



Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children (OVC)

Children may be made vulnerable by a number of factors. One of the most obvious is being orphaned, and by the end of 2003 there were an estimated 143 million orphaned children worldwide. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is a major factor in the growing crisis of orphans and other vulnerable children; a child loses a parent to HIV/AIDS every 14 seconds. But malaria, tuberculosis, water-borne illnesses, maternal mortality, malnutrition, lack of education, poverty, economic exploitation, and armed conflict also make children vulnerable.

Health

- When caregivers are sick, children become more vulnerable to exploitation and other risk factors for acquiring HIV/AIDS. Crowded, impoverished living conditions perpetuate tuberculosis; lack of resources for bed nets and sanitation contribute to malaria; poor nutrition weakens immune systems. Every day almost 30,000 children under age five die of preventable causes. As diseases of poverty devastate the current generation, the consequences will inevitably carry over to the next.
- Over 2.3 million children under age 15 are now living with HIV/AIDS.
- Approximately 6,000 people ages 15-25 are infected with HIV every day.
- Almost 2,000 babies are infected with HIV/AIDS every day during pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding.
- 15 million children had lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS by the end of 2003. With the epidemic overwhelming family and community support systems, these children face homelessness and abandonment and become vulnerable to exploitation, including forced labor and physical and sexual abuse. Nearly 100% of children orphaned by AIDS live in the developing world.
- Almost 40% of children in the developing world may be infected with tuberculosis by age 15.
- Over 750,000 African children die each year of malaria—or one death every 30 seconds.
- More than 30 million children are not immunized against preventable diseases. As a result, every ten seconds a child dies of a vaccine-preventable disease.

Education

- In many cultures, women and girls remain the caregivers for their families, but when they are prevented from accessing resources or learning about nutrition, sanitation, and other issues, entire families suffer. Vulnerabilities such as ill health, exploitation, and lack of access to education and other opportunities may become intergenerational, making the cycle hard to break. There is one proven way to stop this pattern: education.
- 121 million children in the world are not in school—most of them in the world's poorest countries.
- A recent 63-country study found that education of girls and young women may account for as much as 43% of the decline in malnutrition between 1970 and 1995.
- Girls' education slows and reduces the spread of HIV/AIDS by contributing to female economic independence, delayed marriage, and an understanding of the disease and how to prevent it.
- Experts estimate that as many as 700,000 cases of HIV/AIDS could be prevented each year if all children received a primary education.
- When Kenya eliminated school fees in 2003, 1.3 million children entered the school system.

Food and Nutrition

- Access to adequate nutrition is jeopardized by other risk factors such as ill health and lack of education or skills training. Similarly, vulnerabilities often arise out of the simple need to survive; people will do just about anything to feed their families. Nutrition is a fundamental building block of early childhood development, maternal survival, the ability to attend school and work, and overall health.
- About 6 million children under age five die each year of causes related to malnutrition.
- 50% to 60% of all childhood deaths in the developing world are caused directly or indirectly by hunger.
- 153 million children under age five in the global South are underweight for their age.
- Poor nutrition, particularly in the first three years of life, can greatly impair children's cognitive development, making it harder for them to learn for the rest of their lives.

- According to one study, student enrollment increased by 44% for girls and 28% for boys in schools where food-for-school programs were implemented.

Exploitation

- Children living in devastated communities face enormous difficulties securing the resources they would normally acquire from their parents, such as training in agriculture or other productive skills, social and emotional development, and psychosocial support. Without comprehensive social protection mechanisms, such as birth and death registration and property and inheritance rights, too many children are left without a livelihood or even a home.
- 1.2 million children are trafficked each year, either into bonded labor or as sex workers.
- An additional 1 million children are put at risk by the sex industry and child pornography.
- 246 million children are engaged in exploitative labor. Some have been abducted or lured with the promise of food and shelter. Many are bonded laborers, essentially slaves. Three-quarters of these children work in conditions made hazardous by the presence of toxins, hard labor, or other factors.
- 300,000 children are soldiers in armed conflict at any given time. Many children are lured into service with promises of shelter, regular meals, and a family atmosphere—essential elements of life they often lack at home.

What is being done to help orphans and vulnerable children?

- In 2005, President Bush signed into law the Assistance for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children in Developing Countries Act. This law is an important step in ensuring that all children have access to health care, nutrition, education, and support services.
- The AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Act of 2003 allocates 10% of all HIV/AIDS funding to programs that help orphans and other vulnerable children. However, as advocates we must make sure that the 10% promised by this law is actually delivered.

To get involved in protecting orphans and other vulnerable children and generating the political will to end the HIV/AIDS pandemic and its socio-economic and political root causes, join the Global AIDS Alliance Grassroots Network. Sign up at <http://www.globalaidsalliance.org/getinvolved.cfm> or email grassroots@globalaidsalliance.org.

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