

# Orphans and HIV

## Introduction

HIV/AIDS is striking down African adults in the prime of their lives, leaving millions of orphans to struggle on without parents. Globally, about 3 million deaths a year can be traced to HIV/AIDS - uncles, aunts, grandparents and governments must carry the burden of caring for more and more orphans. These children often lose much more than a mother or father. Orphans are often forced to care for siblings or sick relatives, meaning they must give up school or jobs. Many face discrimination - the stigma of HIV/AIDS persists in many countries - while others not lucky enough to find family or community support end up living on the streets, begging, stealing or trading sex for food and money. Having lost a parent or parents to AIDS, many orphans are themselves vulnerable to HIV infection.

HIV/AIDS is an exceptional cause of orphanhood: if one parent is infected, it is highly likely both will be infected, so children often lose both parents to illness within a short span of time. Governments are waking up to the problem, but much more needs to be done to help children who have lost everything to HIV/AIDS. British charity Save the Children recently called for greater international donors to provide greater support to orphans and vulnerable children (OVC), saying billions of dollars were needed.

*See: AFRICA: Additional OVC support urged*

[http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=5790&SelectRegion=Southern\\_Africa&SelectCountry=AFRICA](http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=5790&SelectRegion=Southern_Africa&SelectCountry=AFRICA)

## The Numbers

HIV/AIDS has left a terrible legacy - about 15 million children worldwide under the age of 18 have lost one or both parents to the disease. Sub-Saharan Africa alone is currently home to about 12 million AIDS orphans. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimated in a recent report that the number in sub-Saharan Africa will climb to more than 16 million orphans and vulnerable children by 2010. In two particularly badly-affected countries, Zimbabwe and Botswana, children orphaned by AIDS account for 77 and 76 percent of all orphans nationally. Across much of Africa, the picture is grim. In Malawi, 550,000 children below the age of 17 have been orphaned by AIDS. UNAIDS' 2006 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic estimated that Zambia had about 710,000 AIDS orphans, of whom over six percent were homeless and less than one percent were housed in orphanages. It's estimated that by 2010 Swaziland will have over 120,000 orphans, about one-eighth of the tiny mountain kingdom's population of just over a million. Most orphans in sub-Saharan Africa - about 90 percent, according to some estimates - live with extended family, usually grandparents, meaning the very old are often forced to care for the very young.

*See: MALAWI: Show us the money, says UN AIDS envoy*

[http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=6508&SelectRegion=Southern\\_Africa&SelectCountry=MALAWI](http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=6508&SelectRegion=Southern_Africa&SelectCountry=MALAWI)

*See: SOUTH AFRICA: HIV/AIDS Still running amok - report*

[http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=6583&SelectRegion=Southern\\_Africa&SelectCountry=SOUTH\\_AFRICA](http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=6583&SelectRegion=Southern_Africa&SelectCountry=SOUTH_AFRICA)

*See: AFRICA: OVC are continent's new AIDS challenge - UNICEF*

<http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=6262&SelectRegion=Africa&SelectCountry=AFRICA>

*See: ETHIOPIA: Nearly half of the children orphaned by HIV/AIDS*

[http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=5365&SelectRegion=Horn\\_of\\_Africa&SelectCountry=ETHIOPIA](http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=5365&SelectRegion=Horn_of_Africa&SelectCountry=ETHIOPIA)

## The Issues

### 1. Orphans robbed of parents - and much more

A child who loses one or both parents to AIDS might also be infected with HIV: Orphans often find themselves battling the very disease that took their parents. Orphans are also at greater risk of malnourishment and stunted growth. Young orphans, healthy or not, are often forced into adult roles long before they should be. An eldest child who loses parents to HIV/AIDS might carry the heavy responsibility of caring for brothers and sisters. A growing number of households across Africa, especially in southern Africa, are headed by children. Extended family members often step in to raise orphans, but the magnitude of the HIV/AIDS crisis is collapsing even this traditional safety net as whole communities fall prey to the illness. Even before they become orphans, children might have

to care for parents suffering from AIDS-related illnesses. According to a UNAIDS report, after the death of one or both parents, a Ugandan child's chances of attending school are halved. The result can be bleak futures for badly affected communities where one generation is cut down by AIDS and the next is left without education or skills.

See: UGANDA: Raw deal for children orphaned by HIV/AIDS  
[http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=5928&SelectRegion=East\\_Africa&SelectCountry=UGANDA](http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=5928&SelectRegion=East_Africa&SelectCountry=UGANDA)

See: ZAMBIA: Help for child-headed homes  
[http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=6602&SelectRegion=Southern\\_Africa&SelectCountry=ZAMBIA](http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=6602&SelectRegion=Southern_Africa&SelectCountry=ZAMBIA)

See: NAMIBIA: Orphans bear the brunt of WFP cash shortfall  
[http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=6578&SelectRegion=Southern\\_Africa&SelectCountry=NAMIBIA](http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=6578&SelectRegion=Southern_Africa&SelectCountry=NAMIBIA)

See: KENYA: Better care could be taken of AIDS orphans  
[http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=6405&SelectRegion=East\\_Africa&SelectCountry=KENYA](http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=6405&SelectRegion=East_Africa&SelectCountry=KENYA)

## 2. Emotional Stress and Stigma

Children with an HIV positive parent or parents are susceptible to intense emotional stress even before they are orphaned. Children might suffer the trauma of watching a parent suffer and then die. When parents are sick with HIV, children often suffer from neglect. After a parent's death, orphans are sometimes stigmatised for being associated with HIV/AIDS. Because of lingering stigmas surrounding the disease, children are sometimes denied access to schools or health care, while also losing the support of friends. Such children are often more at risk of being abused, exploited or discriminated against.

## 3. Loss of Property

Family members are usually an orphan's best allies, but in some parts of Africa it is still customary for relatives to claim whatever land, livestock and property they like from grieving widows and their children. Orphans who lose both parents to HIV/AIDS might then lose their entire inheritance - no matter how small it is - to avaricious uncles, aunts or grandparents. Even if their parents left wills, their wishes often go unheeded. Namibia is one country trying to end such a tradition through legislation. Last year, the Namibian government said it would introduce a new inheritance bill to protect the rights of widows and children, although rights groups fear the laws will not be properly enforced.

See: NAMIBIA: Inheritance Rights Still an Issue  
[http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=51704&SelectRegion=Southern\\_Africa&SelectCountry=NAMIBIA](http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=51704&SelectRegion=Southern_Africa&SelectCountry=NAMIBIA)

See: BOTSWANA: AIDS Orphans Exploited  
<http://www.irinnews.org/AIDSReport.asp?ReportID=1477>

## 4. Is Help On The Way?

Many African governments are finally waking up to the growing legions of HIV/AIDS orphans and the challenges they present. South Africa recently set out to tackle the myriad problems orphans face, vowing to fast track access to birth certificates and identity documents necessary to apply for grants. Swaziland has launched a policy to deal with its rapidly expanding population of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC). The US\$234.7 million National Plan of Action (NPA) seeks to address the health and education needs of OVC and coordinate the efforts of NGOs and government agencies with a priority of ensuring places for OVC in schools. A project in Kenya is taking a long-term approach, stepping in to teach orphans what they should have learned from parents, including basic farming techniques, family planning and gender equality.

See: SOUTH AFRICA: Govt adopts more focused approach to help orphans  
[http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=5704&SelectRegion=Southern\\_Africa&SelectCountry=SOUTH\\_AFRICA](http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=5704&SelectRegion=Southern_Africa&SelectCountry=SOUTH_AFRICA)

See: SWAZILAND: Comprehensive OVC policy unveiled  
[http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=5873&SelectRegion=Southern\\_Africa&SelectCountry=SWAZILAND](http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=5873&SelectRegion=Southern_Africa&SelectCountry=SWAZILAND)

See: SWAZILAND: Giving parentless children an identity  
[http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=6562&SelectRegion=Southern\\_Africa&SelectCountry=SWAZILAND](http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=6562&SelectRegion=Southern_Africa&SelectCountry=SWAZILAND)

See: *KENYA: Farm project helps AIDS orphans get food, income*

[http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=6466&SelectRegion=East\\_Africa&SelectCountry=KENYA](http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=6466&SelectRegion=East_Africa&SelectCountry=KENYA)

See: *RWANDA: Locals taking AIDS orphans, widows under their wing*

[http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=6568&SelectRegion=East\\_Africa&SelectCountry=RWANDA](http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=6568&SelectRegion=East_Africa&SelectCountry=RWANDA)

## 5. Exploding the Myths

It might be time to rethink the status of orphans. A groundbreaking South African study found that poverty - not whether or not a child has parents - is the key factor determining a child's prospects. According to initial findings, there is no significant difference between orphans and non-orphans in terms of school performance or in their level of risk-taking behaviour. The message from this study is clear: orphaned and non-orphaned children alike are made vulnerable by poverty.

See: *SOUTH AFRICA: Research is discounting myths about orphans*

[http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=6535&SelectRegion=Southern\\_Africa&SelectCountry=SOUTH\\_AFRICA](http://www.plusnews.org/AIDSReport.ASP?ReportID=6535&SelectRegion=Southern_Africa&SelectCountry=SOUTH_AFRICA)