

Care, protection and inclusion

- **Emotional support:** When parents were seriously ill or deceased, children expressed the need for community members to step in to provide emotional care, support and encouragement.
- **Commitment for inclusion:** Children from HIV-affected households often lived with fragile family structures and support. Community members were encouraged to work together and try to create caring, protective environments including all children - kin as well as non-kin.
- **Community groups** played an important role in the protection of children, ensuring their rights and well-being were not violated.
- **Assist children with chores:** Children affected by HIV often carried heavy chores in their households, which became a challenge when they were sick and/or malnourished. Community members were encouraged to help sick and undernourished children with their home chores to help to protecting children's well-being.

“At times we just ignore and leave things for other people believing they will just do it for the children. But at times we could work together and do things as a group.”

Community member, rural Zimbabwe

About us

This is a DFID/ESRC funded research project with collaborations between Biomedical Research and Training Institute (Harare, Zimbabwe), Department of Infectious Disease Epidemiology, Imperial College School of Public Health, (London, UK) and Department of Social Psychology, The London School of Economic (London, UK).

The research was granted ethical approval from the Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe (MRCZ/A/1661).

About this leaflet

This leaflet (III out of III) presents results from a multi-method research project carried out in communities in rural Zimbabwe, exploring the role of schools in supporting children affected by HIV. Drawing on experiences from 3 primary schools and 3 secondary schools, these leaflets present what teachers, community members and children themselves regarded as i) how HIV impact on children's school experiences, and ii) examples of good practice to build on which could strengthen schools' support, care and protection of children affected by HIV. These findings are based on examples of supportive practice already carried out in the study communities - and the study participants' own ideas of ways in which schools could be strengthened to support children affected by HIV.

For further information:

<http://www.psych.lse.ac.uk/beyondeducation>
www.manicalandhivproject.org



Biomedical Research
and Training Institute



Making schools more supportive of vulnerable children

How can communities help to strengthen school support?

Experiences from Zimbabwe

How can communities help schools to support children affected by HIV?

Children living in communities with high levels of HIV and poverty often lack food, clothes and adult care and support, which can have a negative impact on their education and school experiences. At schools, teachers have first-hand daily contact with children and therefore have the potential to help them cope better with difficulties in their lives and ensure inclusion at school. However, schools cannot stand alone in their responses to children affected by HIV. The study identified a number of community-level factors that can position communities and schools to collectively deal with children's HIV-related challenges. These include:

School-community dialogue and collaboration

- **Regular teacher-guardians dialogue:** Regular meetings and dialogue between teachers and guardians helped to follow up on children's school performance, attendance and well-being - and strengthened understandings between teachers, guardians and children.
- **Assist children with chores:** Some community members assisted children with chores and helped them to look after domestic animals, to enable children to access school and focus on their studies.

"There is no collaboration with the schools. The way children are being chased away is because we do not understand each other. It is good if as parents we take time to go into the schools and see if children are facing challenges at school. As parents we should prioritize our school and teachers. Those from the school should remember that there are certain things that they need the parents for."

Community member, rural Zimbabwe

Community as a supportive context for teachers

- **Support for schools:** Community members were encouraged to help teachers create a safe and supportive school environment by assisting in improving facilities at schools or in helping with set up vegetable gardens and income generating projects at the school to raise money for vulnerable children.
- **Appreciation and support of teachers in local community:** Teachers carry out an important task in teaching children, preparing them for their future lives, and potentially supporting children in their general life challenges. Providing daily care and support for children takes time and energy, and teachers were already very busy with their traditional educational roles. Study participants often explained that it is crucial for community members to acknowledge teachers' important work and find ways to encourage, support and motivate teachers.

"For teachers to help students they need support from the community so that teachers are in a position to assist. Communities should have a positive attitude towards teachers in order for the teacher to be motivated. Community should help teachers in order for teachers to help the kids."

Primary school teacher, rural Zimbabwe

"If there is a relationship between the teacher and the parent then the child will respect both sides. So parents can work together with teachers to help the child"

Community member, rural Zimbabwe



How can communities support children affected by HIV?

Dialogue within community

- **Opportunities for children to share concerns:** Facilitating opportunities for children to approach adults they trust within communities was regarded as crucial for children to come forward sharing problems or report abuse.
- **Moral counselling:** Community members were suggested to engage in counselling and life skills training for children.
- **Open communication of HIV and AIDS:** Children affected by HIV were stigmatised and socially excluded in their communities. Open dialogue around HIV promoted better understanding and inclusion of children affected by HIV.

Mobilize support for children's basic needs

- **Agricultural advice and assistance:** It was suggested that community members could give agricultural advice and assist vulnerable children in their vegetable gardens to optimise their food products.
- **Community groups:** Community groups were important resources for mobilising support for children's material needs (food, clothes, shelter, money for hospital visits etc.) through income generating projects.

"If the child is happy at home, he is likely to be happy at school."

Community member, rural Zimbabwe