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THE EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS ENCOUNTERED BY YOUNG CARERS OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED ADULT BEGGARS IN TANZANIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR ACCESS TO BASIC EDUCATION

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Abstract:

This paper examines the experiences and perceptions encountered by Young Carers of Visually Impaired Adult Beggars (YCVIAB) in Tanzania with a goal to understand their plight and suggest more helpful practices in supporting their access to basic education. Data was generated in Dodoma Municipality in which begging phenomenon using children as guides is deeply rooted. Through intensive interviews with Young Carers of Visually Impaired Adult Beggars' family members (YCVIABFMs), influential community members, Visually Impaired Adult Beggars (VIABs) and Young Carers of Visually Impaired Adult Beggars (YCVIABs) themselves, the study captured the experiences and perceptions of Young Carers of Visually Impaired Adult Beggars (YCVIABs) and how the same constituted bottlenecks towards their access to basic education. The study revealed that Young Carers of Visually Impaired Adult Beggars (YCVIABs) encountered the most dreadful experiences and the perceptions of their plight were multifaceted with majority of stakeholders having a negative perception. Negative perceptions culminated into low level of support to Young Carers of Visually Impaired Adult Beggars. Unless interventions at policy and practice level are in place, the quest of basic education access for every child in Dodoma municipality and Tanzania in general will be a day dream.

Keywords: Dodoma Municipality, basic education, young carers of visually impaired adult beggars

1. Introduction

In the context of this study, young carers of visually impaired adult beggars are those children under the age of 18, who take care or rather guide visually impaired adult beggar in the process of begging and are unable to access and participate fully in basic education. Large numbers of children worldwide are involved in some kind of care for members of their families, often a parent. World Health Organization (2004) estimated that over 40 million children in the world were taking care of the visually impaired people. In most of the developed countries both groups, the young carers, the recipient of the care and street children in general, usually attract sympathy and there are policies and programmes developed specifically to support them (Fives, *et al*; 2010). In the United Kingdom for instance, a number of legislations are in place, including Carers Recognition and Services Act 1995, Carers and Disabled Children Act 2001, and Carers Equal Opportunities Act (Fives et al, 2010).

In the USA, a number of people with disabilities are cared by community-based agencies (Angrosino, 1992). Policy attention regarding Most Vulnerable Children, including Young Carers of Visually Impaired Adults Beggars in developing countries, is relatively dismal or none- existent. Tanzania is among the developing countries with young carers and about 4% of children aged between 7 and 14 years in Tanzania were documented to be engaged in care giving (Robson, et al; 2006). Over one million people (aged 15-59) were estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS in 2005, implying a need for care from family members including children (TACAIDS *et al*; 2005; RAWG, 2005).

In Tanzania just as it was the case with many developing countries, though there are various Most Vulnerable Children related policies such as the Law of the Child Act, 2009 and Child Development Policy, 1996; Most Vulnerable Children including Young Carers of Visually Impaired Adult Beggars, have not been reached and effectively mainstreamed (Correl & Correl, 2010). The Tanzania Education and Training Policy of 1995 recognizes that a good system of education in any country must be effective on two fronts namely quantitative in which there would be access to education and equitable distribution and allocation of resources to various segment of the society and on qualitative front in which quality education is guaranteed for all (URT, 1995). Despite this recognition of the 1995 ETP, the presence of YCVIABs in Dodoma Municipality suggest how access and quality basic education is not yet realized to these children.

If less attention to YCVIAB remains unchecked, it may result into a number of negative impacts to this category of Most Vulnerable Children including inaccess to and poor participation in basic education (Abrahams and Pennington, 2008 & URT, 2008).

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The interest of this research was to explore and document the experiences and perceptions of Young Carers of Visually Impaired Beggars with a goal to find ways of supporting them so that they can access to and participate in basic education.

2. Research Purpose and Questions

Tanzania ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the World Declaration on Education for All (1990). The second EFA goal set to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2015; however, it seemed to be missed by a wide margin, among the eligible children in Tanzania (UNESCO, 2014). This situation is likely to be worse for Young Carers of Visually Impaired Adult Beggars (YCVIABs). Education related policies such as *Tanzania's Education and Training Policy and Child Development Policy* have been in place aiming at making access to basic education a reality for every school-age child in Tanzania but the prevailing in access to basic education among young carers of visually impaired adult beggars raises numerous questions regarding their utility.

Though people see this category of Most Vulnerable Children loitering in the streets guiding the Visually Impaired Adult Beggars in the process of begging, yet little attention have been in place making their plight and right to access and participate fully in basic education invisible. This study intended to examine the experiences of YCVIABs and perceptions attached to their plight including their access and participation to basic education.

The study basically thought to answer the following research questions: what were the experiences of Young Carers of Visually Impaired Adult Beggars, what were the perceptions of YCVIABs' plight including access to and participation in basic education and what are the possible solutions that can enhance basic education access among young carers of visually impaired adult beggars?

3. Review of Related Literature

The experiences of young carers of mentally ill people like many other categories of young carers are unpleasant. Because of the nature of the people they cared, they experience bullying from the people they cared for and rejection from peers Grant, *et al*; (2008). The nature of the illness or disability affected the experiences encountered by young carers: some for example, needed help with toileting, others with mobility, or emotional support (Lloyd, 2006).

Young carers and street children in general experience insecurity and portrayed the police as an enemy and a fearful figure Ribeiro (2008). Skovdal (2009) points out that disrupted school attendance were the greatest concern for many children caring for HIV/AIDS in Kenya.

Other studies by Adedibu (1989), Beauchemin (1999), Boaten (2006), and Yilmaz and Dülgerler (2011) found that despite its pronounced manifestation, people still regard existence of street children and begging as a normal phenomenon. Furthermore, the perception of the street child by the government agencies in many parts of Africa is viewed as a social problem and that it affects some people directly and others indirectly, as they occupy public spaces and are potential sources of criminal activities (Boaten, 2006).

While varied views emanated from empirical literature and characterize the street children negatively and relatively slightly positively, these studies focused on the experiences of street children in other parts of the world than Tanzania, and the one doing other caring roles than the relatively unique role of guiding visually impaired adult beggars.

Article 26(1) of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed education as a universal basic human right, Education for All (EFA), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Universal Primary Education (UPE) campaigns have been launched at different times in different countries especially in the developing world such Asia, the Arab world, and South (or Latin) America but the continued existence of inaccess to basic education among MVC still persisted (Anangisye, 2011). Though Tanzania is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, there are in fact no established child protection laws, nor regular adherence to children's rights practices (Kate, *et al*; 2010).

Furthermore, despite the political will of Tanzania and a sound education policy entailed in the Education for Self-Reliance (ESR), ETP of 1995 and PEDP that advocates among other things the democratization of education, access to and participation in basic education has not been an easy task to children from economically and socially disadvantaged households (Anangisye, 2011 and Ishumi, 1986).

While various studies have documented some helpful practices to MVC generally and some for other categories of young carers, a number of studies have indicated failure to support and some unhelpful practices to MVC. Available evidence has shown that parents with poor socio-economic status generally tended to fail to support their children's education (Anangisye, 2011), VIABs are among the parents that may be termed as poor. Mwai (2004, p. 143) contends that many governments in the developing countries encounter challenges that continue to hinder the implementation

of Education for All (EFA). Consequently, a large proportion of children remain without access to basic education.

There has been paucity of research on young carers generally, and Young Carers of Visually Impaired Adult Beggars in Tanzania particularly. Based on the synthesis of the reviewed literature, it was apparent that there were content, geographical location and methodological gaps. Little study (if any) both locally and internationally has been conducted, addressing basic education access and participation among YCVIABs, in a view to find out the solution to their plight and basic education access for these children. The experiences encountered by YCVIABs, in their guidance role and their perceptions on guidance role in Dodoma Municipality of Dodoma region and Tanzania in general, have also not been studied.

4. Methodology

The methodology employed in this research is informed by the objectives and research questions. In particular, the research questions reflected in this section emanates from the experiences and perceptions of young carers of visually impaired adult beggars and implications to basic education access and participation.

4.1 The Research Design

The study used intrinsic case study which Ary, et al, (2010) say is conducted to understand a particular case that may be unusual, unique, or different in some way and that the case in and of itself is of interest to the researcher. This study investigated one of unusual, unique, and complex phenomenon of children guiding visually impaired adult beggars in the begging process instead of attending school. This study also investigated the phenomenon which was of interest to the researcher. A case study was also relevant for this study, as the design focuses on individual actors or group of actors, and seeks to understand their perceptions of events (Cohen, *et al*; 2005). The plight facing Young Carers of Visually Impaired Adult Beggars are complex, unique and particular to Dodoma Municipality. A case study design was also used as it is suitable for providing a detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships (Yin, 1984).

4.2 Location of the study

The location of the study was Dodoma municipality of Tanzania since unlike in other regions of Tanzania; it has more Visually Impaired Adult Beggars Namwata, *et al*; (2010). There was also a rapidly increasing number of Most Vulnerable Children

generally and Young Carers of Visually Impaired Adult Beggars in particular. According to the available statistics (2012) from Dodoma Municipal, estimated figures of Most Vulnerable Children were 7,635, while that of street children including Young Carers of Visually Impaired Adult Beggars were around 170.

4.3 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The total sample for this study was 40 respondents and Table 3.2 presents the details of the sample size for each category of research participants.

Table 3.2: Sample Size

Category of respondents	Number of respondents	Percent
Ward Executive Officers	4	10
Ward Education Coordinators	3	7.5
Head Teachers	3	7.5
Ward Councillors	4	10
Religious leaders	3	7.5
NGOs coordinators	3	7.5
Social Welfare Officer	1	2.5
Community Development Officer	1	2.5
YCVIABs	6	15
Visually Impaired Adult Beggars	6	15
YCVIABs' Family Members	6	15
Total	40	100

Source: Field Data, (2013)

Purposive sampling of YCVIABs and the VIABs was done out of the knowledge that they were key and fundamental targets of this study and so their views were of paramount significance. Snowballing, incidental or accidental techniques were employed to YCVIABs and VIABs since they were mostly not stationed in one place but kept on moving in the course of begging thus to overcome their moving nature the accessed YCVIABs and VIABs were asked to reveal the whereabouts of the other beggars. Since street beggars keep on moving (Namwata, et al; 2010); public places where Young Carers of Visually Impaired Adult Beggars were generally found including Nyerere Square, in hotels, restaurants, bars, near Automatic Teller Machines, churches, mosques, markets, the famous One Way Road and bus stands were further selected as a strategy, to overcome their moving nature. Purposive sampling was also employed to sample YCVIABs' family members, (Influential community members) ward councillors, religious leaders, NGO coordinators, social welfare officers and

community development officers as they were considered to be information rich and can represent the entire community members.

Methods of Data collection and Analysis 4.4

Data were collected through appropriate in-depth interviews, direct-non participant observations and documentary reviews. Artefacts were used to depict vivid experiences of young carers of visually impaired adult beggars. The data analysis process was guided by Pellegrin's (1998) two principles of qualitative data analysis, namely homogeneity and mutual exclusiveness in which both deductive and inductive processes were used to determine the main themes and sub- themes respectively (Ezzy, 2002). All the data sets from interviews, observations and documents were analysed following procedures recommended by Miles and Hubberman (1994); that is data organization, data reduction and data interpretation.

5. **Findings and Discussion**

The findings and discussions of this study are presented in three sub-sections namely the experiences of young carers of visually impaired adult beggars, the perceptions of young carers of visually impaired adult beggars' plight and emerging implications for access to and participation in basic education among young carers of visually impaired adult beggars.

5.1 The Experiences of Young Carers of Visually Impaired Adult Beggars

Interview results indicated that Young Carers of Visually Impaired Adult Beggars (YCVIABs) experienced dreadful encounters. These vulnerable children experience tiredness which make them unhappy and was detrimental to their health. In this regard, one of the participant Young carers of visually impaired adult beggars had the following to share:

"I have never felt happy in my life as guiding in begging is a tiresome work. Some time I suffer from headache and nose bleeding due to hot sun, and people could always ask the where about of our parents and few of them can give us some money.

Another YCVIAB who was interviewed claimed that:

"Guiding in the begging process is a tiresome work and one gets tired due to the sun and sometimes rain, so I have never felt happy. My father and mother are all visually

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impaired. Despite their visual impairment they have both gone to school up to standard seven and since they are not employed, we earn our living through begging in which I used to guide my father almost daily but I have recently been relieved by my two young sisters who have taken over the guiding role while I guide in some days especially weekends. Though we get support from the church community and NGO, the support is not sufficient thus we rely on begging."

The experiences of every individual young carer of visually impaired adult beggar in Dodoma municipality are very different and peculiar in their own perspective. However, they share some features. One young carer aged 15 but out of school narrated his experience that led him into the phenomenon of guiding a visually impaired adult beggar:

"I live with my grandmother; my mother absconded since I was a little child and I do not know her whereabouts. I have never seen my father and since my grandmother is a visually impaired, we live through beggary. I sniff glue so as to refresh my mind and offset the painful event of my mother's abscondment. Guiding the visually impaired adult beggar in the begging process is the most difficult role as we go around the streets and sometimes face harsh responses from the people."

Observational results indicated that the YCVIABs and the VIABs were excessively sweating and seemed to be very tired and hungry, but kept on begging. Their cloth had poor quality as they were torn, dirty and had deteriorated colour. As to the body hygiene, they seemed dirty and most of them had bare feet. Regarding the interaction between YCVIABs and the VIABs observation generally indicated that they were intimate and when the YCVIABs was tired, the VIABs would allow him or her to lie on the ground while the VIABs continued to beg at a stationed begging point. A drawn picture by one of the participant influential community members in figure 4.1 could help to portray the hardship of a beggary life vividly.



Artefact 1: The Experiences of Beggary Life

Source: (Seni, 2014)

The drawn picture in Artefact 1 indicates how YCVIABs and the VIABs are in constant move be it sunny or rainy, their cloth conditions and bare feet to the part of the VIABs could all suggest the hardship they faced in the beggary life.

5.2 Multiple Vulnerabilities for Young Carers of Visually Impaired Adult Beggars

Through observation it was found that young carers guiding visually impaired adult beggars who had multiple disabilities experienced the most dreadful encounter and multiple vulnerability than their counterparts, who guided the one with a single impairment namely; visual impairment.

Guiding a visually impaired adult beggar who had a leg disability was observed to be more difficult as the VIAB was unstable and could even fall down, as he was assisted in walking.

The YCVIABs who guided VIABs with multiple disabilities responded to the interview question that wanted them to explain the way they felt as guides of VIABs and the following voice was recorded:

"The guiding role is more complicated since my father has a problem with his leg, one of his leg was cut in the hospital as he had an elephantiasis disease. He cannot walk without the support of a limping stick and as he walks, I guide him through the white stick but he can sometimes fall down."

Describing the difficulties he faces in walking all day long begging, the VIAB with multiple disabilities had the following to say:

"My leg is impaired as I had an elephantiasis disease and have recently undergone an operation in which my leg was cut. However, I have to keep on begging despite the pains I face since it is the only way in which we can earn our daily meal."

The picture (in Artefact 3) drawn by one of the participant influential community member aids to portray the situation of YCVIAB guiding a VIAB with multiple disabilities vividly:



Artefact 3: Drawn Picture of YCVIAB Guiding a VIAB with Multiple Disabilities

Source: (Seni, 2014)

Multiple vulnerabilities were also evident from observational findings which indicated that there were YCVIABs who guided VIABs with young children. The VIAB was

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observed to carry a young child on her back despite the fact that she was visually impaired. As that was not enough, the young child carried on the back had skin disability (an albino) reflecting what we may call an extreme multiple vulnerability to the part of the YCVIAB as he had to care two people with disabilities at a time and guiding in the begging process. In her own words the YCVIAB who guided the VIAB with an albino sibling had the following to remark:

"My role as a guide is extremely cumbersome as my mother does not see; beside my young sister is an albino and I feel very bad since people would gaze at us as we pass through in the streets begging. Some people would help us with some food or money but others would just gaze at us astonishingly."

The picture (in Artefact 4) drawn by one of the participant influential community members portrays the situation vividly.



Artefact 4.5: Drawn Picture for YCVAB Guiding a VIAB with an Albino Sibling

Source: (Seni, 2014)

5.3 Perceptions of YCVIABs' Plight

Young Carers of Visually Impaired Adult Beggars in Dodoma Municipality were perceived negatively and slightly positively. Unhappy encounters due to tiredness, headache, nose bleeding and lack of time to rest, play and attend to school in one hand and fulfilling of their daily needs through income gained in the begging activity were

implied as the reason for the YCVIABs to perceive their plight the way they did. Most of the participants young carers of visually impaired adult beggars, perceived their role of guiding visually impaired adult beggars as an activity full of miserable moments.

Articulating the situation in an interview, the YCVIAB was asked to express the experiences of guiding a visually impaired adult beggar had this to say:

"I take positively my role as I am compelled by the condition of my parent to guide him in begging so that we can have money to buy food and school requirements. I felt happy when I was given money. Although it was a torn Tsh 1,000 but I got an assistance of exchanging it at the bank and I felt very happy."

Community members' perceptions on the YCVIABs' plight were either positive or negative depending on how one perceived the circumstances and factors leading to the existence of the unique category of begging using children as guides. Furthermore, how community members perceived young carers of visually impaired adult beggars tended to be reflected by their response when asked for a help. In the perspectives of the YCVIABs, the community members were not bothered by their plight and saw their role of guiding the visually impaired adult beggars, as a normal one. The subsequent voices from the interview with the participants YCVIABs substantiate the issues and messages, surrounding this sub-theme. The following voices of YCVIABs reflect the mixed perceptions.

"Wanatuona poa" (They take us normal), and they could always ask on the where about of our parents and whether we were going to school or not, without asking or reflecting properly on our circumstances. I think they take us negatively and they can sometimes say that "don't disturb me".

There were also positive perceptions of viewing the phenomenon and its unfolding plight as a results of disadvantagement due to poverty, scarcity, wide spread hunger and visual impairment. Positive perceptions held by community members regarding the plight of YCVIABs were articulated in an interview with one of the social worker as he positively characterized them:

"I know YCVIABs as children living in difficult circumstances and facing the effects of abject poverty, scarcity, wide spread hunger as well as visual impairment. They are innocent children requiring the support of stakeholders."

Responding to an interview question that demanded him to explain how he characterized YCVIABs, one of the participant ward councillors expressed the negative perceptions as he said:

"I know in two faces these YCVIABs; they may be part of the family of the VIABs or even a distant person but paid. Even the blood related YCVIABs might be paid. They must be coming from families with a disoriented family base, and they are lazy kind of people. How comes a person having no relatives, neighbours or even religious leaders. The solution is to have by-laws since some of them just pretend and close their eyes with glues."

Some of the respondents had both positive as well as negative perceptions. In this regard, one of the interviewed Community Development officers characterized YCVIABs had the following to share:

"YCVIABs have no time to play like their counterparts; they stay in the sun all the day long, the rain is their companion. Some people despise them and mostly they come from poor families but others come from well off families. If you can make a follow up you find they own cows. Laziness drives them to begging, though Dodoma is a semi-arid area but those who work hard can yield something. They are all not visually impaired but some pretends by putting glue in their eyes."

Another set of mixed perceptions was revealed in an interview with one of the Head teacher who was asked on how he characterized YCVIABs, he had the following assert:

"I know that these children are missing their care and education rights, they are innocent and are expecting the community to solve their problems especially on the issue of food. Sometimes the community members gave them food and money but others rebuked them. Laziness is the most precipitating reason for a begging phenomenon. They think that cultivation delayed them to earn a living, whilst it is in fact a way of earning with dignity."

5.4 **Emerging Perceptions on Access to Basic Education among YCVIABs**

The experiences and perceptions of YCVIABs placed them in a disadvantageous position of not having time to stay at home, rest, play and above all deprived them with opportunity for accessing basic education as their counterparts who were not YCVIABs.

Moving all the daylong in the sun or rain is not only detrimental to the health of YCVIABs but deprived them with an opportunity to be enrolled and access basic education. The findings that the wider community members generally regard the plight facing YCVIABs as being caused by their part (victims of the phenomenon) and so seen as people disturbing others call for the community members to brainstorm the real causes of the whole circumstances and take charge to rescue the situation. The community members implicitly exhibited a failure to acknowledge how disability such as visual impairment may subject the victim into a negative side to the extent of resorting to a beggary life.

Lack of a common perception, in particular lack of positive perceptions towards the plight of YCVIABs may constitute one of the drawbacks for the realization of their basic rights and basic needs, including access to and full participation in basic education. Tanzania ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the World Declaration on Education for All (1990). Non-enrolment, irregular attendance and poor participation in school work to the part of YCVIAB, are in contrast with the Rights of the Child (1989) and the World Declaration on Education for All (1990). Education for All (EFA) goals are also not met in the lives of YCVIABs. The second EFA goal set to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2015; however, UPE has been missed by a wide margin, among the eligible children in Tanzania (UNESCO, 2014). This situation is likely to be worse for YCVIABs. The sixth EFA goal which states "improve the quality of education" may also be hard to achieve within the context of having YCVIAB who were not enrolled or do not attend school on a regular basis, and have a little or no time to concentrate with their studies.

Article four of the Tanzania law of the Child Act of 2009 states that, the government of Tanzania has a responsibility to take all available means to make sure that, children's rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled. The plight facing YCVIABs reflect the extent to which current MVC-related policies and laws for children have remained on paper work and missing in terms of practice.

The Development Vision 2025 intended to achieve high quality livelihood to all social groups, such as the boys and girls, youth and old, and able-bodied and disabled (URT, 2000). Realization of this vision stance has not been a reality to the part of VIABs, as part and parcel of the old and disabled and to YCVIABs as part and parcel of boys and girls.

Although the Tanzanian country report on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of 2010, indicates that, the second MDG of achieving UPE has been realized as the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) in primary education was 95.4% by 2010 (URT, 2011), yet on the basis of the findings in this study, in which most of YCVIABs were out of

school and those in school not fully participating, it could be argued that YCVIABs have been side-lined by this achievement.

The YCVIABs out of school further reinforce what Rubagumya (1991:76) found that the education system of Tanzania still functioned as a reproductive mechanism for small elite, rather than as an instrument towards egalitarianism. It also confirms that the children of more affluent parents in Tanzania are more likely to enter school and to progress than children of less affluent parents (Samoff, 1987:355).

The findings in this study that, YCVIABs spent much of their time guiding the VIABs could suggest improper orientation to these children as they may be led to think that begging was a proper way of gaining income. The persistence of guidance role in the begging process may divorce these children from the love for work engendered in the philosophy of Education for Self-Reliance (ESR) of 1967 propounded by the founder of the Tanzanian nation, the late Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

It could be concluded that the experiences of every individual in Dodoma Municipality were very different and peculiar however, they shared some features of encountering the dreadful life. YCVIABs guiding VIABs who had more than one disability experienced the most dreadful encounter than their counterparts who guided the one with single impairment namely; visual impairment.

Majority of community members perceived the YCVIABs' plight and those of the VIABs negatively. They viewed the phenomenon and its unfolding plight as something emanating from the irresponsibility of the victims mainly the VIABs.

In order to enhance a positive perception of the wider community on the plight facing YCVIABs including inaccess to basic education, there is a need to conduct training to influential community members such as ward councillors, religious leaders, social welfare officers, and community development officers, head teachers, ward education coordinators, NGO coordinators and Ward Executive Officers. Alternative mode of providing basic education for MCV including YCVIABs should be thought by the government and should involve local and international actors. Innovative strategies such as double shift and school feeding should be in place as measures to boast attendance for disadvantaged children. This requires resource allocation and flexibility in the schools based on contextual considerations.

Through the policy for the elders, the VIABs should be assisted in which the government should set aside sufficient resources to establish residence centers for the elders and keep them. In the residence centers, the VIABs should be trained to perform

light activities for production such as needle work, basketry, raising chicken etc. Keeping the VIABs in residence centers may release children from their guidance role and become easy for them to be supported to enroll and attend to school. Capital to begin income generating activities could assist in reducing and even alleviating dependency among the VIABs but before being given capital, they should be given training on how to manage projects they wish to commence.

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