

PRESS RELEASE

UNICEF RECEIVES US 4.96 MILLION FROM SWEDEN TO SCALE UP RESPONSE TO HIV/AIDS AMONG ORPHANS, VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Ahead of the World Summit next week where progress on achieving the Millennium Development Goals will be reviewed, UNICEF calls on donors not to forget Ethiopia's 4.5 million orphans

ADDIS ABABA, 9 September – The Swedish Government today contributed 38 million Swedish Kroners (US 4.96 million) to UNICEF for orphans, vulnerable children and youth programmes in Ethiopia.

The contribution comes as Ethiopia struggles to cope with a burgeoning orphan population. Currently, there are an estimated 4.5 million orphans in Ethiopia of which approximately 800,000 have lost their parents to AIDS. The number of children orphaned by AIDS is expected to increase to 2.5 million by 2014.

About 1.5 million people are living with HIV/AIDS in Ethiopia and this number is projected to top 2.4 million by 2015. The majority of new infections are occurring among young people, with girls and young women bearing the brunt of the epidemic. HIV prevalence rates among girls and young women between the ages of 15 and 24 are three times that of males in the same age group.

“HIV/AIDS is compounding existing emergency conditions in Ethiopia, adding to the strain facing communities already weakened by poverty and hunger,” said Bjorn Ljungqvist, UNICEF Representative in Ethiopia. “We are faced with hard decisions, juggling precious resources between competing needs. However, we have no choice but to act now if we are to save a generation of children and adolescents from being lost. This generous contribution from the Government of Sweden will enable us to scale up our response to this growing emergency.”

The Swedish contribution will be used build the capacity of youth programming, developing youth friendly services including voluntary counseling and testing, strengthening anti-AIDS clubs and other youth groups and fostering open communication between children and parents. Furthermore, the assistance will help establish and reinforce policy and guidelines related to orphans and vulnerable children and build the capacity of community based structures to ensure care and support intervention. Vulnerable children will be provided with basic services including health and educational support. Activities covered by this contribution will be implemented in Afar, Oromia, Somali and Tigray regions over a period of three years.

The Swedish contribution comes one week ahead of the World Summit in New York where world leaders will convene to review progress made toward the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, which include promoting gender equality and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015.

UNICEF is at the forefront of efforts to mitigate the spread and effect of HIV/AIDS in Ethiopia in partnership with the Government of Ethiopia and a collation of sister UN agencies NGOs. Strategies include strengthening the capacity of extended families, mobilizing and strengthening community and home-based responses, strengthening the capacity of children and young people to meet their own needs, ensuring that government protects the most vulnerable children and provides essential policies, services, creating an enabling environment for HIV and AIDS affected children and their families.

UNICEF, together with the Government of Ethiopia and other partners, conducted a comprehensive assessment in 2004 that estimated it would cost US\$300 per year to provide for the basic needs of an orphaned child,

including counseling and psychosocial support. It would cost US\$ 240 million per year to meet the minimum needs of all 800,000 children orphaned by AIDS.

“In Ethiopia, we know what it will take to ensure that millions of orphaned children receive the care and support they need to lead healthy lives, to make sure they are able to go to school and get a fighting chance to escape the pervasive poverty that threatens their future,” said Ljungqvist. “What we have been missing until now is the necessary resources to scale up our programming in order to make a significant impact.”

UNICEF and partners in the orphans and vulnerable children national taskforce have been seeking US\$ 11 million to implement the first phase of the National Plan of Action for children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS which would cover 56,000 orphans.

“Despite our modest initial goals, responses from donors towards the Plan of Action have been poor,” said Ljungqvist. “This Swedish contribution is the first major contribution we have received since the plan was announced last December. In Ethiopia, this poor showing from the donor community has meant that our response to HIV/AIDS, particularly with regard to orphans, remains at very rudimentary levels.”

UNICEF believes that it is important to work with young people because they are not only affected by HIV/AIDS, but also represent a key resource in mobilizing an expanded and effective response to the epidemic. Adolescents, typically, can learn more easily than adults to modify their behavior or adopt safe practices from the start. Young people in Ethiopia can help break the silence that surrounds HIV and AIDS.

UNICEF and its partners are seeking US \$125.4 million to provide 2,500 anti-AIDS clubs in Ethiopia with supplies, training in life skills, youth dialogue, home-based care, youth leadership skills and for income generation activities for young people over a two year period.

“Over the past three years, together with our partners and with the assistance of the Norwegian and Austrian Governments, we have been laying the groundwork and refining methods for working with youth,” said Ljungqvist. “National youth networks are now in place and over 10,000 anti-AIDS clubs have been established across the country. We are positioned to dramatically scale up our interventions and therefore call upon other donor nations to follow the Swedish example and make good on promises made to developing nations five years ago at the Millennium Summit to help them fight poverty and HIV/AIDS.

“Any further delays, for whatever reason, in putting the required resources to scale up these already well established priorities and actions for young people and orphans will only make the AIDS virus happy.”

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT UNICEF COMMUNICATION SECTION, (251 1) 44 44 08, 44 43 64. Mobile (251 9) 25 40 18 email: igetachew@unicef.org