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An Assessment of Orphanages as a Response to the Plight of Vulnerable Children: A Case Study of Watoto Bbira Children's Village.

A situational analysis of vulnerable children in Uganda conducted in 2010 revealed that 8 million children were generally vulnerable and 1.5 million critically vulnerable (Uganda OVC status report, 2010). Overtime, different organisations both globally and locally have undertaken varied interventions focusing on vulnerable children. Some of these offer relief, family support and others are giving residential care, that is, caring for children in orphanages. The viability of the orphanage is something that has not quite been evaluated. The major objective of this study was to assess the appropriateness of orphanages as a response to the plight of vulnerable children, using the case study of Watoto children's home Bbira. A qualitative approach was considered suitable for this study because it is exploratory, flexible and context sensitive. In addition, the study was descriptive for purposes of providing an accurate picture of what is happening with the vulnerable children in orphanages. Purposive sampling was used to select the 50 respondents. The data collection methods used include interviews and observation. It was revealed that Watoto rescues and raises vulnerable children, with well-organised and coordinated systems and facilities. They do provide for the children's basic needs such as feeding, clothing, medical care, shelter and education. Despite the fact that the Watoto administrative systems and facilities are well resourced and coordinated, there is a gap in the human development programmes. There is very little in terms of practical life skills development as a way to prepare children for life out of the orphanage. This limits their ability to fit within the rest of society after they have been transitioned out of the homes. Furthermore, the children in the orphanage are exposed to risk and abuse that endangers them. There is also a real socio-emotional disconnect between the children and care givers which implies that the orphanage can never be a complete replacement for the natural home. In view of these challenges, orphanages are largely not viable as a response to the plight of vulnerable children. Therefore, the removal of a child from his or her family should be considered an option of last resort with proper reason and for the shortest time possible; the first option should be the family and community.

Key Words: Orphanages, Plight, Vulnerable Children, Watoto