Provision of child protection services in Zimbabwe: review of the human rights perspective

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Abstract: The article reviews child protection services in Zimbabwe and its interface with the changing social and economic environment. Within the qualitative research design, the study deployed the documentary analysis and the interview of six key informants only, which created an epistemological front for knowledge production. The study was guided by the Human Rights Perspective and established that the Child Protection Services in Zimbabwe have been marred with a plethora of socioeconomic encounters which stretch from policy inconsistency, corruption, brain drain, lack of operational research, lack of capacity of Department of Social Development and the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these issues are global concerns. Drawing from Human Rights Perspective, the study concludes that the socioeconomic challenges associated with child protection services in Zimbabwe demonstrate the violation of children’s as enshrined in provisions of Convention on the Rights of the Child. The research concludes by arguing for provision of more investment towards child service programmes in Zimbabwe. The study respectfully recommends that key stakeholders can improve this state of affairs by promoting child rights.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Children are an important part of the Zimbabwean society. Sadly, children are a vulnerable group and require either child welfare or protection services. These services should guarantee realization of their individual rights. This article looks into child protection services in Zimbabwe and its link with the changing social and economic environment.
1. Introduction
Child protection is one of the key responsibilities of any government including that of Zimbabwe. Driven by the “Children are the future” mantra, the government through the Department of Social Development (DSD) administers a number of legislative provisions in a bid to protect and provide a service to children including street children with disabilities (Mwapaura et al., 2022). The government generally aspires to reduce risk or threat to children’s development and increase positive adaptation through resilience-building interventions which include mentoring talents and skills, child care; access to systems of care and child protection. However, evidence shows that programme is bewildered by a number of setbacks that limit the delivery of child protection services (Mwapaura et al., 2022). According to National Case Management System for the Development and Protection of Children in Zimbabwe (2017), child protection is a set of services and mechanisms put in place to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect, which threaten the well-being of children. This research article examines the social and economic environment in which the delivery of child protection services is located in Zimbabwe. The first section of the presentation focuses on the overview of child protection in Zimbabwe, then situational analysis, followed by theoretical framework, another section focuses on research methodology, discussion of findings and recommendations.

2. Child protection: an overview
Child protection refers to the continuum of services designed to ensure the safety and necessary support for children and families (UNICEF, 2010). Save the Children (2009) defines child protection as:

‘The measures and structures to prevent or respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation as well as violence affecting children’

Child welfare policies and initiatives target the care, health and wellbeing of children with the goal of improving child health with the public sector (Save the Children, 2009). The purpose of child welfare services is to ensure all children have access to health, education, shelter, participation, psychosocial support among several other needs.

Internationally there are legal instruments or policies that guide states who ratify them in the provision of child protection services within their nations such as United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Likewise, there is a regional instrument that also guides signatory states in the provision of Child Protection Services such as African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). In Zimbabwe, child protection systems strive to adhere to the minimum standards set by international conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), among others and regional instruments such as African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). According to Kaseke (1991), the modern child protection system in Zimbabwe was introduced in response to juvenile delinquency. However, during the course of its development the child protection system in Zimbabwe was not immune to social, economic, political and environmental problems. The main types of child maltreatment in Zimbabwe include physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect (Government of Zimbabwe, 2001a; Mzingili & Taruvinga, 2017; Mwapaura et al., 2022). A study by Chikoko et al. (2021) unravels that street children are usually sexually exploited and tend to abuse illicit drugs as a coping mechanism.
3. Situational analysis

Zimbabwe is a landlocked, lower-middle-income country located in Southern Africa with a population of 15 million (United Nations, 2019). Of this 15 million, 69% is estimated to be residing in rural areas (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2018). It is estimated that 69% of the Zimbabwean citizenry is in poverty (Energy Sector Management Assistance Program, 2020). The proportion of Zimbabweans living in extreme poverty was estimated to be two million (The World Bank, 2020). Zimbabwe is facing its worst economic crisis in a decade; it is in the second recession in 20 years, which has been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic (Mwapaura and Chikoko, 2021). The country has also experienced decades of food shortages, which have been exacerbated by poor harvest, reduced income and high food prices partially mitigated by increased humanitarian food assistance (Integreted Food Security Phase Classification, 2022).

Corruption and poorly implemented economic reforms since 2018 have triggered another cycle of hyperinflation, eroding the capacity of the already fragile public health, education and social protection systems on which the majority of the population depends (The World Bank, 2020). The recently created local currency has been successively devalued, with inflation officially reaching 838 per cent in July 2020.14. A significant proportion of the country’s population has migrated to neighbouring countries such as South Africa, Botswana and Namibia, and overseas to the UK, Australia, Canada and the U.S, among others. This diaspora is an important source of remittances which amount to 10 per cent of the country’s foreign currency receipts (World Bank, 2018). Corruption has negative influence on health, water or sanitation services, education which are important to child protection efforts in the country.

Zimbabwe ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 (Government of Zimbabwe, 2001; UNICEF, 2008). The Government of Zimbabwe under the Ministry of Public, Labor and Social Welfare under the Department of Social Development which is now known as the Department of Social Development as the name was recently changed as the sole provider of child protection services (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020). The Department of Social Development serves as the government arm with the overall statutory mandate for child protection and safeguarding. The Children’s Act (Chapter 5:06) notes that a child is a person under the age of sixteen years and includes an infant. The Department of Social Development is the one which registers, regulates and coordinates all non-governmental organisations, government ministries and any other person who indulges in issues to do with child protection. According to the National Case Management System for the Welfare and Protection of Children in Zimbabwe (2017), child Protection services refer to a set of services and mechanisms put in place to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect, which threaten the well-being of children.

Child protection services that are offered by the department of social development include advocating for children’s rights, dealing with juveniles, linking orphans with resources, protecting all children from harm, ensuring the safety of children and many others (National Case Management System for the Welfare and Protection of Children in Zimbabwe, 2017). The duty of Non-Governmental Organisations is to reinforce the efforts of the government thus they stand guided by the government of Zimbabwe. The politico and socioeconomic challenges facing Zimbabwe have obstructed the country’s child welfare standards. These challenges include inflation, low staff capacity, policy inconsistencies, insufficient funding, corruption, HIV/AIDS, natural disasters, child poverty among other challenges. As a result, these challenges compel for effective interventions from multiple bodies in an effort to combat them.

4. Human rights based approach (HRBA)

The study is informed by the human rights perspective which is most appropriate because it views children as rights holders who have legal entitlements. The central focus of the human rights perspective is the recognition that unequal power relations and social exclusion deny people their human rights and keep them in poverty hence the plausibility of this perspective to assist in assessing the capabilities of children and government (duty bearers) and development of
appropriate strategies to build capacities as it puts a strong emphasis on the children (margin-
alised group). PLANET is an acronym that summaries the basic tenets of human rights approach (Sida, 2021). Table 1 illustrates components of human rights approach.

As shown above, PLANET means participation, links to human rights, accountability, non-
discrimination, empowerment, transparency (Sida, 2021). In this study, participation is the recog-
nition that children should have active and meaningful involvement in decision-making process.
Links to human rights refer to ways provision from international legal instruments are utilised to
advance child protection goals. Accountability refers to analysis on whether duty bearers (government) have knowledge, mandate, resources and willingness to achieve their human rights obliga-
tions. Non-discrimination means a closer look on whether rights holders (children) are taken into
account in the design of child protection services in Zimbabwe. Empowerment means interrogation
on the capacity of duty bearers (government) to fulfill their obligation and rights holders’ (children)
to claim their human rights. Transparency refers to checking whether the information about child
services provision in Zimbabwe is available in an accessible way to all stakeholders.

We adopted ideological position in this case children have the same general human rights as
adults and also specific rights that recognise their special need. Among the first important
international legislation to adopt this framework is the Convention on the Rights of the Child
(CRC) which sets out the rights that must be realised for children to develop their full potential.
Based on the above, we argue that the human rights perspective exuberate it relevance in
unpacking the present socioeconomic challenges affecting child services in Zimbabwe. In this
study, child protection system should be seen as consisting of the child as an individual and as
a member of a family or community, with rights and responsibilities appropriate to his or her age
as well as stage of development. Therefore, by recognising children's rights in this way, the human
rights perspective is advantageous because it sets the focus on the whole child. This directly links
with child protection system as it has certain structures, functions, and capacities, among other
components that have been assembled in relation to a set of child protection goals such as human
rights (Save the Children, 2009; UNICEF 2008). On the other hand, legislation alone does not reduce
issues such as discrimination as there is need to work harder at changing attitudes.

5. Research methodology
This study, in line with its focus, made use of a qualitative phenomenological design.
Phenomenology is the study of people’s views on a particular phenomenon (Willis, 2007), and
the focus is on understanding from the standpoint of participants (Willis, 2007). The use of
a phenomenological design helped researchers to solicit the experiences of participants (registered
social workers) on child protection services in Zimbabwe and its interface with the changing social
and economic environment within government departments. This was meant to contribute to the
understanding of many challenges faced by children and child protection systems in Zimbabwe
population.

The study also utilised the qualitative documentary analysis to supplement the interviews of six
(6) key informants that is, experienced social workers from the Departments of Social Development
and Health. Document analysis is a qualitative method of reviewing documents to assess an
appraisal theme (Creswell, 2009). Six participants were chosen because these were the people
who held important positions hence, “key informants” (Morse, 1994). Despite the limitation of the
small number of participants, the researchers managed to collect data and reach a point of
saturation. According to Faulkner and Trotter (2017), data saturation refers to a point in the
research process when there is no discovery of new data from data collection or analysis, and
when researchers reach this point, it is a clear sign that data collection may stop.

As a qualitative sampling technique purposive sampling is highly beneficial because of its focus
on specific characteristics of a population that are of interest, in this context, in this case experts
from Department of Social Development and Health who have knowledge on provision of child
| Participation                                                                 | Links to human rights obligations                                                                 | Non-discrimination and equality                                                                 | Accountability                                                                                     | Empowerment                                                                                      | Transparency                                                                                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| In and access to decision making process. Is there active and meaningful participation of rights holders? | How are the human rights standards from treaties, laws and recommendations used to define and advance services? What are the human rights obligations for states or duty bearers that ratify these instruments? | Is there equal access to decision making process? Are there guarantees that those in similar circumstances are dealt with equally in law and practice? | Do duty bearers have knowledge, mandate, resources and willingness to achieve their human rights obligations? | Have the rights holders been taken into account and prioritised in service delivery? | Is information about intervention available in an accessible way to all stakeholders? |
protection services in Zimbabwe. Considering purposive sampling involves direct participants in the case and created based on the judgment of the researchers, it can be prone to researcher bias. Purposive sampling has been used similarly on studies related to child protection by (Chikoko et al., 2021).

To ensure a fairly efficient triangulation process, document analysis and informant interviews were the two methods utilised in the data collection process. Triangulation is typically conducted by using various methods to verify or enrich data that is being collected (Creswell, 2009). The government documents analysed included but not limited to, Constitution of Zimbabwe, Children Act, National Orphan Care Policy, National Case Management Operational Manual, and National Development Strategy among others. Some of the key questions include, what are some of the examples of child protection services in Zimbabwe? What are the challenges encountered in delivery of child protection services in Zimbabwe? What are some of the recommendations that you can suggest that can improve delivery of child protection services in Zimbabwe?

Document analysis became the most appropriate because of its efficient and effective way of reaching out to data that gives particular worlds view. The researchers shared Bowen’s (2009, p. 31) ideas about documentary analysis who postulates that documents are manageable and practical resources that provide the researcher with data without traversing the field site. The research process was augmented by the deployment of the MaxQDA, a computer based application used in qualitative data analysis. The following steps were followed in conducting a qualitative document analysis using MaxQDA, definition of research question; collection and sampling of data; transcription of interview data, important parts of document; developing code book, coding, analysing data; interpretation and presentation of findings. The researchers worked collaboratively as a team in analysing the data. However, the study acknowledges the limitations associated with the utilisation of a limited scope of methods but maintain the argument that field work engagements are not restricted to a given set but a multifarious applications which include the processes we did in this regard. In the final analysis, data that was collected and generated was transformed into intelligent scholarly information, hence, the study contributes to the debates on child protection.

5.1. Ethical considerations
This section describes the process of adhering to ethical principles in conducting research. The restricted our research methodological and epistemological engagements to very few research participants as indicated above as a way of responding to the COVID-19. Considering this research involved interaction with participants through interviews several considerations were adopted to reduce risks of harm (Creswell, 2009). Although there was 50% decongestion of government offices, the researchers sought for permission from the Department of Social Development, and then finally engaged the key informants for consent. Consultation was also made to African Independent Ethics Committee (African Social Work Network). The participants were furnished with details of research purpose so that they can decide for themselves whether to participate or not. The copy of this research was to be availed to the Child Protection Section of the Department of Social Development since it has bearing on the welfare of children all children in Zimbabwe.

6. Research findings
The child protection field-based evidence raised intriguing insights that point to new trends, developments and nuances in child welfare. The sections below gaze at the variety of dimensions that affect efficient and effective child protection service provision in Zimbabwe.

6.1. Policy inconsistency
The study findings show that child protection service delivery remain constricted and one of the major factors has been the policy and legislative inconsistencies. The review of child protection literature points to Shangwa and Mathende (2019) who postulate that child protection in Zimbabwe is governed by a number of national, regional and international statutory and policy
framework documents which create a state of inconsistence and disorientation. Our observation points to the example of the constitution of Zimbabwe (Amendment No 20 Act of 2013) which defines a child as a boy or girl under the age of 18 years while the Children’s Act (Chapter 5:06) defines a child as a person under the age of 16 years and includes an infant. This therefore poses as a challenge to the delivery of child protection services as it makes it difficult to understand who exactly is liable to receive child protection services.

Analysis of government documents from Department of Social Development showed inconsistent monetary policies which do not give a solid direction in terms of channeling resources to this social protection programming enclave. Therefore, from the same documents it can be noted that child protection fails to provide child protection service delivery due to lack of material resources. This challenge is mostly affecting the NGOs that are in child welfare and one of the key informant had this to say:

‘Currently the monetary policies that have been introduced since 2018 are many and inconsistent. In 2018, one statutory instrument was gazetted in the state press that banned the use of United States Dollar (USD) of which most NGO’s receive funding in USD. It meant that they had to convert it. Later on there was authorization of Nostro account use for USD. Recently another statutory instrument 96/20 was implemented which allowed use of USD but trading on the official current bank rate. From that time USD was now auctioned but it tended to have a lower rate than the one offered on the black market’. (Key Informant 1)

Weighing in on the same issue another key informant had this to say:

‘Such state of affairs have scared away most donors since they cannot risk their funding in a country where they are not sure what will happen next because policies are always changing and some withdrew their funding. Some suppliers needed USD payments of which NGO’s were told to abide by the law of using the local currency. As a way forward, the government needs to have consistent monetary policies to avoid scaring away of potential donors.’ (Key Informant 2)

Analysis of government documents from Department of Social Development showed that this restricted purchasing of other essential items for use in child protection activities and it hampered service delivery.

6.2. Corruption

The research findings show that corruption is one of the challenges affecting child protection service delivery in Zimbabwe. Corruption can be defined as being a form of dishonesty or criminal offense undertaken by a person or organization entrusted with a position of authority, to acquire illicit benefit or abuse power for one’s private gain. Analysis of National Press Websites and key informant interviews showed that corruption cannot be ignored among the economic challenges affecting the delivery of child protection services in Zimbabwe. Therefore, from the same websites it can be noted that corruption may include many activities including bribery and embezzlement of funds. Analysis of government documents from Department of Social Development showed that many organizations and the top child protection officers channel the child protection funds to their own personal benefit. An example of the documents is the one concerning the whistle blown by community members on Childline on their corrupt practices this was even published on social media platform on (15 March 2020). An article in NewsDay (2020) reads, “Corruption has become a grave issue in Zimbabwe with government doing little to curb the scourge.”

Analysis of key informant interviews showed that labour force within the agencies that offer child protection services has greatly hindered the provision of services either through embezzlement of funds or misappropriation of funds. Key informant 2 had this to say:

‘Do you recall that headline in the Herald (local state own newspaper) around 2019, the Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare was arrested on alleged corruption
activities. The same ministry caters for the welfare of children under the Department of Social Development. These corrupt tendencies slow down service delivery of child protection as funds meant to benefit children will be unavailable hence the unavailability of resources’. (Key Informant 3)

Another informant labored to explain the same issue and had this to say:

‘Such practices have greatly affected negatively the delivery of child protection services. Such amount of money could have been channeled towards initiatives such as Basic Education Assistance Module thereby helping children who are in need of educational assistance. In this regard, it is imperative to note that, corruption affects the delivery of child protection services in Zimbabwe.’ (Key Informant 4)

6.3. COVID-19 pandemic and child protection in Zimbabwe

The research findings show that COVID-19 pandemic has also affected child protection service delivery in Zimbabwe. A plethora of COVID-19 studies were commission but focused on the virology, epidemiology and clinical aspects of the virus. Our literature review and documentary analysis show a dearth of social science scholarship more so on the implications of the pandemic on child protection. The study established that the COVID-19 lockdown regulations impacted negatively on child protection service delivery. Documents indicated that most funding was channeled toward fighting the deadly global pandemic while Non-Governmental Organisations operations were limited due to the WHO regulations and requirements to work from home, limit social interactions and protect the vulnerable. One government functionary said:

‘The government when the pandemic reached alarming levels closed down most offices around the country and with the extreme lockdown that was initiated cases involving children could not be brought to the responsible offices of which other schools of thought have alleged that more child abuse cases have occurred during the imposed lockdown and they go unreported because the child protection cluster members mostly were biased towards COVID-19 pandemic. During COVID-19 the department mainly focused on the quarantine centers and the prevention of the deadly virus thus child protection services were hampered as most probation officers were taken to provide services such as psycho-social support to returnees at the expense of children’. (Key Informant 5)

Analysis of government documents from Department of Social Development showed that the dilemma governments face as the key stakeholders in safeguarding the interests of the vulnerable was around the issues of how to balance between serving the people from COVID-19 or and from hunger and starvation. From the documents it can also be noted that, non-governmental organizations which dealt with child protection issues were not spared by the compulsory halting of business operations. Therefore, we argue that while the COVID-19 pandemic was a medical scourge to others, it was both a medical and a poverty threat to Zimbabwean children in vulnerability. COVID-19 pandemic contributed to pushing down child protection systems and mechanisms, hence, children were left in the margins.

6.4. Lack of capacity of department of social development (DSD)

Findings from the research noted that lack of capacity of DSD has negatively impacted the delivery of child protection services in Zimbabwe. The main issues are shown below.

6.4.1. Limited funding

Analysis of government documents from Department of Social Development showed that poor human resources and physical resources among child protection service organizations in Zimbabwe also affect the smooth delivery of better services to children. As a result of limited funding, child protection institution has reduced the number of employees (service providers) at the expense of quality service provision in Zimbabwe. A capacity and Institutional assessment of the department of social services revealed that; the ratio of children to social workers was 49,587:1
in 2018 which is a huge caseload compared with other countries in the region (Wyatt et al., 2010). Distressed by such state of affairs, a key informant had his to say:

‘A limited staff capacity has led to high caseloads and lack of specialization within the field of child protection. A good example is that of the Department of Social Development, which employs a maximum of three social workers in each district; however these officers provide services to different clientele groups which include the elderly, persons with disabilities, war veterans, and children. From this setup, specialization is limited and responses rate is also limited since employee capacity is limited. In addition to that, lack of physical resources like, computers inhibits modern response to cases and follow ups, to the extent that, a number of district Social Development offices lacks data bases for children in their respective districts.’ (Key Informant 6)

According to Wyatt et al. (2010), the shortage of physical resources such as transport, office equipment and other supplies also affects the delivery of child protection services like, home visits, physical vulnerability assessments, removing children from abusive environments to places of safety among others. In this regard, limited human and physical due to economic meltdown affects negatively the smooth delivery of child protection services in Zimbabwe.

6.4.2. The “Drain of the brain” of child protection
Analysis of government documents from Department of Social Development and key informant responses showed that effective child protection services delivery in Zimbabwe is affected by what we define as brain drain of child protection. The Zimbabwean socioeconomic environment created a trend in which qualified professionals social workers and health personnel leave the country to seek employment in different parts of the world (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020). Chikanda (2005) highlighted in his study that the magnitude and trend of brain drain had reached unacceptable and unsuitable levels in Zimbabwe. Evidence has been overwhelming pointing the sluggish service delivery in the Departments of Social Development, Health and NGOS due to non-availability of experts, which according to (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020) is pegged at 40% or below. An interview with a Probation Officer brought out the following:

‘With less professionals more children are left vulnerable when it comes to child protection or are being left in the hands of individuals that have little to no knowledge of child protection services. Social workers are the appropriately trained personnel to deliver child protection services the brain drain due to high levels of inflation affects the delivery of child protection services’.

Thus it can be seen that brain drain due to economic hardships has affected the delivery of child protection services in Zimbabwe to a greater extent.

6.4.3. Low recruitment of social workers
Analysis of government documents from Department of Social Development showed that another socio-economic challenge affecting child protection service delivery is the low recruitment of social workers or probation officers. According to the Social Workers Act (Chapter, 27:21), a probation officer is a social worker registered with the Social Workers Council of Zimbabwe (Government of Zimbabwe, 2001b). The Department of Social Development employs at most two probation officers per each district of which the districts are very huge for two officers. For example Harare Province is serviced by three districts each with two probation officers thus the worker per capita ratio stands at 1:50 000 which is abnormal. According to Wyatt et al. (2010), Zimbabwe social Development system has a huge case load and even by the most conservative estimates, its professional staffing is wildly out of alignment with that of other countries in the region therefore the lack of adequate numbers of professional personnel impedes effective implementation and monitoring of child protection legislation. The government should increase the number of probation officers per district so as to ease the work load experienced by current Probation Officers.
6.4.4. Cultural dynamics
Analysis of government documents from Department of Social Development showed that
dynamics in culture has led to resistance and lack of confidence in existing child protection
systems and this has also hindered the delivery of child protection services in Zimbabwe. Abney
and Gunn (1993) define culture as a set of beliefs attitudes, values and standards of behavior
which are passed from one generation to the next. It is what everybody knows. It includes
language, world view, dress, food, styles of communication, and notions of wellness, healing
techniques, child-rearing patterns and self-identity. A key informant had this to say:

‘Working with resistant, hostile and non-compliant parents is a key feature in child protection
work in Zimbabwe. Violence and resistance from parents towards child care and protection
workers have negatively affected the safety and well-being of both staff and child clients in
Zimbabwe.’ (Key Informant 5)

6.4.5. High levels of poverty
We acknowledge the relativity of the conceptualisation of poverty and that it is settle at a single
poverty index. In this research we adopted (Royce, 2009) definition of poverty that it transcends
issues of material deprivation and argue from the ZimStat (2018) survey that state that 89% of the
population of Zimbabwe survive under the poverty datum line and this has incapacitated the
people to seek child protection services. Statistics indicate that an estimated 1.5 million house-
holds in Zimbabwe are extremely poor and food insecure. One in three of the children in these
households suffer from chronic malnutrition. As a result, many children live in difficult circum-
stances where they cannot afford and access social services. We concur with Todaro and Smith
(2012) in that high levels of poverty are a key and common characteristic of developing economies
but for Zimbabwe it pushed the vulnerable children further away from child protection mech-
anisms. Efforts of government and non-governmental organisations has been outweighed by abso-
late poverty. Related to the above discussion is the aspect of child abuse. Our research established
that cases of child abuse went on a resurgence as the perpetrators went away undetected.
Referring to the rural enclave, one informant had this to say about poverty:

‘Rural populations in Zimbabwe lacks information on where and how to access child protection
services like Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM), Assisted Medical Treatment Orders
(AMTOs), hence this inhibits the delivery of child protection services in Zimbabwe. Despite
efforts by the government of Zimbabwe, to provide AMTOs to vulnerable children poverty still
inhibits access to medical services in that, some children lacks transport money to reach
essential child protection services’. (Key Informant 4)

Weakened child protection services have downward effects of having unsupported and unsuper-
vised child headed families. We noted that child headed households under the circumstances
become the “breeding ground” for child marriages, child labour, gender based violence, sexual
exploitation that equally breed more poverty.

6.4.6. When a multifaceted approach point to poor coordination
Analysis of government documents from Department of Social Development showed established
that the area of child protection in Zimbabwe is characterised by poor coordination among key
stakeholders in government and non-governmental organisations. The multifaceted model
requires active participation and coordination of key stakeholders in child protection however
our observation was that in practice it was only the Department of Social Development which
was into Case Management. As a result, the Department was overwhelmed, hence, children could
not access the services indented for them. A key informant highlighted that despite the mandate
given to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education of reporting concerns for potential abuse,
few cases were reported. Corroborative evidence was provided by a member of one of the
functional child protection committee (CPC) who said:
According to the Department of Social Development Annual report of 2018, only 22% of child protection cases were reported by other key ministries in child Development. Coordination in Zimbabwe is fragmented, complex and lacks strategy and buy-in from all stakeholders and the high number of groups and meetings calls for rationalization and contributes to a meeting and coordination fatigue among Child protection Service Organisations. (Key Informant 6)

Therefore, field-based evidence refute the general notion that when a multifaceted approach is deployed to manage a crisis, good results harvested. We project a view that out of the plurality of organisations and institutions meant for child protection, only a few were playing their part. Others were only included in the “multi-dimensional” approach in name as working limits and parameters were not clear.

6.4.7. Shortage of resources

Analysis of government documents from Department of Social Development indicated that child protection service delivery in Zimbabwe is mainly affected by the shortage of financial resources. According to Kaseke (1993), inadequate finances can have a big impact on duty bearers of child protection services in Zimbabwe. Key informant 6 had this to say:

‘Child protection officers and Child protection committees face a big challenge of inadequate finances and motivation to go far with some case. This is so because they have limited resources for example transport shortages to follow up cases or to host enough sensitizing meetings hence posing a big challenge on the delivery of child protection services. Failure of having enough of these sensitization meetings for example on parenting and child protection poignantly affects the child which greatly affects the delivery of child protection services in Zimbabwe’. (Key Informant 6)

Shortages of financial resources also exist in foster homes and rehabilitation centers. Kaseke (1993), due to economic challenges going through Zimbabwe, it is becoming difficult for foster parents to volunteer in taking in more children because of the unavailability of food, clothing, proper shelter and other needs and this therefore poses a great challenge on children facing abuse or other challenges as they can no longer be removed from abusive environments due to the shortage of financial resources which greatly affects the delivery of child protection services in Zimbabwe. However a suggested solution to shortage of financial resources can be through starting some income generating projects in Child protection institutions so as help solve the problem of shortage of funds and material resources.

7. Discussion and synthesis

As shown in the findings above, the inconsistencies in legislative provisions when it comes to children in Zimbabwe and feeble monetary policies pose as a challenge to the delivery of child protection services as it makes it difficult to understand who exactly is liable to receive child protection services. Zimbabwe’s promulgated Acts of parliament are instituted with some disparities such as on the clear cut definition of a child between the Children’s Act Chapter (5:06) and the Constitution Amendment Act Number 20 (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013). This has posed inconveniences between different agencies and difficulties in protecting children from various forms of abuse such as child labour, sexual abuse and early child marriages. For example, the Labour Relations Act allows children less than 18 years to work, whilst the minimum standards set by the UNCRP are against child labor. As a result, it compromises child rights movements by child commissions such as Child Protection Society and Childline. According to SOS Children’s Villages International (2014), the legislative and policies in Zimbabwe are quite adequate to be able to cater for children. However, the problem of disparities, inadequate resourcing and implementation remain a major challenge. There is therefore the need for the laws of the country to be aligned to the dictates of the current Constitution, cultural basis and the international children rights frameworks, particularly the UN Guidelines. This is because the Constitution adopted in May 2013, includes provisions of promoting and protecting the rights of children in line with the Convention.
From the findings, corruption is among the economic challenges affecting the delivery of child protection services in Zimbabwe. Labour force within the agencies that offer child protection services have greatly hindered the provision of services either through embezzlement of funds or misappropriation of funds. Corruption in Child Protection Services illustrate a compromised system. The compromised child protection system is evident as there is corruption. In cases of corruption, UNICEF (2008), in the discussion of child protection strategy and accountability in child protection systems, highlights three applications of accountability, financial accountability, performance accountability, and political or democratic accountability, each of which is relevant to Zimbabwean child protection systems. Institutions such as Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission that have the mandate and resources to monitor children’s rights and is able to receive, investigate and address complaints by children in a child-sensitive manner are encouraged to address corruptions issues to ensure smooth delivery of child protection services in Zimbabwe.

Another challenge affecting delivery of child protection services in Zimbabwe is that due to the prevailing situation more and more professionals are leaving the country to seek employment in different parts of the world. Brain drain in Child Protection Services illustrates a compromised system. The compromised child protection system is evident as there is brain drain. There is need for capacity that is, facilities, material resources, skilled personnel, and funding needed to operate the child Development system and these capacities have to be allocated in relation to the purpose of the system (UNICEF, 2010).

Currently the pandemic that has bedeviled the whole world is one of the major challenges that has faced the effective delivery of child protection services. As the systems are interconnected, during COVID-19 the department mainly focused on the quarantine centers and the prevention of the deadly virus thus child protection services were hampered as most probation officers were taken to provide services such as psycho-social support to returnees at the expense of children. This interdependence of systems is also evident as many non-governmental organizations which deal which deal with child protection issues were forced to halt business and consider working from home which hampered effective delivery of child protection services. Thus the government should balance between saving people from the pandemic and also making sure child protection services are prioritised so as to reach the state of homeostasis. This is mainly because the efforts to contain the disease such as movement restrictions and school closures have proven to expose children to increased risks of violence including maltreatment, gender-based violence and sexual exploitation particularly those children already living in violent or dysfunctional family situations. Recent anecdotal evidence from organizations such as MUSASA project, for instance, points to a significant rise in cases of domestic violence against women and girls. This is mainly because these control measures do not necessarily account for the gender-specific needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls (OCHA, 2020). Thus, the government has a central role to play to ensure that COVID-19 prevention and response plans integrate age appropriate and gender sensitive measures to protect all children from violence, neglect and abuse. Child protection services and workers must be designated as essential and resourced accordingly. Thus, the government should train health, education and child services staff on COVID-19 related child protection risks, including on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and how to safely report concerns (UNICEF, 2020).

Poor human resources and physical resources among child protection service organisations in Zimbabwe also affect the smooth delivery of better services to children. Child poverty refers to the state of children living in poverty and applies to children from poor families or orphans being raised with limited or in some cases absent, state resources (UNICEF, 2008). Children that fail to meet the minimum acceptable standard of the nation where that child lives are said to be poor in developing countries, these standards are low and when combined with the increased number of orphans the effects are more extreme. An estimated 385 million children live in extreme poverty (UNICEF, 2010). Child poverty is caused by several factors which include adult poverty, government policies, and lack of education, unemployment, social services, disabilities and discrimination. Child poverty
can be ended by prioritizing the social protection programs that have the greatest benefits for children and these include food, education and health. There is a need to increase budget allocations and human resources for child services. As a result of limited funding, child protection system has reduced the number of employees (service providers) at the expense of quality service provision in Zimbabwe. A limited staff capacity has led to high caseloads and lack of specialization within the field of child protection hence systems are experiencing an imbalance in attempting to reach their goals. This lack of capacity illustrate a compromised system. The compromised child protection system is evident as there is poor human resources and physical resources among child protection service organisations in Zimbabwe also affect the smooth delivery of better services to children.

The government of Zimbabwe austerity neoliberal measure to cut the wage bill has severely reduced the social service workforce (Wyatt et al., 2010). The strategy entails the implementation of strict measures such as severe cuts on social expenditures and reduction of the civil service wage bill (Muchacha et al., 2016). As a result, social workers are operating with limited essential resources such as vehicles, office space and stationery which are critical for social workers to perform their duties (Wyatt et al., 2010). For example, the shortage of vehicles within the child protection departments have resulted in client service delays especially in rural areas since social work also requires child protection officers to go out to court cases, family visits and health assessments for children (Hampson & Kaseke, 1987). Henceforth, this hinders intensive intervention towards children’s developmental needs for example, early identification of vulnerability, child participation, risk assessments at home visits and comprehensive psychosocial assessments which all require immense attention. Therefore, the government should reconsider its neoliberal approach on social services and start to consider child protection in national budget allocations.

Zimbabwe is a highly patriarchal society strongly bonded by the “Ubuntu philosophy” where children are victims of abuse (Sibanda, 2011). A good example is that of religious beliefs and practices in Mashonaland province which promote child marriages (Dzimiri & Chikunda, 2017). Advocating against such practices is a potential threat to the society since the practice is condoned by some religion sects such as the Johane Marange Apostolic sect, which is believed to constitute 1.2 million of the country’s population (Sibanda, 2011). Formal adoption and institutional care for “children in need of care” are practices that are foreign to the African majority, where fostering and informal adoption by family and kin rather than strangers are the rule (Powell et al., 1994). Contrary to the Government of Zimbabwe (2013) which stipulates that all children belong to the state, Zimbabwean “Ubuntu” concept articulate that, children belongs to the male counterparts hence, Social workers often suffer resistance in their efforts to remove children from abusive environments to places of safety. Despite the fact that, Children’s Act chapter (5:06), section (14), mandated Social workers to remove children and young persons from abusive environments to places of safety, resistance due to cultural dynamics remains a threat in the delivery of child protection services in Zimbabwe.

According to Muzingili and Taruvinga (2017), they concluded from their research that children’s rights are violated as a result of culture. In some cultures there are cases of, childhood ends through rites of passage despite how old an individual might be therefore this means that rites of passage can be done before a child reaches the child of 18, after rites of passage girls and boys are then expected to marry and perform adult chores. This therefore possess threat to the delivery of child protection services as the children’s rights would be violated by exposing them to child marriages. It is also quite difficult to protect such children since they would believe this is the right thing to do and the people of Zimbabwe are still practicing ancient cultural beliefs, overlooking the laws of children’s rights. For an example members of select apostolic sects in Zimbabwe do not believe in sending children to school as part of their religion therefore educating these individuals about a child’s right to education can prove to be difficult as it conflicts with their religious beliefs. In this light it can be seen that cultural beliefs can pose as a challenge to the delivery of child protection services in Zimbabwe.
8. Conclusion
The major conclusion drawn from the research themes was that child protection delivery services in Zimbabwe has been weighed down by a number socioeconomic factors. Drawing from the theoretical framework which guided the study, the socioeconomic environment and an uncoordinated multi sectional approach crippled the Zimbabwean protection delivery system. With all the legislative and policy guidelines, the Zimbabwean child protection delivery systems was supposed to be very effective but evidence have shown that, good service delivery requires more than drafting of laws and policies. More so with the novel coronavirus, the child protection delivery system was thrown into disarray that drove vulnerable children into the margins. Guided by human rights perspective, the study managed to put across debates about child protection service delivery in the context of a developing economy. The research further argues for the provision of and channeling more resources into social protection programming in Zimbabwe as highlighted below.

9. Recommendations
Suggestive measures to improve the delivery of child welfare services in Zimbabwe raised in this research paper include the following chronologised points:

9.1. Policy revisions
The study recommends that the Zimbabwean government revise and restructure legal and policy frameworks meant to guarantee a protective environment for children. The government should revise and create new frameworks along with the cultural trends such as the Zunde raManbo system and combine with the Sustainable Development Goals and provide adequate resources for social protection to implement these laws.

9.2. Decentralisation of child welfare systems
The study also recommends that the decentralisation of child welfare services be used as a measure to improve the delivery of child welfare services in Zimbabwe. Decentralisation of child welfare services enables investigation, assessment and intervention of various cases of child abuse and neglect. Hence decentralisation of child welfare services is essential in improving the delivery of child welfare services in Zimbabwe.

9.3. Adhering to the constitutes of COVID-19
Given the changing social structures and trends posed by the current COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need to adhere to the safety precautions of the disease whilst employing adequate cautious strategies for the welfare of children. The government together with non-governmental organizations should promote information sharing on referral and other support services available for children by working with service providers. In addition, children, particularly adolescents, should be engaged in assessing how COVID-19 affects them differently to inform programming and advocacy. Of particular concern are interim care centers, child-headed households and foster family which child protection services should support financially, emotionally and capacitate.

9.4. Advocacy
To improve service delivery of child welfare in Zimbabwe there is a need to advocate for greater investment in social protection and support government efforts to track and monitor progress on child poverty reduction. There is a need to educate people about child protection services and removal of barriers such as bureaucratic processes about entitlements and programs. Discrimination against the most vulnerable people including those who receive social protection should be stopped in order to improve service delivery of child welfare in Zimbabwe.

9.5. Resource allocations
To improve the child welfare service delivery in Zimbabwe, it is paramount to provide adequate funds to the child welfare systems. Insufficient funding within the child protection services contributes to the poor service delivery within the department. Thus, supply needed resources to the department of social welfare especially the Department of child welfare. The allocation of
resources for the social sector needs to reflect the centrality of the social sector in improving the quality of life and delivery of child welfare services. This will serve to improve child welfare delivery as the children will receive the immediate cautious attention they require.

9.6. Improvements in the working conditions
Considering Zimbabwe has been facing a surge of migrations of professional and reliable social workers to other countries for economic reasons, there is need for the Government of Zimbabwe to ensure the recruitment of social workers and capacitating them through commensurate remuneration packages.

9.7. Promotion of child rights
Awareness campaigns and psych educative counselling services can be utilized as means to improve the child welfare service work. In this case awareness campaigns can be used as a measure of socio-cultural factors that affect delivery of child welfare services. Therefore, child welfare delivery can be improved by simply utilizing awareness campaigns and psych educative counselling services to provide realization of certain social, cultural, religious practices.

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