

\*Working paper: please do not cite without permission from the author(s)

# **MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES FOR ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN**

**Edwin T. Mutambanengwe**

[etmutambanengwe@gmail.com](mailto:etmutambanengwe@gmail.com)

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

A lack of national policy and indicators to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the developmental approach in the welfare field (specifically in child welfare) continues to be a challenge. The new Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 emphasizes the delivery of integrated developmental services for children and their families. Weight is placed on building human capabilities and strengthening social support systems in the family and community. The Act also promotes best practices, which entail being child-focused and outcome oriented in child welfare planning and engagement. The key principle informing the new approach to child welfare practice is that services should be family-centred and community-based. Child welfare agencies continue to implement community-based care and support models even though little is known about their effectiveness. This paper therefore explores how community-based services are being monitored and evaluated placing emphasis on how M&E systems in child welfare could be improved.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW & METHOD**

Due to limitations revolving around the length of this paper, literature review will be omitted and the bare bones of the methodology will be presented. Nonetheless, it is crucial to underline that there is a paucity of literature on child welfare systems as well as information on the monitoring and evaluation of community-based services for OVCs locally and internationally.

A qualitative approach was utilised for this study and the study was exploratory and descriptive in nature. A case study design was utilised with the view to thoroughly explore the M&E of community-based services for OVCs in Soweto, Johannesburg at a well-established child welfare agency. A purposive sampling technique was used and data collection was divided into three distinct yet complimentary phases, namely documentary study, semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion. Documentary study involved the analysis of relevant

agency M&E documents to describe the 'as is' situation and suggest the 'what could be' situation. Semi-structured interviews elicited information from the implementers (social workers, supervisors and managers) of what could constitute an appropriate and effective M&E system. The focus group discussion provided a platform for the participants to provide their perceptions of the findings of the study and to explore options for improving the agency's M&E system.

### **3. FINDINGS**

The findings of the study revealed the 'as is' situation including gaps that were identified. The utility and appropriateness of the existing M&E data for organisational performance in rendering community-based services for OVCs was also considered. Key findings were, in this discourse, presented with respect to overall M&E policy and guidelines; organisational structure; knowledge of the principles governing community-based services for OVCs; M&E tools and processes within the agency; M&E data processing, analysis and use; reporting; and training.

**Overall M&E policy and guidelines:** There appears to be no overall policy and guidelines for M&E and there is reliance on the reporting guidelines provided by the government, that is, six-monthly reports and the annual business plan.

**Organisational structure:** There is neither an M&E unit nor expert staff dedicated to perform M&E. Resultantly, the M&E function is embedded in the programmes of the agency and unit managers are tasked with the overall duty for M&E.

**Knowledge of the principles governing community-based services for OVCs:** There is inadequate knowledge of the developmental approach to child welfare practice and of indicators among practitioners. However, there is a fair understanding of the concept of M&E among practitioners even though it is understood to be a funding strategy and an accountability measure.

**M&E tools and processes within the agency:** M&E planning is regarded as a preserve of managers. Therefore, social workers have a negative attitude towards the collection of M&E data as they perceive their M&E role to be peripheral. The design and implementation of M&E data collection tools is not participatory and there no standardized tools, which makes it difficult to understand the purpose and use of the data generated.

**M&E data processing, analysis and use:** The agency has a tailored computer-based M&E system but has no tools to analyse voluminous complex quantitative data being generated. Moreover, there are no strict measures to ensure data integrity and quality. Consequently, there is no data analysis conducted.

**Reporting:** The main reporting structures of the agency are the six-monthly progress reports and the annual report. However, M&E is not a topical issue in these reports and there is a lack of emphasis on the M&E of community-based services for OVCs. These structures report on output indicators and do not transcend this level of reporting to incorporate outcomes and impacts. Reporting seems to be one way from the agency to the funders.

**M&E training:** There is a significant lack of M&E skills among practitioners. Training workshops seem to be geared towards continuous professional development, that is, to inculcate social work skills and to enhance service delivery not to provide staff responsible for implementing M&E with guidance for continuous data quality improvement.

#### **4. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION**

The fact that there is no overall policy to govern how the implementation of community-based services for OVCs should be monitored and evaluated, implies that the child welfare field is operating without rules and principles to guide decision making. Moreover, the agency lacks baseline information to inform planning. This challenge emanates from the fact that there is no overall national policy on M&E in the welfare field. It is therefore an arduous task for South Africa to credibly comment on the progress being made in the implementation of OVC policies and legislation.

Since child welfare services have incalculable and intangible characteristics, specific indicators are required to give concrete but indirect values to particular concepts. The finding that there are no overall indicators implies that child welfare is unable to track organisational performance with respect to the implementation of OVC policies and plans. Against this background, information on outcomes and impacts is therefore difficult to draw at national level.

Rabie and Cloete (2011) contend that organisations should have an M&E unit to provide sound technical capacity for data collection and analysis. Also, the rule of thumb is that M&E activities should be allocated between 5% and 10% of the project budget (USAID, 2010).

The child welfare agency under study, however, is operating without an M&E unit and there are no budget allocations for M&E. It is therefore logical to conclude that there is a lack of emphasis on M&E in the child welfare agency and it is impractical to expect the agency to engage in M&E without appropriate technical expertise and adequate financial backup. The agency is able to report on outputs but has no M&E capacity, adequate tools and appropriate systems and infrastructure to measure outcomes and impacts. Thus, government-wide M&E systems and national frameworks devised to spur M&E efforts in the public sector should first consider capacitating organisations before policy implementation.

The study realised an unprecedented demand for accountability, which detracts from the agency's commitment to effective service delivery and evaluation thereof. Poor communication between the agency and the main funders often results in M&E data collection tools being imposed and effected without giving sufficient prior notice. There is therefore need for a participatory approach to M&E, which promotes equal involvement, empowerment and adherence to principles of mutual respect among stakeholders. The government could enhance ownership, participation, shared understanding and properly align its policies by adopting participatory M&E principles and practices and creating an enabling environment for stakeholders to discuss M&E policy directions and tools used in generating M&E data. Additionally, utilization-focused principles need to be fully incorporated in order for M&E data to be optimally used to inform programme design, service delivery improvement, and to devise appropriate strategies for goal achievement.

M&E has a role to play in establishing why, where, and for whom programmes work or fail. In other words, M&E plays a pivotal role in evaluating theories that inform child welfare practice (e.g. the developmental child welfare model). The finding that there is a poorly constructed M&E system within child welfare agency is concerning. It implies that the child welfare agency has no sound capacity to evaluate the extent to which principles and practices of the developmental approach are being implemented. One may infer from this finding that there is a difficulty being experienced by child welfare NGOs and the government in commenting on the appropriateness and effectiveness of child welfare policies and theories on a national scale.

There is a demand for M&E systems in child welfare that are participatory in nature and that form part of the organisational management tool. Such M&E systems that are results-based,

participatory and utilization focused are of immense significance to the child welfare field as they will provide valuable information on the implementation of the developmental approach for OVCs. The welfare field needs to concentrate and intensify its efforts on M&E in order to realise the outcomes and the impact of government spending. Recommendations for M&E policy at national and agency level are made, as well as the training of social workers and managers in M&E.