A protective environment for children

unite for children
Strengthening the care of the most vulnerable children, and preventing all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse against children, are critical challenges in South African society. The extent of child protection violations is notoriously hard to measure, but there is enough evidence to suggest that violence against children remains pervasive, and that in all communities, in all settings, and from their young years through adolescence, girls and boys are being beaten, abused and exploited.

Many families in South Africa face severe challenges in protecting and caring for their children. On one hand, the country has inherited a legacy of violence, extreme inequality and social dislocation. This has translated into many social ills in the day-to-day lives of children, such as high levels of domestic violence, substance abuse, sexual abuse and neglect.

On the other hand, the country’s huge HIV burden has resulted in high levels of orphanging. Many children are deprived of the care of their biological parents; most of these children are placed in the care of extended families, already under stress due to the impact of the pandemic. Childhoods are stolen as children take on adult roles as caregivers of ill parents; or of siblings in child-headed households.

South Africa’s cities are poles of economic opportunity in a region beleaguered by inequality, unemployment and HIV and AIDS. They therefore serve as magnets for both internal and foreign migrants. Thousands of migrant children arrive in South Africa unaccompanied by parents or caregivers. These vulnerable youngsters face great risk, including trafficking, harmful child labour, and the perils of homelessness and street life.
Protecting children from violence, abuse and exploitation

A key national achievement has been the establishment of a progressive legal framework and the elaboration of policies that protect children and guarantee their rights to social services. The new Children’s Act, which brings South African law in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, is one of the major legislative reforms poised to make a real difference to the lives of children.

The Act stresses that the State has a key role in providing social services to strengthen the capacity of families and communities to care for and protect children. This builds on more conventional forms of child protection legislation whereby the State would only intervene after the child has already suffered from abuse, neglect or exploitation.

Other recent legislative reforms include the Sexual Offences Act, which is inclusive of the wide range of crimes that commonly occur against children. Finally there is the Child Justice Act, which establishes a separate criminal justice system for children in conflict with the law. Together, these laws form the foundation of a comprehensive child protection framework.

However, many challenges remain before a protective environment becomes a reality for children in South Africa. These include:

- Improving monitoring and reporting on child protection violations which are, by their very nature, hidden from public view;
- Mobilising the necessary commitment, expertise and resources from all sectors in society to ensure that the child protection system works for children at risk;
- Challenging the social acceptance of violence and harmful practices such as corporal punishment, early marriage, child labour and other rights violations that undermine Government efforts to protect children.

Caring for orphans and vulnerable children

Communities are on the frontline of the response to the devastating impact of the AIDS pandemic. Informal childcare forums have sprung up across the country, helping to identify orphans and vulnerable children, providing psychosocial care and support, and referring children to government services.

Some key statistics

Around one-third of parents report using severe forms of corporal punishment against their children. Children under the age of five are the most common victims of such chastisement.

More than a third of girls have experienced sexual violence before the age of 18. Forty per cent of victims who report rape to the police, are girls under 18, and 15 per cent are under the age of 12. Typically less than one in ten reported rapes result in a conviction.

The custom of early marriage affecting girls 12-15 years of age is common in some areas of South Africa. The resurgence of “virginity testing” of adolescent girls in other areas has been identified as causing emotional harm and placing girls at higher risks of rape.

Over a quarter of a million children between the ages of five and 14 work more than 12 hours per week in economic activities.

It is estimated that 1.99 million children in South Africa have lost one or both parents due to AIDS.

There are over 510,000 children living in foster care.

6 Statistics South Africa. Mid-Year Population Estimates. 20 July 2010
The government recognises this vital role, and has committed its support to scaling up childcare forums to reach children in highly affected communities.

In addition, the government acknowledges its obligation to provide a comprehensive social protection system to reach all vulnerable children in families. Within this framework, more than eight million families receive financial aid through child support grants; and a half million families who have taken on foster children are provided with foster child grants.

Efforts are underway to make sure that those children deprived of parental care do not languish in institutions, but are reunified with relatives or placed in community care. The progressive extension of early intervention and prevention services will also help keep children in families and out of alternative care.

Challenges

UNICEF is committed to supporting government to bolster the care of orphans and vulnerable children and has singled out the following key challenges:

- While the reach of community childcare forums is extensive, there remain many gaps in coverage that include some of the worst-hit areas. In addition, services provided through these forums are inconsistent, and there is no consensus on the minimum basket of assistance that needs to be provided. In particular, their role in providing psychosocial support is poorly understood.

- The burden of caring for orphans and vulnerable children deprived of parental care has created a crisis in the alternative care system: the number of unregistered childcare institutions is thought to have mushroomed, and social workers are struggling to meet the demand for foster care placements.

- South Africa’s urban areas are hit with an influx of unaccompanied children on the move – from both rural areas within South Africa, and from neighbouring countries in the sub-region. Many leave families that are imploding under the impacts of poverty and disease, and find themselves vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Such children, who are difficult to identify and place, are often excluded from national care and protection systems.

What UNICEF is doing

Strengthening the child protection system

UNICEF is supporting the implementation of laws, policies, regulations and services that protect children from violence, exploitation and abuse, and that respond to and support victims. Within this framework, we are developing and disseminating guidelines and child-friendly materials on new legislation. UNICEF is also supporting the training of social services professionals to take up their responsibilities under the new legislation and is working with partners to roll out services for child and women victims of sexual violence to the whole country.
Challenging the status quo

Social acceptance of severe corporal punishment, child labour, early marriage and sexual exploitation undermine government efforts to protect children. UNICEF is identifying evidence-based strategies to address the root causes of violence, change behaviour and plan the national rollout of successful models. The engagement of men and boys in violence prevention programmes is a key element.

Working with families and communities

Community childcare forums are on the frontline of the response to the challenges of childcare in the context of HIV and AIDS. Childcare forums operate within local communities and are made up of members of the community itself. They have an inherent potential to identify orphans and vulnerable children and refer them to appropriate services or link them with relevant service providers.

UNICEF is supporting efforts to scale up these childcare forums for widespread national coverage, and help them provide quality, comprehensive services. Helping children deal with grief and bereavement is one key service provided in communities, and UNICEF is helping caregivers to provide the best psychosocial support possible. This is complemented by a national programme to protect children’s rights from ‘property-grabbing’ when caregivers die.

Reaching the most vulnerable

The government is responsible for ensuring an adequate coverage of services to reach the most vulnerable children, and UNICEF is helping with the development and implementation of national strategies to fulfil this role. Key priorities are assistance in accessing birth registration and social grants, ensuring an adequate spread of prevention and early intervention services, and strengthening alternative care systems for children deprived of family care.

Supporting children in crisis

The social stresses caused by extreme national and regional disparities place children at risk. Migrant children are particularly vulnerable. UNICEF helps to provide psychosocial support to children affected by xenophobic attacks, meet the immediate needs of unaccompanied children and helps to reunite them with their families. UNICEF also supported national efforts to reduce child exploitation during the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

What UNICEF plans to achieve

By 2011, UNICEF aims to make a substantial impact on the protection of vulnerable children and women:

- Increase the coverage of home and community-based services from 30 per cent to 70 per cent of orphans and vulnerable children.
- Integrate best practices in psychosocial support and succession planning into major programmes of support for orphans and vulnerable children nationwide.
- Establish systems to assess and review all children in formal care and promote family and community-based placements, potentially benefiting 500,000 children thought to be in alternative care in South Africa.
- Put into effect specialised structures and protocols to ensure care, protection and assistance to children at risk of violence, exploitation and abuse, including unaccompanied migrant children.
- Strengthen a specialised child justice system for the 100,000 children who are arrested each year.
- Support the engagement of at least 90,000 men and boys in addressing social and behavioural patterns that sustain violence against women and children.
Support to a vulnerable child yearning for a mother’s love

A seven-year-old girl carries her little brother on her back, pretending to be just like Mommy; a young boy flies his home-made kite and a few elders sit on the sidewalk enjoying the breezy, hot open space near the Middelpos informal settlement in Saldanah Bay, on the Atlantic coast of the Western Cape province.

Across the street, workmen are putting the finishing touches on a blue canopy, offering welcome shade to children playing in the small sparse sanctuary or ‘safe park’, operated by the National Association of Childcare Workers (NACCW). It is one of only two such sites in the Western Cape province and is part of the Isibindi programme, a child protection project supported by UNICEF.

The Isibindi model of care is a community-based programme that trains unemployed community members in accredited, integrated child and youth care services for child-headed households and vulnerable families. The Saldanah Bay project is part of a larger initiative aiming to replicate itself nationally in partnership with the Department of Social Development, and through support from organisations like UNICEF.

The safe park project helps meet the basic needs of some 387 vulnerable children from two small settlements in the area, occupied mostly by migrant workers from the Eastern Cape who have come to find work in the fishing town. About 130 children come to the park from 11 am each day, mostly after school. Trained home-based carers, teachers and others provide information on the children’s primary needs to the team of Isibindi childcare workers in the park, who watch after the children, offering them a morning or afternoon meal, social and physical experiences and cognitive learning.

“We teach children basic hygiene skills, how to wash their hands, how to start a food garden and how to prepare food, as some children who have lost their parents have to do this by themselves, and we help them with their homework. Some children come here after walking 2–3km to and from school and just need to rest and play a bit. We also observe them as they play, looking for signs of distress or alcohol abuse, which is common in this area, and other problems. We then follow up on those issues that may need referral,” says Lobabalo Macongoto, Project Manager at the site.

Helping a grieving child

Other children need parental love, a sense of security and help to handle grief.

Mr. Macongoto tells the heart-warming story of Andile, an 11-year-old boy who came to the safe park every day, but whose mood seemed sad and morose. “Childcare workers noticed that he always sat by himself, did not eat and did not engage or play at all with other children. We knew something was very wrong,” he said.

When team members began to talk with the child and to look deeper into the situation, they discovered that Andile was missing and grieving for his mother who had died. Andile had
come to the Midelpos area from the Eastern Cape Province where he lived with his extended family in a traditional homestead, to visit his mother, because the family had not heard from her for some time. Family members had only learned of her death after she had been gone for several weeks. The child was devastated that he would never again see his beloved mother and became withdrawn.

Once the Isibindi childcare team realised that Andile was grieving for his deceased mother, they immediately provided a counsellor and arranged for him to say goodbye to his Mum. They shared treasured photographs with the young boy and along with other child relatives, accompanied him to her gravesite, where he placed his own goodbye note and a wooden cross that he had made and inscribed with her name.

“I feel very happy now,” Andile told UNICEF. “I got interested in my school work again and I would like to go back to visit my mother’s grave,” he said. The Isibindi childcare workers agree he has changed. “He has gradually come to terms with his grief, has opened up once again and is playing happily with other children,” they said.

Protecting vulnerable children through psychosocial support

“One of the key components our partnership with the Isibindi programme has, is their ability to offer early interventions and psychosocial protection to vulnerable children and their families. Child and youth caregivers are trained in Life Space work and developmental programmes and they learn how to provide counsel in times of grief and loss. They also help children to deal with bereavement through succession planning, memory box-making and grief-work,” says Heidi Loeining-Voysey, OVC Child Protection Specialist at UNICEF South Africa.

UNICEF has assisted NACCW in developing its training programme for child and youth care workers and in costing the Isibindi model for scaling up nationwide. There are currently 50 Isibindi sites reaching 33,000 orphans and vulnerable children, and 575 child and youth care workers have been trained. NACCW has also partnered with UNICEF to improve the care and protection of the growing numbers of unaccompanied migrant children in Central Johannesburg.
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Alternative care
Many families in South Africa are struggling to care for their children. On the one hand, the country has inherited a legacy of violence, extreme inequality and social dislocation from the former apartheid regime. This has translated into high levels of domestic violence, substance abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. The South African Police Services reports that 50,000 children are victims of crime every year, with sexual offences constituting about 40 per cent of these cases. Research reveals that the vast majority of such cases happen in families.

On the other hand, the country is experiencing the highest burden of HIV in the world, with over 5.7 million people currently infected. Parents are dying and leaving behind orphaned children. There are an estimated 3.7 million orphans in South Africa, about half of whom have lost one or both parents to AIDS; and 150,000 children are believed to be living in child-headed households.

Communities are doing the best they can to care for...
 orphaned and vulnerable children. A UNICEF-supported audit of community childcare forums found 400 volunteer-run networks that provide frontline support to 190,000 children.

Foster care has also greatly expanded in recent years, in part due to a policy in 2000 that legalised the placement of children with extended family members. By September 2008, data from the South Africa Social Security Agency showed that close to half a million children were in formal, court-ordered foster care. About 80 per cent of these children are placed with relatives. Adoption is modest and in decline. Many abused, neglected and abandoned children land up in children’s homes. Statistics on children in institutional care are not complete, but it is known that there are 345 registered children’s homes in South Africa, looking after some 21,000 children. These facilities qualify as ‘child and youth care centres’, a provision of the new Children’s Act that will establish a system of specialised alternative childcare programmes with proper standards and governance structures.

**What needs to be done?**

UNICEF is working with the Department of Social Development to strengthen alternative care for orphans and vulnerable children in South Africa, and will support the following initiatives:

**National guidelines:** The Government will be supported in developing national guidelines to manage alternative care. These will be published and distributed to service providers and will provide practical guidance, operational norms and standards, and a monitoring tool.

**Information management system:** A system to collect and manage data on children in formal care will be put into place. This will include standardised indicators, profiles of children’s homes and other facilities in preparation for their transformation into Child and Youth Care Centres, provincial databases on children in alternative care, and training programmes for district and provincial data collection co-ordinators.

**Training service providers:** With UNICEF support, district social workers, child and youth care workers and other service providers will be trained to implement the national guidelines on alternative care.

**Best practice models:** The most successful programmes that promote family and community care of vulnerable children will be identified. These ‘best practice’ models will be used to inform the development of national polices and guidelines on cluster foster care, support to child-headed households and early intervention and prevention programmes.

**National adoption:** UNICEF will help the government to promote adoption as an alternative to foster care. A sample of 600 foster care placements will be researched; legal, cultural and ethical concerns on adoption will be analysed; and an evidence-based strategy will be developed.

**Challenges in implementing alternative care**

- Lack of comprehensive data on children in formal care;
- Overburdened foster care system;
- No support system for children once they reach the age of 18 and leave formal care;
- Low rate of national adoption;
- Scarcity of alternative care programmes suitable for older adolescents, many of whom are unaccompanied migrant children;
- Inadequate capacity of child welfare professionals in regulating and implementing alternative care.
What UNICEF plans to achieve

- A database with standardised indicators on children in registered alternative care. A regular system for information collection will be established.
- A core team of 63 master trainers. Plans for provincial training programmes will be put in place.
- Best practice models will be documented and assessed for national scale up.
- The Department of Social Development will be able to design a policy on transforming foster care placements into adoption.
- There will be an increase in the percentage of 16- to 17-year old children in quality supervised independent living.
Children on the move
Children on the move

The context

South Africa, the strongest economy on the continent, is a magnet for millions of foreign migrants from the continent. Most foreigners flock to the country’s urban hubs to escape poverty and destitution in their home countries. Often without legal documents to stay, migrants are highly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

The high unemployment rate in South Africa, combined with competition for jobs and a climate of mistrust, create social pressures, which erupted in widespread xenophobic attacks in 2008. Women and children bore the brunt of this violence; many were abused and raped.

There are also thousands of foreign children who arrive in big cities each year, unaccompanied by parents or caregivers. They travel to South Africa on their own and cross the border illegally, in search of food, shelter and education. Many are sent for by parents in South Africa and lose their chaperones when crossing the border. These unaccompanied and separated children are in extreme situations and at risk of:

- Attack, robbery and physical assault while crossing the border, often by criminal gangs known as “gumaguma”. Rape of children is also commonly reported.
- Sexual violence, robbery and harassment by the police when sleeping in dangerous places such as taxi ranks and the bushes.
- Domestic exploitation, sexual abuse and commercial sexual exploitation, especially of girls. Girls are reportedly forced to have sex in exchange of refuge and are sometimes victims of organised trafficking.
Child labour and exploitation, including domestic work, piece work on farms, begging and odd jobs on the street.

Distress due to traumatic experiences, xenophobic attitudes in the community, substance abuse, and distance from loved ones.

Limited access to basic needs such as shelter, sanitation, hygienic facilities, education, food, clothing, and household goods.

Detention and deportation, which forces them to lead underground lives, due to a lack of documentation and poorly understood legal status in South Africa.

South African legislation clearly guarantees unaccompanied and separated migrant children access to national care and protection systems, regardless of their origin and legal status in the country. However, the Department of Social Development is poorly equipped to meet the specific needs of these children, whose numbers have reached emergency proportions. Furthermore, persistent discrimination impedes their access to services.

**What UNICEF is doing**

In response to the crisis in Zimbabwe in late 2008, UNICEF began providing emergency assistance to children on the move, both at the border region and in areas where they congregate in central Johannesburg. This expanded to a capacity-building programme with the Department of Social Development to improve systems of care and protection of migrant children.

Within this framework, standard operating procedures were developed and disseminated to social workers; information systems were established to identify, document, trace, and reunify unaccompanied children with their families; and hundreds of children were able to get an education and placement in appropriate alternative care. Special attention was paid to address risks of sexual exploitation and abuse of girls.

**What has been achieved**

Lydia*, an HIV-positive 15-year-old Zimbabwean girl with an eight-month-old baby, was referred to a Department of Social Development social worker by a medical team carrying out a visit to one of the temporary women’s shelters in the border town of Musina. She came to South Africa to get away from a troubled past in Zimbabwe and was in search of antiretroviral treatment, which she could not get in her home town.

Lydia explained to the social worker that she previously lived with her aunt in Zimbabwe. The aunt used to exploit her, forcing her to exchange sexual favours with men for money. One man who slept with her made her pregnant. He was arrested together with the aunt for statutory rape and engaging in criminal activity. The aunt was released after two months but the perpetrator is still imprisoned.

Lydia decided to come to South Africa with her baby. She ended up in Musina and found a place of refuge in a women’s shelter. But she is still a child even if she has a baby. This prompted the social worker to identify a more child-friendly place of safety where she could be formally taken in.

The process for obtaining a court order to support her move is underway. Once she receives it and can move to the care facility, she will get the medical treatment she needs, and will be able to go to school and access other basic services. Most importantly she will be placed in an environment where she will receive the support she needs to care for her child without having the baby taken away from her.

**Going forward**

Recognising that the numbers of children on the move within South Africa and from neighbouring countries are destined to increase, UNICEF and the Department of Social Development are committed to making sure these children have access to national care and
protection systems, and are protected from abuse, exploitation and trafficking. In 2010–2011, the aim is to:

- Improve the capacity of the Department of Social Development and its provincial sub-structures to implement basic procedures in dealing with unaccompanied and separated migrant children. This includes identification, documentation, assessment, court orders, placement, tracing and reunification.

- Establish a regional Child Protection Network. This will include setting up inter-country protocols for children on the move; compatible databases to strengthen documentation, tracing and reunification; and a common communications strategy to raise awareness of the risks faced by child migrants.

- Provide children on the move in areas of high concentration with emergency assistance and appropriate care such as shelter, food, hygiene supplies, clothing and access to education and life skills training.

- Provide services for vulnerable migrant women and children to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. Standard operating procedures to respond to sexual violence will be updated, and role players will be trained. Men and women in migrant communities will be mobilised to prevent sexual violence and promote access to services. UNICEF will also strengthen a monitoring mechanism on sexual violence and trafficking.

- Support the establishment of a supervised independent living programme for older children without parental care. This will be done in line with the provisions of recent childcare legislation.
Engaging men and boys

child protection programme

unite for children

UNICEF South Africa/Ingham-Brown
Progress towards the universal realisation of human rights in South Africa is hampered by high rates of violence against women and children, the continued spread of HIV, and the frequent absence of men’s positive presence in children’s lives.

One woman or child in every 833 people is raped, which is far above the global average of one in 10,000. The real level of rape is much higher, as many cases go unreported: many victims are too disempowered, too intimidated or too fearful of further traumatisation in the criminal justice system to step forward. Most women who experience violence are victims in their own homes, at the hands of their husbands or partners. Where women are unprotected, children are equally at risk: child abuse is often correlated with domestic violence.

South Africa also has the highest burden of HIV and AIDS globally, with more than 5.7 million people currently infected. More women than men are infected and women...
carry a higher burden of care and support for those with AIDS-related illnesses. It is very difficult for girls and women to protect themselves from HIV in a patriarchal society that gives men the power to initiate and dictate the terms of sex.

High rates of HIV and AIDS have translated into large numbers of orphaned and vulnerable children. There are an estimated three million children who have lost one or both parents, about half as a result of AIDS-related deaths. Yet men are often not present in the care and upbringing of children, and for 40 per cent of children, completely absent in their households.

In this context, addressing violence against women and children and HIV and AIDS cannot take place without the active engagement of men and boys. This fact has been increasingly recognised worldwide and has led to a movement towards the full participation of men at all levels. In South Africa, the Department of Social Development is leading the development of a strategy to engage men and boys in the prevention of gender-based violence.

What UNICEF is doing

In 2008, UNICEF researched a series of case studies on violence prevention. The aim was to develop models of best practice for countrywide scale up. The research report now informs UNICEF’s strategy to prevent and reduce violence against women and children.

One element of this strategy is the direct engagement of the public, with a focus on high-risk people, including potential perpetrators. UNICEF is now deploying teams of facilitators to engage commuters and people living in rural areas on issues of domestic violence and child abuse. These “taxi talks” and “rural talks” have so far reached over 100,000 people.

Within the UNICEF programme for orphans and vulnerable children, the organisation is promoting the engagement of men and boys with its partner, Sonke Gender Justice. In selected municipalities in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, Sonke Gender Justice has mobilised men as peer educators and developed their capacity to be advocates and activists in an effort to:

- Eliminate violence against women and children;
- Prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS;
- Promote health, care and support of orphans and vulnerable children.

The engagement of men and children has also been incorporated in municipal integrated development plans. Sonke Gender Justice has also worked with children in schools to improve their understanding and challenge gender roles using various digital media.

With the launch of the national ‘Brothers for Life’ mass media campaign, UNICEF’s support of Johns Hopkins Health and Education South Africa, one of the main partners in the campaign, will contribute to a specific component on gender-based violence.

What has been achieved

An impact evaluation undertaken in 2009 demonstrated the impact of this work in increasing access to information and interventions on HIV; increasing condom use and uptake of voluntary counselling and testing for HIV; adherence to anti-retroviral therapy; and increased awareness and reporting of gender-based violence. Work in schools also challenged girls and boys to think about gender issues.

“I learnt many things,” says 15-year-old Thulane Shange. “I used to think boys and girls can’t do the same things. I thought girls have to clean, cook and do chores around the house, and boys have to fetch firewood and herd cattle.”

He says he now understands that women can also be heads of households and should be given the same rights and responsibilities as men. As part of the PhotoVoice school-based project that trains learners to use photography and writing to chronicle their daily lives, Thulane took a photo of a water tap and wrote: “At our school we have one tap but we have many learners. Girls must have their tap and boys

4 Children’s Institute, Child Gauge 2009
must have their tap. Because when the boy wants to drink and there is a girl at the tap he just push the girl.”

**Going forward**

Recognising that men and boys play a key role in reducing violence against women and children, UNICEF is scaling up its behavioural change communications work in this area. It is applying a ‘Communications for Development’ approach – that is, a systematic, planned and evidence-informed strategic process that promotes positive behaviour and social change and transformation. The following activities will be carried out in 2010 and 2011:

- Based on a review of current research on violence against women and children, a mapping exercise of existing initiatives to end violence and an assessment of lessons learned and best practices from international experience, UNICEF will help to develop a behavioral change communications strategy to address the social norms that drive violence against children in South Africa.

- A mass media campaign that challenges the social acceptance of violence against children will be implemented. The multi-year campaign will address a number of themes identified through the formative research, and use radio, television, print media, children’s programming and other media.

- The capacity of key organisations working with men will be strengthened to mobilise society against child abuse and gender-based violence. Community dialogues will take place in homes, work places, churches, schools and through sporting events.

- Through support to the Department of Social Development, UNICEF will help to improve the co-ordination of initiatives regarding the engagement of men and boys.
Orphans and vulnerable children

unite for children
The context
The AIDS epidemic in South Africa is devastating families and communities. The country has the world’s largest number of HIV-infected people. Close to half of all orphans in the country have lost their parents to AIDS-related diseases and there are many more children living with sick and bedridden caregivers.

There is nothing more traumatic for a child than to see a parent die. Added to this tragedy is the loss of adult guidance and protection. Children without proper adult care are more likely to be abused and exploited. Many orphans and vulnerable children slip further into poverty once the family’s main breadwinner stops working or dies. Losing a parent or caregiver often means losing access to social grants, education and healthcare.

What UNICEF is doing
Many poor communities have developed local responses to the plight of orphans and vulnerable children. Close to 240,000 orphans and vulnerable children are getting some help from community-based ‘childcare forums’. These informal networks play a critical role in helping to identify orphans and vulnerable children, in providing psychosocial support, and in referring children to Government services. However, these community initiatives often do not reach all vulnerable children nor cover all of their needs.

The community is the best place for children to grow up; but the increasing burden of HIV and AIDS means that communities need support to look after their orphans and vulnerable children. This has prompted UNICEF to team up with the Department of Social Development to
strengthen and expand the reach of community and home-based care for orphans and vulnerable children.

What has been achieved?

When their parents died, 18-year-old Mboniseni, 14-year-old Mlungisi and their two younger sisters, Balungile aged nine and six-year old Khethiwe, wandered around their village in KwaZulu-Natal searching for food and compassion. Their health deteriorated and they dropped out of school.

Concerned neighbours called a social worker, who referred them to an Isibindi childcare worker. The childcare worker taught the orphans how to problem-solve, tend to their home, and maintain personal hygiene and discipline. Best of all, they went back to school. The eldest, Mboniseni applied for legal guardianship of his siblings, which meant that he could also apply for a monthly foster grant of R1,500 to keep the family afloat.

Isibindi Circles of Care is an award-winning childcare forum developed by the National Association of Child Care Workers. It reaches around 33,000 children in KwaZulu-Natal. UNICEF is supporting Isibindi and two other models of community and home-based orphan care in the Eastern Cape. The aim is to replicate their programmes across South Africa.

- A UNICEF-supported national audit of all childcare forums in South Africa is helping government to establish a standardised package of basic services for orphans and vulnerable children.
- UNICEF supported the development of a national training programme on childcare forums. A team of 180 master trainers was created in 2008.
- A training manual on succession planning was developed to help organisations protect children’s inheritance rights once their parents have died.
- UNICEF is working with the Department of Social Development to develop guidelines on helping orphans and vulnerable children deal with their grief and trauma after the death of loved ones.
**Going forward**

In 2010-2011, UNICEF will focus on extending the reach of comprehensive community-based programmes for orphans and other vulnerable children:

- In each province, UNICEF will work with partners to ensure that community childcare forums reach all children in need; that volunteers and caregivers are adequately trained; and that a comprehensive package of services is provided.

- Children dealing with trauma and grief will be assisted by enabling caregivers to provide the best psychosocial care. UNICEF will support the inclusion of psychosocial care components in ongoing programmes for orphans and vulnerable children.

UNICEF will also promote a move towards a broader social protection framework, in support of the provisions of new legislation for children.

- The Government will be supported to review and assess all children currently living in childcare institutions, promoting family-based care as an alternative to orphanages.

- Making sure that no child “falls through the cracks” and that extended families caring for orphans and vulnerable children living in poverty receive their entitlements to Government support, including the payment of social grants.