

# THE CHILDREN OUR FUTURE

The Coalition for Children Affected by AIDS is fighting to ensure that children and adolescents affected by this disease receive the global attention and help they so deserve.



✕ All children have the right to life – the right to be given the chance to live happy, healthy lives where they can thrive in their schools, communities and families. The right to no longer be made to engage in demands that exceed their young years, nor be ravaged by disease and plagues of ignorance. Sadly, the situation for children facing major global pandemics like HIV/AIDS continues to be a major struggle. Whilst huge progress has been made, and continues to be made, in the world-wide fight against HIV/AIDS, the developments for children and adolescents are lagging behind and the epidemic risks are at an all-time high. The facts speak for themselves, and are truly frightening.

- According to UNICEF's *Seventh Stocktaking Report, 2016*:
- Children living with HIV (aged 0–4) face the highest risk of AIDS-related death compared to all other age groups.
  - Only half of HIV-exposed babies are tested for HIV by the recommended age of two months.
  - Of the 1.8 million children under 15 living with HIV, only half are on treatment.
  - More than 100 adolescents (10–19) died of AIDS every day in 2015.

An increased focus has got to be placed on this extremely vulnerable population, who are the very rock of our society's

future and deserve to be a top priority in the struggle against the disease. Children in every single region of the world are faced with the very real struggle presented by HIV/AIDS. As South Africans, we know this all too well. This includes those millions infected by the disease, but also those at the risk of infection and those suffering the massive consequences of having a family member or someone close to them with the disease.

Enter The Coalition for Children Affected by AIDS (The Coalition) – a truly exceptional group of global donors, United Nations agencies, non-governmental agencies, and independent experts whose main concern is the lack of attention being paid to these children. Founded in 2005 with just five founding members, The Coalition now has 23 UN agencies, NGOs, donors and academic organisations as well as four Ambassadors (experts of their own experiences with HIV/AIDS who represent those affected at a grassroots level). The Coalition aims to ensure that children and adolescents receive the global attention they so strongly deserve in order to survive and to thrive at home, in their schools and in their communities.

I recently had the privilege of meeting a remarkable and passionate woman by the name of Corinna Csáky, manager of The Coalition. Csáky lives in the United Kingdom, and began working with children in extreme poverty in Ecuador over 20 years ago. Since then, she has lived and worked with children and families in Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Colombia and Peru, and continues to be deeply inspired by both the tragic injustices facing these children and their incredible resilience and ability to spearhead change despite their dire circumstances.

**Julie Graham (JG): What does The Coalition do?**

**Corinna Csáky (CC):** The Coalition advocates better policies, practices and funding for children affected by HIV/AIDS. We host influential global conferences, speak at major HIV events, compile critical evidence, produce cutting-edge reports, and make expert recommendations towards major global policies and decisions. We also support a growing number of Ambassadors from HIV-affected communities around the world to speak at the global level.

**JG: What have been some of the key challenges faced in getting your message across?**

**CC:** A key challenge has been to persuade others that it takes more than medicine to tackle HIV/AIDS in children. Children need a range of biomedical, social and economic support to enable them to avoid and survive HIV/AIDS. For example, in order to take HIV medication, a child needs a healthy diet and the support of an informed parent or carer. Using critical scientific evidence and speaking alongside families living with HIV/AIDS





themselves, The Coalition, together with our friends and partners, has successfully influenced many major donors and policy-makers to acknowledge the importance of supporting the “whole child”.

The key challenge now is to find the resources to deliver this holistic approach. As part of this we must persuade those working on other issues – social equality, education, health and poverty – to target children and families in areas of high prevalence of HIV. We need to pool our resources and expertise so that the HIV sector and other international development sectors work together more effectively for children.

**JG: What have been some of the most memorable moments of your time in The Coalition?**

**CC:** Our Ambassadors from South Africa, Uganda and Malawi are cherished members of The Coalition. The first time I saw them speaking at a global level so passionately and effectively – about personal stories as well as complex policies – I was tremendously proud, both of them and of the work that our other members do to support them.

**JG: What are some of The Coalition’s goals in the near future?**

**CC:** A central goal for 2018 is to harness the momentum around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [see sidebar] for the benefit of children and families affected by HIV. Governments have committed to delivering the SDGs and we are developing a range of tools to help people working at all levels – from the community to the global level – to support their governments and to hold them to account, with and on behalf of children affected by HIV/AIDS.

**JG: What is your message to global leaders?**

**CC:** Children affected by HIV/AIDS are central to achieving commitments to international development, HIV, and human rights. These can only be achieved by providing children and families in

areas of high HIV burden with an effective combination of medical, social and economic support. Listen to these children and their communities, and support them to be champions of change.

**JG: How can our readers help?**

**CC:** The public plays a vital role. Firstly, they can donate to any reputable charity supporting children and families in areas where HIV/AIDS is prevalent – this could be a local community organisation or a global charity. Secondly, they can join any campaign actions proposed by these charities, such as signing a petition or writing to their political representatives. And finally, they can talk about and promote inclusive, empathetic and equal views in their own families and communities and tackle the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS.

*For more information, and to read more about the brave Ambassadors and their personal stories, please visit [www.childrenandhiv.org](http://www.childrenandhiv.org).*

**WHAT ARE THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)?**

The SDGs are a United Nations-sponsored effort to create a common set of development goals for all communities in every country, with a deadline for attainment of 2030. The idea is to get governments, aid organisations, foundations and NGOs on the same page about what global problems most urgently need to be solved, and how to measure progress and solutions. For a full list of the goals, visit [www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals).