



### BRIEF 3

# YOUNG CHILDREN AND HIV/AIDS: Policy and Advocacy Responses

Approximately 15 million children have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS worldwide (COB, 2004), and 12.4 million of those children live in sub-Saharan Africa (UNICEF, UNAIDS, 2006). AIDS also affects children living with HIV positive parents or caregivers, and children who are otherwise affected by the impact of the disease on the adults and the communities that provide them care and protection.

Communities have long been responding to the impact of HIV/AIDS at the local level. But it is only recently that the global community and individual nations have begun to recognize the urgent need to mount large-scale, multifaceted responses to children affected by HIV/AIDS (Smart, 2003). However, within the response to HIV/AIDS, children affected by the pandemic have too often been viewed as a single group when, in reality, there is great diversity in their ages, circumstances and degrees of vulnerability (Fonseca et al., 2005; COB, 2004). Of the 12.4 million orphans in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, almost 18 percent are under the age of six (UNICEF, UNAIDS, 2006).

During the past five years, advocacy and resources for HIV treatment programs have greatly increased. While support for paediatric treatment has increased, resources and advocacy efforts for the care and support of children infected and affected by HIV/AIDS are still lacking. Therefore, this briefing note will focus on advocacy and policy issues related to interventions that target ongoing care and support of orphans and other vulnerable children.

## The Groundwork Has Been Laid

A great deal of advocacy to promote the well being of young children affected by HIV/AIDS has already been initiated. The groundwork has been laid through policies and frameworks for action to improve the situation of young children and their caregivers. Some of these efforts focus specifically on early childhood care and development (ECD), while others focus on the response to the impacts of HIV/AIDS on children. The following are examples of global, regional, and national commitments that have already been made that, if implemented, would improve the lives of young children and those who care for them.

### GLOBAL AND REGIONAL COMMITMENTS

- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) obliges States to ensure the optimal survival and development of the child and to have the best interest of the child guide its action (Dunne, 2005). In 2004, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, emphasized the importance of early childhood development and called on States "...to ensure that all children are guaranteed access to these programs, especially the most vulnerable." (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2004).

- Leaders from 189 Member States have signed the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS, 2001) *Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS* which calls for national policies and strategies to support children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS. Articles 65, 66 and 67 relate specifically to orphans and girls and boys infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.
- The *Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments*, was adopted by participants at the World Education Forum (April, 2000). It collectively committed the world community to achieving education for "every citizen in every society," with early childhood care and education for vulnerable children specifically included. (Dakar Framework, 2000).
- The UN General Assembly Special Session on Children (2002) adopted a plan of action that committed member states to the "development and implementation of national early childhood development policies and programmes to ensure the enhancement of children's physical, social, emotional, spiritual and cognitive development" (UNGASS, 2002).
- At the 2nd International Conference on Early Childhood Development in Asmara in 2002, a framework for action was developed that makes specific reference to the need to avert the consequences of HIV and AIDS on young children, and the importance of programmes for reintegrating orphans into family settings and developing approaches for young children infected and affected by HIV and AIDS (Asmara re Dunn, 2005).
- A workshop on Early Child Development and HIV/AIDS was held in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, in April, 2004, sponsored by the World Bank, UNICEF and UNAIDS. At the end of the workshop, government representatives and NGOs from five African countries—Ghana, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Zambia—prepared country action plans and declared their commitment to accelerate action in support of the special needs of young children in HIV/AIDS programs (Meeting the Special Needs, 2004).

### NATIONAL POLICIES AND PLANS OF ACTION

Countries that are struggling with increasing numbers of orphans and other children affected by HIV/AIDS are already signatories to global and regional conventions and commitments to provide for the protection of children and promotion of their rights. Many countries (with both high and low

*continued other side*

### BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS TO IMPLEMENTATION

A number of factors contribute to the likelihood of translating policies into action. These include:

- Political commitment
- Practical action plans
- Finances
- Coordination mechanisms
- Leadership

prevalence) already have a supportive policy environment with national laws, policies, guidelines, action plans and coordinating bodies that are relevant to young children affected by HIV/AIDS, even though this age group may not be specifically included in the stated mandates. These include National Strategic Frameworks on HIV/AIDS, National AIDS Control Policies and Plans, National Policies on ECD and numerous other guidelines.

## Implementation is Key

International conventions, national laws, policies and commitments already exist to protect the rights of all children at the national level. However, implementation is generally weak and inadequate. Five years after the UNGASS 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, for example, reports to UNAIDS from 126 countries and territories (by March 2006) indicate that “National governments, international partners and communities are failing to provide adequate care and support for the 15 million children orphaned by AIDS and for millions of other children made vulnerable by the epidemic.” (UNAIDS, 2006).

Moving from official policies to active implementation necessitate government commitment and funding. The ministries that are responsible for enactment and monitoring of the policies and programs to provide support to young children and their caregivers may not have the capacity to implement the commitments made by the government. They are often among the most under-resourced of the ministries in both human and financial terms, and action plans are typically not accompanied by the required budgetary support. Alternatively, incorporating the specific needs of young children, including those affected by HIV/AIDS, into national policies and commitments does increase the chance that donors, as well as governments, will be willing to consider these efforts among the competing interests that vie for limited funds.

There is a great deal of potential to capitalize on the synergistic effect of linking ECD mechanisms with those that focus on young children who are orphaned and otherwise vulnerable in AIDS affected areas. However, there are barriers that must be addressed. For example, ECD and HIV/AIDS-related mitigation efforts are often administered by different ministries.

## Conclusion: Moving from Policy to Action

Only a small proportion of children who are affected by HIV/AIDS and their families are currently receiving external support. National policies and commitments to respond to the needs of young children and caregivers who are affected by HIV/AIDS are imperative. They lay the groundwork for ongoing support to services and programs with government and donor

resources. Government policies and commitments must be complemented by effective structures and mechanisms with the capacity to reach a significant proportion of those in need. Ultimately, in order to translate existing policies, commitments, and systems into action, resources—both human and financial—must accompany them as they move from the desks of well-meaning advocates and politicians into the communities that have struggled to support the increasing numbers of children living with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

*The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development would like to thank Linda Sussman for her invaluable work in compiling this brief.*

### REFERENCES

- Asmara Declaration: Report of the 2nd International Conference on Early Childhood Development; Government of Eritrea, World Bank, UNICEF and ADEA; Asmara; 2002 re Dunn, 2005.
- Children on the Brink 2004 (COB), A Joint Report of New Orphan Estimates and a Framework for Action; UNAIDS, UNICEF, USAID; July 2004.
- Convention on the Rights of the Child; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; (<http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm>).
- The Dakar Framework for Action; World Education Forum; Dakar, Senegal; April 26-28, 2000; <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121147e.pdf>.
- Dunn, Alison; HIV/AIDS: What about very young children? Working paper #35 in Early Childhood Development; Young Children and HIV/AIDS sub-series; Bernard Van Leer Foundation; March 2005.
- Dunn, Alison; *The way the money goes; An investigation of flows of funding and resources for young children affected by HIV/AIDS*; Working paper #37 in Early Childhood Development; Young Children and HIV/AIDS sub-series; Bernard Van Leer Foundation; March 2005.
- Engle, Patrice L, Dunkelberg, E, Issa, S; *ECD and HIV/AIDS: the newest programming and policy challenge*; Updated Draft; May 8, 2006.
- Engle, P.L., Dunkelberg, E., Issa, S; *ECD and HIV/AIDS: the newest programming and policy challenge*; Draft; December 12, 2005.
- Fonseca, J; O’Gara, C; Sussman, L; Williamson, J; *New Threats to Early Childhood Development: Children Affected by HIV/AIDS*; Draft; 2006.
- Meeting the Special Needs of Young Children: *The Way Forward*; Workshop Report; ECD HIV/AIDS Workshop, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, April, 2004.
- Smart, Rose; *Policies for Orphans and Vulnerable Children: A Framework for Moving Ahead*; POLICY Project; July, 2003.
- UNAIDS; Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic; 2006 (<http://www.unaids.org/en/>).
- UNAIDS; World Leaders Chart Way Forward to Reverse AIDS Epidemic; 2006 High level meeting on General Assembly, United Nations, New York; May 31-June 2, 2006 ([http://data.unaids.org/pub/PressRelease/2006/20060531\\_PR\\_HLM\\_en.pdf](http://data.unaids.org/pub/PressRelease/2006/20060531_PR_HLM_en.pdf)).
- UNAIDS; Pediatric AIDS ([http://www.unaids.org/en/Issues/Prevention\\_treatment/pediatric\\_aids.asp](http://www.unaids.org/en/Issues/Prevention_treatment/pediatric_aids.asp)).
- UNGASS (2002) UN General Assembly 2002 Special Session on Children, Plan of Action [www.unhcr.ch/html/menu2/6/crc/doc/discussion.htm](http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu2/6/crc/doc/discussion.htm)) re Dunn, 2005.
- UNICEF, UNAIDS; A call to action: Children the missing face of AIDS; 2005; ([www.unicef.org/uniteforchildren](http://www.unicef.org/uniteforchildren)).
- United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child; Day of Discussion: Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood; Recommendations; Palais Wilson; 17 September, 2004; ([www.unhcr.ch/html/menu2/6/crc/doc/discussion.htm](http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu2/6/crc/doc/discussion.htm)).
- United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, Bernard van Leer Foundation; *A Guide to General Comment 7: Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood*; Bernard van Leer Foundation; 2006

**The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development** (CGECCD) is a consortium of agencies, donors, NGOs, as well as regional and national networks that works collaboratively to identify critical issues and emergency areas of need related to Early Childhood Care and Development.

To learn more about the ways orphans and other young children are affected by HIV/AIDS and the measures that can be taken to assist them, visit CGECCD’s website: [www.ecdgroup.com](http://www.ecdgroup.com) or contact: Louise Zimanyi or Chanel Croker, Co-Directors ([lzimanyi@ryerson.ca](mailto:lzimanyi@ryerson.ca)/[chanelcroker@gmail.com](mailto:chanelcroker@gmail.com)) and/or Jodie Fonseca, CGECCD Working Group on Early Childhood and HIV/AIDS ([jfonseca@dc.savechildren.org](mailto:jfonseca@dc.savechildren.org))