

Zimbabwean Children Being Overlooked

Written by Robert ID1037

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As the world focuses on the upcoming Zimbabwean elections, UNICEF today released startling new statistics which call for politicians and donors to defend children as rigorously as they defend democracy.

Despite the world's fourth worst rate of HIV/AIDS and the highest rise in child mortality of any nation, Zimbabweans receive just a fraction of donor funding compared to other countries in their region.

"The world must differentiate between the politics and the people of Zimbabwe," said UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy, speaking in Johannesburg. "Every day children in Zimbabwe are dying of HIV/AIDS, every day children are becoming infected, orphaned, and forced to leave school to care for sick parents. The global generosity towards tsunami victims was inspiring, but it has dried up for Zimbabwean children who are facing a deadly crisis every day of their lives."

This massive disparity in aid comes despite the fact that:

- The under-five mortality rate has risen 50% since 1990 (now 1 death for every 8 births)
- One hundred babies become HIV-positive every day in Zimbabwe
- One in five Zimbabwean children are now orphans (1 million from HIV/AIDS)
- A child dies every 15 minutes due to HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe
- 160,000 children will experience the death of a parent in 2005

In 2004-5 Zimbabwe received little or no HIV/AIDS funding support from the main donor initiatives.

In southern Africa, the area most devastated by HIV/AIDS, the average annual donor-spending-per-HIV-infected-person among these three initiatives is US \$74. In Zimbabwe the figure is just \$4.

In Zambia, a country with slightly lower HIV rates than Zimbabwe, donors give US \$187 per HIV-positive person; in Namibia \$101, in Uganda \$319, and in Eritrea \$802.

Overall donor support for Zimbabwe is also far lower than any other country in the region. The World Bank estimates that Zimbabweans receive US \$14 per capita, from both official development assistance (ODA) and official aid from the World Bank, the IMF, other international organizations and from individual nation donors. This is less than one-quarter of what Namibians (\$68) receive, and around 12 percent of those in neighbouring Mozambique (\$111).

Progress Nonetheless

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Despite the dearth in funds, Zimbabwe is making inroads in the fight against HIV/AIDS and rising child mortality. UNICEF, in concert with the rest of the UN family, is providing community support to counseling and psychosocial support for 100,000 orphaned children, and has provided assistance in achieving a national measles coverage of 95 per cent.

This progress has occurred thanks to critical and direct support from the UK's Department for International Development, the European Commission, and the Norwegian, Dutch, Japanese and German Governments. Other actors are working hard across Zimbabwe to address the needs of children.

But much more would be done with greater funding. Despite the current political climate, Zimbabwe is one of but a few countries with a National Plan of Action for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) adopted by government. This plan is costed and includes a clear monitoring and evaluation plan. UNICEF is responsible for overall UN coordination of the OVC response, and is supporting implementation across Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is the only country in Africa which has instituted a three percent tax levy to mobilize domestic resources for fighting HIV/AIDS.

"Some 110 Zimbabweans under the age of 15 will become infected with HIV/AIDS today," said Bellamy. "Another 110 will be infected tomorrow, 110 more the day after that. Yet despite these horrendous numbers Zimbabweans have the determination and the education to defeat HIV/AIDS and other causes of child mortality. But to do so they need international help."

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Recent broadcast quality footage and photographs from Zimbabwe are online at <http://www.unicef.org>

For nearly 60 years UNICEF has been the world's leader for children, working on the ground in 158 countries to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for poor countries, UNICEF supports child health and

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nutrition, quality basic education for all boys and girls, access to clean water and sanitation, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of governments, businesses, foundations and individuals.

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