

Improving the quality of life for orphans and vulnerable children through Protection

FACT SHEET

Here's the problem...

Children affected by HIV are at risk of losing the care of parents even before one or both have died. Of children affected by HIV, approximately 95% live with extended family. The overwhelming majority of children who have lost a parent to AIDS can and should remain in the care of their families, provided that those families receive appropriate support. This support for families is crucial because most families who take in children are already burdened by poverty.ⁱ

Without social protection mechanisms, such as birth and death registration and property and inheritance rights, children are left without legal protection from abuse and exploitation.

- One in three developing countries has birth registration rates of less than 50 percent.
- Two out of three African children under age five are not registered.
- Children under five who have been denied the right to identity tend to be poor, live in rural areas, have limited access to health care, are not attending early childhood education, have higher levels of malnutrition and have higher mortality rates.ⁱⁱ

UNICEF's findings on children's legal rights are similar to findings from Catholic Relief Services (CRS) 2007 Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) PEPFAR program midterm evaluation report.

- A minority of parents had made a plan for the care of their children before they died; only 8%-33% of OVC said that their parents had a will.
- The perception of inheritance denial is common; 17%-48% of OVC and guardians believed that it was a common occurrence. But, personal experience with relatives denying inheritance to the OVC was uncommon; 5%-33% of OVC claimed personal experience.
- While will writing is uncommon, in cases where a plan has been made, 71.4% to 97.1% of OVC interviewed said it has been respected by guardians and the community.

As a result of these findings, the project increased its emphasis on promotion of parental planning and protection of children's rights.

Here is how

CRS is responding...

CRS implements the orphans and vulnerable children component of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) in six countries: Botswana, Haiti, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zambia. Protection of children requires interventions at all levels—individual, family, community and government.

On the individual level, all of the PEPFAR OVC programs include home visits by community health workers or volunteers who can assess and intervene at the individual level. When a volunteer assesses that there is abuse in the home, she can refer the case to authorities. In 2008, the Tanzania program referred 500 children on to community services.

On the family level, community health workers give training to families on signs of abuse, the rights of children, and ways to protect children. In Kenya, 9790 caregivers and OVC were counseled on child rights and protection in 2009. In Zambia, birth registration pamphlets were distributed to 2500 families informing them of children's rights and the process for obtaining certification.

On the community level, there are a number of activities to protect children. One intervention has been public awareness campaigns, such as in Zambia where 16,465 community members have been reached with

ⁱ Joint Learning Initiative on Children and HIV/AIDS, February 2009.

ⁱⁱ www.UNICEF.org, "Child Protection from Violence, Exploitation and Abuse" May 2009.

messages on children protection and legal rights. Another intervention is training the community health workers who relay the message at the community level through community sensitization meetings for both children and adults. In Haiti, 5922 community members have participated in these events.

On the government level, several programs are creating linkages with legal services and government agencies to facilitate birth registrations and wills. In Kenya 276 OVC and in Botswana 108 OVC were assisted with obtaining a birth certificate in 2009. In Zambia 3914 OVC were assisted in obtaining service cards which allows them to access social services. Another government-level intervention includes advocacy with local authorities to define and follow protocol for referring cases of abuse and finding a safe environment for the child.

On an agency level, CRS has measures in place to protect children including a “Do No Harm” policy that protects children from unintended exploitation in research or in program promotion. CRS also requires staff to sign a Code of Conduct indicating that they are aware of their responsibilities in working with children.

Those who have been helped...

A total of **173,743** children and their families who are vulnerable due to HIV and AIDS have been served through the OVC PEPFAR program from 2004 through 2009. During the length of the project, child protection activities have been steadily increasing. In 2008, **27,469** OVC, families and communities were reached with child protection assistance with the number increasing in 2009 to **29,252** beneficiaries.



Photo by David Snyder for CRS

A story of intervention...

In a remote Botswanian village, a mother died leaving behind two daughters, ages 8 and 10. Their mother left them with an alcohol addicted uncle in a dilapidated mud house which soon collapsed.

The girls were registered with the government social services who provided them with a food basket, but the uncle would take the food, sell it and squander the money. One good Samaritan family, and their daughter, Lerato, who is an OVC project youth leader, found a new housing situation for the girls and their uncle. The new home was far from their school and only the uncle was able to get them placed into a closer school, but he was too consumed with drinking to move the girls into a new school. With the proximity of the girls' new home to Lerato's family, the evidence of the uncle's sexual abuse became more evident. Lerato sought help in removing the girls from their home.

The government social services gave excuses about intervening. With persistence, the CRS OVC project staff, together with Lerato, made daily visits to the school and the government social welfare office advocating for a new situation for the girls. Finally they were successful in getting the girls moved to a new living situation.

The photographs in this publication are for illustrative purposes only; they do not imply any particular health status (such as HIV or AIDS) on the part of the persons who appear in them.