

Community Need, Institutional Gaps, and NGO Facilitation: Explaining the Emergence of Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms in Kisumu County, Kenya

Faith Chelagat Maiyo¹; Gilbert Kimutai²; Murumba Wangamati³

^{1,2,3}Maseno

ABSTRACT: Community-based child protection mechanisms (CBCPMs) have gradually been developing across the Global South in response to the continuous vulnerabilities faced by children and inadequacy in the formal welfare systems. Even though there is constitutional and legal child protection framework in place in Kenya, there exist high cases of abuse, neglect, exploitation, poor reporting channels and lack of access to institutions in many communities. In this regard, this paper discusses the emergence of CBCPMs in Kisumu County, Kenya with focus on the connection between community vulnerability, institutional deficiencies and NGO facilitation. Guided by the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) perspective, a mixed method research design was used in the research process. Data was collected from both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection such as questionnaires, key informant interviews and focus group discussions among community members, community leaders, child protection actors and institutional actors from chosen communities in Kisumu County. Descriptive statistics analysis approach was used to analyze the quantitative data while thematic content analysis was done for qualitative data. From the analysis, it has been established that CBCPMs were established due to persistent violence and abuse, poor reporting mechanisms, poverty and unstable families, institutional deficiencies, and inaccessibility of child protection mechanisms by communities. It has also been found that even though the problem existed before the intervention, the NGO Plan International played an important role in institutionalization of the process by organizing committees, improving reporting system, enhancing community participation, and integrating the mechanism into formal accountability structures.

KEYWORDS: Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms; Human Rights-Based Approach; Child Protection Governance; NGO Facilitation; Participation; Accountability; Kisumu County

1. INTRODUCTION

Child protection systems in many countries of the Global South continue to experience numerous problems connected with structural, institutional, and socio-economic vulnerabilities that undermine their ability to address everyday vulnerabilities faced by children. In spite of progress made over the last three decades in terms of the introduction of international human rights frameworks, the development of legislation, and the implementation of targeted child development projects in developing countries, millions of children continue to face issues such as abuse, neglect, exploitation, violence, child labour, harmful cultural practices, displacement, and deprivation in environments where formal child protection systems remain fragile, inaccessible, or weak (UNICEF, 2021; Wessells, 2015). As a result, child protection scholars increasingly direct their attention to community-based strategies in addressing everyday vulnerabilities that children face in the Global South. In particular, community-based child protection mechanisms (CBCPMs) have become prominent organizational solutions adopted by communities to address risks related to child protection by identifying, preventing, reporting, and responding to different types of threats (UNICEF, 2012; Save the Children Alliance, 2008). However, far from representing merely informal welfare measures, CBCPMs are being increasingly regarded as intermediating structures connecting communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and official state institutions (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Gaventa & Barrett, 2012).

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, the emergence of CBCPMs has occurred as a response to the combination of social vulnerability and inadequate institutional development. High levels of poverty, orphanhood, family vulnerability, gender-based violence, poor

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reporting systems, and lack of access to services provided by formal child protection institutions make many communities vulnerable and force them to seek ways of protecting children in their local environment (Abebe & Bessell, 2011; Twum-Danso Imoh, 2012). For example, many African countries still have poorly developed formal institutions responsible for child protection, which may operate inefficiently due to geographical distance, financial constraints, bureaucratic problems, and social detachment from the actual needs of communities (Wessells, 2009). Moreover, international child development programs conducted by NGOs in the Global South often serve as catalysts of institutionalizing community-based child protection structures through setting up child protection committees, establishing referral mechanisms, organizing awareness-raising events, and other participatory measures designed to complement state systems (World Vision International, 2011; Norad, 2020). While CBCPMs have become increasingly common among the components of child protection systems in many African countries, important theoretical and empirical questions concerning their emergence remain underexplored.

In Kenya, recent years have seen dramatic changes in child protection legislation and institutional practices following the ratification of international child rights frameworks and national legal reforms. In particular, the Constitution of Kenya, 2010, the Children Act, 2022, and other child protection documents have recognized children as individuals whose rights should be protected from abuse, exploitation, neglect, violence, and harmful practices. Nonetheless, legal frameworks adopted in Kenya do not necessarily translate into an efficient functioning of child protection systems. For instance, UNICEF (2021), the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2022), and the National Council for Children's Services continue to report numerous cases of child protection failures within various Kenyan counties, including violence against children, child labour, teenage pregnancy, neglect, family vulnerability, and reporting and referral problems. Formal child protection services are often institutionally scarce, socially inaccessible, or limited by a lack of human resources, means of transportation, coordination possibilities, and funds. As a result, NGOs and community members play important roles in the governance of child protection in Kenya. For example, Kisumu County is a context characterized by high levels of poverty, growth of informal settlements, family vulnerability, and institutional pressure to take action. This situation calls for a child protection strategy that can be implemented on the basis of local resources and conditions. Plan International has contributed to the formation of CBCPMs in some communities of the county as a strategy of addressing child protection challenges.

Existing research has already shed light on the issue of functioning of CBCPMs in relation to such topics as participation, accountability, coordination, and sustainability of CBCPMs. In their report on the definition and functioning of CBCPMs, UNICEF (2012) describes CBCPMs as a locally grounded tool of strengthening child protection through enhanced community involvement and improved reporting. Wessells (2015) emphasizes that community-based approaches to child protection become particularly significant when formal institutions lack resources, capacities, or close social connections with vulnerable communities. Other scholars stress the importance of participatory governance, local ownership, and social legitimacy of child protection initiatives (Cornwall, 2008; Gaventa & Barrett, 2012). However, criticisms stemming from participatory development literature highlight the role of local power dynamics and dependence as major factors that influence community-based structures (Cleaver, 2001). Moreover, other studies draw attention to the challenges posed by the sustainability of CBCPMs as a result of their heavy reliance on donors and NGOs as facilitating actors (Norad, 2020; World Vision International, 2011). Nevertheless, although these studies provide a valuable basis for discussing CBCPMs, an even more fundamental question remains unexplored: Why do communities recognize the necessity of implementing CBCPMs? And how do institutional and social deficiencies and NGO facilitation work in conjunction to bring CBCPMs into existence?

This paper attempts to fill this research gap by analyzing the rationale behind the emergence of CBCPMs in Kisumu County of Kenya. Using the framework of the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA), this paper will discuss the reasons for introducing CBCPMs as a governance solution in the context of community child vulnerability, institutional shortcomings, socio-economic pressures, ineffective reporting systems, and NGO facilitation in the field of child protection. HRBA becomes a helpful conceptual foundation for analyzing CBCPMs because this approach views children as rights holders and institutions as duty bearers responsible for ensuring participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment, and access to child protection (UNDP, 2006). Accordingly, the process of introducing CBCPMs will be analyzed in the context of meeting children's needs for protection and addressing shortcomings of the formal child protection systems.

The core of the proposed study is that the formation of CBCPMs in Kisumu County cannot be attributed solely to the problem of child vulnerability. Rather, CBCPMs emerge as a result of interdependence among persistent socio-economic pressures, inadequately developed reporting systems and other child protection institutions, and system-building interventions initiated and mediated by external facilitators, for example, by Plan International. In addition, this paper will argue that Plan International does not create the need for community-based protection systems. Instead, Plan International creates a context for CBCPMs by translating community concerns about child vulnerability into participatory practices, reporting mechanisms, and localized accountability practices. In this regard, CBCPMs become socially embedded governance structures that emerge within the context of interrelated community child vulnerability, institutional inadequacies, and NGO facilitation in the domain of child protection.

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2. METHODOLOGY

The paper employed a mixed-methods approach based largely on a descriptive and interpretivist methodology (to assess the justification for the establishment of community-based child protection mechanisms (CBCPMs) in Kisumu County, Kenya. The methodology used in this research work is guided by the need to both quantify and interpret community perceptions regarding the need for CBCPMs. Whereas the study made extensive use of quantitative methodologies, a qualitative approach was crucial in explaining the rationale for community perceptions regarding child protection in their contexts. Thus, through the application of both the qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection, the study was able to interpret the deeper realities that informed the need for CBCPMs in the study area.

The research was conducted in selected communities in Kisumu County, where Plan International had put into place and operationalized child protection mechanisms at community levels. The population targeted for the study included community members, community leaders, child protection actors and institutions and other stakeholders involved either directly or indirectly in community-based child protection processes. For quantitative data, structured questionnaires were administered to household respondents, while Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were used to collect qualitative data from various stakeholders including community leaders, committee members of child protection committees, children's officers, NGOs and other stakeholders. It was imperative to conduct KIIs and FGDs in order to gain insights regarding the rationale of establishing CBCPMs. This is because the explanation for such a rationale cannot be achieved using numbers alone, but also requires an explanation of the realities of child vulnerability, institution weakness and reporting challenges within the community.

For data sampling, the study used a mix of probability and non-probability techniques to select the quantitative respondents and qualitative participants respectively. The probability techniques included systematic and purposive sampling methods to ensure the selection of adequately represented quantitative respondents, while purposive sampling was used for the selection of qualitative participants. It is important to note that it is methodologically appropriate to conduct a study in this context since the study needed to represent survey findings and gain insights from actors engaged in child protection governance. The data collected was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The former involved the use of frequencies and percentages, as well as indices for describing perceptions regarding the justification for CBCPMs. Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. Ethical concerns were considered in conducting the research through gaining consent, confidentiality, voluntarism and research approvals by various institutions.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper employs the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) as its underlying theoretical framework. This approach considers child protection not as a form of welfare, but rather as a process based upon rights that must be protected by states and other actors through institutional duty and good governance (UNDP, 2006; UNICEF, 2012). Originating within international development and human rights dialogue, the HRBA shifts focus from needs to rights, from beneficiaries to rights-holders, and from voluntary assistance to institutional duty (UNDP, 2006; UNICEF, 2012). Within this approach, children become rights-holders who possess the right to protection, dignity, participation, survival, and development, whereas states, institutions, and relevant actors become duty-bearers who have to ensure these rights. The HRBA includes such key principles as participation, accountability, empowerment, non-discrimination, and institutional responsiveness. These concepts prove particularly significant in the field of child protection governance since they allow moving the discussion forward not only to the existence of child protection legislative frameworks, but also to questions of accessibility, inclusivity, institutional responsiveness, and possibilities for communities to access and realize the rights of their children. Within the context of weak formal systems, distant and institutionally bound child protection governance structures, the HRBA framework becomes particularly helpful in explaining how gaps in rights realization create the need for localized child protection governance.

For analyzing the issues related to child protection within this paper, the Human Rights-Based Approach framework proves particularly relevant since it allows considering community-based child protection mechanisms (CBCPMs) as participatory and localized accountability processes operating at the point of intersection between community vulnerability and inadequate institutional provisions. According to the HRBA, the creation of CBCPMs represents the response to not only to child protection concerns, but also to the inability of formal duty-bearing institutions to provide socially accessible and responsive mechanisms for protecting children. Thus, CBCPMs can be regarded as community-based governance mechanisms allowing for the implementation of participation, reporting, referral, and accountability within the conditions when formal systems are unable to address the problem alone. On the other hand, the HRBA framework offers an adequate tool for examining the role played by NGOs, such as Plan International, in localized child protection governance. In this case, NGOs cannot be viewed as mere service providers, but should be considered as intermediaries facilitating participation, improving reporting procedures, enhancing institutional linkages, and promoting both the empowerment of rights-holders and improved institutional performance. At the same time, the HRBA approach allows exploring the issue of dependency and sustainability in relation to localized child protection governance.

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4. FINDINGS

4.1 Respondent Demographic Profile and Empirical Context

Data were drawn from 359 respondents selected across five study locations in Kisumu County, which include Nyalenda, Nyakach, Manyatta, Obunga, and Seme. Of the respondents, females accounted for 218 (60.7%), in comparison to 141 (39.3%) males. From an analytical perspective, this demographic characteristic may be interpreted as suggesting that females play a dominant role in community-level protection structures. Specifically, caregiving practices, reporting of child protection issues, and engagement in localized protection systems tend to be highly gendered roles in many communities. Geographically, respondents appear evenly spread across the study locations, with Nyalenda contributing 82 (22.8%) respondents, Nyakach 76 (21.2%), Manyatta 74 (20.6%), Obunga 64 (17.8%), and Seme 63 (17.5%). With respect to their respondent category, most of the respondents, constituting 236 (65.7%), were community members and caregivers, followed by CBCPM members 68 (18.9%) and youth respondents 55 (15.3%). In terms of educational background, the majority of the respondents attained secondary education 132 (36.8%), followed by primary education 91 (25.3%), college education 71 (19.8%), university education 33 (9.2%), and no education 32 (8.9%). The mean age of respondents was 33.6 years, with ages spanning from 15 to 62 years. Collectively, these demographic characteristics of the respondents imply that findings emanated from socially active individuals who lived close to the child protection processes at the community-level.

4.2 Community Awareness of the Need for CBCPMs

Results on the rationale variables indicate extremely high level of agreement in all the variables relating to the need for CBCPMs in the study areas. Among the highest rated variables were child abuse and neglect ($M = 4.23$), community need for protection structures ($M = 4.19$), coordination problems ($M = 4.15$), Plan International's facilitative role ($M = 4.13$), poverty and family breakdown ($M = 4.11$), and weak reporting structures ($M = 4.09$). Other variables, such as harmful cultural practices, weak connection to duty-bearers, lack of protection structures at the community level, and poor accessibility to formal protection systems were also rated high, with mean scores falling close to the top end of the Likert scale. Low standard deviation across the variables suggests consensus among respondents regarding the severity and frequency of child protection risks experienced in the study areas. Overall, these results reveal a strong link between the creation of CBCPMs and widely recognized and persistent community institutional needs as opposed to sporadic problems.

More interestingly, results indicate that respondents did not see child protection risk as comprising isolated cases of abuse and harm. Rather, vulnerability in child protection appears to have been part of the socio-economic and institutional context characterized by poverty, family instability, poor reporting system, and difficult accessibility to child protection services. Some of the accounts from community members indicate that “there were cases, but there was no structure to track them... people knew, but nothing got past talking” (Community Facilitator, Nyalenda); “you cannot talk about child protection without mentioning poverty—most of the cases are from there” (Community Member, Obunga). Thus, the findings reveal that CBCPMs were developed as a response to pre-existing and wide awareness of the risks children faced in the respective communities. Furthermore, the findings reveal that the role of Plan International in these communities was to facilitate organizational and structural transformation and development of systems to address child protection needs, as opposed to raising awareness of the risk to start with.

4.3 The Rationale Index: Nearly Universal Justification for CBCPMs

Analysis of the combined Rationale Index shows an incredibly high degree of justified need for CBCPMs in Kisumu County. Among the 359 respondents, 357 (99.4%) showed high degree of rationale, while only 2 (0.6%) fell under the moderate category with no respondent showing low rationale scores. This indicates that there exists nearly universal justification for CBCPMs among respondents. These findings demonstrate that the need for CBCPMs in the study areas stemmed from recognition that child protection problems in respective communities are not sporadic or infrequent events, but persistently severe enough to warrant structured and organized institutional response.

However, findings also suggest the existence of a clear distinction between community awareness and ability to organize and coordinate institutional response to child protection problems. Even though recognition of the problem appears to be widespread, respondents indicated that there existed difficulties with organizing structures for dealing with identified problems. In this regard, the facilitative role of Plan International appears to be particularly important in helping respective communities to develop CBCPMs as structured and coordinated institutional mechanisms. Thus, the findings clearly point out that the organization did not contribute to the creation of need for child protection mechanisms in these communities.

4.4 Disaggregated Factors Influencing CBCPM Formation

The multivariate analysis highlighted the factors that were seen by respondents as influencing the creation of community-based child protection structures. While the composite rationale variable illustrated the general validity of CBCPM, the multivariate approach offered a more specific understanding of the practical and institutional conditions that drove communities towards the establishment of the structures. According to the results, the highest percentage of factors identified by respondents was related to

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the occurrence of many instances of abuse and violence, which was reported by 280 (78.0%) respondents. Other factors included poor reporting system by 260 (72.4%) respondents, and poverty and breakdown in families reported by 250 (69.6%). Further, 230 (64.1%) respondents mentioned child neglect, early marriages and teenage pregnancy reported by 210 (58.5%), and the lack of the presence of the government by 190 (52.9%). On the other hand, relatively few respondents pointed out factors such as awareness creation 170 (47.4%), child labor 150 (41.8%), and the involvement of NGOs/communities in 140 (39.0%) cases. Overall, the results show that the rationale for creating CBCPMs in Kisumu County stemmed from practical child protection needs and socio-economic difficulties of communities.

The order of priority of the factors is significant from analytical perspective since it indicates that CBCPMs were created in response to existing child protection challenges rather than to any development initiative. Abuses, violence, neglect, and poor reporting system appeared to be among the top concerns identified by respondents, which means that respondents saw CBCPMs primarily as response measures addressing governance and protection gaps affecting children. Indeed, the results of the qualitative interviews supported the findings to a large extent. For instance, one respondent from Manyatta stated that "there were many cases of abuse in our community, but families did not know where to report and were afraid to do it". Also, one volunteer from Seme explained that "it was clear that problems affecting children were becoming too many and visible, and the need for committees emerged". Other respondents linked the need for CBCPMs to institutional gaps that affected communities. For example, one participant from Nyakach commented that "many villages were far away from offices, and thus the local community required mechanisms which would allow them to access relevant offices more conveniently". Overall, the findings indicate that CBCPMs were formed in contexts where communities experienced a certain degree of inadequacy of institutionalized child protection processes.

On the other hand, the results concerning low frequency of NGO/community mobilization are also very informative from analytical perspective. Even though Plan International was clearly active during the formation of CBCPMs in Kisumu County, the findings reveal that respondents saw CBCPMs not as externally initiated projects promoted by NGOs, but rather as structures that allowed communities to address existing protection concerns. In particular, several interviewees stressed that "child protection problems existed in our community before the committee, but it was Plan that helped us to organize ourselves". Another respondent said that "problems were clear, but there was no way to link communities to relevant institutions that could help them". These findings indicate that Plan International acted in this case more as an institution that institutionalized and coordinated community responses to child protection needs rather than generated those needs. Indeed, NGOs' role in this context can be explained in terms of intermediation between communities and formal institutions.

4.5 Existing Reporting Processes and Institutional Gaps

The results of analysis also revealed that prior to the introduction of CBCPMs, community reporting processes for addressing child protection concerns were highly fragmented and depended on informal community structures. According to the findings, the highest percentage of reporting processes referred to family members or relatives, which was mentioned by 120 (33.4%) respondents. Also, many respondents mentioned village elders and chiefs who were considered as sources where child protection concerns should have been addressed. 90 (25.1%) of the respondents indicated schools or teachers, while other sources were identified by significantly smaller percentages of respondents, namely the police 40 (11.1%), children's officers 25 (7.0%), and religious leaders 15 (4.2%). Finally, 9 (2.5%) respondents admitted that some cases were never reported at all. This finding is especially significant since it shows that formal child protection institutions had a much smaller role in addressing community concerns in comparison with other structures.

Indeed, the qualitative findings confirmed this perception. Respondents often reported about environments where children's concerns were informally addressed either within family or in village mediation forums long before the introduction of CBCPMs. For example, one participant from Kisumu West claimed that "most issues were settled informally until the committee came; otherwise, we did not use this mechanism before". Another respondent also mentioned that "families were reluctant to address their child protection concerns to police or other offices as they considered them distant". Similarly, other respondents talked about the problem of fragmentation and weak institutional coordination before the introduction of CBCPMs. For example, one participant from Obunga explained that "community members knew something bad happened, but they were confused what to do and to whom they should report the issue". Overall, the findings revealed that the environment in which CBCPMs were introduced was characterized by fragmented accountability structures, inadequate accessibility of child protection offices, and highly informal reporting processes.

Moreover, the findings also indicated how CBCPMs transformed the reporting process and increased its institutionalization level. Many respondents claimed that CBCPMs significantly influenced child protection processes by improving reporting pathways and structuring referral procedures in addition to raising awareness in the community. In this respect, many respondents mentioned Plan International as an important factor that facilitated these processes. Thus, one participant commented that "we used to address child protection problems to families or private individuals only; now we know where the case should start". Another respondent added that "the committee helped connect communities with chiefs, schools, children's officers, and other organizations which were not

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formally involved in this process before". Overall, the findings confirm that the role of CBCPMs extended far beyond awareness creation. Instead, the structures helped integrate informal community needs with formal child protection systems.

5. DISCUSSION

It should be observed that the results of the research prove that the emergence of community-based child protection mechanisms (CBCPMs) in the region is inherently linked to the interaction of persisting child vulnerability, institutional insufficiency, and external facilitation of the process of community organization. While not being independent development activities, CBCPMs arose in the environment characterized by visible protection pressure on children, poor reporting, poverty-induced child vulnerability, and lack of accountability mechanisms. The fact that there are almost no low justification scores and almost all participants (357 people, 99.4%) indicated a high-level rationality of establishing CBCPM in the communities indicates the social legitimacy of these structures. Therefore, the study findings substantially contribute to the discussion initiated by UNICEF in 2012 about the fact that CBCPMs develop most actively in areas where the community experiences persisting gaps in formal child protection systems. The present study contributes to the argument with its own perspective by revealing the nature of the rationale behind the establishment of CBCPM as a social institution. Namely, while communities recognized abuse as the main driving factor, the problem was also perceived as resulting from insufficient formal systems, poor reporting pathways, and lack of accountability. In other words, the findings extend current knowledge about CBCPMs by pointing out that these structures do not arise simply because of child vulnerability, but because of deficient governance.

The prominent identification of abuse and violence (280, 78.0%), weak reporting systems (260, 72.4%), and poverty and family breakdown (250, 69.6%) among CBCPM drivers allows discussing the findings in relation to the debate about structural factors contributing to child protection issues in Africa. For example, scholars like Abebe and Bessell (2011) and Twum-Danso Imoh (2012) emphasize that child protection problems are inherently linked to socio-economic circumstances and institutional weaknesses that influence household vulnerability, social strain, and differential access to protection services. According to the study findings, it means that the respondents do not see child abuse in isolation but understand the phenomenon as part of a larger pattern of vulnerability associated with poverty, neglect, weak institutions, and dysfunctional families. The result challenges intervention-focused approaches that view child protection exclusively as a matter of law enforcement and case management. In the Kisumu environment, CBCPMs represent not only protective committees but, first of all, governance structures emerging in a socio-economical context marked by child vulnerability.

When discussing the relationship between community-based structures and participatory governance, the findings allow referring to arguments by Cornwall (2008) and Gaventa & Barrett (2012) who maintain that the key aspect of legitimacy for participatory institutions includes their close ties to local realities and creation of spaces for engagement and accountability. According to the data, the social legitimacy of CBCPMs in Kisumu is associated precisely with the fact that these organizations are accessible, understandable, and familiar for community members. Nevertheless, at the same time, the study reveals the complexity of participatory governance processes that require institutional involvement to achieve organizational coordination and accountability. Specifically, before the appearance of CBCPMs, child protection problems were handled in an informal way with the majority of cases being addressed by families, elders, chiefs, or by negotiating. The conclusion is highly consistent with Cleaver's (2001) criticism of participatory approaches for overlooking socially differentiated and fragmented spaces characterized by divided authority and irregular institutional organization. Hence, the study contributes to the debate on the topic by illustrating that community legitimacy is crucial but not sufficient for effective governance.

Finally, one must discuss the role of Plan International in the process of developing CBCPMs in Kisumu. The most interesting contribution to the literature emerges when comparing the role of NGO in establishing community-based structures and the issue of generating vs institutionalizing the need for child protection measures. The key point is that the community already had an idea of the problem prior to the process in question. The respondents perceived the abuse and neglect, weak reporting channels, and family vulnerability as obvious child protection issues. Nevertheless, the fact that CBCPMs were required to help address these problems lies in the reality that there was an inadequate infrastructure to deal with the problems in question. Namely, communities were lacking institutionalized structures and processes for reporting and referring. Thus, the importance of Plan International was associated with helping organize the process, increase awareness of the community, and clarify reporting procedures. From this viewpoint, the study makes a valuable addition to the current body of literature on child protection. For the most part, scholars discuss NGOs' roles in terms of implementing, coordinating, and delivering services (World Vision International, 2011; Save the Children Alliance, 2008). On the contrary, the research proves that NGOs can perform additional governance functions associated with organizing communities.

The study's findings allow discussing the role of CBCPMs and their connection to the Human Rights-Based Approach to Development (HRBA). As UNDP (2006) and UNICEF (2012) point out, HRBA requires the implementation of four principles, namely participation, accountability, empowerment, and institutional responsibility. Each principle is represented in the case of

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CBCPM development in Kisumu. Thus, the community's recognition of the need for CBCPMs proves the principle of participation. Weakness of reporting and accountability systems illustrates deficiencies of the formal protection structures indicating problems with duty bearers' obligation and accountability. Finally, the work done by Plan International can be described as processes of empowerment in which communities obtained the capacity to recognize and respond to protection needs. Nevertheless, at the same time, the study highlights a contradiction typical of rights-based governance structures. Namely, while NGOs are able to facilitate community accountability, HRBA requires the implementation of the principle of institutional responsibility stipulating that states are ultimately responsible for ensuring rights holders' well-being. Thus, the findings bring up an important question about the sustainability of CBCPMs based on NGO assistance.

In the context of broader discussions on hybridity of accountability structures and layeredness of development governance in African countries, the findings provide some valuable insights for understanding the governance of child protection programs. Namely, existing literature on the topic tends to acknowledge hybridity of development governance as a combination of multiple institutional agents operating simultaneously in the field (Ansell & Gash, 2008). The research proves that the development of child protection programs in Kisumu involves a mixture of formal and informal structures. While CBCPMs are not introduced to substitute existing community organizations and formal institutions, they serve as intermediary structures that link families, elders, chiefs, schools, NGOs, and child protection agencies in order to improve accountability in this area.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper explored the reasoning behind the creation of community-based child protection mechanisms (CBCPMs) in Kisumu County, Kenya, considering the ongoing challenges regarding the vulnerability of the child population, insufficient formal child protection systems, and increased intervention by NGOs promoting community-level governance. The findings suggest that while the issue of child vulnerability does provide a rationale for the creation of CBCPMs, this explanation would not sufficiently describe the development of these mechanisms. Instead, they resulted from interactions between highly salient socio-economic conditions, fragmented accountability structures, insufficiencies of existing institutions, and the need for community-level protection structures addressing specific problems. The combination of high rates of abuse and violence, weak reporting mechanisms, poverty and familial instabilities, neglect, and poor accessibility of existing formal institutions produced a situation in which CBCPMs became essential to communities rather than just desirable. The nearly unanimous recognition of CBCPMs among the survey participants points to their social embedding within these communities as legitimate places for coordinating, reporting and dealing with child protection issues.

In terms of a broader analysis of community-based protection mechanisms, the study shows how CBCPMs act as hybrid forms of governance based on community legitimacy, institutional insufficiencies, and external facilitation in organizing community efforts and cooperation. The findings indicate that Plan International was not responsible for developing the underlying problem of children protection; it existed socially before the creation of the mechanisms. Nonetheless, the institution contributed to the institutionalization of CBCPMs by providing structures for organizing community participation, improving reporting and referral mechanisms, and linking local stakeholders with accountability structures. Hence, the paper adds to scholarship on child protection and participatory governance by highlighting that the CBCPMs prove to be most effective when formal institutions do not provide an adequate institutionalization of child protection issues. As such, they allow communities to develop and establish participatory accountability structures, in which they operationalize children's rights within the context of their limitations. Analyzed from the perspective of Human Rights Based Approach, the results show that community-level child protection structures can play a crucial role in empowering communities to address child vulnerabilities through community participation and cooperation.

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