

Impact of the inadequate support systems for orphans in Western Kenya

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Abstract:

This paper describes the support systems available for orphans in a rural Luo community in Nyang'oma sub-location in Bondo District of Western Kenya. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with orphaned children and their caretakers as well as key informants, and through focus group discussions with orphaned children, widows and community elders. Quantitative data were obtained by questionnaires administered to 100 caretakers of orphaned children. The most serious problem was inability of the orphan households to afford school fees, although lack of food, medicare and clothing were also prominent. The traditional, kinship-based support systems made a major contribution to catering for the orphans though the resources were far from enough. Various community-based groups in the area did not contribute significantly. The problem is getting desperate due to a combination of an exponentially increasing prevalence of orphans, poor socio-economic conditions and decline of the traditional support systems. For health planners and policy makers there are two major concerns. In the short term, a big and rapidly growing group of children are without adequate access to health services, while in the long term, the negative consequences for (in particular the girl) orphans' schooling pose a serious threat to the health of their future children. Based on the study findings, two recommendations are made: that the responsible parties address the issue of education for orphans rapidly and sufficiently and with due consideration of their food security and medicare; and that potential community resources such as kinship networks and community groups are mobilised in order to assist in achieving the goal.