

**Global Partners Forum
for Children Orphaned and Made Vulnerable by HIV/AIDS**

**20-21 October 2003
Geneva**

MEETING REPORT

“The Global Partners Forum is about signing up to turn the tide – to moving beyond feeling overwhelmed to feeling outraged by the unacceptable suffering of children. There is no room for inaction. In years to come, we want to look back and say this is when it began in earnest; this is when a better future for orphans and vulnerable children was secured.” Carol Bellamy, 20 October 2003, Geneva.

This report summarises the proceedings of the first Global Partners Forum for Children Orphaned and Made Vulnerable by HIV/AIDS, organised by UNICEF and the UNAIDS Secretariat, and held in Geneva on 20-21 October. The Global Partners Forum brought together more than 70 representatives of UN agencies, bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, non-governmental and faith-based organisations, academic and research institutions and other key civil society organisations.

Background and Purpose of the Meeting

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has already orphaned more than 14 million children and another 600,000 children die due to AIDS each year. Many millions more are experiencing increased poverty and vulnerability as a result of the pandemic. This massive tragedy is straining families and communities, weakening social safety nets and diminishing national stability and security in the most affected countries. Although political leadership and resources dedicated to the fight against HIV/AIDS are increasing, the pandemic and its impacts on children are far greater than the scattered responses mounted to date.

Since 2000, a series of regional consultations elevated the issue of orphans and vulnerable children and assisted countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the region hardest hit, to plan for an accelerated response. These consultations were given added momentum in 2001 when global goals were set for orphans and vulnerable children at the United Nations General Assembly’s Special Session on HIV/AIDS. Capitalizing on increasing momentum and commitment, the Global Partners Forum represents a turning point in the collective response for children affected by HIV/AIDS.

The Forum provided a timely and strategic opportunity to:

- provide an evidence-based update on the global situation and responses to orphans and vulnerable children;
- endorse in principle a common framework to mobilise and guide substantially increased partnerships, resources and action; and,

- agree upon urgent and critical actions required at global level to stimulate a response that matches the enormity of the crisis for orphans and vulnerable children.

Process of the Global Partners Forum

The Forum agenda combined plenary presentations with working group discussions. During the first day participants focused on **1)** analysing the scale and depth of the challenges faced by orphans and vulnerable children and **2)** the purpose, process and content of the draft Strategic Framework. The second day was comprised of technical updates on education as a strategic leverage point in the response to orphans and vulnerable children; the crucial role of faith-based organisations; costing the global response; and, the need for stronger monitoring and evaluation. The meeting ended with a plenary discussion of group work presented by civil society organisations, United Nations, and bilateral donor agency representatives on how to mobilise urgent action for orphans and vulnerable children at the global level and ensure that adequate resources are made available.

A Challenge from Leaders

Carol Bellamy and Peter Piot opened the meeting by challenging participants to harness their collective and individual powers and networks to accelerate action in support of orphans and vulnerable children.

Peter Piot stressed that we have reached a historical juncture in the epidemic and that recent developments, including greater political leadership, more empirical evidence, and increasing resources, and cheaper ARV treatments provide new opportunities for innovative actions. He called for accelerated responses in three priority areas: keeping mothers alive; acting on a large scale through improved management and capacity building; and, ensuring that support for orphans and vulnerable occurs within and catalyses broader development and poverty reduction initiatives.

Carol Bellamy stressed the enormity of the crisis and the alarming gap between where we are and where we should be with respect to protecting and fulfilling the rights of orphans and vulnerable children. She emphasized the importance of endorsing a common framework as a tool for accelerating action and monitoring responses. She highlighted education as a strategic leverage point in the response, and the pressing need for school fee abolition as one concrete way to boost school attendance for all children, especially girls and those made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS.

The Strategic Framework

UNICEF, UNAIDS, and a group of technical experts developed the draft *Strategic Framework for the Protection, Care and Support of Orphans and Children Made Vulnerable by HIV/AIDS* for review at the Partners Forum. The framework brings together goals agreed upon at the United Nations General Assembly's Special Session on HIV/AIDS (UNGASS); the guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and, strategies and programming guidance first published in *Children on the Brink 2002*. It pulls together contributions from a wide range of partners and is the culmination of country level programming experiences and

broad consultation over the past few years. The framework targets senior leaders and decision makers at global and national levels who can influence the response.

In preparation for the Forum, all participants were asked to review the document in consultation within their respective organisations and with their colleagues. Based on this process and ensuing discussions at the Forum, the group agreed that in principle the Framework is a useful tool to guide and accelerate the response to the crisis of orphans and vulnerable children.

Through group and plenary discussions, several suggestions were made to further strengthen the document in order for it to receive the widest possible endorsement and utilisation. There was agreement on the need for a sharper Executive Summary to target senior leaders and policy makers. Suggested revisions also included more specific definition of the target audience and purpose, increased sense of urgency and clearer relation of the response to Millennium Development Goals and the broader development agenda, including poverty reduction.

November 7th was set as the deadline for written comments back to UNICEF. Since that time, the Framework has undergone a final revision based on the discussion at the Forum and further comments received. A small group of peers representing various sectors commented on the revised document in December. The final version will be circulated to all partner organisations for endorsement in early 2004.

Themes from Technical Presentations and Discussion

Strategic Information

Linda Sussman of USAID and Roeland Monasch of UNICEF shared the latest evidence on the scale and impacts of the orphans and vulnerable children crisis and provided an update on plans for monitoring progress toward UNGASS goals.

The UNAIDS Monitoring and Evaluation Reference Group (MERG) is leading and coordinating efforts to strengthen countries' ability to monitor and evaluate progress on orphans and vulnerable children. The MERG is currently finalising a list of indicators for use at national level. Indicators are being developed to measure progress in the following areas:

- 1- OVC policy and strategy development
- 2- School attendance
- 3- Access to health care
- 4- Malnutrition
- 5- Provision of appropriate psychosocial support
- 6 - Basic personal needs met
- 7 – Vulnerable households receiving external support in childcare
- 8 - Government expenditure on OVC
- 9 - Birth registration
- 10 - Children outside family care

The indicators will be field tested from early 2004, then finalised, approved and launched with the forthcoming *Guide for monitoring and evaluation of the national response for children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS* by May 2004. USAID is also supporting the development of tools for programmatic monitoring and evaluation scheduled to be available for broad use in 2004.

Costing an Adequate Response for Orphans and Vulnerable Children

An initial attempt to cost an adequate global response to the orphans and vulnerable children crisis was presented by Sara Sievers of the Earth Institute at Columbia University. The estimates included the costs of the following minimum set of priority actions for children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS:

1. Eliminate all school fees and expand education access.
2. Provide meals for children at schools, including clean water source.
3. Child care services near schools.
4. Increased government support for low-skilled labour in communities.
5. Creation or augmentation of community support funds.
6. Institute or invigorate national de-stigmatisation campaigns.
7. Eliminate user fees in health care and provide child survival at clinics, or when possible, schools.

Assuming broad coverage, the global cost of the minimum set of priority actions in countries with generalised AIDS epidemics was estimated at \$10.1 billion annually. This very preliminary gross estimate is stimulating debate and discussion. It is clear that current funds available to respond to the orphans and vulnerable children crisis are a small fraction of what is required.

The presentation and discussions highlighted the need to further consult on costing and refine the methodology to produce a figure for broader consideration and analyses. UNAIDS through the Economic Reference Group will coordinate with academic experts to further refine cost estimates.

Faith Based Organisations (FBOs)

Jim Cairns of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) presented a groundbreaking study jointly sponsored with UNICEF. This study assessed the faith-based response in six countries and revealed the extensive reach and potential of faith based organisations (FBOs) to protect and support orphans and vulnerable children. The study documented that faith-based community responses are expanding services and reaching significant numbers of orphans and vulnerable children with a range of support and services. With appropriate external financial support, FBOs provide the opportunity for rapid expansion. However, scale up must be sensitive in order to avoid undermining existing capacities, volunteerism and local systems.

Key recommendations of the UNICEF/WCRP study included:

- Ensure that a majority of funding is spent at community level.
- Support small grants funds operated by religious coordinating bodies to resource activities initiated by congregations.

- Ensure that funding policies and processes are guided by the experience and capacity of local religious partners rather than programmes being designed by external partners with little local involvement.

Education and Orphans and Vulnerable Children

Sheldon Shaeffer of UNESCO presented an update on education as a strategic leverage point in the response to orphans and vulnerable children. He outlined the capacity of the education sector at both the national and community level to respond to psycho-emotional, social and material impacts of HIV/AIDS. Boosting education systems to achieve Education for All was seen as a priority not only for education per se, but for reducing vulnerability of orphans and vulnerable children, including girls. Strengthening education systems to be more effective generally would address many of the needs of orphans and vulnerable children directly, and indirectly through important networks – for example to link efforts with food and nutrition programmes, and community based psychosocial support. There are clear opportunities to promote initiatives to benefit orphans and vulnerable children in the context of existing efforts, but there is also a need for creative and expanded approaches that broaden the role of schools within communities. A number of actions were discussed. For example:

- Ensure access to education for all through the abolition of school fees and the reduction of school-related costs and by developing flexible alternatives to formal education, schedules, and curricula.
- Manage the supply and ensure the quality of education through planning for the anticipated impact of HIV/AIDS and building HIV/AIDS capacity into teacher and administrator training programmes.
- Expand the role of schools to serve as community resource centres by promoting HIV awareness, preventive education and attitudes of compassion throughout the community and by providing food, psychosocial support and life and livelihood skills to vulnerable children and their families.
- Improve school policies and practices related to reducing stigma, discrimination, sexual abuse and exploitation, and also promoting life skills-based education and making linkages with other networks to expand options for income generation.

The discussion also emphasised focussing on education as a principal means for protecting the rights of orphans and vulnerable children, including girls. While education alone cannot meet all of the needs, it was identified as a central mechanism for facilitating access to networks that can improve the well-being of orphans and vulnerable children.

Proposed Actions

Forum participants agreed on the following key next steps to increase global action in support of orphans and vulnerable children.

- Finalise, widely endorse and disseminate the **Framework** as a tool to catalyse an accelerated response.
- Convene the **Global Partners Forum** on a periodic basis to share information, better coordinate global efforts and maintain pressure for action. Regional Partners Forums were also recommended to move the action agenda forward. Informal discussions with partners will determine the frequency, membership and terms of reference for these fora.
- Sharpen the global **costing** of an adequate response to orphans and vulnerable children and use it to advocate for increased resources.
- Field test and disseminate the tools for **monitoring and evaluation** to assess progress towards UNGASS goals.
- Follow-up discussions with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (**GFATM**) to make sure an adequate and appropriate level of resources are allocated to children.
- Implement team visits to highly affected countries in early 2004 to raise awareness and provide technical support for the development and implementation of national action plans. UNICEF will coordinate these visits.
- **Advocate for action** through existing fora. Identify a small number of these to increase engagement with over the next year to increase resources and action for orphans and vulnerable children. Possibilities include:
 - Promotion of Education for All
 - The WHO and UNAIDS 3x5 Initiative: ensuring that vulnerable and infected children and their caretakers, are at the centre of plans to increased access to antiretroviral therapy.
 - Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Country Coordinating Mechanisms
 - Poverty Reduction Strategy and Sectoral programme implementation and monitoring.

Conclusion

The evidence presented during this Forum confirmed that the magnitude and situation of orphans and vulnerable children is growing considerably worse and that immediate, large-scale action is needed. The challenge of broadly expanding responses that work was a central focus of the discussions. Forum participants agreed that the strategic framework would be an important tool for mobilising resources, partnerships and action and that priority should be given to finalising and circulating it for wide endorsement and use.

Participants also agreed that action for orphans and vulnerable children best takes place within existing development and poverty reduction initiatives and that such action can accelerate these initiatives for the benefit of all children. Armed with a common framework and a unified voice,

this expanded global partnership has the power to begin closing the gap between what is and what should be for millions of orphans and vulnerable children.

ANNEXES

Participant list
Agenda