

HIV and Children

Twenty-five years into the HIV epidemic, the children in its path remain at grave risk. It is estimated that 2.5 million children under 15 years of age are infected with HIV, 15.2 million children under 18 have lost one or both parents to AIDS and millions more have been made vulnerable as they are more likely to experience extreme poverty, homelessness, discrimination, lack of access to education, compromised health and possibly death. In fact, a child under 15 dies of an AIDS-related illness every two minutes, and more than 6,000 young people aged 15 to 24 are newly infected by HIV every day.

HIV has left virtually no country, rich or poor, untouched. In the hardest-hit countries, health systems are increasingly losing their capacity to treat and care for children and their families. Schools are becoming dysfunctional, losing their teachers due to illness and death. Farmers are becoming too sick to farm. Affected families are selling their assets, spending increasing amounts on health care and less on food, education and other necessities.

In spite of the major impact that HIV and AIDS are having on children, they have been largely missing from the picture. When strategies for HIV prevention and treatment are drafted, policies made and budgets allocated, the rights and needs of children are often forgotten. The consequences are unacceptable:

- Increasing numbers of children enter the world infected with the virus, diminishing their chances of survival.
- Increasing numbers of adolescents and young people contract the virus every year, threatening their hopes for the future.
- Increasing numbers of parents die, leaving infected and vulnerable children behind.
- Increasing numbers of children are traumatized as their parents, guardians and teachers sicken and die.

Unite for Children, Unite against AIDS

UNICEF has launched the global *Unite for Children, Unite against AIDS* campaign to provide life-changing interventions to children and adolescents living with HIV or affected by AIDS, and to respond to the lack of attention given to the needs of children and adolescents within the context of the pandemic.

The global campaign provides a child-focused framework in four key result areas, dubbed “The Four Ps”. The Four Ps are urgent imperatives that will make a real difference in the lives and life chances of children affected by AIDS. The Four P’s are:

- Prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV: By 2010, offer appropriate services to 80 per cent of women in need;
- Providing paediatric treatment: By 2010, provide either antiretroviral treatment or cotrimoxazole, or both, to 80 per cent of children in need;
- Prevention of infection among adolescents and young people: By 2010, reduce the percentage of young people living with HIV by 25 per cent globally; and
- Protection and support of children affected by HIV and AIDS: By 2010, reach 80 per cent of children most in need.

Protecting and supporting children affected by HIV and AIDS

Today, an estimated 15.2 million children globally under the age of 18 have lost one or both parents to AIDS. The hardship brought by HIV and AIDS hits well before children are orphaned. As a parent or caregiver becomes ill with HIV or AIDS, and is unable to work, the entire family begins to feel the economic impact – children, especially girls, must often drop out of school to go to work, care for their parents, look after their siblings and put food on the table. In addition to the psychological impact of losing one’s parents, children who have been orphaned by AIDS are often stigmatized or ostracized by their communities. These children are often much more at risk of becoming a victim of violence, exploitative child labour, discrimination or other abuses. Without urgent, collective action, millions more children will face enormous risks in their struggle to stay alive including malnutrition, illness, physical and psychosocial trauma, and impaired cognitive and emotional development.

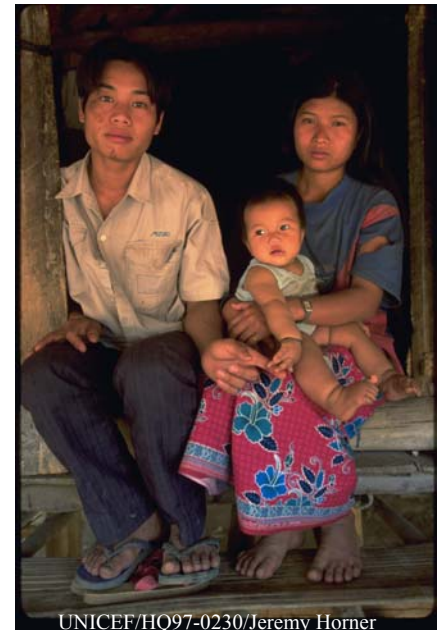
With proper care, support and protection, children orphaned and affected by the pandemic will gain hope for the future and lead healthy, productive and fulfilling lives. UNICEF will continue to work with governments and civil society to help create and implement national policies, laws and action plans to protect and support children affected by HIV and AIDS. This support ranges from providing psychological counseling and helping parents with succession planning, to job training, paying school fees and providing nutritional support and basic health care.



UNICEF/HQ98-0912/Giacomo Pirozzi

This is a short list of major interventions UNICEF is undertaking to protect children. UNICEF is:

- Strengthening the capacity of families to protect and care for orphaned and vulnerable children by prolonging the lives of parents and providing economic, psychosocial and other support;
- Mobilizing and supporting community-based responses;
- Ensuring access to essential services, including education, health care, birth registration and others for orphaned and vulnerable children;
- Ensuring that governments protect the most vulnerable children through improved policy and legislation and by channeling resources to families and communities; and
- Raising awareness at all levels through advocacy and social mobilization to create a supportive environment for children and families affected by HIV and AIDS.



UNICEF/HQ97-0230/Jeremy Horner

Your Contributions at work in Mozambique and Namibia

Mozambique

In Mozambique, approximately 510,000 children have lost one or both parents to HIV-related illnesses. Children orphaned by AIDS are especially vulnerable to abuse and exploitation because of stigma and a lack of adult care and supervision. Children who have lost their mother and children living in child-headed households are considered to be at greater risk of malnutrition, poor health, abuse and exploitation.

UNICEF supports the provision of basic support to orphaned and vulnerable children through cash transfers and delivery of a package of essential materials (including cooking utensils, clothing, school materials, mosquito nets, soap and bedding) to households caring for orphaned and vulnerable children.



Namibia

In Namibia, the number of orphaned children is increasing at an alarming rate – from 27,500 in 1991 to 140,000 in 2005. Extended family networks have been stretched to the limit in providing care. With limited support, many orphaned and vulnerable children suffer from a lack of food and access to basic services including healthcare and education.

UNICEF continues to support the creation of village care points, which focus on identifying, caring for and protecting orphaned and vulnerable children. The children are provided with food, pre-school and non-formal education activities, psycho-social counselling support and opportunities for recreation and play.

