



Nurturing the Future of Southern Africa: How can National Governments Sustainably Address the Impact of AIDS on Children?

REOSA Policy Brief

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Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
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This policy brief is the result of three case studies undertaken by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the Regional Inter-Agency Task Team for Children and AIDS (RIATT) on livelihood-based social protection for orphaned and highly vulnerable children in southern Africa.



Villagers in southern Madagascar are surrounded by the drought-stricken land that is common throughout the region.

The Context of the Problem

In southern Africa, children affected by HIV and AIDS are becoming the most vulnerable members of society. By 2010, more than 18 million children will have lost one or both parents as a consequence of the HIV epidemic, while millions more children – although not orphaned – will have been plunged deeper into poverty and food insecurity as a result of HIV and AIDS.



The Regional Challenges

In the context of poverty and increasing pressure on livelihoods of the poor, orphans and vulnerable children are likely to be more food insecure, more malnourished, and in generally poorer health. Research has shown that these children face a higher risk of abuse, early pregnancy and HIV infection as they grow up. The future prospects for these children are fraught with the risk of repeating and worsening the cycle of poverty.

The Solutions

In order to address these challenges and support vulnerable children and their caregivers, policies must address the complexity of the stressors they face. A livelihood approach takes a multifaceted, holistic view of these stressors and seeks to address them by protecting the destitute, preventing the vulnerable from sliding into destitution, and promoting the future welfare of both in order to support their livelihoods, now and in the future.

Investing in the well-being of young people from early childhood is the most effective way to prevent negative social problems and promote economic growth in the future. Building on children's productive potential allows for the sustainable development of their future livelihoods, their countries and southern Africa as a whole.



Boys play soccer at a settlement in the village of Nyamukwara, Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe has one of the highest HIV rates in the world.

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SUMMARY OF POLICY RESPONSES

- SADC has largely responded to the needs of OVC through National Plans of Action;
- Though most plans encourage comprehensive, multisectoral support of OVC, full implementation is limited;
- Most national responses focus on providing immediate physical and material assistance; and
- There is increasing recognition that a holistic, livelihood-based approach is needed.

Policy Responses in the SADC Region

Responses by Southern African Development Community (SADC) governments to the needs of orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC) have largely been through their National Plans of Action. Unfortunately, most of these plans, while encouraging comprehensive and multisectoral responses have fallen short in their implementation.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), young people's well-being can be most effectively safeguarded by strengthening their capabilities, increasing their access to opportunities, and providing them with safe and supportive environments. However, most national responses focus more on providing children with support for their immediate physical and material needs instead of focusing on holistic child development.

Recently there has been increasing recognition of the importance of adopting a holistic approach to supporting OVC in the SADC region. Through the education system, some SADC member states are implementing a number of holistic livelihood programmes and projects that address aspects of both health and vulnerability in children. These programmes and projects

include grants, Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools and feeding schemes. However, these initiatives are small-scale, fragmented and problem-based, and they lack the comprehensive, system-wide approach and framework to yield the desired results.

Successfully implementing an effective national livelihood-based social protection intervention for orphaned and vulnerable children requires a commitment to coordinating efforts among multiple agencies and organizations, as well as to long-term and large-scale action. This can be a major challenge for governments that are already overwhelmed by a myriad of development responsibilities.

While some SADC member states have made advances in the support of orphaned and vulnerable children through the earmarking of funds, resource levels in the most severely affected countries still remain far below what is needed to build robust, comprehensive national programmes for children and families affected by HIV and AIDS. In addition, many programmes are donor-driven, making them vulnerable to changes in funding priorities and minimizing their impact.

Guiding Principles to Applying a Livelihood Perspective

Integration

Governments must take the initiative to institutionalize support for orphaned and vulnerable children. Rather than relying on donors and other external bodies to address this issue, national governments should examine their own policies and strategies, starting with their National Plans of Action, to ensure that they are aligned with the needs of OVC in the context of the HIV epidemic.

Holistic Development

Policies, strategies and programmes must promote holistic and comprehensive services for children and youth. These services include combining, coordinating and adopting different intervention approaches and methodologies that fulfil not only children's basic needs but also support their well-being and development. Additionally, interventions should make use of existing service delivery structures and partner with existing organizations, in particular community-based organizations, to minimize costs and elicit community buy-in.

Coverage

Within communities, programmes should use 'universal targeting' of all children in order to reduce stigma and discrimination. Chosen responses must be implemented nationally, or be suitable for gradual scaling up. To ensure 'scalability', interventions should be culturally neutral and flexible enough to be readily adopted across communities, and core objectives should be adaptable to varying contexts.

Developmental

Interventions should focus on empowering and building children's capacities to realize their full human potential whether physically, emotionally, economically or otherwise. The specific skills that are taught as part of these livelihood interventions must require little technical knowledge and be both easily attained in a short period of time and easily integrated within existing service delivery systems.

Gender Sensitivity

Policies, strategies and programmes must be gender sensitive, particularly considering the feminization of both poverty and the HIV epidemic in the region.

Participation

Children and their communities must actively participate in developing policies, strategies, programmes, methodologies and tools. Interventions should be driven and informed by beneficiaries and communities to ensure community buy-in and participation.

Sustainability

Interventions should be designed to consider the long-term nature of the needs of children and youth and that vulnerabilities may outlast project life cycles.

Child Rights Centred

Interventions should be child-rights centred. This would entail encouraging duty bearers such as local government officials, NGO staff, older children and youth to take on the role of meeting the needs of all vulnerable children and youth regardless of their own conditions and circumstances. Policies and programmes designed at all levels should demonstrate how they will translate into real benefits for children and youth.



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A LIVELIHOOD PERSPECTIVE

Livelihood-based social protection programmes must incorporate a three-pronged response comprising:

- Protecting the destitute;
- Preventing the vulnerable from sliding into destitution; and
- Promoting the future welfare of both.



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Anjado village in Madagascar. Many Madagascans have been left without a livelihood amid the turmoil and economic decline linked to the current political situation.

Conclusion

Addressing the cycle of poverty in Southern Africa requires decisive action to meet the rights and needs of orphaned and vulnerable children. To adequately address this critical issue, national governments must take the lead in designing comprehensive responses in cooperation with donors, civil society and communities. Responses must be shaped for particular contexts and must consider each of the critical guiding principles outlined in this policy brief.



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