

# The Promise of a Future

**Strengthening Family and Community Care  
for Orphans and Vulnerable Children  
in Sub-Saharan Africa**



**Firelight Foundation**



**American Jewish World Service**



**Bernard van Leer Foundation**



**Pan African Children's Fund**

# Dear Reader,

This brief report addresses the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS on children and families in Sub-Saharan Africa, a region that is home to over 80% of the 15 million children under the age of 18 who have been orphaned by the pandemic worldwide. The health, education, safety, and survival of increasing numbers of children are particularly at risk in African countries that are heavily affected by HIV/AIDS, poverty and disease. The most promising solutions to this mounting crisis look beyond orphanages and institutional care to more sustainable, cost-effective, and developmentally appropriate alternatives.

The first line of support for children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS is family and community. With great creativity and resilience, growing numbers of grassroots, community-based, and non-governmental organizations are working to strengthen and revitalize the local safety nets that have been unraveling as the pandemic spreads. All children need the nurturing support of family and the experience of community in order to thrive. This publication highlights the programs and strategies that help ensure that children remain in family care within their communities by reducing discrimination, ensuring access to education, creating income, and providing direct support.

The four donor organizations that have produced this report – the Firelight Foundation, American Jewish World Service, Bernard van Leer Foundation, and Pan African Children's Fund – fund grassroots organizations serving children in 21 African countries. We have witnessed the effective work of groups rising to the challenge of HIV/AIDS in their communities. We have also struggled with the issue of institutional care. While we do not endorse the use of orphanages as a solution for reasons outlined in this report and described much more broadly elsewhere (see Additional Resources, p. 11), we recognize the need for short-term emergency care for especially vulnerable children, such as street youth and children who have been abused or abandoned. As donors, we have funded residential programs for children who have no other means of support while also working to ensure that these placements are temporary. The bottom line is that investing in community-based approaches enables children to be provided and cared for within families – where they grow best - and reduces the number of children who are left without care or are placed within institutions.

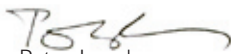
One of the greatest challenges that grassroots groups face is that their work is under-recognized and under-funded. It is the intent of this report to provide readers with a better understanding of community-based organizations and the vital role they play in supporting the needs of children and families affected by HIV/AIDS. We offer it as both a summary and a guide to current and future donors – foundations, individuals, and faith-based organizations – eager to help address the HIV/AIDS pandemic wisely.



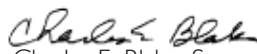
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"The Promise of a Future" underwent an extensive review process. Thank you to the many individuals and representatives of community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, foundations, and international agencies that contributed to the ideas and formation of this publication and provided us with valuable feedback.

## To Obtain the Full-Length Version of this Report

If you would like to learn more about community-based organizations and the work that they do, we encourage you to read the comprehensive version of this report, which includes descriptions of exemplary programs, as well as a more detailed resource list and further information regarding the impact of HIV/AIDS on children and families in Sub-Saharan Africa. The report will be available in 2006.

To receive a copy, please contact Firelight Foundation:

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# The Challenge

## Africa is Being Ravaged by HIV/AIDS and Children are Paying the Greatest Price

Another 10 million children in Sub-Saharan Africa will lose their parents by 2015 due to HIV/AIDS. They will join the 14 million African children who have already lost their mothers or fathers to the disease, bringing the total to 24 million orphans in the region. **This is an orphan crisis without historical precedent.** It calls for a broad-based response that is compassionate and strategic, and addresses the root cause of the pandemic, which is poverty.

## Family and Community Safety Nets Are Weakened by HIV/AIDS

A common thread that runs through Africa's diverse cultures is that of extended family members stepping in to provide orphans with a nurturing home and a family, which children need to grow into healthy adults. Given the scale and scope of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, it is remarkable that most of the children who have been orphaned continue to be cared for by extended family members. But this safety net is becoming less reliable as more and more caregivers die. Family and community resources are stretched to the breaking point and are in need of help.

Many African countries and international organizations recognize the shortcomings of institutions and discourage their use. They recognize that some children are placed in orphanages by family members to access food, clothing, and an education. They know that the existence of an orphanage can weaken a community's motivation to address orphan issues.

## Building More Orphanages is not in the Best Interests of Children

The sheer number of orphaned and vulnerable children is overwhelming. Many well-meaning donors are funding orphanages as a solution to the problem. However, institutions are very expensive and can only reach limited numbers of children. Most importantly, orphanages often fail to meet children's developmental needs and do not prepare them for adult life in a community. While institutions can serve as a temporary, last-resort response, they are not a long-term solution.



*As grandparents lose their adult children to AIDS, they suffer the loss of their support system for old age and find themselves caring for increasing numbers of grandchildren.*



# Family and Community Care for Orphans and Vulnerable Children

## Children Grow Best in Families

Children who are cared for by families within communities are more likely to thrive than those in institutions. Children growing up in families generally receive more consistent care, develop better social and emotional relationships, and form a stronger self-image. They absorb the patterns and values of their culture and develop the language, customs, and skills they will need in their adult lives.

## Community-Based Responses Strengthen Families

The best way to serve vulnerable children is to strengthen the capacity of families and communities to care for them. Extended family members and caregivers in the community who are willing to take in children in need often lack the means to do so. Community-based organizations address this by providing households with support to meet the material, educational, and emotional needs of children. These local solutions are more cost-effective than orphanages, making it possible to support many more children. The programs and strategies vary as each community determines the form of assistance that best meets the needs of its population.

In the complex puzzle posed by HIV/AIDS there are no easy answers. The critical question we must ask is, "What is in the best interests of the child?" Children need to be protected from neglect, abuse, and deprivation of their basic needs. They require loving and consistent care, access to health services, good nutrition, an education, and interaction with local community life, no matter where they live.

## Grassroots Solutions Involve Community Members and Local Resources

Most community-based organizations have lean budgets and limited, if any, paid staff. Volunteers are often the backbone of grassroots efforts. As local people work side by side to address the impact of HIV/AIDS, they involve others, inspire community ownership, and build community strength. Community responses vary in their size and maturity and in the scope and scale of their services. They can include community-based organizations with voluntary membership, local non-governmental organizations employing paid staff, and religious groups and networks.



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*Children in families experience the close relationships and day-to-day patterns that provide them with an identity and prepare them for adult life in the community.*

# Strategies to Support Family and Community-Based Care

## Grassroots Groups Grow in Response to Real Needs

Examining how different communities identify their priorities demonstrates that there is no single right way to do things. Problems are best addressed when the people directly involved in a situation develop their own solutions. Many community groups start by providing one type of assistance and then add on other services as they see the need. A variety of strategies offer the best results. This section highlights the range of programs and strategies that organizations use to address the effects of HIV/AIDS on children and families in their communities.

## Raising Awareness Inspires Action

As long as people are ignorant of the needs of vulnerable children or are fearful of contracting HIV/AIDS from simple social contact, there will be children left uncared for. Many groups educate people about the responsibility they all share to protect orphans and vulnerable children. A common approach is to form “Orphan Care Committees” that bring together a cross-section of community members to identify children in need and develop a plan of action. Many organizations also work to reduce the high level of discrimination associated with the disease through outreach and education. These programs help ensure that children and their families receive the acceptance and support crucial to their survival.

## Community Groups Provide HIV-Prevention Information

Every new HIV infection puts increasing numbers of children at risk. Education is the key to prevention. A growing number of groups provide reproductive health education in places where such topics have never been discussed openly. They work within the culture of the communities, use peer educators, and address the myths about HIV/AIDS. The involvement of young people (who are at the highest risk for becoming infected) is key to building community awareness, increasing voluntary HIV-testing, and changing sexual behaviors to reduce the spread of the disease.



© Jennifer Anderson-Bähr

*A village Orphan Care Committee gathers to discuss how the community can best respond to the needs of vulnerable children.*

## Home-Based Care Reduces the Burden on Children

People who are ill with AIDS are vulnerable to social isolation, depression, and the inability to care for their own and their family's basic needs. Children are often forced to leave school to care for their dying parents. A widespread response is a home-based care program, which provides a community with trained volunteers to visit the homes of the ill. Home-based care volunteers assist with a range of needs, including food preparation, hygiene, basic medical care, and counseling.

**A community-based organization's ability to expand its services and increase its impact is often challenged by limited resources. Donor funding can enable groups to address this challenge.**



# Strategies to Support Family and Community-Based Care

## Addressing Psychosocial Needs Helps Children Cope with Loss

Orphans and vulnerable children have emotional and social needs that can be devastating if left unmet. They need help to cope with the trauma of witnessing their parents' deaths and the possible separation from their siblings. Many face overwhelming family responsibilities after their parents are gone. Community organizations can play a critical role in the healing process. Bereavement counseling and peer support groups give young people the opportunity to express their feelings and talk with others who are in similar situations. Recreational, sports, and arts programs allow children to play and be children again and create an opportunity for information sharing and support.



© Joop Rubens

Many community-based organizations work to ensure a child's right to an education.

## Helping Children Stay in School

An education is a child's future. One of the most distressing effects of HIV/AIDS is the increasing numbers of children who must leave school because their parents or caregivers cannot pay their school fees. Community organizations often work to help children stay in school. They may provide school fees, cover the costs of uniforms and books, negotiate with local schools to reduce or eliminate fees, or help children get the food and counseling they need to be able to learn.

## Creating Livelihood Opportunities Helps Caregivers Provide for Children

Poverty often prevents potential caregivers from being able to take in children in need. This situation makes youth vulnerable to prostitution and labor exploitation as they struggle to support themselves. Many community groups create income-generating activities for caregivers, offering microcredit loans and small business training. Others provide agricultural supplies or livestock to families in rural areas. Some provide vocational education and skills training to young people who are heads of households. In many cases, material support such as food and clothing is supplied when the head of household is too ill or too old to work.



© Karen Ande

Small loans can help a caregiver start a business, enabling her to earn an income and support a family.

# Strategies to Support Family and Community-Based Care

## Supporting Caregivers' Needs Helps Children Remain in Family Care

It is difficult for those caring for young children to manage their childcare responsibilities in addition to working or attending school. Caregivers who are elderly or ill often need a respite. Childcare programs may focus on the special needs of disabled or HIV-infected children, or may simply provide relief so caregivers can continue to earn money to support their families while knowing their children are being well cared for. Support groups give caregivers the opportunity to receive psychological comfort, as well as tools for meeting the emotional and developmental needs of the children in their care.

## Addressing Gender Inequality Gives Girls a Fair Chance

In the most severely affected regions, five girls between the ages of 15 and 19 are infected with HIV/AIDS for every boy in the same age group. Economic and social inequality and their roles as caretakers put girls at greater risk for dropping out of school and makes them more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and HIV infection. Many community groups give girls tools to resist unsafe sex and sexual abuse. Some programs offer shelter, counseling, and legal advice to girls who have been abused. Programs to keep girls in school recognize that the more education young women have, the more likely they are to marry later, send their own children to school, and earn income enabling them to break the cycle of poverty.

## Protecting Children's Legal Rights Safeguards Their Future

Orphaned children are at high risk of being separated from their siblings, losing their rights to family property, and being mistreated by caregivers who do not have their best interests at heart. Some groups address these risks by encouraging parents to communicate plans to ensure the best possible care for their children after their death. This can include designating caregivers and helping children get the legal identification they need to protect their rights to their family's land and an education. Some community organizations engage in advocacy to change local and national customs and laws to ensure that children receive the protection, education, material support, inheritance, and care that is every child's birthright.



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*When parents receive life-saving medications, they can care for their children into the future.*

## Antiretroviral Drugs (ARVs) Prolong Parents' Lives

Until ARVs and drugs to prevent mother-to-child transmission become more available in Africa, the HIV/AIDS-related death toll will continue to rise at an unacceptable rate, leaving increasing numbers of children in need of care and at risk for HIV infection themselves. Community-based groups play an important role at the local level in the distribution of these life-saving medications. They educate the public and mobilize grassroots movements for treatment access. They prepare home-based care and community health workers for ARV administration and identify the people most in need of immediate treatment support.

**Many children in addition to orphans face serious hardships due to HIV/AIDS. The phrase "orphans and vulnerable children" is used to describe all children who community members and organizations determine to be in the greatest need of assistance.**



# Institutional Care: A Temporary Response and a Last Resort

The purpose of this publication is to raise awareness about the importance of family and community-based solutions to the problems that orphans and vulnerable children face. We hope to move funders, governments, and other organizations away from reliance on orphanages, which are unable to address the scale of the orphan crisis in Africa and often fail to meet children's developmental and long-term needs. Institutional care should be recognized as valuable only when it is a temporary response or a last resort for vulnerable children having no other means of support. However, donors can play a needed role in funding short-term and transitional residential care for children who do not have access to family care.

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*Once a child has been placed in an institution, every effort should be made to find reliable family care.*

## **Institutions as Short-Term Way Stations for Vulnerable Children**

Institutional care can offer a way station for especially vulnerable children, offering them a safe shelter and providing for other immediate needs while searches are made for reliable family care. Children who have nowhere else to go, are living on the streets, are victims of sexual or physical violence, or have been abandoned because they have disabilities or are ill with HIV/AIDS often need this type of transitional residential care. Once crisis intervention and treatment to support recovery have been provided, every effort should be made to keep these institutional placements short term. Used in this way, institutions can keep a child safe and cared for until a better alternative within a family home in the community is found.

## **Strengthening Family and Community Ties**

An increasing number of orphanages are redesigning their programs to offer family and community-based care. Some are transitioning from larger institutions into smaller group homes modeled on the family. Some are finding ways to bring institutionalized children back into the community by reunifying them with extended family members and encouraging local adoption and foster care.

It is important for existing institutions to bring the community into the lives of the children they serve. For example, community volunteers can work with the children to create deeper relationships and social ties. Children can be involved in important community events and can participate in local apprenticeships. When orphanages strengthen community ties in these ways, children are better prepared for life in their community and the potential for local families to open their homes is increased. Donors can support these types of changes in partnership with institutions.



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*Apprenticeships connect a young person to his community and provide him with skills he will need in the future.*



# How to Direct Your Money to Those in Need



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*Funding grassroots organizations is one of the best ways to ensure that donor dollars directly benefit families.*

There are many ways to get your dollars to grassroots groups, where every dollar counts. You can give to foundations and donor agencies that award grants to community-based groups. Faith-based donors can contact the African diocese or national representative associated with their faith and ask to be connected with African organizations within their network. You can also give directly to grassroots groups. The following paragraphs offer some suggestions to guide your giving.

## Honor Community Ownership

It is essential for donors to respect local leadership and community ownership if communities are to develop the capacity to meet their own needs. Grassroots groups know best how to help the children and families in their communities and devise creative solutions that outside donors would not have considered. When donor funds subsidize, it is the programs that are truly owned by the community that are most likely to survive.

Helping communities in their efforts to support families in the care of orphaned and vulnerable children requires thoughtful, responsive, and respectful partnerships with community leaders and local organizations.

## Fund in Amounts that Make Sense for a Community

Donors need to be sensitive to the capacity of community-based organizations to absorb and utilize funds. The size of a grant should be matched to an organization's actual needs and management capabilities. As community organizations increase both their management capacity and range of programs, they are able to handle larger grants.

## Fund Administrative and Technical Support Costs

It is difficult to run effective programs when all outside funds are tagged for programs alone. Organizations need money to pay for rent, utilities, staff salaries and office supplies. While these expenses should be balanced with program costs, covering at least a portion of administrative expenses allows organizations to focus more fully on direct services. Local responses are strengthened when organizations have access to information about best practices and technical support. Funds to support management and program training, networking meetings, exchange programs, and conference participation provide community organizations with the tools and information to build their programs.

# An Invitation

Stemming the tide of HIV/AIDS requires a broad response, from large international agencies and nations to small assemblies of concerned neighbors and community members. This report discusses the important and widespread work that is happening at the community level, at the frontlines of AIDS, often invisible to outside funders and reporters. National and international efforts fare much better when they are coupled with grassroots activism.

Investing in grassroots programs is one of the most powerful ways that a donor can make a difference in the lives of children and in the battle against HIV/AIDS. Solutions that strengthen the capacity of the family and the community to care for children help ensure that fewer children will be abandoned, neglected, or placed within institutional care. Equally important, community-based solutions mobilize individuals to action, building hope and increasing the local capacity of community members to address their own needs. We invite you to join us in building a better future for children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS. There are thousands of diligent community-based organizations working to support families in their efforts to provide children with the loving care, basic material support, and educational opportunities that every child deserves. What these groups lack most are the resources to do so adequately.



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# The Foundations That Produced This Report

The **Firelight Foundation** supports and advocates for the needs and rights of children who are orphaned or affected by HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa. Firelight strives to increase the resources available to grassroots organizations that are strengthening the capacity of families and communities to care for children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS. In our first five years, Firelight has made 380 grants to over 200 organizations in 12 Sub-Saharan African countries. To learn more about us or to make a donation, visit our website at [www.firelightfoundation.org](http://www.firelightfoundation.org); call us: +1-831-429-8750; write: 510 Mission Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060 USA; or email: [info@firelightfoundation.org](mailto:info@firelightfoundation.org).

**American Jewish World Service (AJWS)** is the hand, heart, and voice of the American Jewish community in the developing world, helping thousands of people in Africa, Asia and the Americas move beyond the ills of poverty, illiteracy, disease, disaster, and war. A pioneering international development organization, AJWS is engaged in innovative non-sectarian grant making, Peace Corps-like volunteer service, and educational and advocacy programs, supporting the visionary efforts of 200 non-governmental organizations in 40 countries that are galvanizing, inspiring and fueling the engines of social change where inequities are most severe. To learn more and support our work, visit our website: [www.ajws.org](http://www.ajws.org), call us: +1-212-736-2597 or 800-889-7146, or write: 45 West 36th Street, New York, NY 10018 USA.

The **Bernard van Leer Foundation** works to improve opportunities for children up to eight years of age who are growing up in socially and economically difficult circumstances. We make grants to organisations working with young children to promote culturally and contextually appropriate approaches to early childhood development. We also share knowledge and expertise in early childhood development through our print publications, our website, and other media, with the aim of informing and influencing policy and practice. Please note that Bernard van Leer is a private foundation that does not accept outside donations. To learn more about us, visit our website at [www.bernardvanleer.org](http://www.bernardvanleer.org); call us +31-(0)70-3312200; write: Eisenhowerlaan 156, P.O. Box 82334, 2508 EH The Hague, The Netherlands; or email: [registry@bvleerf.nl](mailto:registry@bvleerf.nl).

**Save Africa's Children**, a program of the **Pan African Children's Fund**, partners with faith-based and grassroots initiatives that serve orphans and vulnerable children in Africa and the Diaspora. SAC provides financial and material assistance to organizations in Africa directly responding to the needs of the most vulnerable children. We work with a variety of U.S. and African churches and denominations to carry out our work. Our grants assist community-based programs that are locally designed and managed, such as community schools, feeding programs, income generating activities, and AIDS prevention. For more information or to donate online, visit our website at [www.saveafricaschildren.org](http://www.saveafricaschildren.org); call us: +1-323-733-1048; or write us: P.O. Box 8386, Los Angeles, CA 90008 USA.

## Additional Resources

The strategies and programs described in *The Promise of a Future* follow the shared principles set forth in the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and *The Principles to Guide Programming for Orphans and Other Children Affected by HIV/AIDS* developed by the United Nations, USAID, and international development organizations in consultation with local community-based organizations. Available at <http://www.unicef.org/crc/crc.htm> and <http://www.firelightfoundation.org/principles.htm>.

*A Family is for a Lifetime: A Discussion of the Need for Family Care for Children Impacted by AIDS*. Jan Williamson, The Synergy Project/USAID, March 2004. Available at [http://www.synergyaids.com/documents/FamilyForLifetimeVersion\\_1March04.pdf](http://www.synergyaids.com/documents/FamilyForLifetimeVersion_1March04.pdf) or by writing The Synergy Project, 1101 Vermont Avenue NW, Suite 900, Washington DC 20005 USA.

*A Last Resort: The Growing Concern About Children in Residential Care*. International Save the Children Alliance, London, UK. Available at [www.savethechildren.net](http://www.savethechildren.net) or email [enquiries@savethechildren.net](mailto:enquiries@savethechildren.net).

*Children in Residential Care and Alternatives* (Children at Risk Guidelines Vol. 5), Tearfund, England, 2001. Available at <http://www.tearfundinternationaldevelopment.baigent.net/frameset.asp>. Then choose the option, "Resources" then "Children at Risk." Or, request at [roots@tearfund.org](mailto:roots@tearfund.org).

*Children on the Brink 2004: A Joint Report on New Orphan Estimates and Program Strategies*, UNAIDS, UNICEF, USAID. Available at [http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/cob\\_layout6-013.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/cob_layout6-013.pdf) or by writing UNICEF, 3 United Nations Plaza, NY, NY 10017 USA or emailing [pubdoc@unicef.org](mailto:pubdoc@unicef.org).

*Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children Support Toolkit*, International HIV/AIDS Alliance, Family Health International. Available at <http://www.ovcsupport.net/sw505.asp>.

*Roots and Roots: The Care of Separated Children in the Developing World*, David Tolfree, 1995, Save the Children (Ashgate Publishing, England).

*The Framework for the Protection, Care and Support of Orphans and Vulnerable Children Living in a World with HIV and AIDS*. UNICEF, UNAIDS, et al. July 2004. Available at [http://www.unicef.org/aids/files/Framework\\_English.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/aids/files/Framework_English.pdf) or by writing UNICEF, 3 United Nations Plaza, NY, NY 10017 USA or emailing [pubdoc@unicef.org](mailto:pubdoc@unicef.org).

This report and these online resources are accessible at [www.firelightfoundation.org](http://www.firelightfoundation.org).



*“For the millions of children across Africa who have been orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS, the promise of the future lies in the compassionate response of families and community members taking action on their behalf. Investing in community-based organizations that strengthen the capacity of families to support children in need is one of the most effective ways a donor can make a direct and real difference.*

***We must never forget the importance of family and community  
in the life of a child.”***

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

July 2005



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## Contents

<b>Dear Reader</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>The Challenge</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Family and Community Care for Orphans and Vulnerable Children</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Strategies to Support Family and Community-Based Care</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Institutional Care: A Temporary Response and a Last Resort</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>How to Direct Your Money to Those in Need</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>An Invitation</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>The Foundations That Produced This Report</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Additional Resources</b> .....	<b>11</b>