

AIDS News Note

CARING FOR CHILDREN AFFECTED BY HIV AND AIDS

MADRID, 26 October 2007 – Several countries are making progress in the provision of a minimum package of services for orphans and vulnerable children, which includes access to education, health care, social welfare and protection services. In the context introduced by the UNICEF IRC *Insight* report on ‘Caring for Children Affected by HIV and AIDS’, being presented today by UNICEF to stimulate debate on the continuing grave situation of this highly vulnerable group, the past year and a half have seen a number of significant developments with regards to children affected by HIV/AIDS.

Increasing numbers of children are receiving treatment as a result of testing, lower drug prices and simpler formulations. There is now a broadened recognition of the need to intensify and accelerate actions towards universal access to comprehensive care and support of children affected by AIDS, both at the global and national level.

In several countries, there has been recent progress in reducing the disparity between orphans and non-orphans in access to education, partly due to the abolition of school fees. An increasing number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa have begun to provide social protection for AIDS-affected children, through promising initiatives such as unconditional cash transfers, which include transfers to poor households, child support grants, orphan care grants, disability grants and social pensions.

Yet, the situation remains critical for the majority of children orphaned by AIDS - some 15.2 million children under age 18 in 2005, according to UNAIDS. Globally, less than 10 per cent of children who have been orphaned or made vulnerable by AIDS receive support or services from outside their communities.

In sub-Saharan Africa, families continue to carry the main burden of care and support for the 12 million children who had been orphaned by AIDS as of 2005. Fewer than one in three young people in sub-Saharan Africa has the comprehensive knowledge about HIV that will help protect them against the virus.

Findings of the report

The resounding message of the 2006 IRC *Insight* is that drastic measures and resources are needed to support families and communities to care for their most vulnerable children. Small-scale projects and programmes that are already providing support must be scaled-up and institutional structures must be put into place to ensure that those most in need are assisted.

The report looks at how HIV and AIDS eat away at every facet of a child’s life by undermining health and schooling, and reinforcing marginalization and deprivation. The impacts of HIV and AIDS reach

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in expanding circles, not only affecting orphans but also children within extended families, and friends and neighbours who help care for orphaned children.

HIV/AIDS endangers nutrition and health, often resulting in less food for families. The epidemic deepens gender inequality, with girls often being the first to be taken out of school to take on increasing family responsibilities when HIV/AIDS strikes. Girls and women are the primary caregivers of those affected by AIDS and of the children left behind and orphaned by the disease. HIV/AIDS isolates and excludes, in many instances placing children at increased risk of ostracism and abandonment by their families, friends and communities.

The *Insight* highlights the many ways communities have been coping, and how the burden of care has been shared by neighbours and volunteers within communities. It examines other mechanisms that have increased their coping capacity, such as clubs and support groups, group-based credit and savings programmes and health-microfinance schemes.

The report examines alternative solutions when family care is not possible, including foster care and adoption, but emphasizes that all childcare solutions need to keep children in a nurturing and supportive family environment and close to child's community, wherever possible. It stresses that support for extended families must also be coupled with support for education.

In communities affected by HIV and AIDS, children's rights must be protected. Large-scale support that is integrated, comprehensive and holistic is urgently needed to respond to the immediate and long-term needs of these children.

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