on social cash transfer (SCT) and also ensuring that these children are placed in safer places (Times of Zambia, 2023). Despite, government efforts, some street children disappeared from the programme, while others who were placed in orphanages run away (AllAfrica, 2023). Key informant 5 stated that:

*'Despite street kids being offered a place in an orphanage or child care centre, with regular meals, chance to go to school, many of the kids run away from these safe orphanages'.*

Drug abuse has been one major factor that has contributed to this trend, as street children find it difficult to stop abusing drugs. Hence, they choose to go back to the streets where they have access to these drugs. The reliance on substance becomes a strong motivator for children to return to their previous environments, despite the safety and opportunities offered in the orphanages and child care facilities (Garutsa, 2023). For some, the decision to run away from the orphanages is motivated by having their freedom restricted and having numerous obligations they must fulfil. Children accustomed to the independence of the streets life often find their structure and rules of orphanages restrictions; leading them to escape in search of the freedom they once had (Rybarczyk, 2022). These findings highlight the need for a holistic approach to child welfare that goes beyond basic care to include addiction rehabilitation, psychological support, and a focus on empowerment.

### CONCLUSIONS

The integration of vulnerable and orphaned children into orphanages and child care facilities in Zambia has shown progress, largely due to the government efforts and strategic partnerships with various stakeholders such as NGOs, faith-based organizations, and local businesses. Despite these efforts significant barriers persists, including inadequate funding, insufficient caregiver training, social resistance, and challenges related to the legal framework enforcement. These barriers not only hinder the successful reintegration of vulnerable children but also perpetuate the cycle of neglect, abuse and exploitation that many of these children face. To enhance the integration of orphaned and vulnerable children into safer environment's, the government must adopt a multi-faced approach. Firstly, increased and sustained financial investment is essential to ensure the sustainability of child care facilities and the wellbeing of both children and

caregivers. Adequately funding should also support the expansion of skill-building and rehabilitation programs, as well as the training of caregivers to better meet the needs of vulnerable children.

Additionally, the government should strengthen the enforcement of the legal framework governing child welfare and care the facilities. Regular monitoring and evaluations must be conducted to ensure that facilities meet the established standards of care, particularly for children with special needs. Furthermore, registration and regulation of all orphanages and child care facilities are crucial to ensure that they operate within the legal framework and receive the necessary support. A concerted effort to improve coordination between government bodies, NGOs and other stakeholders is critical to avoid duplicative efforts and ensure that resources are used efficiently. Collaborative programs that address not only the immediate needs of vulnerable children but also their long term well-being, including mental health support, addiction rehabilitation and skills development, must be prioritized. Finally, raising awareness about the importance of institutional care and addressing the stigma associate with orphanages will be key to overcoming cultural and social resistance. By combining these recommendations with ongoing efforts, Zambia can improve its approach o child welfare and ensure a better future for its vulnerable children.

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