

Family strengthening programme: A sustainable social protection intervention for vulnerable children and families in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study appraised the family strengthening programme of the SOS Children's Villages Nigeria and places its best practice, challenges and lessons in the public domain. Focus Group Discussion [FGD] was conducted with 48 families who were programme beneficiaries for a period of 5 years. Six stakeholders that were part of the programme development and implementation were also interviewed separately. Best practice as found from the study is the role of community stakeholders in identifying vulnerable families within their community and helping such families to achieve programme objectives using the Family Development Plan [FDP]. Challenges and key lessons are presented in the study findings. The study recommends that SDGs programmes targeted at vulnerable families must identify the need for community stakeholders in programme intervention. This should be well-thought-out in programme design, implementation and evaluation. Sustainable development programmes for vulnerable families should therefore adopt a need-based intervention rather than service count.

Keywords: Family strengthening programme, SDGs, social protection, SOS Children's Villages Nigeria, vulnerable children.

Introduction

Nigeria is the largest economy in West Africa and also the most populous country in Africa but with a huge number of poor families (Bangboye et al, 2016; Gert and Kharas, 2018; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2017). Family poverty in Nigeria is a leading cause of child vulnerability manifesting in the forms of child trafficking, child abuse, illegal child adoption, alternative child care placements, child labour and increase in out-of-school children (Abdullahi, 2020; Magahi, 2015; Nnama-Okechukwu and Okoye, 2019; Nwaolikpe, 2018). Compounding these issues is the growing number of children who have lost parental care or at the risk of losing parental care and are cared for in child-headed households; this suggests the need for social protection by means of family strengthening programmes to empower families to play their role (Kah, 2015; Nnama-Okechukwu, Agwu and Okoye, 2020). Social protection programmes include policies and programme interventions that provide a sustainable path to improving the well-being of people (Astorino, Amaral, Banth, and Salles, 2016). Such improvement can be targeted to various aspects of family living such as

support for vulnerable children, economic generating activities for poor families and capacity building for effective family empowerment.

Effective family strengthening programme had been found in studies provide a safety net for vulnerable children in a family environment, prevent alternative child care placement and empower families to provide adequate care for children within their community (Isaacs, Roman and Shazly, 2018; Nnama-Okechukwu and Okoye, 2019; Ritcher et al, 2009; Victor, 2019). Field experiences by the researchers as social workers and coordinators in programme design, implementation and evaluation revealed that a successful family strengthening programme provides evidence to a sustainable social protection programme for vulnerable families. This claim had been supported by studies in Nigeria and other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa where vulnerable families have been empowered through various capacity building on income-generating activities, parenting skills training and public health issues (Adelakan, Iluma, Godspower, Peter 2017; Ofoaha and Saidu, 2018; Nnama-Okechukwu et al, 2019; Schola, 2015; Sibomana and Shuwla, 2016).

Families are vulnerable when they are economically deprived, lack basic/essential needs and have restricted knowledge on child's rights and effective parenting care practices (Brimelow, 2013; Okoye, 2011; Save the Children, 2016; SOS Children's Villages International, 2015). Family strengthening thus as a social protection programme has the potential of building the capacity of vulnerable families through knowledge sharing, provision of basic needs and economic empowerment. This is most effective when community leaders and stakeholders are involved in programme design, implementation and evaluation as this provide the means by which community stakeholders come face-to-face with challenges, best practices and lessons in family strengthening programme intervention for a sustainable future (Orte, Brage, Amer and Barceio, 2019; Schola, 2015). Studies on lessons learnt and best practices in family strengthening programmes revealed that the involvement of community leaders, community members and other community-based organizations as part of stakeholders in programme intervention is vital in achieving programme targets and goals (Abubakari, Sadix & Keisan, 2014; Okeke-Ogbuakor, Gray & Stead, 2018; Orte, et al, 2019). Rithcer et al (2009) aver that successful family strengthening programme activities must provide access to essential services, adopt a family-centered approach in service delivery, build efforts to economically strengthen families, promote systematic response on which local initiatives can build and more importantly must have in place social welfare services to respond and prevent any family-based negative input.

The family strengthening programme intervention therefore through the involvement of community stakeholders is more flexible in terms of working with programme beneficiaries and administrators as it adopts a need-based intervention approach rather than service count (Ksoll, Lilledor, Lonborg and Rasmuswn, 2016; Musansakilwa, Tembo, Zula and Wamaluma, 2017). The need-based intervention approach ensures that programme beneficiaries receive support based on identified family needs rather than imposition of services from the administrators. This means that family choices need to be respected and stakeholders working with families during programme interventions need to play the role of a guide while strengthening the capacity of the

family. This promotes the path for sustainability, monitors objectives through the cooperation of community stakeholders and addresses the need for quality social welfare services for vulnerable children and families. According to Jones and Holmes (2010), the existence of successful and well-implemented social protection can play an important role in strengthening access to and demand for quality basic social welfare services for vulnerable families as this promotes the family as a sure safety net for children in need of care and protection.

It is worthy to note that Non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental agencies in Nigeria had continued to invest resources to implement programmes to develop social protection within communities with the aim of empowering families to adequately care for their children (Eneh, Nnama-Okechukwu, Uzuegbu, and Okoye, 2017). However, most interventions are not coordinated and sustainable because programme administrators often count services rendered to beneficiaries that may not meet the needs of vulnerable recipients. Furthermore, the absence or rather non-inclusion of community stakeholders' in most family strengthening programme intervention in Nigeria makes it difficult for programmes to identify the real beneficiaries hence impact and learning is not in the public domain (Bamgboye et al, 2017; Okeke-Ogbuafor et al., 2018). This present study attempted to x-ray lessons, best practices and challenges from the family strengthening of the SOS Children's Villages Nigeria as a panacea for scalable intervention in other regions across Nigeria. The study answered the following questions: (1) how well do participants and stakeholders understand the goal of the family strengthening programme with regards to addressing child vulnerability? (2) Why involve community stakeholders in a family strengthening programme? (3) What are the challenges encountered during programme implementation?

Methodology

Study area

The study area is SOS Children's Village Programme [SOSCV] Ogun in Ogun state where the SOS Children's Villages Nigeria is implementing its programme. Ogun state is one of Nigeria's 36 states within the southwest geo-political zone of the country with a total population of 3,728,098 (National Population Commission, 2006). SOSCV Ogun is located in Owu-Ijebu in Ijebu-East Local Government Area [LGA] of Ogun state. SOS Children's Villages Nigeria operates in four locations in Nigeria, namely SOS Children's Village Programme Lagos, SOS Children's Village Programme Ogun, SOS Children's Village Programme Abuja and SOS Children's Village Programme Plateau. In these entire programme locations, SOS Children's Villages Nigeria provides two forms of programme intervention. These are the alternative child care programme with a family-based care model for children who have lost parental care and the FSP as a prevention mechanism against child abandonment for children at risk of losing parental care. SOS Children's Village Ogun programme location was chosen because the authors of this manuscript participated in the family strengthening programme design, implementation and evaluation.

Study design/participants

The study design was an explorative research design that relied on the qualitative research method. This was informed by the need to adequately capture the phases and

nuances within families. Family strengthening programme by SOSCVOP Ogun was implemented in 5 communities (Ijebu-Imushin, Ijebu-Ife, Ijebu-Itele, Ijebu-Ikija and Owu-Ijebu). These communities are located within Ijebu-East LGA of Ogun state. A total of 68 families participated in the FSP from 2010-2015. Out of the 5 communities where the FSP was implemented, 3 communities (Ijebu-Ife, Ijebu-Ikija and Owu-Ijebu) were selected to participate in the study using the hand drawing method without replacement. This was to give each community an equal opportunity of participating in the study. From the total number of families that participated, 48 families (16 families from each selected community) were purposively selected to participate in the study based on their willingness to be part of the study. The purposive sampling method was used to select participants who were programme beneficiaries from 2010-2015. The selected families were regarded as FSP beneficiaries in this study. Recruitment of FSP beneficiaries was through the CFDI [Child and Family Development Initiative], a Community Based Organization [CBO] responsible for identifying and supporting vulnerable families in the community. Efforts were made to reach those willing and ready to participate in the study.

Three CBO staff (one from each community) was purposively selected because of their level of involvement during the FSP development and implementation. A field officer at the SOS Children's Villages Ogun programme location was also purposively selected because of his involvement with families and children who participated in the FS. Two government social welfare officers within the state were purposively selected. This was due to their level of involvement in child and family welfare services at the community and state levels. These categories of study participants were regarded as FS stakeholders. Overall, the sample size for the study was

Study procedure

Focus group discussions with FSP beneficiaries and In-depth interviews with FSP stakeholders were held in different locations respectively to allow participants the opportunity to express themselves freely. The programme Director at the programme location gave the approval for the study to be conducted. Semi-structured questions with probing questions were used during the FGDs and IDIs to elicit responses from participants. These methods were more engaging and allowed participants to express themselves more through open discussions. Six focus group discussions were held in all with the FSP beneficiaries who were selected from the three communities. Two FGDs were held in the Ijebu-Ife community while four FGDs were held in the Owu-Ijebu community. The discussion sessions were conducted in Yoruba and Pidgin English language based on the choice of the study participants. In-depth interviews were conducted with CBO staff, social welfare officers and the field officer at the SOSCVOP Ogun. The Programme Director at the programme location gave the approval for the study to be conducted.

Data analysis procedure

The voice recordings were transcribed verbatim in order to retain the original thoughts of the interviewees. The transcriptions were translated to the English language and edited as the case required. The transcripts generated from each of the FGD in the two locations were read for content validity by two of the research assistants. The transcribed discussions were compared to the recorded discussions by the researchers

to ensure that the original meanings of what participants said were retained. This enabled the researchers to ensure that no information was lost during the translation. Triangulation was also used to compare responses. Triangulation refers to conforming inquiry over the same issue or theme applying different question styles or presentations in order to ensure that the correct information is stimulated.

Study themes were developed through noticed trends in the transcriptions. The final themes became (a) identifying and recruiting vulnerable families, (b) support for identified families, (c) the role of community stakeholders and social welfare in the programme. The data were presented sequentially with excerpts that capture vividly participant thoughts or expresses contrary thoughts

Results

Table Ia: Socio-demographic characteristics of study participants

Socio-demographic features	Frequency	Percentage
FSP Beneficiaries		
<i>Gender</i>		
Males	-	-
Females	48	100
Total	48	100
<i>Age</i>		
10-17years	1	2
18-25 years	-	-
26-33 years	-	-
34-41years	21	44
> 42 years	26	54
Total	48	100
<i>Status of household</i>		
Widow headed households	27	56
Grandparents headed households	20	42
Child headed households	1	2
Total	48	100
<i>Educational Qualification</i>		
No formal education	16	33
Primary education	22	46
Secondary	9	19
Diploma/ vocational certificate	1	2
Total	48	100
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
South-West	41	85
South-South	4	8
South-East	3	6
Total	48	100

Table Ib: Socio-demographic characteristics of study participants

Socio-demographic features	Frequency	Percentage
Field Officer		
<i>Gender</i>		
Males	1	100
Total	1	100
<i>Age</i>		
26-33	1	1
Total	1	100
<i>Occupation category</i>		
Formal labour	1	1
Total	1	100
Community Based Stakeholder		
<i>Gender</i>		
Males	3	100
Females	-	-
Total	3	100
<i>Age</i>		
>42	3	100
Total	3	100
<i>Occupation category</i>		
Informal labour	3	100
Total	3	100
Social Welfare Officers		
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	2	100
Total	2	100
<i>Age</i>		
34-41	1	50
>42years	1	50
Total	2	100
<i>Length of work experience</i>		
1-10years	1	50
>10years	1	50
Total	2	100

Identifying and recruiting vulnerable families

Vulnerable children and their families based on the findings of the study were identified by the CBO staff in each community. It was revealed during discussions with some stakeholders that SOS Children Village Ogun programme conducted a baseline study of the challenges of orphans and vulnerable children in Ijebu-East LGA and result from the baseline study was presented to all FSP stakeholders in the three communities amongst which are government agencies, community leaders and traditional leaders. The presentation necessitated a community response which latter metamorphosed to the establishment of the Child and Family Development Initiative (CFDI) which is a community based organization registered with both the local and

State government. For families to be considered for programme intervention, a CBO staff narrated that:

Families are being referred by community leaders or any other person in the community to the CFDI which is located in Ijebu-Ikija. Any family in the community can also approach the office to request for support. My responsibility as the person representing my community is to visit the family and conduct an assessment of the situation of the families. After the assessment, the family may be approved or rejected based on the findings of the family situation [**IDI/CBO staff/Ijebu-Ikija**].

Another CBO staff also explained that:

We know who is who in our community and so we know families that need support and those that do not need any support. I think it is good that we are the ones identifying these families...if another person who is not in our community is doing this work; that person may not know the true situation of some families...we live here and we know those who are in need and those that don't need any help [**IDI/CBO staff/ Owu-Ijebu**].

The identification process was also further elaborated during the FGD as most participants narrated how they were selected for programme intervention. This gave us insight on the knowledge the participants have about the programme intervention and the selection criteria. In the words of one of the participants from Ijebu-Ife:

I heard that SOS was helping poor families in this community so I went to the CFDI community office in Owu-Ikija with another woman who lost her husband some years back...they came to my house with uncle Tolu (not real name). I was asked many questions...It was after many days that they called me and told me that I will be part of those to be supported. For that my friend, she was told that she is not qualified for support because there are family members who are of help to her. Besides, she is doing well in her petty trading and supporting her children's education...well she felt unhappy that she was not selected for support.

Most participants asserted that many families were disqualified at the selection stage because they failed to satisfy some selection criteria. Identified families according to a CBO staff in one of the sampled communities must satisfy two levels of indicators. Firstly, the family must be headed by a widow(er) or care for at least four orphans; secondly, the families with the least access to education, health, shelter, nutrition and economic strengthening were offered support. Findings from our study showed that families were identified using a template known as the Initial Assessment Form (IAF). The template was divided into two sections which are the "family/caregiver assessment form" and the "child assessment form". According to a CBO staff from Ikija community, "the forms contain some checklist that helped identify if a family was at risk and if a child was at risk of losing parental or has lost parental care". The outcome of the assessment formed the bases for which support was offered to the family and was also the reason for which a family was rejected or not considered for support. The quote by a CBO staff revealed thus:

For a family to be recruited into the programme, we must make sure that they deserve help. You know if there are no means of assessment, people can come

from anywhere and tell you stories. With the assessment forms, we know who is qualified and who is not. The process is very simple and there is nothing to hide because the reason for admission of the families is well captured in the assessment form [IDI/CBO staff/Ikija/].

To further explain the responsibilities of the field officer in terms of working with community stakeholders in recruiting families, the field officer from SOS Children's Village Programme Ogun explained that:

...the assessment form identifies most vulnerable families in the community as it captures the baseline information about the situation of the family before programme intervention. With that initial assessment of the situation of the families before program intervention, it is easy to know whether there was impact or not...We work with the community stakeholders and provide technical support to them. We allow them to drive the process...as a field officer, I am always in the field to monitor the process and write my report... the community does more in identifying families for support.

Support for identified families

Our data further revealed that after the identification process, recommendations and approval to support identified families were based on the willingness of the families to take responsibility and work toward meeting their targets based on the family assessment. Discussions with CBO staff in the communities showed that once a family was qualified to benefit from the programme support, a Family Development Plan (FDP) was undertaken by the community stakeholders, SOSCVOP Ogun and the recruited family. The FDP shows the pathway, development goals and plans of the families towards sustainability and self-reliance after programme interventions. The FDP also has documented activities that a family is expected to accomplish within five years of the programme intervention. Our discussion with the FDP beneficiaries further revealed that all participants have their FDP and each made effort within the five years of the programme duration to achieve the set objectives. Most participants were also aware of the consequences of not meeting up with the set objectives. For instance, a participant boldly said: "we all have the FDP agreement in our house...those that didn't work with the agreement based on the family plan were removed...yes some people were removed...I worked with my own and that is why I am here today". For some participants, however, the FDP was tasking and took a toll on their private engagements. A participant going by her facial expression was sad during her narration when she said: "...I did my best based on the FDP agreement but we are not the same... You can blame me for not meeting the set objectives but you should also know that other personal issues in the family can be challenging". To further shade more light on the FDP, a CBO staff explained that:

If a family is approved, the next step is to conduct a five-year development plan for the families which will be the basis for intervention. A copy of the development plan will be with the family and one copy will be with the CBO. This is to make sure that families fulfill their own responsibility...the plan is made by the family and I don't think it is tasking. People must make contribution in the support we are giving if not, they will depend on SOS to do everything for them...[IDI/CBO/Ijebu-Ikija/]

Our data showed that the FDP allows families to see reasons to be part of the success story and not depend on the programme for all intervention. The reason for this was to build a sense of responsibility in the family where they do not have to see themselves as not having anything to contribute towards taking responsibility for the provision of the basic needs of their family. The field officer from the SOS Children's Village Ogun programme while explaining the FDP revealed that:

When we started, we had issues with families complaining that they don't have anything to offer in terms of reducing child vulnerability and improving economic situation of their family using the FDP. Each time I visit some families, it is always from one complain to the other. All they wanted was for SOSCVF Ogun to provide everything for them. Some families were dropped because it was obvious they were not willing to take responsibility based on the roles they are expected to play in the FDP...like attending parenting classes, engaging in income generating activity...Those that continued made some effort and this kept getting better and better by the years through counseling from me and a social worker.

Findings from this study revealed that most participant and stakeholders understood the goal of the family strengthening programme. For instance, a participant explained that:

...yes I am happy with the explanation that was given to us on how we need to take responsibility to support ourselves and our children...the planned visit by uncle Tolu and aunt Venn (not real names) from SOS for me was the most helpful because it always reminded me of the FDP and what I need to do to make progress...yes it is written and we all have copies...the people from our community also use to explain this to us and this people are people that we respect in the community...I make effort to provide some school materials for the children while SOS gave us some school provision..I go for the parenting classes... to learn how to train these children...it is not easy as a widow...[FGD/Ijebu-Ife].

Few participants however felt that that though they are aware of the goal of the family strengthening and the need to work based on the agreement in the FDP, they however do not appreciate home visits as they were intruding into their private lives A participant said:

I don't like people coming to my home and discussing the FDP thing because I know that some of us are not as active as others...when we are not making progress, it is as if we are failing in our responsibilities...the fear of removing us from the list of beneficiaries made us feel uncomfortable too...our weakness should be respected...we all are not created the same day...I am a poor widow...I don't have anything and so I want them to help me...I want them to follow us up gradually... they should not rush ejooo! [FGD/Owu-Ikija]

To explore further the role of the CBO and social welfare officers in supporting families and giving families opportunities to develop at their pace, all the CBO staff and welfare staff explained that they worked hand-in-hand with the SOSCVF Ogun staff during the five-year period of intervention. A welfare officer from Ijebu-Ife while

trying to clarify the important role of the community stakeholders during the programme implementation revealed that:

It is also important that the community is fully involved in what is happening in terms of identifying who is qualified to benefit from these services and work with the FDP...if you leave some people, they will not make any effort for 10 years...they have to be monitored to work. It is good that SOS Children's Village has social workers and field officers to visit families and monitor the process[**IDI/Social welfare offers/2**)

For a CBO in one of the communities, he explained that:

...because the community is also involved, it is easy to know who is ready and who is not ready to use the support provided in improving the lots of children. I must say that one unique thing about the support from SOS Children's Villages Nigeria is that it addresses not just one area but many areas for family and child development...well some people will want you to just be feeding them but this programme is not like that...everybody is expected to work even the children who are the ultimate beneficiaries...they must pass their exams to benefit from the educational support...the CBO need to work hard to get external support to continue moving forward...[**IDI/CBO/Owu-Ijebu**]

Roles of Community and social welfare in programme intervention

Further discussions with participants and stakeholders revealed that once a family is recruited for support, new and existing support services within the community are introduced for people to be aware of the existence of such services even within their communities and the community stakeholders are responsible for this action. Our data showed that children and families in the programme had access to a range of essential services and resources required for their healthy development; including possibilities to organize with other community members to address their situation, such as self-help groups, Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) support groups and other community-based initiatives (microcredit).

Community stakeholders worked together; to provide a comprehensive 'safety net' of essential services required by families to address the development needs of their children; as well as to stand together in promoting and protecting children's rights. We are aware of this and the families too know what is expected of them. This is made possible through the training and different workshop organized for us by the SOS Children's Village...they keep telling us that we should be responsible for caring for poor families and children in our community...yes we know and we are also asking government to be involved in providing needed services to poor families[**IDI/CBO/ Owu-Ijebu**].

Furthermore, findings from the study revealed that the state government is recognized as a duty bearer and has a central role to play in addressing the challenges faced by its most vulnerable members, including children at risk of losing the care of their families. It was unanimously agreed by the community stakeholders that the state government needs to understudy some intervention programmes of NGOs that have a positive impact on children and the family. This will help in identifying vulnerable populations within a community and providing needed support to them. Stakeholders also

expressed their understanding of how the programme intervention works, the role of the lead organization, and the need for family engagement. All stakeholders affirmed that the family has primary responsibility for the care and upbringing of children. They also affirmed that government at different levels should be involved with the intervention programme of NGOs and contribute in providing needed resources for the sustainability of intervention programmes. A stakeholder from Ijebu-Ikija community revealed that:

...one thing about the kind of support services given to families by the SOS Children Villages Nigeria is that there is a pre and post assessment of families...this is something that the government should emulate in their support for poor families not just giving support without evidence to show...government should emulate SOS Children's Village by having committed people like social workers who can monitor the support that vulnerable children and families are given [**IDI/CBO/ Ijebu-Ikija**]

It was obvious from the discussions with both social welfare officers that there is a lack of professional social workers who are actively engaged in programme intervention for families and children. Both welfare officers attributed the success of the FSP to the effort of field officers and social workers in the programme location. As stated by one of the social welfare officers: "the FS was a success story because SOSCVOP Ogun has social workers and field officers who are doing monitoring and evaluation...if others NGOs are doing this kind of monitoring and evaluation, a proper record will be kept". The welfare officers also noted the need for NGOs to employ professional social workers so that such social workers can be involved with programme intervention of NGOs in the state. The need for social workers to be involved during programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation was constantly brought to the fore by both social welfare officers:

You cannot be talking about implementing programme for children and families and you will not be talking about having a social worker on ground...they have gone through special training...I am talking out of experience as a social welfare officer who is a trained social worker. If SOS didn't invite us to be part of this programme intervention, we may not know that something like this is happening in our state...we need to be involved so that we can also advice government better on what is working and how to plan programme vulnerable for families and children in the state...oh we are doing a lot for vulnerable children and families in this state but we need to do more and we also need to be part of most intervention programme that development partners are implementing. This will help us enhance our services [**IDI/social welfare/2**]

Discussion

The main objective of the study was to unearth the family strengthening programme of the SOS Children's Villages Nigeria and place its best practices, lessons and challenges in the public domain. One of the key lessons in the programme is the understanding of FDP that creates a mental picture of where the family is expected to be in 5 years. All stakeholders provided support and contributed to the attainment of the programme plan through careful identification and support of FSP beneficiaries using the IAF and FDP. This approach creates more personal, empathetic and sustainable programming as

against the service count of most programme interventions. This is supported by the finding of Adelekan et al (2017) in their evaluation of programme intervention for orphans and vulnerable children in Bayelsa state which recommended that programme intervention should not focus on just the immediate survival needs of beneficiaries but rather on developmental needs and household economic strengthening.

Based on our findings, the involvement and contribution of all stakeholders in the FSP including having the community in the driver's seat remain one of the key successes and best practices in the programme. Findings from this study revealed that beneficiaries in a family strengthening community programme cannot be identified by external personnel who have no knowledge of the situation of vulnerable children or families in a community. Though external personnel such as programme administrators may know how best to achieve the target objective of the programme, identifying vulnerable families within the community will however require the help of community stakeholders and CBOs. Community stakeholders therefore based on the findings of this study are vital in identifying vulnerable families within their community and helping such families to achieve the target objectives of programme and become self-reliant. This finding is vital in programming and a major lesson for future programming on social protection using family strengthening programme in communities across Nigeria. Taking the driver's position by the community means participation, ownership and willingness to drive the family strengthening process to a sustainable future.

Other best practices as found from the study are the supportive roles of social welfare agencies, social workers and field officers in monitoring and providing services to families and children during programme implementation. The clarification of the lead organization's (SOS Children's Villages Nigeria) role as a facilitator and technical role assisted in building sustainability structure. This however does not undermine the need for government to assume its role as duty-bearer. The role and need for government ministries and agencies such as the social welfare agencies to assume their role as duty-bearer in child and family welfare programme intervention is very crucial in programme implementation. The fact however is that the duty of most social welfare agencies in Nigeria has to a large extent been taken over by NGOs and new government departments (Okoye, 2013). This is because professional social workers are often not recruited to superintend sensitive positions in social welfare agencies that address the plight of children and families in Nigeria. When they are even recruited, enabling environment is not always provided for their practice to be visible. Visible rather is the vast number of unprofessional social workers in most social welfare agencies who engage in various unethical practices (Okoye, 2013).

The study findings revealed that attitudes of some vulnerable families who are unable and unwilling to fulfill their part and responsibilities as agreed in their development plan remain one of the challenges of the programme. For instance, the lack of savings culture and the mentality that "I don't have", "I don't have anything...we are poor and need help" remain one of the challenges of the programme. Some families kept insisting that they do not have anything and wanted to depend fully on the programme for support. To mitigate this problem, family strengthening programmes should consider other activities that families are involved in the community and plan toward having capacity training that will provide economic strengthening but not overburden

families. Every family however based on the finding of this study wants to be respected and given the opportunity to move at their own pace. Most families often do not appreciate applying the same techniques that worked with other families on them. Programmes targeted at vulnerable families should therefore advocate for policies designed to eliminate poverty and promote sustainable impact toward addressing child vulnerability.

Conclusion

Provision of effective social protection intervention through the family strengthening programme in Nigeria can help build sustainable systems for vulnerable children and families as successful family strengthening programmes are associated with quality programme delivery, involvement of professional staff and active participation of community stakeholders. Community stakeholders are vital in identifying vulnerable families within their community and helping such families to achieve the target objectives of programmes. The impact of a successful family strengthening programme will, however, be in the public domain when programme administrators share challenges, lessons and best practices through evidence-based research. Such a narrative can provide evidence-based data for scalable intervention in other regions across Nigeria and also help ongoing social protection programmes to tell their stories and experiences with future programme administrators. This present study attempted to x-ray lessons, challenges and best practices from the FSP of the SOS Children's Villages. Findings from this study represent the views of selected participants who were beneficiaries of the FSP from 2010-2015; this means that the views of others who did not participate in the study were not heard. We, therefore, did not generalize our findings knowing that with larger sample size, findings may vary. For further studies, exploring the views of children who benefited from the FSP is recommended.

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